EDWARD M. KENNEDY ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW WITH WYCHE FOWLER

November 9, 2009
Washington, D.C.

Interviewer

James Sterling Young

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TRANSCRIPT

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Young: This is an interview with Wyche Fowler.

Fowler: Teddy [Edward Kennedy] was one of those guys who was interested in *all* politics and politicians, so he would have known those in the House of Representatives who thought and voted like him. He would have known those who would be most likely to share his political philosophy. Now, he would especially know the ones who would share his political philosophy on the committees in the House that were the same as his committees in the Senate, like military affairs and health, because he would meet with them over at conference, after both sides passed a bill.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: He's a smart enough politician, and a smart enough legislator, with the political instincts. He was a legislator with political instincts. You've got a lot of legislators who have no political instincts, and they don't get very far.

Young: And you have some who are politicians but not legislators.

Fowler: And you have a lot of politicians who have no idea, and are not even interested in the legislative process. They are interested only in self-aggrandizement, power, title. This is especially true today. I was never on a concurrent or concomitant committee with Teddy Kennedy. I was never at a conference with him. I was on the Committee on Ways and Means in the House dealing with taxes. He didn't have any role in that. I was on the foreign policy committees, but not Armed Services. I was a charter member of the Committee on Intelligence.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: But somewhere along the line—it may have been when I was in the House or it may have been just when I was running—I became known as a Southern liberal. As an example, during the [Jimmy] Carter years, I received a letter from the Secretary of State commending me for voting for the foreign aid budget, the State Department's appropriations. I didn't like to vote

for foreign aid, I must tell you, as I represented, my whole life, a majority black district, the highest in the history of the Congress. The last time there was a white man representing blacks. For my last two elections, black population was over 70 percent.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: So, somewhere along the line, I probably caught the attention of the Kennedy crowd of liberals. Then I ran for the Senate and nobody gave me a chance. I had no money, against an incumbent.

Young: This was '85?

Fowler: It was '86. My opponent was [Mack] Mattingly. He had been there one term. He was from Indiana and had moved to Georgia with IBM [International Business Machines]. But he was known as a very poor legislator. Anyway, I'd been in the House for ten years. I didn't have any burning desire to be in the Senate. I just had conferences with him. Mattingly was on the Finance Committee in the Senate and I was on the House Ways and Means. So, I knew him very well and knew he couldn't deliver any inside earmarks for Georgia, things that were done in tax bills. Anyway, I ran against him and nobody gave me a chance, and I won. I don't remember when Teddy and I really started becoming friends. He liked me. My friends know me for my storytelling ability. It's that simple. I like tall tales. They're not jokes; I don't tell jokes. These are all stories. They might have a little mixture of fabrication in them.

So, all of a sudden, somewhere along the way, I got invited by Teddy or Chris Dodd to join a little group that would go off in one of the hideaways and have a drink when we were in long sessions. And we would entertain each other, just like the old days of the Senate, the way you're supposed to have a couple rounds, waiting for the next vote, and just laughing and gossiping about the other Senators and about anything and everything. I also traveled with Chris a lot. I was on the Intelligence Committee and wasn't married at the time, so these chairmen used me a lot, to go investigate things. I liked to do it and they thought I was a pretty good reporter.

I never went on a Congressional delegation trip with Teddy, to my memory. I was only at his house a couple of times. I think both occasions were when the Democratic National Committee, or the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, had fundraisers, because I would have remembered had I been up there dealing with him for a specific reason.

Young: Which house was that? Was that when he was in McLean?

Fowler: No, in Cape Cod. I've been to parties at McLean. No, I'm just talking about the early days with Teddy.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: The reason I remember it is we were sitting downstairs waiting for his mother to come down to breakfast. She finally came down with her attendant. She was in a wheelchair. And Teddy said, "Mother, this is Senator Fowler. He's a good friend from Georgia." She was in the wheelchair and the piano was nearby and on it were all these pictures. She pointed and said,

"There's Jack, he's dead; there's Bobby, he's dead; and Teddy, you're going to be dead soon too." That was the only thing she said, and then we had breakfast and her nurse fed her.

Young: This was in the '80s?

Fowler: Well, it would have been after '86. As I said, prior to '86 I had no contact with him. Oh, I ran into him at events around town and shook hands with him on occasion, but I had no legislative or political, Congressional dealings with him whatsoever.

