EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH CAREY PARKER

October 20, 2008
Washington, D.C.

Interviewer
James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is an interview with Carey Parker, on October 20, in Washington, D.C. We're starting today on the so-called [Ronald] Reagan era—how it began, how it turned out, and what some of the high points were in terms of Senator Kennedy's work and politics during this period.

Parker: One of the first things the Senator decided on after Reagan was inaugurated was the chairmanships of his committees. After the 1978 election, at the beginning of 1979, he had become, by seniority, chairman of the Judiciary Committee. During his first two years as chairman, though, he was running for President, so he hadn't really established himself yet as chairman of the Judiciary Committee. In 1981, he had the opportunity to choose between the Judiciary Committee and the Labor and Public Welfare Committee. Its name has changed over the years, but basically that was the committee where he pursued most of his domestic agenda—meaning jobs, education, and health care—we always referred to it as the Labor Committee.

After the 1980 election he decided that he wanted to pursue that domestic agenda very intensely. He felt strongly about those issues, and he was concerned that with the incoming Reagan administration, it would be difficult to make progress on any of them. He wanted to have as strong a forum as possible in the Senate to press his views, so he chose to become the lead Democrat on the Labor Committee, and he remained chairman—or the so-called ranking member when Republicans controlled the Senate—for the rest of his career.

In 1981, his title was ranking member, because the Republicans had just won a majority of the Senate in the 1980 election. Over the years, he has enjoyed his senior status on the Committee immensely, whether in the majority or the minority. With a Democratic Senate, he was the chairman of the committee. With Republicans in control of the Senate, he was the ranking Democrat.

Young: Was the loss of the Senate by the Democrats anticipated?

Parker: No, that was unexpected. It was a big surprise.

Young: He was thinking he'd be chair.

Parker: There was a sense of pessimism that the country had basically repudiated the Democratic Party in 1980 by giving control of the Senate and White House to the Republicans. We felt that it would require much more effort, and Senator Kennedy felt very strongly that he wanted to roll up his sleeves, get to work, and make sure that the country didn't regress on the

issues he cared about so deeply. But he also wanted to see what possibilities there were to work with the Reagan administration.

Young: When you took into account the loss of the Senate, which certainly was not counted upon, did this look like a new kind of conservative movement in the White House, a [Barry] Goldwater redux or something?

Parker: I think it was the beginning of Goldwater in power. I think that's the way people looked at it. Reagan was clearly much more conservative than [Richard] Nixon, who was more of a moderate Republican compared with President Reagan. We had plenty of battles with President Nixon on a lot of issues. But in terms of the conservative right-wing agenda, Reagan took over, and with his control of the Senate, and Republicans were obviously serious about the changes they wanted to make, both in foreign policy and domestic policy.

Over the next few years, there were many confrontations between the Senator and President Reagan, but I think the Senator feels that we mostly held our own on preventing deep cuts in the key social programs that he cared about. There clearly wasn't a possibility of dramatically improving those programs. There was no hope, for example, of enacting national health insurance.

Young: So it was basically a defensive posture.

Parker: Yes, we were very much on defense, trying to prevent any serious retreats on the progress we'd made during the '60s and '70s.

Young: There were some significant liberal casualties in the Senate from the 1980 campaign. Some of the senior liberal Senators didn't come back—[Jacob] Javits, [Birch] Bayh, and others. Was that important?

Parker: It was not so much that they were liberals who had been replaced; it was that Democrats had lost control of the Senate. That was the key change. Senator Robert Byrd became the Democratic leader. Although Senator Kennedy had not had a particularly close relationship with Senator Byrd during the earlier years, particularly after he lost the whip race to him at the beginning of 1971, they gradually established a very good working relationship, and eventually a close friendship.

Democrats felt a strong need in the 1980s to work together and to be united, so that the Republicans couldn't divide us and therefore have more success with their agenda. There was a lot of positioning that took place in the Senate. We did our best to achieve a consensus on our positions on most of the major issues, particularly on budget issues, in order to avoid any harsh cutbacks in the Democratic social programs that we cared about most.

People were very concerned as well, at the start of the Reagan administration, about some of Reagan's foreign policy approaches. The Senator became involved quite early in arms control issues. We got into a big battle with the administration over Reagan's increased support for nuclear weapons. In response, a nationwide nuclear weapons freeze movement was developing, and Senator Kennedy, along with Mark Hatfield, the liberal Republican Senator from Oregon, picked up that issue in the Senate in 1982.

As that bipartisan example indicated, Republicans had their own problems with some of their moderate and liberal Senators. They didn't have a united front, and we could count on being able to reach across the aisle to Senators like Mark Hatfield. Kennedy and Hatfield introduced a resolution in the Senate calling for a nuclear weapons freeze. Somewhat on the spur of the moment, we decided that it would make sense to put out not just a position paper but a little book on the efforts. We worked with experts at Harvard and other experts around the country, who wrote chapters for the book, and it came out rather quickly. We put it together in about a month. Its title was *Freeze*.

Young: Let's talk about the array of foreign policy and defense issues that came up and about how Kennedy approached them. I guess there was a concern about Reagan. I don't know if "aggressive" is the right word to describe him.

Parker: That's the way we saw him, as aggressive.

Young: He had an aggressive foreign policy, complete later on with the "evil empire" speech and SDI [Strategic Defense Initiative] and so forth. There was also a package of concerns about domestic policy, about cutbacks and the undoing of things that had been achieved. Then there was the move to conservatize the judiciary. I see those as three main threats.

Parker: Yes, that's right.

Young: You were talking about foreign affairs and defense policy.

Parker: Yes. We wanted to counteract Reagan's effort to use a more military approach to foreign policy. In particular, we thought that escalating the nuclear arms race was the wrong way to go, and we were concerned that an arms race would get out of hand. We felt we needed—and we had felt this way even before the Reagan administration came in—a way to restrain the development of nuclear weapons.

The freeze issue drew that line very sharply. The Senator felt that it was an area where he could emphasize his commitment to foreign policy and defense policy. He had not yet become a member of the Armed Services Committee. He became a member after the 1982 election, in '83. The freeze debate took off fairly late. We brought out the freeze book in early 1982, and the Senator gave a major address in which he labeled the Reagan administration approach "Star Wars," which caught on, and Democrats began talking about it.

Young: That was his phrase?

Parker: Yes.

Young: I didn't realize that.

Parker: At the time, we didn't think that anybody had used it before. There may have been one other example of where it had been used. Obviously it was based on the Hollywood movie, but the phrase caught on as a way to describe what we felt was recklessness in Reagan's nuclear arms policies. It produced a significant measure of restraint. Reagan no longer had a green light to develop more and newer types of nuclear weapons. The Senator put a lot of effort into that,

along with Senator Hatfield. It was bipartisan. We weren't able to prevent the administration from moving forward on its agenda, but in terms of going as far as they wanted, they had to cut it back substantially. It's hard to measure the results, but we felt that the Senator had a significant impact by raising such strong opposition.

Young: Would this have affected the budget?

Parker: Yes. The budget issues were a serious problem, and we worked with a number of Senators, both in the leadership and on the appropriations bills, to make sure that the budgets that the Senate passed would grant adequate resources to the Democratic agenda. We at least had to compromise with the Republicans. Even though the Reagan administration wanted more substantial reductions, we were able to hold the line by working with Senators on the Budget Committee so that the budget that Congress passed would tilt toward Reagan but wouldn't completely undermine some of the programs—especially in education, employment, and health care—that Kennedy cared about. Although we were playing defense, I think he felt that we were holding the line reasonably well on those issues.

