

ROBERT J. DOLE  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview with  
Sen. TOM DASCHLE

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[Sen. Daschle reviewed this transcript for accuracy of names and dates. Because no changes of substance were made, it is an accurate rendition of the original recording.]

Smith: Well, first of all, like Bob Dole, you've been in both the House and the Senate. Which is better?

Daschle: Oh, the Senate is better, I think, in many respects. It's a smaller institution. You're given more latitude to be involved in the legislative process. If you work hard and keep your focus, there's a lot you can do. But I think in large measure because you have longer terms and smaller numbers, it accommodates those who are real interested in legislative process.

Smith: The trajectory of your career in many ways is similar to his. Presumably when you first went to Congress, as opposed to when you left, the role of television, fundraising—what kind of changes took place during that period that in some ways redefined the job?

Daschle: Well, I think the media probably had more to do with redefining how it functions as anything. I think the two big consequential effects environmentally on the legislative process were the airplane and the television, the airplane because it accommodated members in a way that they'd never had the opportunity to be accommodated before to get back to their states and districts, and that changed the dynamics here in town a lot. You really began to reduce the level of social interaction and the kind of bonding that occurred among legislators when they were really forced to stay in town.

The second, the media, allowed for a scrutiny and sort of an intrusive view of the process that ultimately, in my view, exacerbated rather than enhanced the process because in many respects it created an opportunity for dialogue not one-on-one, but through the media, and that's really a big part of what happens now. Leaders would walk out of their office and face a bank of cameras and in some ways direct their comments to the leader down the hall through the camera, and that happens all too frequently, not to mention the extraordinary power of a thirty-second commercial and the fear of most

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legislators to be victimized or to be affected in some way by the thirty-second attack ad that they knew would be coming on virtually everything they did. So it had an effect, in my view, on the courage—if not courage, at least the flip side, the temerity, of members to look at issues in a more thoughtful way.

Smith: That's interesting, because it also raises this question. Bob Dole is a classic pragmatist, a get-things-done kind of conservative, and it would seem that that's out of fashion, that the rise of the 24/7 news cycle, the Internet, ideologically defined cable networks driving a lot of the political conversation, pragmatists don't fare very well—

Daschle: That's true.

Smith: -in that arena, do they?

Daschle: No. Pragmatists on either side. I think we've seen to a certain extent an erosion of the middle because of a number of factors, the media being a big part of it. But there is a tendency now to play to your base a lot more, and the bases are more extreme by their very nature. So it's hard to find a pragmatist willing to face the base, maybe upset them a little, to accomplish something for the larger good.

Smith: Is there a difference, at least in degree there, between the House and the Senate in that clearly House districts tend to be drawn along lines that reinforce that quality, that the parties tend to enshrine their bases in congressional districts, where when you're running statewide, at least in theory you have to appeal to a broader audience?

Daschle: Well, I think that it depends on the state. Those that are prominently Republican or Democratic have bases that are every bit as demanding statewide as they are within their districts. I would look at, say, perhaps maybe a Rhode Island and a Utah as two good examples where you've got a pretty strong Democratic base in one, a strong Republican base in the other, and that base is statewide. I think your point is well taken. I think by and large, it's probably more of an issue among members of the House, but unfortunately it's all too prominent a challenge in the Senate now as well.

Smith: Tell me about your first contact with Bob Dole.

Daschle: I'd have to say I don't recall my first contact. I remember coming to the Senate and almost immediately developing a friendship and a relationship in part because of his work on Agriculture [Committee]. Also I was a member of the Finance Committee and he was a very prominent member of the Finance Committee as well. So we shared committees together and we shared the same geographic proximity. My wife is from Kansas and was Miss Kansas and got to know Bob Dole probably before I did, and had a very, very high regard for him based on her experiences way back when. So the combination of my wife's experiences and mine on the committees led us to have a friendship that meant a lot to me.