Young: On issues.

Fowler: On anything.

Young: On anything. Well, what about when you were—

Fowler: When I became a Senator, he had to make this first move toward the friendship. I didn't tail him around. As I say, I wish I could remember. But all of a sudden, he decided he liked my company and he included me in this little group, including Dodd, Jim Sasser, [Donald] Riegle, and a few others. We never went off, just the two of us. I've never sailed with him. I've never fished with him. You know he had a big New Year's Eve party every year and we'd dress up in costumes. I went to two or three of those. The staff gave him a birthday party every year, and I went. In both cases, these were big groups. But I was on his invite list and the staff knew that.

Young: So you were a social friend.

Fowler: It could be described more accurately that way. I hadn't thought about it until you said that, but that's what I was. Of course we talked politics, but the truth was it was a friendship—

Young: He never asked you for help on a piece of legislation, because you were cosponsors on a lot of his—

Fowler: Oh, I probably was. His staff may have called my staff and said that Senator Kennedy wants Senator Fowler to take a look at this, but I can't think of anything big. I cast some votes like him, that nobody else—very few in the South would—like vote against the first Gulf War. I was for all the liberal things at the time, such as freedom of choice. It was mainly on foreign policy that I was more in his line, and unusual for a southerner. But the test, since I'm on a roll here, of the friendship was, just like about any other institution, once you leave the Senate, whether you do so voluntarily or whether you're defeated, it's hard to maintain access, much less a friendship, with sitting Senators. There are a lot of reasons for that. They are busier than they need to be. The staffs are very protective, because you've got so many people trying to see them and they can't see all of them, and they are running back and forth to the states. All the things you know so well.

It may sound immodest but it's true. I'm one of the rare former Senators that has never lobbied. I find it very uncomfortable. I just wouldn't do it, and I haven't done it. I'm not in Washington, but I'm on a couple of nonprofit boards, so I visit often. Therefore, when I go to the gym, for instance—you get lifetime access—I see former colleagues. I've been on the floor once. I could

go on the floor, but the guys who see me who knew me, who served with me, seem to—They're gracious, they seem to enjoy seeing me.

But Teddy, the point of all that lead-up, continued almost until the day he died to invite me for lunch about once every two months. Not just me, it was always that little group. Dodd would be there, maybe [Dale] Bumpers, [John] Culver, who went to Harvard with him and is his oldest friend. But there was no reason in the world to continue to include me, except he considered me a friend and we liked each other's company. Sometimes I couldn't come. I don't think I ever made a special trip. I feel quite bad about saying that. I'd miss one but then I'd make the next one, so I'd see him three or four times a year.

Young: Yes. And that started when you were both in the Senate.

Fowler: Yes.

Young: And it continued.

Fowler: And it continued, but as I say, it was just so much more impressive when I left. You know all the legions of stories. When I was in the Senate, my mother had terrible esophageal cancer. My sister is somewhat handicapped and my father had died, so I was with her during her last year and a half. I'd fly home whenever I could, be there three or four days, then I'd come back to vote. Teddy called my mother once every two weeks for over a year, and he wouldn't even tell me. My mother would say, "I talked to Senator Kennedy this morning." So, I have that personal experience of his kindness and his faithfulness.

I look in retrospect and I just can't believe that we never went on a Congressional trip together. Of course, he did what I described to you when I was in the Senate. He'd say let's go have a drink, or we might have a sandwich together. But I don't recall ever being invited to the Cape for a weekend to sail with him. But I knew we liked each other and we were friends, and the test was when I left the Senate. I've been gone now since '92, that's 17 years, and he was still calling every six or eight weeks.

Young: He saw something in you and you saw something in him, and you clicked.

Fowler: I guess that was it. I came to Washington in my early 20s, with then-Congressman Charles Longstreet Weltner.

Young: Weltner I know. I'm from Georgia too.

Fowler: Oh, you are?

Young: Oh, yes.

Fowler: Where?

Young: Savannah.

Fowler: How about that? Well, he was—With his reputation, everybody thought he was going to be Vice President if not President.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: Because he became very famous as being the only, they call it "Deep South southerner," to vote for the civil rights bill. That was the year before I got there, but I was with him in '65, when he voted for the Voting Rights Act, and then we did Medicare, I think, in '65. He knew Teddy, I think because when the little girls were bombed in Birmingham in 1963, he was the first one to take the floor and, of course, condemn the violence, and to say that we all shared the blame because those who had been elected to lead had failed to lead. The newspapers made him very famous for that statement. Then he followed that with voting for these landmark—and liberal—statutes. During this time he was in his second term and running for his third term.