Judiciary wasn't as satisfactory, especially on the selection of judges, largely because the President makes the nomination and the Senate has the power to confirm. In order to block a judge, we needed enough support to prevent a two-thirds vote to break our filibuster against a nominee. We often could get a significant numbers of votes, but we rarely could get more than a third of the Senators to reject a nomination and keep a filibuster going.

Young: [Robert] Bork being the exception.

Parker: Yes. Bork was the big exception, and it was a surprise that we were able to defeat his nomination. That came later in the Reagan years, in 1987, toward the end. We shudder to think what might have happened if Reagan had nominated Bork during his first term. When the nomination came up, Kennedy had an instinctive reaction against it.

I might have mentioned this briefly before, but the job of firing Watergate Independent Prosecutor Archibald Cox had come down to Bork in 1973 after two more senior officials in the Justice Department at the time, under Nixon—Attorney General Elliot Richardson and Deputy Attorney General Bill Ruckelshaus—had resigned rather than fire Cox. The number-three person in seniority in the Department was Bork, who was then Solicitor General, meaning that he was in charge of arguing cases before the Supreme Court for the Justice Department. Bork said that he felt he had a duty under the Constitution to respect the wishes of President Nixon, and he ordered Archibald Cox to be fired.

Fourteen years later, when Reagan submitted Bork's name to the Senate for the Supreme Court, Senator Kennedy basically said, "No way." About two hours after President Reagan announced Bork's nomination, Kennedy went to the Senate floor and gave a strong speech opposing the nomination.

Young: "Bork's America" speech.

Parker: Yes, "Robert Bork's America," as people called it. We had a few lines in the speech like, "In Robert Bork's America," this and that will happen, in order to describe the dire consequences that would result from Bork's confirmation to the Court.

Young: It must have been fun to put that speech together.

Parker: It certainly served its purpose. The brakes were slammed on, and it was clear that this would be an all-out fight. That was probably the single strongest step we took against the Reagan administration. The Senator did it instantly, which has been relatively rare. Senators come out in opposition to other judges, and sometimes it takes a day or so. The administration gets the favorable publicity initially, but Senator Kennedy wanted to speak against the nomination immediately and say, basically, "Over my dead body. This nomination is not going through."

The passion was because of Cox. If the Cox issue hadn't been part of the case against Bork, I think the Senator probably would have waited, talked to a few constitutional law scholars, and made sure that we had the case against him together. But the fact that he instantly drew the line in the sand made a difference in the outcome. It turned out that after all of the hearings took place and after all of the opposing views were heard, the vast majority of Democrats—and a significant number of Republicans also—felt that Bork was Reagan squared, that he was an archconservative, and that he was not an appropriate nominee for the Supreme Court.

We ended up gaining a majority of Senate votes against Bork. We didn't have to filibuster the nomination. It was rather surprising. The Senator worked very hard for a long time on the nomination to round up support and make the case against Bork. A number of moderate Republicans basically felt, *No, this is too extreme. We supported many other conservative nominees of the President, but in this case, we're comfortable voting against him with the Democrats*. So they did.

Young: Much has been made in a lot of writings that Bork's views were in print all over the place. With some nominees, like John Roberts, there was not much in print that you could get hold of.

Parker: Right. Bork was the idol of the Republican right. That made him very vulnerable in Congress, at least with a fairly strong Democratic minority in the Senate. It became clear that we probably would succeed if we had to filibuster the nomination, and as we got closer, it became clear that we actually had the votes to defeat him. It came to an up-or-down vote, and it was 58 to 42 against Bork.

Young: He didn't do himself any good in the hearings.

Parker: He was not a particularly impressive witness at the hearing, and that turned off some of his Republican support. He clearly has an extraordinary intellect, and we were appalled that he used his powers of intellect for such a regressive, reactionary view of the law.

Young: The Federalist Society was very much in the picture for judicial nominations at this time, wasn't it?

Parker: Yes, they were gaining strength.

Young: And [Edwin] Meese was working very hard.

Parker: Bork became a cause célèbre. He was so extreme in most people's views. His nomination became a test of a bridge too far by the Republican administration. Although it was understandable that President Reagan would nominate Bork because Bork was clearly the conservatives' very first choice and with his strong intellect would have been a very right-wing Justice on the Court. Senator Kennedy felt strongly that he had to do everything he could to prevent his confirmation.

Young: Do you suppose the administration was surprised?

Parker: I think they were. I think they felt reasonably confident, especially with nominations to the Supreme Court, that they could convince Congress that they had picked an outstanding scholar and jurist, a person with a deep understanding of constitutional law. Our sense was that they were overconfident. We had no idea when we started out how successful we might be, but in the end, when the case was laid out against Robert Bork, there wasn't a more conservative judicial nominee during the Senator's time on the Hill who was recommended for the Supreme Court. People put him in a category by himself.

The Reagan administration fully expected that with their Senate majority, they would easily be able to isolate Democratic resistance to him. I don't think they compared Bork's views with those of other possible nominees or with other Justices' views on the Court, nor did they consider the degree to which he would swing the Court to the right. The Court was beginning to become more conservative than in its heyday, going all the way back to Earl Warren.

A number of Democratic Senators were interested in stopping this momentum, and the intense battle that erupted obviously gave many Republicans second thoughts. It was one thing to put a conservative on the Court. It was another thing to put an archconservative on the Court who raised such passionate opposition from the other side. There were a lot of factors. There have been other major Supreme Court confirmation battles, but there hasn't been one as intense as Bork's, at least since I've been here.

Young: This is a little beyond the scope of what we're doing today, but I'm thinking of Bork and of the Clarence Thomas nomination by [George H.W.] Bush. I'm not comparing the nominees. I'm comparing the administrations' expectations as they went about supporting their nominees. It looks, from what I've heard, like there was assiduous preparation, working the aisles in Congress and working all the circuits—not the judicial circuits, but the political circuits.

Parker: Yes, right.

Young: In contrast, it doesn't seem to me that they were making a big effort for Bork.

Parker: I certainly had that impression. There was an assumption that Bork, who had been Solicitor General, was eminently qualified for the office, and that his judicial philosophy shouldn't count. Republicans felt that his qualifications were enough, and that his nomination shouldn't be politicized over ideology. Yet in many cases, ideology is a factor in Supreme Court nominations.

With Clarence Thomas, the case was different because most members of the Senate didn't know his background very well. Of course, choosing a minority nominee for the Court gave Bush 41 a head start with Democrats in Congress. It was only the Anita Hill episode with Thomas that made it a somewhat closer fight at the end. He finally went through. Perhaps, arguably, his philosophy was no different from Bork's, but it didn't leap out at you when his nomination first came up.

Young: How were you involved in the judicial nominations in the Bork affair? Were you writing comments for him? Were you pushing on this?

Parker: Yes, I worked with the Judiciary staff. I think we all knew Archibald Cox personally, and we had worked with him. The Senator was very close to him as well. You didn't need to push the Senator.[*laughs*] He was ready and eager to lead the fight. He leaped at the opportunity. He said, "Let's go."

Cox was an extraordinarily respected figure in legal circles, and he had become an icon of good government during the Watergate investigation. He won immense respect for the way he conducted that investigation. A decade earlier, Senator Kennedy had urged President [Jimmy] Carter appoint Cox to the Court of Appeals for the First Circuit, and the Senator was upset when Carter ruled out Cox because of his age. When President Reagan nominated Bork to the Supreme Court, the ties with Cox were very personal to everyone in our office and to everyone who had worked with Cox and had known him over the years. As I said, if Senator Kennedy hadn't had such a close relationship with Archibald Cox, I doubt he would have come out as strongly and as instantly as he did against Bork, and Bork might have been confirmed. You never know, but I think that the very strong initial storm changed the battle scenario immensely.

