

Maureen and Mike

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Interviewee: Conrad Burns

Interviewer: Jim Caron

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Conrad Burns: [Burns was a Republican senator from Montana from 1988-2000.] He says, my gosh, he says, "This is more exclusive than the Houston Country Club." [Laughter] You know, and I think it's, I think that's right. Something you realize, too, that the power of this office is an awesome power. I didn't say the power of the man, I said the power of the office. If there was one quality probably that Mike understood was that.

Also if you'll read the books over there in my bookcase you'll probably find the book *Plain Speaking*, the Miller book on Harry Truman. That was a secret of Harry's success from the time he was a county judge, the time he served in the United States Senate from Missouri, the time that he was vice president under Mr. Roosevelt, and the time that he was president. That Harry Truman always had seemed like an awesome respect for the office that he held. And after you're here the first stint, so to speak, you understand that you know. That is if you're paying attention. We didn't come back here with any pre-conceived idea of, to reinvent the wheel.

We know there's a system here. We don't know what the system is, or didn't know what it was then, but we learned every day. But I think Mike understood that or that's what I'm getting. Mike wasn't a forceful power in the Senate. He wasn't a great driving force, but he was a great buffer between the extremes, and he had an innate way of bringing those views together and finding solutions. I think that's the legacy of Mike, and I think that's what made him very popular in Japan. I don't think Mike ever was a player on the internal policy of Japan like some ambassadors get to be. I think Mike presented the American position very well, and understood the Japanese, understood the Japanese very well because he studied the Far East. He studied the cultures of the Far East, the Eastern cultures, and was a very good student of it, and made him a very effective ambassador also, because he's got great ambassadorial qualities.

I know I'd come here and first time I had an opportunity to sit down and talk to Mike and went into his office a couple of times on some issues and called him on the telephone two or three times because I think he's a tremendous resource. It would seem to me to be almost impossible to come back here, and especially a person like me who had no experience in even a state legislature, that you wouldn't use him as a resource, you know. And so it was a—I have a tremendous amount of respect for Mike.

Jim Caron: Everything we've read indicated he was a real cross-party kind of fella. Can you comment on that? He was a Democrat but he was also—

CB: Well he had—no, let's face it. Mike was a—I think Mike was a bona fide liberal, and you can find those in in both parties, which would make him a cross-party person. Of course, you can

also find bona fide conservatives in the Democratic Party, but I think he was a bona fide liberal, and I don't mean that in a bad sense. I think there are those of that political view, and there are those of a conservative view, and both of them doesn't have any more or any less love for this country and the system that we operate under. And so it was refreshing, you know. At least Mike took a position. We have some people that never take positions, you know, and as a result, I don't think—I think they have a hard time sleeping at night, if you know what I mean. I think it would be so bad to go through life without a conviction, or if you know what I mean. A newspaper man in Missoula said to me, he said "Your votes are just 75 percent of time they're opposite to your colleague." Well, I said, "Well, you have a hard time dealing with a person that says he believes one way but he votes another. I happen to vote the way I believe and in which I think the majority of Montanans believe and because basically I think we're a fairly conservative state." Resource-based, you know, fair people, you know, and so the newspaper people might have a problem dealing with that. They've never had to deal with that before.

JC: I get it. Well we sure appreciate this (unintelligible).

CB: Well we got a hearing today that's kind of important to Montana where Jay Rockefeller from West Virginia and I have crafted a tourism bill that we think that will help Montana. We realize it's a big industry in the state, so we have we have crafted this bill, and we're having a hearing on it today. Excuse me. [telephone rings] Hello, hi there. Okay, okay, I'm on my way up. Bye. [End of phone conversation]

JC: Monte Dolack.

BH: Huh?

JC: Monte Dolack is one of my best friends and you know what? I'd love to get a picture of you standing in your office with all his posters over your shoulder.

CB: Ok, well let's go out that way. How's that?

JC: That's super.

CB: I reckon this is all we've got here. Is that all you want?

JC: Yes sir, I think so.

[End of Interview]