I remember when Bob and Elizabeth celebrated their twenty-fifth wedding anniversary. They invited a few senators to come to the reception, and they were kind enough to invite Linda and me. I thought it was a reflection of the kind of friendship that we had that lasts to this day.

Smith: How much is he shaped by Russell, Kansas, and what does that mean in terms of the kind of senator, the kind of leader he is?

Daschle: Well, I don't think he's ever very far away from Russell, Kansas. I think the values that he acquired growing up and the extraordinary sense of community that he has with Russell today is still very much in evidence. He talks about it in many of his speeches as I appear with him on stages around the country. He, in personal conversation, will regale us with stories of his time in Russell. So it means a lot to him, I think, as one degree of the identity that he treasures. I can understand that connection. I have one myself with my hometown of Aberdeen, South Dakota. So it's a big part of his persona and his character.

Smith: Do you think there's a little bit of populism in that background?

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Daschle: Oh, I don't think there's any doubt. When you come from the Great Plains, there is a populist element to your philosophical views and to the direction and the outlook you have, maybe more evident in some than in others, but clearly a different attitude or a different experience, life experience, than you'd probably have on either coast.

Smith: 1994 is not a great year for the Democrats, but it's a pretty good year for you. Tell us about how you became Minority Leader, how you became Leader.

Daschle: In '94 George Mitchell was my predecessor and a very close friend and a mentor. He made the decision not to run for reelection, so it was clearly going to be a competitive opportunity. I chose early to run, after confiding with a few of my colleagues. Jim Sasser was my original opponent, and Jim Sasser was from Tennessee, so it was a Sasser-Daschle race all the way up until the election.

Then the election occurred and Sasser was defeated by Bill Frist, somewhat unexpectedly, and so Chris [Christopher] Dodd then became, in a sense, a surrogate for Jim Sasser, but, nonetheless, a very highly regarded member of the Caucus. I think the concern among many in our caucus was whether someone with such limited experience as I had—I'd only been elected in '86, so this was six years later—and not really as senior as most leaders had been in the past, so those who were more senior were concerned about that and chose to support Chris in part for that reason, obviously other reasons as well. As I said, he was highly regarded.

I ended up winning, and of course we were running for Majority Leader up until the election, and then we lost the majority because, as you've correctly noted, it was a bad year for Democrats. So overnight I became a candidate for Minority Leader rather than Majority Leader, but certainly Democratic Leader. To make a long story short, I won by one vote, so I became the Leader in December of 1994. Bob Dole at the time was the Republican Leader, and overnight he became the Majority Leader.

Smith: That's exactly ten years after he was elected Republican Leader. What kind of initial contact did the two of you have following your election?

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Daschle: Well, I remember for some reason a reception a couple of nights after the election, and it was at the Corcoran Art Gallery, very elaborate reception and dinner. Now that I think about it, it was a reception and dinner, and for some reason I remember, in typical Bob Dole fashion, his observation, cracking that as a result of the Leader election, everybody in the Great Plains, all farmers in the Great Plains, are now buying new pickups. I think there was somewhat—I recall some of the stories at the time, where agriculture was thinking, “This is going to be pretty good for us.” This is the first time both Leaders came from agricultural states. So we were perceived to be a good team from that perspective. But it was right from the beginning, in part because of our previous relationship, that he reached out to me and made me feel very comfortable, and we began working together.

Obviously we had many issues that divided us. The Clinton administration, of course, had only been in office for two years and had had a rough two years with Whitewater investigations and other matters of political import that seemed to undermine the president’s ability to get started. He had just come off somewhat of a debacle with the healthcare debate in the two years prior. He had passed NAFTA [North American Free Trade Agreement], which was a good thing. So with somewhat of a shaky beginning and a new administration and the Republicans taking over with not a significant majority, but, nonetheless, a majority, it was a precarious way to get started in leadership.

Smith: Was there any sense of shellshock at all? I mean, let’s face it, it had been a long time since the Republicans had control of one, let alone both houses. Did it take any time to sort of recover from that initial shock?