Young: It seems as though the organization and activation of the opposition to Bork was intense and strategic. It looked like the kind of campaign that the Senator would mount on behalf of a legislative issue that was important to him. That looked to me like a first also.

Parker: That's probably true. Outside interest groups had worked against previous Republican nominees to the Supreme Court, such as [Clement] Haynsworth and [George Harrold] Carswell. With Bork, a lot of the liberal interest groups that we worked with on Judiciary Committee issues felt as intensely as Senator Kennedy did. They were very active in organizing and in reaching out to Senators in all the states.

Young: The bar and others. I had an interview with the Senator that was mostly about Bork. The Senator shared with us some of those documents and notes from his own files, including a letter to Archibald Cox. Looking through the papers that he supplied to us, it looked like a well-organized effort to get across the points that he was making against Bork, not only within the Senate but outside as well.

Parker: That's definitely what it was. It was a nationwide political battle. The outside groups didn't need much urging. They felt the same as we did in many ways. They probably would have wanted to gear up against someone as conservative as Bork anyway, but our judiciary staff worked closely with them. We had a list of possible Senators whom we might have been able to persuade, and every one of those Senators, I'm sure, heard about it from their local bar members

and local judiciary-activist groups. It was about as intense a political issue as you'll see in the Senate, and it crystallized around a nominee rather than around legislation. That was an interesting difference.

Young: There are people in academia who have never forgiven Kennedy for killing the Bork nomination.

Parker: I like to think that there are many more who are still grateful to Kennedy.

Young: I'm sure there are, but they're not always as articulate after the fact. Kennedy goes down in the opposition's book as the man who politicized Supreme Court nominations.

Parker: It's hard to see that as having much weight when you look at the previous nomination battles in the Senate.

Young: But I believe the Senator said in response to this clucking of Senators that it was Reagan who politicized the nomination by his plan and intention to appoint ideological conservatives to the federal bench, from top to bottom.

Parker: Yes. The development of ideology and partisanship in politics took a much more intense turn during the Reagan years. Reagan was, no question, the most conservative President of most Senators' lifetimes. A lot of issues began to draw sharp, partisan battle lines, and not just on judicial nominations. Bork may have been a principal example of this trend, because it was so easy to focus the issue on the personality rather than on the ideology in some ways. It's a little easier to run a national campaign against a person than for an initiative.

There's some truth, I think, to the view that it took the opposition of Supreme Court nominations to a new level. It wasn't as though it was the first time that nominees were politicized, but I think it became much more common after that. Republicans would oppose Democratic nominees more intensely too, and it became a way of doing business in the Senate. I don't know the statistics. Consider the appellate courts, the courts of appeals, and the Supreme Court, and how often there were contests. After Bork, I think there were more fights in the Senate over nominations to courts of appeals as well.

There was a Republican notion of seeding the lower courts with conservative nominees in order to have a pool of judges from which they could select future judicial nominees. Appellate court judges would come from the pool of conservative district judges, and Supreme Court Justices would come from the pool of conservative appellate justices. It was a strategy for implementing their views. In many ways, I think it started with the Republican goal of changing the ideology of the Supreme Court. They clearly were on the warpath against a liberal Supreme Court, and that probably started with *Brown v. the Board of Education*.

Young: Way back.

Parker: Yes.

Young: "Impeach Earl Warren."

Parker: Yes, that's right.

Young: I remember driving and seeing signs.

Parker: I remember seeing those too. I think the Supreme Court, in a sense, had been very political all along. There hadn't been many fights like Bork's, I don't think, but the Haynsworth and Carswell battles, for example, were pretty intense in the Nixon years. I'd say they had almost three-quarters the intensity of the Bork fight. People began to use Bork's name as a verb. You "Bork" other people.

Young: But for the Haynsworth and Carswell nominations, the Senator didn't have the same kind of passion.

Parker: No, but he had the same intellectual commitment. Obviously he didn't have the same passion against other nominees as he had with Bork. That rose to a much higher level because of his friendship and great respect for Cox. The Senator was genuinely appalled that the man who fired Archibald Cox might have a seat on the Supreme Court. But the Senator has gotten very involved in numerous Supreme Court battles over the years. In fact we're very uneasy right now. Hopefully this election won't have a Republican choosing the next nominees, because the balance is very shaky. It's four to four, with Anthony Kennedy in the middle, casting the decisive vote. He tends to go more toward the conservative than the liberal side.

Young: Yes, that's true. Well, he does have Steve Breyer on the Court.

Parker: That's right.

Young: Were there big battles that were comparable to the Bork battle, in terms of going head to head against the administration and what it was trying to do? Was there anything in the foreign policy or defense policy areas that incited the same degree of passion or that were of similar importance to the Senator?

Parker: I think the freeze came close.

Young: That was a grassroots movement.

Parker: Yes, but they picked up the intensity in the Senate. There was growing concern that the Reagan approach to the Soviet Union was too adversarial. Many Democratic members of the Senate felt that it was too confrontational and that Reagan's challenge to the Soviet Union, particularly with the escalation of the nuclear arms race, conceivably could provoke a nuclear war. Senator Kennedy felt that the Reagan administration's aggressive posture against the Soviet Union was a fundamentally wrong strategy. He felt that there was too much of a premium on confrontation and not enough on containment.

Young: An arms buildup.

Parker: An arms buildup instead of arms control agreements, for example.

Young: And this happened very early. The nuclear freeze was an issue in the very first year.

Parker: That's right. The nuclear freeze came up very early, and as I say, it got rolling in Congress in 1982, when Kennedy and Hatfield jumped in intensely. They were working with the leaders of the freeze movement. It caught the attention of more and more members of Congress, and it made it more difficult for the administration to get its way.

Defense budget issues were very intense too. There was very strong resistance by Democratic Senators to excessive spending for defense, which would shortchange domestic priorities—that is, the New Deal, Great Society, and New Frontier approaches that Democrats favored. That worked itself out through compromises with the administration. They got some but not all of the defense increases they wanted, and we got some but not all of the social spending we wanted.

I don't think that was necessarily the case with other aspects of arms control. The confrontational attitude was of growing concern to Senator Kennedy, and he took on, in the mid-1980s, an individual role in foreign policy. He made a number of visits to the Soviet Union. You probably talked to Larry Horowitz about some of those trips.

Young: Yes.

Parker: The one I would call an extraordinary achievement by the Senator was his visit to the Soviet Union in 1986. The Senator and many in the country had been pushing for the administration and the Soviet Union to negotiate. If we couldn't get an arms control agreement on the nuclear build-up between our two countries, we could at least get an arms control agreement on where we would place nuclear weapons in Europe. There was a concern that as the tensions escalated, there would be more Soviet nuclear weapons in the Soviet sectors in Eastern Europe and that Western Europe would be caught up in this as well. We came to believe that not everyone, starting with Secretary of State George Shultz, was 100 percent in agreement with the hardliners in the Reagan administration who were pushing this confrontation. Kennedy felt he had a special relationship with Shultz, going back to the years when Shultz was Secretary of Labor ad the beginning of the Nixon Administration. He wasn't one of the hardliners.

Young: [Caspar] Weinberger?