At that time in Georgia when you qualified for office and paid your money, there was an attached sheaf of mimeographed papers that included—I've forgotten when it first was put in there—a loyalty oath, in which you pledged to support all other members of the Democratic Party. I probably signed it when I was running for city council and didn't even know it. You just sign, pay your money, and get ready.

In this case, Weltner runs and wins the primary. To the astonishment of every political creature in the state, in or out of office, the guy who wins the Democratic primary for Governor that year was Lester Maddox. The votes were in on the Tuesday night of the primary and Charles won handily. Lester won not so handily, but there was no runoff, so he was the nominee. So, without telling anybody—not even his chief of staff—Charles calls a press conference at 10:00 the next morning and resigns. He says, "I cannot violate my oath and I can't support this guy. I fought racism and segregation all my life." People always said, myself included, that was the Presbyterian in him. He comes from a long line of Presbyterian preachers. General [James] Longstreet was his great-grandfather.

So, to tie this all together, about two or three years after his resignation, Kennedy and the Kennedy Foundation, or whatever it is called, gave Charles the Profiles in Courage Award. I've forgotten why, but I was not there—traveling in Europe I think. That would have provided a chance for Kennedy to know me. In hearing myself relay this story, I probably could have first come to Teddy's attention through Charles Weltner, but he never followed up with it. Anyway, Charles got out in 1966 and I was elected to the House in '77.

Carter was elected in November 1976, taking office in January 1977. Andy Young, who was the Congressman for the Fifth District, was appointed as United Nations Ambassador, creating the vacancy, which I ran for in a huge field and won. So, it was 11 years later that I came to the House, and then another 10 years before I went to the Senate. That's 20 years since Weltner, before Teddy Kennedy would have ever known me.

Young: So, you were in Atlanta when Jimmy Carter was elected Governor.

Fowler: Yes.

Young: Governor. Okay, so that's a switch from Lester Maddox, a big one.

Fowler: And Carter—people say he couldn't have been reelected. He was going to run for President, hell or high water. We now know it was planned for a long time, but that was after Lester Maddox.

Young: It may have been speculation, whether it was true then or not, but certainly it was true later. His brother Robert was alive, I think probably, when Weltner got the Profiles in Courage Award.

Fowler: No, I don't think so. I have to think again about the timing. I went into the Army after college. I went to Weltner because I was waiting to go in the Army. I was a couple of years in the Army. I went to law school when I was 29 and ran for the city council that first quarter in law school. But the reason I go through all that is that I failed my tax test. The night Bobby Kennedy was shot, I was watching it on television, and I had my tax exam the next morning. But I stayed up all night watching the crying and carrying on, and I went to the professor and he wouldn't postpone it. I think I stayed there about 20 minutes. I just couldn't keep my mind on it and failed it. What year was Bobby shot? Was that '69?

Young: I think it was '68.

Fowler: I entered law school in—that would have been right. It was first year, freshman tax. It was September.

Young: Chappaquiddick occurred almost one year to the day after that.

Fowler: Yes. As I told you, I feel like I'm wasting your time because he never mentioned Chappaquiddick in my presence, or any of the painful part of his life. He was just always chipper and laughing when I was with him.

Young: He didn't talk about himself.

Fowler: No. And I never was in his presence when anybody else around asked him about anything sensitive or personal, much less that.

Young: As an aside, that was quite a challenge for me, because I did almost 30 interviews with him over the last—

Fowler: I was going to ask you how much time. Wow.

Young: A lot. I started in 2005 and my last interview was the year he got his brain cancer. He came to talk about himself, so when I saw the book, I recognized that was his second draft. There were a lot of the things he talked about—

Fowler: But he didn't change his story.

Young: No. There was nothing about that book that was ghostwritten. That was him, a mirror of him, I think.