Daschle: Absolutely. It took a long time. I can recall after my election I debated a lot about just how was I going to convince my colleagues. Here you’ve got a guy who really hasn’t been around that long, just won election by one vote, just after having lost the majority. What were we going to do, and what was the plan, and how much expectation was there that we could get it back, say, in ’96? Given the president’s precarious start, up for reelection in ’96, we thought this was not going to be an easy ride for any of us. So I decided that I thought the best policy was full candor, and I said, “I’m not sure I have the

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answers today, but I think we need to come together and find them and work together to see if we can work our way out of this mess.” And over time I guess you could say we made an effort to do that.

Smith: You had a little bit of help from the Republicans, didn't you? I mean, the fact is, the whole [Newt] Gingrich-Dole relationship must have been pretty fraught, certainly when the government shutdown came along, which was, I think most people will agree, brilliantly played by the White House and mishandled by Republicans in Congress. What are your recollections of that? And in particular, Dole must have been climbing the wall during that period.

Daschle: He made his views known to me and to others all the way along. As we had been talking earlier about pragmatism versus ideological fervor, this was probably the best early indication of the conflict within the Republican ranks between pragmatic, somewhat moderate conservatives and the ideological firebrand conservatives that had just taken over the House. Newt Gingrich had a different style and a different tone, and as a result, there were very obvious elements of real friction between House and Senate Republican leaders.

During the shutdown we used to have to come to the Oval Office, and we would actually—I mean for negotiations directly with the president, the vice president, and Leon Panetta was in the room, and the four leaders, night after night. We'd reserve the negotiations. We'd do our work during the day and then everybody would come down there at night. I recall at one point Senator Dole and Speaker Gingrich having a clear dispute about how to respond to what we were working on at the time, and whispered something to each other and then just left, and indicated to us that they didn't know how long it would be before they came back, but they did want to come back. So there we were in the Oval Office, and the president said, “You want to just watch a movie?” So we watched a movie and he made popcorn, waiting for our colleagues to come back as the government was shut down.

Smith: And did they come back?

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Daschle: And because it was just the essential workers, there weren't many people to make popcorn for us, so the president made it himself. And they did come back later on that night.

Smith: They had reached agreement between themselves?

Daschle: Exactly.

Smith: It's funny, I think you said at one point you talked about, I think right after you became Minority Leader, that he came to visit you in your office and you wondered whether it was some sort of psychological trick that was being played, and you concluded that wasn't the case, but you also concluded that under those circumstances, he determined when the meeting ended, which leads me to something Danny [Dan] Rostenkowski told me, that right about the time of the government shutdown, the president called him to say, "Tell me something about Bob Dole that I don't know," in effect trying to get an advantage in the negotiations. And Rostenkowski went on saying all sorts of nice things, but he said, "But I'll tell you, he's the most impatient guy in Washington. There are times when he'll give you whatever you want just to get out of the room." Presumably that's an exaggeration, but is that a quality that you've noticed?

Daschle: I think it's fair to say that while he is a pragmatic, generally moderate person on a philosophical scale, his willingness to subject himself to long periods of bull sessions are not ones that he relishes. He has a great impatience with a lot of the more deliberative aspects of the work that we're subjected to sometimes. Yes, no patience, but a great deal of humor through most of it. He has sort of two personalities. He has a dark side and he has a very humorous, light and lively, full of—just an amazing ability to, in a word or in a phrase, sort of sum up the moment with a touch of humor or with a lot of humor sometimes, but then on the other hand, he can be a very frustrated and somewhat angry person who can direct that anger and make it very clear what his feelings are about a given issue.



Smith: You've been Minority Leader, you've been Majority Leader, and he's been both of those. There is a school of thought that says if you don't particularly care about getting things done, being Minority Leader is actually more fun than being Majority Leader. I'm not sure about fun. What's attractive about each position and what's less so?