Parker: Weinberger principally. It wasn't clear where President Reagan himself was, but there were hints that he was on board. This gave an incentive to Senator Kennedy to feel out what he could with some of the Soviet leaders. Perhaps something could be worked out. Part of this also involved appealing to the Soviet Union to release some prisoners who were well known, people like [Mstislav] Rostropovich, for example. That was an issue that we worked on with the State Department. We had a list of 25 or 30 people who we felt were unfairly imprisoned, who would leave the Soviet Union if they could have refuge in another country, perhaps in this country.

Young: The Senator was serving as a back channel.

Parker: Yes.

Young: This is not fully appreciated either. I think it's important to flesh that out. At the time he undertook this role, the talk between the Soviet Union and the United States was at a standstill.

Parker: That was certainly our impression. Our foreign policy people might have a better perspective on this than I do, but the thing that came through to me was the degree to which we were able to talk candidly with Shultz and others in the State Department, and report to them what we thought we were hearing from the Soviet Union. They welcomed the chance to talk with us, and we had an understanding with them: this wasn't something we were going to hash out in public. We would tell them things in confidence that we'd heard, and we appreciated whatever guidance they could give us as to whether there was some middle ground where some of the tensions that were building up in the Cold War could be eased.

It came to a head with the Senator's visit to the Soviet Union in 1986. As I recall, we were very well briefed in terms of where the arms control negotiations stood and whether the Soviet leaders had objections to a deal on so-called intermediate-range nuclear weapons in Europe, even if they weren't willing to reach a deal on intercontinental missiles. Shultz was encouraging us to raise this issue with Soviet leaders, and they fully expected that we would raise it, as the State Department and the Reagan administration had been doing with the Soviet leaders. They had been rejected out of hand by the Soviets. But in a private meeting by the Senator with the Soviet leader [Leonid] Brezhnev, Brezhnev told the Senator that he would be willing to sign an intermediate nuclear weapons agreement with the United States, though with some conditions. There had to be an understanding about other aspects of the arms control issue.

To make a long story short, Kennedy came back from that meeting with a feeling that he had achieved a breakthrough, and he went right to Shultz to tell him. Shultz was amazed to find out, at least as I understand it, that this was even a possibility. It didn't surface right away, but within a few weeks it became clear to us that a deal was in the wind. An intermediate nuclear weapons treaty was soon negotiated successfully.

Young: Why do you suppose the Soviet leadership wanted to deal with Kennedy on these issues? Did they see him as an agent of the administration?

Parker: No. I think they felt that he would represent an effective wing of the political opposition to Reagan. He had taken other trips to the Soviet Union before then.

Young: He had met Brezhnev before, hadn't he, in '75?

Parker: Yes. I think the Soviets felt that they could deal with Kennedy, and that Kennedy could be effective with the administration as well. I think that was why they were willing to show the Reagan administration that if they were going to hand out carrots, they would do it through Ted Kennedy because, "You folks are so confrontational with us, we won't do it with you. We'll go through an intermediary," and they chose Kennedy for this one.

To me it was a major breakthrough in the Cold War. It turned the Cold War away from confrontation and much more toward negotiation. I can remember a lot of people breathing a sigh of relief that we weren't facing an all-out confrontation and that we could deal with the Soviets. Reagan and the hardliners were willing to let this happen because they thought it demonstrated that Reagan could use both a fist and an olive branch and that he could use them at the appropriate times.

They primarily wanted to press the Soviet military as hard as they could. Their overall philosophy was that the Soviet Union couldn't match the all-out effort we were making with our stronger economy and stronger defenses. They couldn't continue to battle us on the Cold War one on one. They would inevitably fall behind.

Their goal was to see the Soviet Union collapse. They felt that they were achieving it in some ways, and they didn't mind extending an occasional olive branch to show that they weren't heading for nuclear war. They wanted to show the opposition in this country that they had a certain point beyond which they were not willing to continue forcing confrontation. That reassured a lot of people. By the end of the Reagan years, they were claiming victory, and with some credit.

A lot of people were very nervous, though. Certainly Democrats in both Houses of Congress were extremely nervous about the tactics that the administration was using to challenge the Soviet Union. It was just opposition, opposition, opposition, and the sowing of discord within some of the Soviet states. They wanted to make it clear that no matter how much the Soviets wanted to rule the world, they couldn't surpass what the United States could hold up against them.

Young: Détente was out the window.

Parker: Right.

Young: This was a failing policy, as I understood the Reagan position. But I never understood that that was Shultz's position.

Parker: It was never clear. It's hard to tell. In many ways Shultz was an ineffective negotiator with the Weinbergers. I have no inside information about this, but he at least, our feeling was, constantly pressed them to use a negotiating strategy, not just rely on military strategy. "Let's see what we can find." I think he, as much as anyone, probably said, "When Ted Kennedy goes over there, I find out what he's doing. He's willing to be a back channel." It certainly served his interests, especially in this case in particular.

Although the Soviets wouldn't tell the Reagan administration that they would acquiesce on a nuclear arms control agreement or on an intermediate weapons treaty for Europe, they would tell it to Senator Kennedy, with the understanding that he would pass it along to Shultz. I think they felt that it showed the hardliners in the Reagan administration, "You won't deal with us, but we can deal with the more reasonable people in your country." That was unheard of. We were amazed. We thought the back channels would produce lesser information and perhaps succeed in bringing out many of the dissidents, things like that, but to get an arms control agreement turned out to be one of Kennedy's major achievements.

Young: Where Reagan himself fitted into this—the hawks versus doves—will be very interesting for people to look at.

Parker: Yes, no one has understood that.

Young: Because he was on the QT in his private writings.

Parker: It seems like it, but I'm no expert.

Young: I'm not either but it's fascinating to try to figure out. I got the impression that George Shultz moved very cautiously but very effectively in that direction, even when the cards were—

Parker: Yes, it was extraordinary. Because of his background—maybe as the Secretary of Labor he learned how to deal with the intensity of opposing forces in this country. I think it made a big difference for him to be in the critical position of Secretary of State at that time.

Young: Yes, and I think Kennedy gave him a perfect opportunity.

Parker: Because we had such a good relationship with Shultz from his Secretary of Labor days. In fact, David Burke, who was one of the Senator's first chiefs of staff, had worked for Secretary Shultz at one point, so there were many different levels of ties.

Just a little story. They had a dinner to honor Shultz. The Senator knew that Shultz was a graduate of Princeton, and he teased him that Harvard and Princeton could get together just like Brezhnev and Reagan could. We came across a rare glass item, a beautiful piece of glasswork showing a tiger looking at a globe of the world. It was a small piece, about 10 inches wide and 3 inches high. I remember Senator Kennedy holding that up and presenting it to Shultz as a gift, and saying, "He's the tiger from Princeton who sees the world as it should be seen." Shultz was very touched by this.

Young: And then [Jack F.] Matlock gave Kennedy a lot of—

Parker: Matlock was very influential as well. Matlock was one of the key back-channel people too. He and Shultz were the principals. They thought they were doing good things for the country. We have no doubt about that.

Young: That's right. I got the impression that Shultz was very cognizant of where the hawks were, and he saw the White House staff as mainly hawks.

Parker: Yes, that was another reason why he felt that he should use Senator Kennedy as a back channel. My impression is that Horowitz dealt extensively with Matlock, and the Senator dealt much more with Shultz. Many of the details about things we were doing and sometimes talking about, and the list of people that we'd send, Larry would send those through Matlock.

Young: Ultimately the Reykjavik conference came along. If you could have seen the faces of the hawks, Richard Perle.

Parker: Not happy. [*laughter*]

Young: He had indigestion because of it. [*laughter*] At some point the Senator was on the arms-control observer group. Do you know anything about that?