Fowler: I got that impression.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: He probably had somebody help him organize the material, but I don't know. I haven't asked Vicki [Reggie Kennedy]. I thought it was a very honest account that basically said he didn't know what happened really, and then he all of a sudden came up for air and realized that the girl was trapped and still in the car, and then he panicked. I think what nobody really knows is whether they were—how much they were drinking and whether or not Teddy and the girl were at least doing some old-fashioned necking at some point and may or may not have been heading to a motel.

Young: I think it was—Well, I don't know. I didn't ask him to talk about what happened and give his story. What I was interested in was the effect on him.

Fowler: Oh, of course.

Young: And the way—

Fowler: Well, that's what I say. To me, just those few short paragraphs in the book were painfully honest. That's the way that I would have thought that he—That's the way he is. He recognized that he just panicked. He was thinking of himself, as most of us would, especially if you had a reputation, the family.

Young: But he does say in the book, talking about in general—And I bring this up because I wonder if that was any impression you had. You knew him at the time, over these years. He said that he was—He didn't use the word "driven," but he came pretty close to the concept that he kept going and kept driving himself. Work, work, work, do something, make something of yourself, make something for the country, trying to keep the despair at bay. If he stopped, he'd fall into despair. I just wondered if you ever sensed the despondence in the man, or the despair. He did a lot of partying, a lot of sailing, a lot of legislating, always on the go.

Fowler: I'm just trying to separate my own views of people like that and other experiences. I don't think I could help you with any specific memories. I think that all the books that have been written on the Kennedys basically come to that conclusion, that these boys had a stern, even tyrannical father, who at the early stages would say, "Make something of yourself and be determined." If everybody else was running a mile, he wanted the Kennedy boys, his boys, to run two miles and practice an extra half hour, whether at tennis or whatever they were doing. Then that came to be solidified more in approach as they got older and could understand the concept, that you owe it to your family to succeed.

And then, when—Well, Joe [Joseph Kennedy, Jr.] too, when the three of them died, all in public service, then the family and everybody, thought that Teddy, the last, owed it to the country to do well and to survive, and survive by thriving. I think Teddy, by then, had it inculcated in him somehow that he wasn't supposed to go sit in the corner and feel sorry for himself. He could not tolerate that psychologically, and the family wouldn't. And because of the personality that I've been discussing and we both know, we found out, as you saw at that funeral, the extraordinary testimony of all those children seeing him as a father figure but also as a leader.

I just never saw it, but I'm sure he had some times of the black dog—isn't that what [Winston] Churchill called it?—where he was probably alone and had enough of chasing women for that week, or his favorite one wasn't in town, and he probably sat by himself and drank.

Young: His marriage was already on the rocks.

Fowler: Oh, yes. Oh, that went way back.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: She—I mean, they all knew that in the family—was a hopeless alcoholic in her mid-20s, and then that went into pills. She just sort of went away in the house. As you and I saw growing up in the South—you in Savannah, and my parents in Washington and Warrington, Georgia, over there in the eastern part of the state—you knew who the alcoholics were. They just pulled the curtains shut, whiskey was delivered on the back step, and they might come out in about two weeks.

Young: Yes, every family has them, mine included.

Fowler: Here's something I wouldn't have remembered, and I don't think I know anything else. This is when I was in the Senate, and he didn't have any protection. He wouldn't allow that. Of course, he could have paid for his own, but he always—I think there are six doors to the Senate, and he never came in or out the same door. We must have come in together and voted, and we were going somewhere that was back the way we came, but he said, "No, we'll go out this door." I said, "Why are we going out this door?" He said, "It's sort of a security thing," and he told me not to go in and out the same doors. And that was it.

Young: You didn't play tennis with him?

Fowler: No.

Young: Were you aware that as the years went on, he was in great pain from his back?

Fowler: No.

Young: He didn't show it?

Fowler: Well, he never discussed it. I think he tried to go every day to the gym, about 5:00 or 6:00, and took steam baths for his back. It just so happened that that was usually the time that I was in the gym, but I never was in the sauna with him, but I would see him. From behind, his whole back is zigged and zagged and broken, curved. I don't know how they put all those things back together. I think when the plane crashed he had broken it in two or three places. But he never said "I'm tired." Alcohol sedates me; I just get sleepier and sleepier after three or four drinks. But Teddy was one of those guys who would never admit that he was tired, and as long as you'd sit there and drink with him, he'd get livelier and livelier.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: I always attributed that to the Irish in him.

Young: Like Chris Dodd.