Daschle: Well, I think it depends a little bit on how many people constitute your majority, because if you've got a comfortable majority, I would say it's always more fun being in the majority because you really can work your will, with a little help from Republicans. Mike Mansfield in many respects had his own issues within his caucus because of the South and the difficulties that he had in keeping some degree of unity and cohesion. Same with Lyndon Johnson. But when you've got sixty-seven senators, as they had, it's a little different story than if you had fifty-one like I had, being in the majority. And Bob Dole has had similar majorities and minorities. But I think it starts with that. But Majority Leader clearly is the six hundred-pound gorilla when it comes to your ability to set the agenda, your ability to orchestrate a legislative response to a president who is not of your party, which is what my circumstances were. You are sort of the alternative voice. You are the person to respond to the president when you are the Majority Leader and he's the leader of the Republican ranks. So it starts with that, a realization that both from a legislative as well as a political point of view, you're in a very commanding position at least to articulate to the country what you like and what you don't like. The minority position, if you are a forty-nine-vote caucus, is in a relatively strong position. You have the ability to express yourself with regard to the agenda, even though you don't set it, and so it's very important for the Majority Leader to deal with you fairly frequently.

In all of my years, we were in that proximity of fifty-one, fifty-two votes, and so it was a far more challenging partnership for the two leaders. I remember Trent Lott and I had to work through what we called the power sharing agreement because we were at a point where we were at fifty-fifty for a while, even debated how would we deal with managing the Senate with fifty-fifty relationships in our caucuses. So it's probably a little more fun, at least a little less responsibility and a little more opportunity to be critical where you want to be when you're in the minority, but when you've got that

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partnership, there is a responsibility that comes with it, so it's a little bit different, I think, than what it was like in the sixties and early seventies when one party had two-thirds of the vote.

Smith: You read these stories about Lyndon Johnson's legendary mastery of the Senate. What is it that's changed about the Senate? It is just the numbers that seems to preclude that kind of command—or was LBJ just a unique figure?

Daschle: Well, LBJ, if you read the biographies of LBJ, his influence was waning at the end of his six years. He didn't have the same power he had during his heyday, because there were a lot of young senators that were just not going to take it anymore and they were going to assert themselves. You had the Frank Churches at the time and the people that really began to—Fred—I can't think of his name, from Oklahoma—Fred—

Smith: Harris.

Daschle: Right. But a number of young Turks were rising up. I'll never forget the famous story that when he became vice president he decided he still wanted to have the opportunity to lead the Caucus and to be chairman of the Caucus, even though he was going to be vice president, because technically he's still a member of the Senate. And no one really wanted to tell him no, and so he just assumed that it was all a done deal, and he came to the Caucus and they rolled him. He was so embarrassed, he didn't come back for an entire year after being rolled as the vice president. So he learned, too, that there were limits to power that I think are becoming much more prominent.

What's happened, I think, is that to a large extent senators over time became far more independent, far more assertive, and far more unwilling to be dictated to, and that in part came as a result of reforms in the caucus. "Reform" is sometimes a word that I'm reluctant to use because change is more—if reform is always viewed as a good thing, in many cases I'm not sure these reforms were always the best thing, but, nonetheless, changes in the Senate that gave more independence and more opportunities for freedom of movement and freedom of expression in the Senate than it used to be. Used to be a senator was rarely heard from in his first year, but that's changed as well. Now senators

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are very vocal in their very first year in office. That's probably good thing. Nonetheless, I think things have changed internally and externally to bring about a difference. I'll never forget George Mitchell's advice to me as he was leaving the office the very first day, he said that in order to be successful in this job, you have to learn how to grovel. [laughs] I don't know whether—I know he was mostly joking, but there is some truth to that.

Smith: Did he give you any advice about dealing with Dole?

Daschle: Well, his advice was that "Bob Dole will do two things very effectively. One, he will always be straight with you. You'll never have to worry about being surprised by Bob Dole. And secondly, if you have to take him on, it's not going to be a pleasant experience." I remember George sharing that with me the first couple of days we were together after I got elected.