Parker: That group was put together in the '80s, as I recall.

Young: Right. Was this a Senate or a Congressional group?

Parker: It was a Congressional group. They have caucuses, so it was like a caucus. It didn't affect committee assignments, but they would be involved and would have meetings with outside experts, for example. Kennedy was involved in working with that group.

Young: He talked about attending an arms control meeting in Geneva, Soviet-American.

Parker: They typically would send representatives to those meetings.

Young: Max Kampelman was the Reagan administration person there, and there were conversations there between the Senator and members of the Soviet delegation that were a lot more candid—

Parker: Than they were used to back here, yes. He enjoyed participating in it, and he's still a member of that group, although he has been less active. The intense feelings on the Cold War led to deep divisions—the hard-line approach of the Reagan administration versus the more moderate approach that the Democrats felt was more effective. The Republicans have been crowing ever since that the Reagan approach prevailed. We like to think it was because there was also a lot of quiet moderation.

Young: I think the Senator felt that he got a lot more information about what was going on in the meetings—he could not attend the actual formal meetings—from some of the Soviet generals who were there than he got from the American negotiators. It wasn't just him. It was a group of Congressional people.

Iran Contra. Was Reagan's position on the Sandinistas and the Contras of great concern to the Senator?

Parker: Yes. He made that a major effort as well. Our foreign policy people were trying to restrain the Reagan administration there as well. I had less to do with that, but I know that the Senator was active with a number of other Senators in trying to restrain the administration's approach. He felt there were better ways to deal with Nicaragua than the way the administration was pursuing it. It became an all-out battle in the Senate a couple of times.

Young: During this period, it looked like he was much involved in a wider range of international, foreign, and defense issues than he had been involved in in the '70s and earlier. Is that a correct impression, or is it overblown?

Parker: After the Vietnam War, foreign policy was never more intense in Congress than during the Reagan years, and that was the highpoint of the Senator's involvement. He became a member of the Armed Services Committee early in the Reagan administration, and he has been active on numerous defense issues. He became the chairman of the Seapower Subcommittee, and was involved in a range of issues relating to the Navy. He also worked with many of the military leaders in the Pentagon.

But in terms of issues that he has been deeply involved in, I think the principal foreign policy and defense issues involved the Cold War. That was the most contentious, most controversial, and most alarming period he has been through in the Senate. During the first Iraq War and certainly during this current war, he obviously has been very involved as well. The war on terror

is much more amorphous. It's not as though we're facing a traditional enemy overseas, so there are House Judiciary Committee aspects in terms of how we deal with investigations. Guantanamo, what about that? About our tactics in Iraq, there are the issues of whether we should have gone and of how fast we should get out. I think he feels passionately about them now, probably as intensely as the Cold War issues.

Young: I was just comparing it with the '70s.

Parker: Oh, yes, I think that's true.

Young: Compared with the '80s.

Parker: The '70s were about getting out of Vietnam, basically. That was the overriding foreign-policy issue. He was very active in that. He visited Vietnam. Once that war ended and there was an open field again in foreign policy, all of a sudden, we were in a new, intense Cold War with the Reagan hardliners. In terms of refugee issues, he has been active on them all the way through as well. But the Cold War period was the high point, I think, of his involvement.

Young: I don't see it as so much of a switch as much as it was a broadening of his agenda. We haven't talked at length about the civil rights restoration and what he accomplished in civil rights or about what was accomplished during this period of conservative ascendancy. But while we're on foreign policy, do you want to say anything about Reagan and Ireland?

Parker: Reagan was Irish, and that made a big difference.

Young: He was Irish, but he wouldn't acknowledge that until the second term. At least that's what Sean Donlon told us. He said, "We looked up the genealogy, and we saw that his grandmother or great grandmother, someone, was Irish. But she had the baby in London, and Nancy [Reagan] was all from Britain." [*laughter*] Anyway, it was the second term, I guess, but maybe not. Reagan didn't want to do much about Ireland in the first term, did he?

Parker: No, I don't think it was high on his agenda. It wasn't an issue. I think it took some doing by Irish-Americans in Congress.

Young: Bill Clark. Do you remember Bill?

Parker: Yes, right.

Young: He was Irish and he had a place in Ireland. I wonder if he was helpful.

Parker: Yes, he was. We were pushing the issue fairly hard in terms of getting the State Department to be more pro-Irish and less anti-Irish. That was a big challenge. That didn't erupt until the 1990s, after the Reagan administration. During the 1980s we were able to get people in the Reagan administration to be helpful or to at least listen to us. We didn't feel that they were on the wrong side. The concern was over what we could do and whether there was anything the United States could do to make a significant difference.

The feeling was that we wouldn't have any chance of persuading the Reagan administration to intervene against the British. Our principal focus was always on working with the Irish-American community. A lot of it had to do with tamping down support for the IRA [Irish Republican Army] and for the fundraising for it that was going on in the U.S. during most of the '70s and into the '80s. We also worked with the moderates in Northern Ireland, especially the SDLP [Social Democratic and Labour Party], and with the Irish Government.

Young: Reagan and [Margaret] Thatcher were getting along just fine, and she didn't want anything to do with Ireland.

Parker: That's right. She didn't have any use for us.

Young: Not at all. Didn't Reagan do something that helped her accept the agreement with the Irish Government when it was done, something that at least allowed for some negotiation?

Parker: Yes. Reagan did intervene in 1985 to urge Thatcher to accept a role for Ireland on Northern Ireland. Kennedy and Tip O'Neill urged Reagan to do so, and he agreed to. The result was the Anglo-Irish Agreement of 1985, which gave Ireland a voice on Northern Ireland issues. In general, though, the Reagan Administration was willing to go along with anything that the British Government was willing to accept, and there was a lot of pressure on the British Government from Irish America. Our feeling was that British policy, by and large, was controlled by the [Ian] Paisleys and the hard-line Protestant community in Northern Ireland. Their effort was not so much to try to reach reconciliation between the two sides as it was to end the violence, and they treated it as a war that they had to win, not as a peace they could negotiate.

It took a major effort over more than a decade to get to the point where the Catholic community in Northern Ireland felt that the John Hume SDLP view was the path of the future, not the Gerry Adams IRA view. Our feeling, as we moved into the '80s, was that a more moderate wing of the Protestant community was developing as well, and was beginning to gain support. The two sides were coming somewhat closer together.

But there was still the basic problem of how to deal with the violence that was continuing to upset everything. As I saw the situation, we weren't able to make much of a difference until Gerry Adams decided in the 1990s that he was interested in pursuing peace negotiations. That revelation came to us partly through John Hume and partly when the Senator's sister, Jean [Kennedy Smith], became Ambassador to Ireland under President [William J.] Clinton. She picked up Adams' shift very quickly, and she was very influential in convincing Senator Kennedy that it was genuine. The British Government was absolutely unconvinced. They felt that Adams was an out-and-out terrorist and that he should, under no circumstances, be accommodated.

The issue came to a head when Adams sought a visit to visit the United States. The British Government was adamantly opposed to such a visit, and the State Department initially opposed it. But it seemed to be very important to Senator Kennedy that if Adams was genuinely interested in making a shift toward reconciliation, he should be allowed to come here and be able to talk to the Irish-American community, so that they would understand the direction that the party was heading in and so that there would be an end, once and for all, to American support for the

violence. The State Department felt that his visit would hobble any possibility of achieving reconciliation, that the American Irish still wanted the British out of Northern Ireland after all these years, when it seemed totally unrealistic. There was no way the British were going to leave.