Fowler: And Dodd. But those guys, during their heavy-drinking days, I couldn't keep up with them but I would be there with them, say, until 2:00 in the morning. It was never any place where we were in danger or having to drive, but usually in one of the hideaways. But then the next morning, you'd see him at 8:00 at a Congressional breakfast. He never showed any effects of the night before.

Young: Yes, it didn't affect his work in the Senate or his workday. It was after hours or late at night when the Senate was in extended session.

Fowler: Yes. He didn't drink during the day. I feel embarrassed to say this, but I used to drink with Daniel Patrick Moynihan every once in a while, around 2:00 or 3:00. We got along very well and so he'd say, "I want to talk to you about something." He'd give you that grin and say, "I'll meet you in the hideaway at 2:30." We'd have a couple of martinis, then I had to go back to the gym and sleep for two and a half hours before I even dared to go home.

But with Teddy, as we now say, in the old days, where you had people who did everything on a handshake and there wasn't this rank partisanship. People would oppose each other on one thing but have a drink that night or be together on something the next day; nothing like what's happened in the last 15 to 20 years. And I think he identified as friends people who were like that naturally, politicians who really like people. As you know—You study these things—you've got these guys in the Senate and the House who can't stand people. If they never had to shake a hand, they'd be the happiest guys in the world, much less mix it up with people and have to resolve their problems and have to explain themselves.

Young: He enjoyed people a great deal.

Fowler: He really enjoyed people.

Young: All different kinds of people.

Fowler: He was a skilled politician and a skilled legislator and he liked all different kinds of people.

Young: So, you got tagged very early as a Kennedy liberal from Georgia.

Fowler: Oh, yes, and they ran the ads against me, like they do now.

Young: When you ran to defeat Mattingly, [Ronald] Reagan went down there and said, "Do you want somebody as liberal as Ted?" So it's kind of curious that, not really knowing each other, you were identified as another Kennedy, and the presumption is that you were hand in glove with him.

Fowler: Well, certainly the presumption would be—This is a good way to put it—the presumption would be, certainly by my critics, that I would go up there and vote like Ted Kennedy.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: And they were right. [*laughs*]

Young: Well, not on all things.

Fowler: Not on all things, no. I accept the liberalism in Georgia context now. I have to say, I never did like it and tried to explain things a hundred different ways without liberal and conservative. But, given the popular, usual definition of it, especially as I say, in matters of social policy, the charge would be fair. I've always had a little fiscal conservatism. I voted against a lot of things because I just thought they weren't that necessary, and because they just cost too much.

Young: Ellis Arnall was the liberal of my childhood, and old Gene Talmadge.

Fowler: I knew Ellis very well. Once I became a lawyer—because I was on the council, as I told you, at about 28—he tried to recruit me for his law firm. We got along really well. He was a pistol.

Young: Do you have any insight on what it was between Jimmy Carter and Ted Kennedy?

Fowler: Well, back in the distance of history and knowing both men, you would now say that they would be oil and water. Jimmy Carter is a driven, whatever we call them now, type-A, detail-obsessed perfectionist. The traditional role of the legislator and the art of compromise is not in Jimmy Carter's vocabulary and still isn't today. It's his way or he has no part of it. That's a major part of it. But I also think that, because of that nature, that it was the biggest personal insult, unforgivable, that a member of his own party would run against him for President. And the fact that it was a Kennedy, so that Carter could very easily transfer that into a sense of Kennedy and the Kennedy family entitlement, just by throwing their hat in the ring, they would think that Carter ought to willingly give up the Presidency and step aside for the entitled Kennedy. So he never forgave him.

Young: I haven't had the courage to ask him whether Kennedy ever made it to his forgiveness list.

Fowler: Who, Carter?

Young: Carter. I see him twice a year, I would say.

Fowler: He may say so, by God's grace, but I don't believe it.

Young: The friction between them didn't begin when Teddy, very late in the game actually, did the unthinkable. Even though Ted supported him on most of his legislation—They had very high approval. I just wondered if you had any insight into this.

Fowler: I don't. Except, as I go back to my original premise, whether it's right or wrong, it's just that Carter was not like a back-slapping, Irish politician anyway. He didn't get along with Tip [Thomas P. O'Neill]. I mean, if you can't get along with Tip, you don't get along with anybody. Now, they attributed that to the first—Remember the inauguration night, or something like that, and Hamilton Jordan didn't give Tip enough tickets? From then on, he was known as "Hannibal Jerkin."