Smith: What did he mean by that?

Daschle: Well, I think that it just meant that it's never easy, if Bob is going to be your opponent, it's never easy. You can't just assume, even if you're in the majority, that you're going to come out on top, that he had a very effective way of organizing his people and sometimes some of yours.

Smith: Do you have a sense of the Dole-Clinton relationship?

Daschle: **Error! Bookmark not defined.** Well, I think it went through phases. The first phase was not a very good one. I suspect that even though he was the Majority Leader, there were a lot of investigative efforts under way in the Senate and in the House at the time, and I remember many, many conversations with the president where he expressed himself about his—and he felt that Bob Dole was responsible, because it was fairly clear from almost the day Bob became Majority Leader that he was going to run for president. So it was Clinton's view that that experience was going to be affected dramatically by Bob's political ambition. So then when he stepped down from his leadership role and

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became a candidate, in some ways it reduced the tension between the two, because it wasn't viewed any longer as an official capacity, but things didn't change, of course. We went all the way up through impeachment. But Bob was, I think, really quick after the election to send signals to the president that the election's over, and given his humor, in particular, he cut through whatever political issues there were and they developed a pretty good friendship after that and I would say are reasonably good friends today.

Smith: In fact, in some ways I wonder if there wasn't more tension between Dole and the emerging right wing of his own party, the cultural right. I mean, he'd obviously been an economic conservative, but also what I call a sort of "It's none of your business" conservative, a "Leave me alone" conservative.

Daschle: Right.

Smith: And now there was sort of this rise of the religious right in particular within his party, and I always sensed he was never totally comfortable with that, and he had that weighing on him throughout that period.

Daschle: He did. I think this was a tough time because the Republican Party was going through a fairly consequential transition, and you still had elements of the pragmatist faction very much a part of the Caucus in the Senate, but they had lost everything in the House side. Bob Michel had lost his election, and as a result—and I can't recall, there was Ed Madigan was another pragmatist who lost and firebrands took over. I think Trent Lott was viewed somewhat as sort of a transitional figure in that regard, not necessarily a pragmatist, but not quite as ideological, someone who respected the institution, but he beat Alan Simpson by one vote, who was viewed as a pragmatist, so that transition was taking root, and then I think it ultimately did take root with much more of an ideological person in Bill Frist. So that transition took a while and Bob Dole was right there during that period of time.

Smith: Did he discuss at all with you his plans to leave the Senate?

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Daschle: I don't recall.

Smith: Were you surprised when you first heard it?

Daschle: Everybody kind of anticipated. It was a poorly held secret. So I don't recall how early in our relationship as leaders it became clear to me that he was running, but it did mean a lot to me that on a couple of occasions he took me in his confidence about his plans. I'll never forget the day he made his final speech he also had somewhat of a farewell reception on the ninth floor of the Hart Building, and he asked if I would come over and speak at this farewell reception. Of course, here you have the likely Republican nominee for president leaving the Senate, and many of us who worked with him in a sense wishing him well and speaking very, very fondly of him and of our relationships with him at this reception. So I was somewhat moved that he would ask me to do that, and I still remember it quite vividly.

Smith: How did he use staff?

Daschle: Well, all three of the leaders on the Republican side that I have worked with have totally different approaches to leadership and staff. I think Bob was by far, of the three, the most inclusive of staff, and in some ways I have to say I guess I'd probably assert even had the most professional and impressive staff, people that had been with him a long time, people who knew him. We'd come in and sit at one of our conference tables, mostly, as you know, he'd come over to my office about at least once a week, and he would bring his staff with him. I would have my staff with him and it would almost be like a formal two foreign leaders meeting each other, with interpreters and staff on either side. But we would sit down and we'd have paper and walk through the paper. The staff would feel free to interject and correct, in some cases. But it was respectful and very much a part of sort of a team feel that he created as part of his leadership style. I actually learned from that myself, and always felt much closer in style in that regard to Bob Dole than my other two predecessors, who preferred—or I should say his two successors, I should say, who were not as comfortable with staff and preferred in some cases much more one-on-one related communication.