Young: That was why Reagan didn't want to be involved very much in Ireland, and he was not very helpful.

Parker: He was not inclined, but there was not much that he could have done, we felt.

Young: He made one visit to Ireland during his second term, I think.

Parker: That was when things were changing, or at least when there was a beginning of change. There were signs on the wall, but the huge change did not come until well into the '90s. There had been some initiatives that we had supported that the IRA had opposed, and it had been very frustrating. Senator Kennedy cared a lot about the issue. He was very influenced by John Hume. He first came across Hume in the early 1970s, when the Social Democratic and Labour Party first rose. It began searching for an alternative to the violence. Senator Kennedy first got involved with Ireland partly because of an incident that occurred during a trip to Europe he made in 1971 to study the national health insurance plans of those nations. In London, an Irish woman button-holed him in a public park and asked why he had remained silent about British troops attacking Catholic citizens in Northern Ireland, when he had spoken out so strongly in the U.S. against the massacre of students by the Ohio National Guard at Kent State University.

Young: This was after the Kent State killings?

Parker: A year after. There had been some particularly atrocious killings of Catholics in Northern Ireland by Protestant paramilitary forces more recently. The Senator felt she was right, and in October 1971, a month after his return from Europe, he signed on to a resolution that Senator Abe Ribicoff and Congressman Hugh Carey, who was a member of the House at the time, introduced in Congress calling for immediate British to withdrawal from Northern Ireland and the reunification of Ireland.

That was what the American Irish wanted to hear, but as John Hume indicated to some friends of ours in Ireland, "We can understand your frustration, but that's not the way the crisis in Northern Ireland will be resolved." He wanted to talk to the Senator, and the Senator said, "I have to go see John Hume." So on Kennedy's next trip to Europe in 1972, Hume agreed to fly to Bonn to meet with him, and they had a very good discussion. The Senator was very impressed. That meeting began a decades-long relationship, during which we didn't do anything on Northern Ireland without first talking with John Hume about whether it made sense. Certainly, in 1994, Hume was all behind Adams coming to this country. Ambassador Smith strongly recommended that the State Department grant him a visa for the visit, but the Department was adamant against it, largely because of pressure from the British government. Jean urged Senator Kennedy to go directly to President Clinton on the issue, and fortunately the President agreed.

Overall, Kennedy spent many years working closely with John Hume. We respected him immensely, even though progress was very difficult.

Young: It seemed as though whenever a step toward reconciliation was made, it would get torpedoed. There would be an act of violence or something, some tempest.

Parker: There was always that, and behind it was always, I think, the problem of the American Irish basically not being willing to give an inch. They didn't accept Hume's idea of "Let's solve this peacefully." He was sort of the Martin Luther King of Northern Ireland, and it took a long time. People say, "Well, that's the Irish," but eventually it happened, with patience. Hume had immense wisdom and immense patience, and he deserves a lot of credit. He won a Nobel Peace Prize for it in 1998, along with David Trimble, the Protestant leader of the Ulster Unionist Party.

Young: It was a political solution to the problem that worked, not a military solution.

Parker: I think the Senator felt that they should have included Gerry Adams in that award as well. Realistically, the Nobel Committee probably didn't include him because of his reputation as a terrorist, but he had a great deal to do with the breakthrough for peace.

Young: Oh, indeed.

Parker: No question about it, and that's what made it possible.

Young: I happened to be in Ireland when the decommissioning was announced. I was interviewing Garrett Fitzgerald, Al Reynolds, Michael Mullen, and so forth. On the day I arrived, there was this tremendous headline, "The War is Over," in the Dublin paper. The decommissioning announcement of the international commission was held at that time. But that was not the end of the story.

Parker: No, but it was a giant step forward.

Young: Did you get to know Gerry Adams?

Parker: No, I didn't get to know him. I shook his hand a couple of times during his visit here. When he came to this country, he was a hero to the Irish-American community, and they were almost universally behind him. They felt that the British and the Protestants in Northern Ireland were so brutal that there needed to be a strong reaction. He was very effective at raising funds in this country for his party, Sinn Fein, which had close ties to the IRA, the Irish Republican Army.

Young: But not for weapons?

Parker: For weapons too. Yes, of course. That was the problem.

Young: Early?

Parker: Yes.

Young: But he had to move off that position.

Parker: My impression was that he was soliciting support well into the '80s.

Young: Right. But once—

Parker: But once he came in 1994 to the U.S., then I think there was a sea change. He recognized that his path had problems. I don't know. I'm speculating about what was going through his mind, why he came onboard the Anglo-Irish Agreement. The answer primarily was, I suspect, that he saw it as the only practical way to the future. There was no way they were ever going to defeat the British militarily, and the status quo had become untenable. Eventually there was a meeting of the minds, and that was a huge change for him. Senator Kennedy felt that it galvanized the peace process, which had been struggling and not making significant progress until then.

Young: I see this as one of Kennedy's long-term projects.

Parker: Yes, I think so. Apart from national health insurance, I don't know of any other issue that he has spent so much time on.

Young: Spent so much time on and has consistently played such a critical role in at critical points. Right after Gerry Adams, of course, there was Joe Cahill, who had to come over too. That was a little different, though.

Parker: And working with the Clinton administration to push that along. The time was right for a major American initiative in '93. The thing that clinched it, I think, was the Adams visa, when the State Department changed its mind. Senator Kennedy was intent on them granting the visa. The British seemed to have veto power over actions like that, and they were exercising it in '94, but I think that President Clinton finally said, "Let him come. There's enough of a case that can be made." So the State Department, relatively gracefully, allowed the visa to be granted, and they probably were glad they did.

Young: As you said just before we turned on the tape, Reagan was a—I forget the word you used—congenial person, and that made it easier to deal with him.

Parker: Yes.

Young: Did Reagan and Kennedy hit it off personally?

Parker: Very much so. It was totally different dealing with his administration versus dealing with him directly. We used to joke about the Reagan administration: there's Reagan and then there's the rest of the administration. The Senator always found him delightful to work with.

Near the end of the administration, the Senator invited him to a dinner at his home in McLean. Reagan came and it was a beautiful evening. It was basically a tribute to John F. Kennedy. It raised funds for the Kennedy Library. It was remarkable. The Senator remembers it as one of the best evenings he has had at his home. President Reagan gave a beautiful speech about JFK [John Fitzgerald Kennedy]. He created an image of President Kennedy coming into the New Frontier, and the Irishness of the man. I think that Peggy Noonan worked on that speech, and she did a great job.

Young: You never knew with Reagan how much was the actor, but it certainly came across as genuine.

Parker: Yes. There was a total absence of partisanship. They had nothing to argue about that evening. It was basically Reagan talking about JFK, and JFK at the Berlin Wall, Reagan at the Berlin Wall, that sort of thing. "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

Young: The St. Patrick's Day lunches started during this time.

Parker: They started in the mid-'70s, I would say.

Young: Would Carter come?

Parker: I don't remember Carter being at one, but we set up the committee of Irish Americans.

Young: Friends of Ireland. Was that in the Congress?

Parker: Yes, in the Congress, and both Democrats and Republicans joined as members. Basically we had a St. Patrick's Day lunch every year, and we began inviting the President. It may have spilled over into the '80s before we first invited the President. I certainly remember Reagan coming. I don't remember Carter. I'll have to check the year.

Young: Was this Tip [Thomas] O'Neill's event? Was he the host?