I was at Hamilton's [Jordan] funeral in Atlanta. I wasn't at Jody's [Powell], but I read the transcript of all the speeches, and they were beautiful tributes to Jody, who was the closest to Jimmy. He was his driver and everything in the early '70s. But some of the stories about Jody, him telling on Carter, seem to suggest that Carter is an egomaniac with an incredible drive; I don't know where he got it. He might have gotten it from his father. When I was in Saudi Arabia he called me and said, "Do you want me to come to Saudi Arabia and spend a few days, to try to raise $5 million?" I said sure and it was all set up.

He came about six weeks later. We raised the money. But when my staff asked when the Carters left, "What are you going to do now?" I said, "I think I'm going to check myself into the hospital." He demanded that we have four meetings a day, then six, then eight. He got up in the morning at 5:00 and jogged for an hour, and then we'd get going around 6:00 or 6:30. He'd make the Arabs get up (they don't like to work in the morning) and we wouldn't get back until midnight. I'd never been so exhausted in all my life. He was sitting there checking his watch and checking his notes on the next meeting. An amazing man.

Actually, I'm enjoying this; you can tell, I'm talking out of school. I went to see him. He campaigned for me in the runoff. He went to three different places and he said the most extraordinarily nice things about me. This was when I got beat.

[BREAK]

Fowler: Anyway, I got beat, and I went to him about a week later, to thank him for his extraordinary support. I had thought about it beforehand. He said to me, "What are you going to do? Are you going to start practicing law?" I said, "Well, not immediately. I'll tell you what I'd like to do is for you to consider using me on any project, anywhere that you think I might be helpful, for a year, unpaid. I've got enough saved and it would be my contribution to your work."

Young: This is Carter you're talking to.

Fowler: I'm talking to Carter, just the two of us. He said something relatively gracious, but I could tell immediately that he wasn't interested. He said, "Well, let me think about what will be the best thing," and of course I never heard from him. I went on the board of the Carter Center for a couple of years, and I had to get off of it when I went to—I've forgotten why, maybe the State Department. When I went to Saudi Arabia, they wouldn't let you be on any boards, even nonprofit. He could have the best and the brightest people in the world, in the country, working with him, and I know because I suggested it to a good friend of his, who took it to him—This is

10 years ago now, 15 years ago—that he should identify these people and have them come work with him for a year, and take them around with him to introduce them to all these kings and presidents and potentates, and then he could pick his successor, and they would already be not only trained but known by all these places, new countries. But he wouldn't do it. He really thinks he's going to live forever.

Young: I just can't help thinking of such different temperaments.

Fowler: Between Teddy and Carter? Oh, as I say, it's oil and water. They ended up in the same profession, driven to succeed in politics, in elective office. They share that burning desire. I don't have to tell you, being from Savannah and a man of some years, like myself, even looking back, how preposterous it was that Jimmy Carter got elected President, from Plains, Georgia, no platform, no nothing, just out there grit, selling himself. Unbelievable. Well, Teddy did a lot of that too, but the style, the temperament, the only thing the same is there's a certain drive, and whether it came from similar sources, I don't know. I mean, you can find 100 psychiatrists around the country who would say all people are just trying to please their father.

Young: Well, I think you can overdo that, speaking as a son and a father. [*laughter*]

Fowler: How long have you been at Virginia?

Young: I came there in 1978.

Fowler: As a historian?

Young: Yes, a political scientist and historian, and I came there from Columbia University.

Fowler: That's where Charles Weltner went. He went to Columbia and got his law degree. I'm teaching at Oxford this January and February.

Young: Great! What are you teaching?

Fowler: I'm very excited. I'm teaching to the lawyers, a course on Congress and the Constitution. I taught it at the University of Georgia about three years ago and they liked it. They were third-year law students, but they know nothing about the Constitution. They know a few cases, *Marbury v. Madison* decided this, but so many big constitutional issues came up under the [George W.] Bush administration, on torture and detainees and suspension of habeas corpus and all that, that it made for a good course. It was hard work. Georgia has a program with Ohio State that was just inaugurated. So I'm teaching half of those students and half English students, but the thrill for me is just to be in Oxford for ten weeks.