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Smith: Did you ever see him lose his temper?

Daschle: Oh yes. Yes.

Smith: What would make him lose his temper, as a rule?

Daschle: I think in many cases it was what he viewed to be an unreasonable position or unreasonable demand or request, or just circumstances that neither of us really could control but were, nonetheless, there and we had to confront, oftentimes unfair criticism by somebody in my caucus. There wasn't any one thing; it was just—but I have to say, I certainly wouldn't want to give the impression that it was a frequent occurrence. It wasn't. Oftentimes you could tell he was angry, but there wouldn't be an outburst; it was just clear from the body language that he was not happy. But sometimes there was an outburst.

Smith: What do you think the role of Elizabeth [Dole] is? There was a school of thought—not a thought, maybe a little bit oversimplified, that she somehow was responsible, largely responsible for the “new Bob Dole,” for softening Bob Dole, for rubbing some of the rough edges off of Bob Dole and all this. Of course, then there's also the argument that he was given responsibility after having been in the minority all those years, an opportunity to show what he could accomplish in a positive way. What's your sense of not necessarily the relationship, but the significance of Elizabeth in his later political career?

Daschle: I didn't know the Bob Dole prior to Elizabeth, so I really have no basis of comparison. I would think that she had somewhat of a moderating influence on him. If I had to guess—and this is just a guess—there are two things that occurred in Bob's evolution as United States senator. One was the marriage to Elizabeth and the degree of sort of comfort and strength that he drew from that relationship and her larger influence on his overall approach to things, and then secondly, I think he became far more an institution man than he was when he started. The perception of Democrats of Bob Dole

has changed dramatically in the last forty years. When he came to the Senate, he was viewed as a firebrand. He was viewed as a hardcore partisan. He was the chairman of his party, and even up to and including that time when he ran as the vice president, he was kind of viewed as the attack dog.

But then something happened, and even though he was viewed in that way—and in my view, rightfully so oftentimes—he became much more Bob Dole the pragmatist, the deal maker, the person comfortable in working with George McGovern on child nutrition, and with Tom Harkin on the Americans with Disabilities Act. I mean, monumental pieces of legislation that could have never occurred were it not for the fact that somebody with his Republican credentials could come together with someone with equally as strong Democratic credentials and fashion this remarkable compromise legislatively. And I think he got so much fulfillment from those accomplishments that it probably led him to understand that if these were good things, that there's a lot more that could be done in that regard.

So by the time he and I developed our relationship, he had well understood and acquired that feeling, so I was the beneficiary of that evolution and I think it's true today. I've actually heard him say in speeches around the country that some of his proudest accomplishments were ones where he worked across the aisle with others who were not of his philosophy or his political persuasion. But I think that happened about halfway or two-thirds of the way through his career, and now he's viewed by virtually every Democrat as a pragmatic moderate who people would jump at the chance to work with at almost anything he wanted to do.

Smith: And ironically, for that very reason is pilloried by many in his own party.

Daschle: Exactly.

Smith: Particularly on the right.

Daschle: Exactly.

Smith: For whom consensus is a dirty word and compromise is equated with surrender.

Daschle: Exactly.

Smith: Tell me about the McGovern relationship, because that really does encapsulate all of this, and it still surprises people who don't know that the two of them are such close friends.