Parker: Yes, Tip and the Senator. We alternated between the Senate side and the House side each year. Kennedy and O'Neill basically put it together. We felt that the Irish issue needed a voice in Congress that was clearly for reconciliation and peace, so it was the only voice in Congress that wasn't being heard via the IRA. The group didn't do much during the rest of the year. Occasionally, they'd introduce a resolution that commended something in the Irish-American peace process or in the British-Irish peace process. It was largely a way of showing that Republicans and Democrats could work together on the Irish issue and that we were all in favor of the John Hume initiative. Frequently the Irish Ambassador would come.

Young: Sometimes businessmen from Ireland would come, wouldn't they?

Parker: Yes. Usually the Irish Prime Minister would make a St. Patrick's Day visit to the White House. It worked out that he always came up to Capitol Hill too in order to speak there. It was a time when members of Congress could hear a serious message about what was happening in Ireland. At the same time, they could show that Republicans and Democrats knew how to work together if they could find the key to do it. It was a very social organization, and during the Reagan years, people loved it. It was rather amazing.

Young: They could tell stories, but they couldn't discuss policy with Reagan.

Parker: No, he wouldn't do that.

Young: He always said no to that. "Fine, but don't ask him any questions about that."

Parker: "We're here to tell Irish jokes." [*laughter*]

Young: Was he good at it?

Parker: Oh, yes. He had a wonderful sense of humor. It was remarkable. He specialized in doing that. You could see his personality at some of the debates in the 1980 campaign. There were two different Reagans. He was either the movie actor, so congenial at a session with you, or he was the hardliner fighting the intense Cold War.

Young: The political man or the other man.

Parker: A split personality. The more Kennedy saw of him, the more I think he liked him personally.

Young: Well, those qualities seem to have emerged and worked well for Reagan in the talks with [Mikhail] Gorbachev.

Parker: Yes, I think so. Gorbachev was very easy to work with.

Young: I can't see it happening with Brezhnev.

Parker: Or certainly with [Vladimir] Putin today.

Young: No. I take it there weren't as many direct conversations between Kennedy and Reagan over contentious issues as there were between Kennedy and Carter on, for example, health care, because Carter was from the same party and so forth. But the work with the Reagan administration on policy issues was mainly with—

Parker: Cabinet offices. Yes, I think that's true. The Senator would sometimes pick up the phone and try to get through to the President. I don't have a particular example in mind. The Senator may remember some of those. Whenever there was a battle shaping up and we weren't completely satisfied with the administration's position and it was heading toward a confrontation on the Senate floor, we'd sometimes try to work out a meeting at the White House. Relevant members of the House and Senate would go talk with the Reagan Cabinet people and the White House staff.

I don't think that President Reagan himself got much involved with those meetings, but I wouldn't be surprised if there were a few times. I don't recall. The Senator would say, "Mr. President, we feel strongly about this, and we'd rather avoid a confrontation. Can we do something?" I think he felt that by pressing the administration hard, we could achieve a compromise, particularly in the early years, when, for example, we were talking about health and education issues.

That was certainly more likely in the [Gerald] Ford administration than in the Reagan administration. You could deal with Ford's Cabinet officials when you wanted to work out an agreement that didn't necessarily comport with the President's policy. The Senator, being very gregarious, loved to deal with Reagan when he could. I think he relished the occasions—for instance, at a White House bill signing—when he'd have a few minutes with the President. Sometimes he'd go down with a little card that he'd give to the President. It was hard to tell what became of that sometimes.

Young: Explain what the card was and its meaning.

Parker: The card would lay out an issue, with four or five points on one card. People always told us, "Don't give Reagan anything more than a page," so we had five-by-seven cards. They were practically half a page, on which the Senator could write, "Here's what I'd like, and here are five reasons why I think it's good." The Senator would often use those as talking points in meetings. I think the administration sometimes used to joke, "Here comes Ted Kennedy with one of his cards. Who's it for now?"

Young: "Don't let him in." [*laughs*]

Parker: Or they'd fold it up and put it in their pocket, and we'd wonder whether they would ever look at it again.

Young: There were two very important issues that were passed despite Reagan's veto: the South Africa sanctions and the Civil Rights restoration. The latter prevented discrimination in the workplace.

Parker: That's right.

Young: Reagan vetoed both of those.

Parker: I remember the South Africa veto more clearly. We were very involved in the battle against apartheid.

Young: That began in '85, I think.

Parker: Yes. The Senator made a trip to South Africa. He'd been strongly against apartheid and what was going on. We were concerned that the Reagan administration was basically siding with the South African regime instead of with [Nelson] Mandela and with the people who were trying to eliminate injustices against South Africans. Once the Senator went there, saw and heard from Mandela, and came back, he felt that we should put Congress on record against it. He introduced the Anti-Apartheid Act, which basically repealed the Reagan policy and made it more equal toward the reform movement in South Africa. It became very intense.

It was a tribute to the progress that had been made on civil rights in this country that so many Republican Senators, in the end, were willing to confront President Reagan about a civil rights issue in another country. It was difficult to hear the story of apartheid, to understand what was happening in South Africa, to say that you were for civil rights in this country, and yet to say that it was okay for the administration to oppose it in South Africa. That basic argument carried the day, and we weren't sure initially that we had the votes to override the veto. We thought we probably did in the House but not necessarily in the Senate. It turned out, though, that Senators felt the same way.

Young: Reagan dug in his heels on that one, didn't he? It had a sanctions element to it too, didn't it?

Parker: Yes, there were initially sanctions against the regime, which weren't very effective. I think part of the problem was that the administration was unwilling to challenge the South African Government directly. As the movement for reform began to gain strength in South

Africa, there was a lot of pressure on Democrats in Congress to ask, "Why can't we get the Reagan administration to be more active and sympathetic to reform proposals and to support Nelson Mandela?"

When Kennedy was in South Africa meeting with leaders who were working for justice, and heard what they were doing, I think he identified with them. He came back treating it basically as a civil rights issue in this country. It played out that way in Congress, and that's why the veto was overridden. There wasn't a strong argument against it, and it was an easy vote for Republicans who basically were nervous about challenging the administration on anything, but who felt that nothing in the act was going to do damage. It was ego more than principle that was at stake. Even many people in the Reagan administration felt that if any veto should be overridden, it should be this one.

Young: The Reagan Justice Department didn't have a good reputation on civil rights.

Parker: No, but civil rights had a head of steam, and even the Department of Justice couldn't put its finger in the dike for long. It was more of a State Department issue. Certainly the people there were sympathetic. They were going through the motions of opposing it, but we didn't feel that their hearts were in the battle. Reagan was persuaded to veto the bill early, I think, and he didn't change his mind. He thought the thing to do was to go down fighting, I suspect, more than he thought that they could force Congress to give him his way. They probably felt that they couldn't sustain the veto in Congress anyway. To me, it was rather remarkable that the bill finally wound up being vetoed, but you could see the handwriting on the wall.

Young: It seems obvious that the United States was going to go on record and that it should go on record.

Parker: There was a feeling that people would go to the mat to prevent it. It was one thing to say, "I don't know enough about the regime in South Africa. I'm not sure this is the right policy." But when it became a hard issue, an up-or-down vote for it in the Senate, apartheid was more than Senators were willing to ignore.

Young: The South African Government was saying, "You're interfering in our internal affairs. How would you like it if somebody interfered with you in the same way?" The regime was adamantly opposed to it, and they had a lot of corporate support, I think.