Young: I'd like you to say a few words about Teddy's standing in the Senate, and how one figures out or what one should think. Most of the people who are using this oral history—it's really for generations hence, so one of the things we try to do is give them a sense of the person. A lot of the legislative history is written and recorded, not all of it. Then he has an enormous number of personal notes of conversations.

Fowler: Oh, Teddy does?

Young: Oh, yes.

Fowler: See, I didn't know that, that he would write when he was talking on the phone to the President or anybody.

Young: He wrote notes after every—

Fowler: Conversation? Wow. I never knew that.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: Mister compulsion on that was Bob Graham.

Young: I didn't know that.

Fowler: Oh, go back and look. In his whole career, in his office he had color-coded files, going back 25 years. And that's really what got him eliminated from consideration as Vice President, because there is not an ounce of reflection. It's like Samuel Pepys. It's *I got up, this is what I had for breakfast. I went to this meeting at 9:07*. And it goes like that until he goes to bed, but he never reflects on anything.

Young: I wouldn't say that's the characteristic—

Fowler: Oh, I'm sure.

Young: —of Ted's notes.

Fowler: He would make judgments on the conversations.

Young: And reflections on them after the conversation, or here's what I thought.

Fowler: Yes. I never had a hint of that.

Young: But there are these two simple pictures of Teddy; he's the red meat for the right wing, or anybody who is running. He's the spendthrift, silver spoon in the mouth, hedonist, an extravagant liberal. In the Senate, he is—I'm impressed by the number of people across the aisle who don't think of him that way at all. I mean, they say it on the campaign trail, on the stump they may say something, but I've interviewed a lot of his former colleagues and present colleagues on the Republican side, and he enjoys an enormous respect from them, though they really fight tooth and nail on a lot of other things. I'm trying to give people his history, a sense of how that happens. What is it about the man? If you agree with this, if you do think he has this great respect in the Senate, how does one explain it? And yet the fact that he seems to be a polarizing figure for so many.

Fowler: Well, the bottom answer is that respect is genuine, but it comes from his *personal* qualities and his *personal* charm and his *personal* interrelations with those people, including the Republicans. He knows them, cares about their family, and wants to know the names of their children. If he hears one of them is graduating—or he has his staff know their ages and know

their birthdays. None of this artificial thing of having the old Robotype happy birthday letter. He'd go up to the guy, the Senator, and say, "I seem to remember your oldest son has his birthday. What's his number? I want to call him." But the red meat of it, as you describe, is true. I mean, that's what they think about him and they used him, and he was a convenient political battering ram.

Young: Used against you too.

Fowler: Yes, they used it against me, exactly; and without any shame. Now, the thoughtful person, citizen, who is not in public elected life would say, "Well, how could that be? How could they say the nastiest things in the world about him, and yet he still charmed them or even spoke to them the next day?"

Young: He didn't seem to build grudges against anybody.

Fowler: Well, I don't know. I doubt it. What I was about to say is, I just can't imagine that that didn't hurt him a lot in the early days. The early campaigns, as I recall from reading books, were criticized as just a sense of entitlement in Massachusetts. He was too young to be in the Senate and he was given the seat because of his name and his father, his money. But he, from the beginning, set out to be a diligent, some would say compulsive, worker, mastering the legislative process, so he got respect from his colleagues.

We all respect people we see get down into the weeds and the details of legislation, and actually read the bills. He had the money to have as large a staff as he wanted, many of which were paid by him and not by the government when he exceeded his allowance. But he also learned how to pick the best and the brightest, which Carter didn't do, or wouldn't do. So all these Republicans, anybody who ever was around him, knew that he knew what he was talking about, he couldn't be tripped up. You could oppose him because you didn't like the amendment or didn't like the philosophy, but you weren't going to sit up there and debate him on what this thing did and what it cost. But he was just too easy a target for the conservative side.

One thing I noticed in Georgia now, we had a Governor's race, and he said this guy votes too much with the Speaker of the House, and had a picture of him. Nobody in Georgia knows who the Speaker of the House is, but everybody knows Ted Kennedy because of the tragedies of the family that they've been in. And everybody knows that Ted Kennedy is a big social liberal and likes to talk about the plight of the poor and race relations, and is so open and articulate about it. It makes a lot of people nervous anyway, but it makes the right wing furious.

Young: What will they do when they don't have Teddy to kick around?