Daschle: Bob, of course, was the chair of the party when George McGovern ran for president, so they couldn't have been more diametrically opposed politically and ideologically and style and everything. So it was really a classic political case of strange bedfellows, but they both served on the Agriculture Committee and they both, I think, over time realized that the only way they're going to get something done, because by then we had seen the diminution of Democratic strength within the ranks of the Senate, so there was a requirement that they start working, that we find these odd relationships, and from time to time they start to develop. I think it started with Agriculture and it started with this belief that not only could they work out wheat agreements together, maybe they could actually work out nutrition agreements together. To this day I can't tell you who was more the force of the effort. They both care so passionately about this. But over time, because they worked so closely together, they developed this friendship, and the friendship led to a relationship that to this day is one that George McGovern holds to be one of the most special in his life.

I was just fortunate enough to attend the dedication of the McGovern Library in South Dakota, and Bob Dole was there. I was surprised at the depth of public affection they showed towards each other. It was really kind of an emotional experience to see it and to understand how these two old political warriors are now the closest of friends and care deeply. Almost every time I see Bob now, one of his first questions is, "How's George doing now that Eleanor died?" Eleanor, George McGovern's wife. They found a moment that transcended politics and ideology, and that has created a friendship that lasts and is very deep to this day.



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Smith: I wonder, too, to go back to an earlier point, they're both populists. I mean, in there's both that streak of rural populism and real compassion for people who are life's victims.

Daschle: I think they're both about the same age.

Smith: The war experience.

Daschle: The war experience also. George was a very able and heroic pilot. I think he flew something like, I don't know, twenty-five missions or something, it may have been more than that, at the age of nineteen and twenty years old as a pilot. Horror stories about landing aircraft with a bullet-ridden airplane. So I think they both showed remarkable valor and courage in time of war. So they had that wartime experience. But I think with age, too—and I don't know if this is categorically true, but I think with age you become more appreciative of what is really important in life, and some of the things that seem important when you're forty aren't nearly as important when you're seventy.

Smith: Isn't that ironic? It's easier to be a statesman the older you get.

Daschle: I think so.

Smith: Your name isn't on the ballot.

Daschle: I think so. I even find when you're not in office, somehow these battles don't take on the meaning that they had when you were in office. I've had countless very, very friendly relations with some of the people that I had huge legislative battles with in the Senate, but times change and your attitude changes, but I think it is true that once you depart from the Senate or the Congress, for whatever reason, these fights don't quite seem to have the same depth of consequence that they might have had otherwise.

Smith: I became very close to President [Gerald R.] and Mrs. [Betty] Ford in their later years, and I will always be grateful for the Congressional Gold Medal Ceremony, and

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you said some very nice things that day, which I know touched them deeply. There is that sense that why do you have to wait till you're eighty.

Daschle: Right. You saw that with President Ford and President [Jimmy] Carter, two opponents. You saw it with President [George H.W.] Bush now, first President Bush, 41, and President Clinton, two opponents. Really something happens.

Smith: Couple of quick things and then I'll let you go. What is it about being a senator that in some ways, particularly in the modern media age, doesn't necessarily disqualify you for the presidency, but makes it an uphill struggle? Famously only two 20<sup>th</sup> century presidents have gone directly from the Senate to the White House. Oddly enough, in some ways it's almost the more successful you are as a legislator, the harder it is to translate that into whatever it is people are looking for in an executive. Why do you think that is?

Daschle: I think it's three things. First of all, I think that it's hard for somebody who has been entrenched in public life to advocate change, because you're not very credible advocating change when you've been part of the establishment for as long as you have been. Most presidential elections seem to be about change, to a certain extent. Certainly the elections with which I'm most familiar, people have wanted to move in a different direction. 2000 may not have been that necessarily, but certainly to a certain extent from a personal and, I think, a reflection, I think the American people like the policy, they probably didn't like the department. But change has always been a part, and I think once you become part of the establishment, it's harder to advocate from a credibility point of view that you're an agent of change.

The second thing that I think is unfortunate, because it's turned logic on its head in many respects, and that is experience is not viewed as an asset in the presidency. People want fresh faces. People want to think that somebody who can be an agent of change can also not be a part of the process. Unfortunately, our legislators have been part of a process that the American people in large numbers haven't appreciated. I mean the numbers in Congress today are quite low, around 27 percent approval rating, even lower than President [George W.] Bush, in part because I think the perception is nothing gets

done. So you start with this sense that if you've been part of that process for the last twenty years where nothing has gotten done, how is it that you could possibly lead us now and get something done?