Parker: But I don't think that counted for much, because all of those corporations had a lot of other interests in Congress too. It seemed to us that the issue was so one sided, it was hard to believe that Reagan was serious about his veto. So it played out. It started out as an uphill fight, but as it began to gain speed and as more people understood the issue, it wasn't just a narrow issue that the African-American community was working on. It was more a question of, if the Reagan administration is against this, how can they be for human rights anywhere? It was more than a racial issue. It was a basic human-rights issue. It convinced a lot of Republicans that the South African regime was too extreme, and you just couldn't go that far.

Young: The Civil Rights Restoration Act also occurred. Both of these occurred in the second Reagan administration.

Parker: Toward the end of the term.

Young: And the Democrats had won the Senate back at that time, right?

Parker: Yes. In 1987 we came in with a Democratic Senate, and I think that made a big difference in the pork elimination and—

Young: So Kennedy became chairman.

Parker: Yes, of the Labor Committee.

Young: The Civil Rights Restoration Act had been passed in 1988. He had tried this earlier, or something like it, but it had not passed.

Parker: That was probably a case during the Republican years. I'm not familiar with that.

Young: He tried to undo the Grove City thing earlier, and it didn't work.

Parker: Yes, the same way.

Young: This sounds to me like it was much the same thing, that that was part of it at least: anybody who gets federal funds cannot discriminate, period.

Parker: Right.

Young: And it was not just an athletic department or something. This was a case of undoing some of the Supreme Court rulings, was it not?

Parker: Yes, although I think the Justices basically left it up to Congress to decide. We didn't feel that there was a strong constitutional argument against these proposals, so it wasn't a case of it being settled. That wasn't the problem.

I tend to think also—and I certainly think Senator Kennedy felt this way as well—that the overriding civil-rights issue—that is, the battle against apartheid during these times—gained some additional momentum for domestic civil-rights issues as well. The change in control of Congress might not have made a difference on apartheid, but I think it made a difference on domestic civil-rights issues. They were easier to bring to the floor to work out. On both of those issues, Kennedy has always been very active. The Judiciary Committee had much more to do with both Grove City and the Restoration Act, two of the major civil-rights bills of the 1980s and of the 1990s too. As they continued on with these battles, we were trying to develop a head of steam on civil rights and to keep it active.

Young: So his chairmanship of the Labor Committee was deferred by the Republican takeover of the Senate and by whatever plans there were for that.

Parker: It still made a significant difference for him to be the ranking member of the Committee. It's not as though he was just another Senator. It made a difference in terms of the

staff budgets, that sort of thing, that were available. It sent a signal that he cared deeply about these issues. He would always be a fighter for civil rights.

He was interested in Judiciary Committee issues, but his principal focus from then on would be on Labor Committee issues. His focus had been there anyway, but because the Judiciary chairmanship came up by chance after the ’78 election, he took that opportunity. To some extent there was a question of, “Since we’re in the minority, does it make much difference?” But he could have a larger staff on labor issues, so he decided to make the move, and he certainly never regretted it.

Either way he did it, he would have been extremely active on the other committee, but particularly for health care, he felt that the Labor Committee was where he belonged. He obviously cared about jobs and education, but on health care, he thought, *I have to get this through*. It had been his cause ever since ’69 basically, hoping at one time or another that it was the right Congress to finally achieve it. He’s saying that again now in 2008.

Young: When Clinton got elected, all the stars were lined up—Democratic Congress, Democratic President, here we go again. It didn’t turn out that way. During the Reagan years, the Senator was reelected twice, in ’82 and ’88. The notion of his running for President kept cropping up. It cropped up about him challenging Reagan, and then it cropped up again. Was it all over by then for him, or was it not over until ’84?

Parker: I don’t think it was over until after ’84. We talked briefly about this last time. After the 1980 campaign, there was a lot of talk that he would run in ’84. I think he decided in 1982 that he wasn’t ready to run again, in part because it seemed that it would have been very difficult to challenge the incumbent Reagan. Some of his colleagues in the Senate were very interested in getting the nomination. They wanted to start their campaigns and to be ready to go when ’83 started. In ’82 he took himself out of the Presidential campaign for ’84, basically for those reasons.

Young: Family considerations.

Parker: Family considerations were always there, yes. The situation was difficult then, but it always has been. From Teddy’s [Kennedy Jr.] sickness in ’73 on, it was always a factor. It seemed to me that he wouldn’t have wanted to take on Reagan for a second term anyway. That would have been too tough. He wasn’t willing to say never, but he thought it was likely that Reagan would win a second term. Eighty-eight would be the year when he could make one last decision about whether to go for the White House.

I think I mentioned before that he went to South Africa toward the end of 1985 in order to learn about what was going on and to talk about apartheid. That issue was coming up fast, and he wanted to know all he could about it. When he returned from that trip, he said, “It was impossible to go there and be credible. No one took me seriously. They all thought I was there because I was running for President in 1988.” This was after [Walter] Mondale had been defeated and Reagan was set to leave office in ’88.

Here was Ted Kennedy sending a signal. He was traveling around the world, going to other countries. He said, “I don’t want to spend the next few years living like that, as though I’m a

Presidential candidate, where everything I do is viewed through a Kennedy Presidential campaign prism. I want to work on these issues on their merits." He told us to call a press conference, and he went out and said, "I won't be a candidate in '88." He did that at the end of 1985. That was when he made the final decision never again to run for President, and to stay in the Senate. He was comfortable in the Senate.

He had recognized all along that people in this country were thinking, *Well, Kennedy may be running for President. That may influence what he's doing.* But to go to a country like South Africa, where he cared strongly about the issue of apartheid, and to have the South African press and all of the European press reporting on the visit intensely and speculating about his Presidential motives for the trip, he said, "That's not why I went to South Africa." I think the light went on, and he said, "I'm going to take myself out of Presidential races from here on. This speculation is not worth it."

He was establishing himself in the early Reagan years as a principal voice against the Reagan administration on domestic and foreign policy issues, and the apartheid issue obviously contributed to that. But at the same time, he felt after '85 that the extra power and influence would serve him well on issues he cared about in the Senate because nobody would think that there was an ulterior motive anymore. He wasn't laying the groundwork for a Presidential campaign. Most people feel that he turned on the afterburners as a Senator after that announcement. He eliminated the possibility of the White House and became strictly a Senator. He enhanced his reputation in the Senate and his ability to get things done by doing that.

Young: Maybe more of a spokesman or leader of the Democratic Party in a conceptual sense.

Parker: Yes, I think so. That was a subsidiary role. He was the leader of the Democratic Party in the Senate but not so much nationwide. I don't think he saw himself that way. But because of his influence in the Senate, he generated an atmosphere around the country that allowed him to go almost anywhere, make a pitch for something, and have it be taken seriously. There's an old quotation, a joke, by Hubert Humphrey: "The first amendment allows others to hear your ideas, but it doesn't mean that you'll be taken seriously." I think the Senator felt that people would take him seriously because of his leadership in the Senate. He occasionally picks up an issue that's not related to the Senate, but not very often. He tends to Senate business very effectively, and most of his major speeches are keyed toward issues that are either on the agenda or are actively being considered.

He was in the Senate from '63 to '85, basically, as a potential President. He was doing a good job and gaining credibility from his initial start in the Senate, to the point where he was admired and respected by almost all of his colleagues. Even before he took himself out of the Presidential race, they recognized that when you do something with Senator Kennedy, you may not agree with him on much, but when you agree with him and work with him, he knows what he's talking about and he does his homework. Republicans, as we like to say, when they have a chance to work with Senator Kennedy, they leap at it.

Young: Yes. Well, I guess we went a little bit over our allotted time.

Parker: That was fast. Time flies.