Fowler: Well, I think they're trying to replace it with Nancy Pelosi and San Francisco gays or something. There'll never be—because nobody again will span all that time.

Young: Yes, that's part of it. I was interested to find that a great many, a very large majority of his legislative initiatives, always started with a bipartisan—somebody on the Republican side almost always. Maybe on some really hot labor issues like the minimum wage, he didn't do that, but that was—

Fowler: I think he tried, though, because he knew that was the best way to get it passed. Again, you talk about legislating, some people just will introduce something to get their name in the paper and that's it. But once he committed to something, he wanted it passed, and whether it took 4 years or 30 years, like health care, he didn't give up. I think he chose his causes carefully, well researched. He said, "I'm interested in this; how is the best way to go? I want you to come back in a couple of weeks and give me two or three different approaches to how we would do it." He'd probably ask, "Who can we get on the Republican side who will be interested in it? I'll go talk to him."

I think that was a strategy, that was a tactic, because the things that he was interested in were high-profile stuff and very controversial. But he also knew what this White House still doesn't seem to realize, that once the Republicans decide, they're going to oppose you no matter what. You might as well get out there and say it, quit beating your head against the wall. I mean, these guys, they will never support anything [Barack] Obama is for, until it beats him enough that they begin to worry about their own district.

Young: I can't help but wonder what, if anything, how differently it would have gone if Ted had been active during this health scare.

Fowler: Well, those of us who know him think that it would have been done by now.

Young: Yes.

Fowler: But he would compromise if he saw he didn't have enough votes for the public option. He'd say, we'll put it in the bill, we'll offer it as an amendment, or whatever. Of course, that's another thing about being a good legislator, and that's what they say is Pelosi's strength. You've got to be able to count. You've got to know who you can rely on when they tell you something, and those who you can't—who would say, "Well, I'm sorry. I meant it but I went back home and had a couple of town meetings, and my people just won't let me do that." He knew you had to have political courage on tough things.

Young: And many times he's also done some of the projects on the White House that Carter and his successors started. But one thing I heard everywhere, both parties, is that when Ted Kennedy gives you his word, it's his word and you can count on it.

Fowler: Absolutely. It goes to that respect the Republicans have for him.

Young: One person on the first [George H. W.] Bush's staff said, "I couldn't say the same for most of my people."

Fowler: No, it's a rare quality. I don't think it used to be rare because the Senate, especially, used to operate on handshakes.

Young: Yes. What do you think his legacy will be?

Fowler: I think the historians will write, accurately, that his greatest gift and success was as a legislator. How rare that is in a legislative body, that if you had a cause and wanted to ensure its success, then you'd have Ted Kennedy on your side. And he would improve your chances, not

only by his name being associated, but by the tactics and the strategy that he would help devise to get it passed. That's about it. On any of the issues that he was involved in, I think they will find that he was what we now call "education reform," that his hand is in every major piece of education legislation, certainly every piece of children's legislation, the labor issues, will all come together.

Young: So, virtually, every piece of health policy, medical, every phase of it, it's not just care, it's medical education, it's delivery.

Fowler: And it's being in the places where—the issues that he wanted to be involved in. You can't have any healthcare for children over the 40 years he was there without going through his committee and through him. You had to go through him, so to speak, but you have to be there. If he wasn't on the committee or hadn't gotten himself on the committee, that wouldn't have been one of his areas. It's like the—The best thing is the Supreme Court. I mean, I can be as vocal as I want—but if I'm not on the Judiciary Committee when a Supreme Court nominee comes up, I'm not a player.

Young: The two committees that he chose, or Jim Eastland gave him—It's not clear just how that came about—were Judiciary and the Labor Committee, now HELP [Health, Education, Labor, & Pensions], they've got everything pushed in, and that's where you'd look for—Those were the two areas, the one having a lot to do with civil rights. But I think he saw almost everything through a civil rights lens, a human rights lens, when it comes to equal access to affordable health care, he saw that as—

Fowler: That's a human rights issue.

Young: —as a human rights issues and it pervades everything.

Fowler: I agree.

Young: Fair housing, refugees, immigration, the same thing.

Fowler: Equality under the law.

Young: Yes. Well, I've taken enough of your time.

Fowler: I've taken your time and I know it hasn't been very helpful, but it's been fun to meet you.

Young: It's been helpful to history.