The final thing is that I think legislators all too often become victims of their own rhetoric, and they speak in legislativese. I'll never forget Al [Albert] Gore [Jr.] talking about the [John D.] Dingell bill as evidence of the strength of his conviction in support of healthcare, but nobody had a clue what the Dingell bill was, but that's what we do as legislators; it's shorthand. We rarely use numbers. Once in a while you'll use a bill number, but it's mostly you talk in bill and amendment jargon that is a major disconnect with the American people, where those who haven't had to talk in acronyms and in sponsor names are far more able to talk about a grander vision rather than all the muckety-muck of legislativese that so plagues our language as legislators talk with one another.

Smith: You talked about Dole's last speech on the floor of the Senate and the fact that he was urged to really make it a campaign speech, to bring in wedge issues and the like, but he resisted that advice. What's your recollection of that?

Daschle: Well, to be honest, I don't know if I have a lot of recollection. I could recall that right from the beginning when Bob told me he was going to run, he said, "Look, I'm going to run and it's going to be my kind of campaign." Sort of an oblique reference to others in the party had wanted him to run in a way that was more in keeping with what they viewed to be the new success for a strategy for the Republicans, that they wanted to run this firebrand, ideological, Contract with America approach to politics, and I remember Bob clearly saying to me, "That's not who I am. So I'm going to run a race that at the end of the day, win or lose, I'm going to be proud of." And I respected him a great deal for that. He was critical of the Clinton administration for all the reasons that he believed they were on the wrong course, but it wasn't the kind of ideological [Newt] Gingrich approach to politics that Bob never felt comfortable participating in.

Smith: I went back. In that last speech, among other things, he talked about working with George McGovern, he talked about working with Hubert Humphrey.

Daschle: Right.

Smith: He talked about working across the aisle. You have the sense that's the kind of president he would like to have been.

Daschle: No question. He would have been a great president. I have no doubt that Bob Dole would have been a president that I would have truly enjoyed working with simply because of his newfound approach—not necessarily newfound, but because of the evolution of the Bob Dole that I knew when he left the Senate. Bob Dole was no longer the firebrand bomb-thrower and attack dog that he was perceived to be fifteen years ago. He was now a statesman and he was a person who was proud of his achievements, proud of his time in the Senate, proud of the fact that he protected the institution, and I think he would have been every bit as effective a president as he was a Majority Leader.

Smith: And foreign policy, Kosovo and Bosnia were clearly significant issues at that point. Where did he factor in on all that?

Daschle: I'd have to go back. If I recall, he was fairly reluctant to support what the president was trying to do in Bosnia and Kosovo. He was asking some of the questions I wish I'd have asked about Iraq, that I didn't ask. Circumstances, of course, were different. It was pre-9/11. But nonetheless, he was asking questions that I think the minority should have a right to ask and should be expected will ask as we consider intervention abroad. But he was not very supportive of those efforts, and they turned out to be reasonably successful. But his questions were appropriate, and I don't think anyone ever questioned whether or not he raised them for the right reasons.

Smith: Do you think he could have done anything differently in '96 that would have affected the outcome of that election?

Daschle: I don't think so. I remember he spent those final, what was it, twenty-four or thirty-six hours nonstop, because he felt that he was closing that gap. It ultimately didn't

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turn out that way. But I think that President Clinton is one of those rare people in politics that is an extraordinarily able politician, regardless of how one views other aspects of his career or life, but no one can take away the extraordinary ability he has as a political candidate. I think given the fact that our economy was rebounding, things were as strong as they were at the time, it was an uphill battle for anybody, Bob Dole included.

Smith: Was he a factor at all in your winding up here?

Daschle: He was.

Smith: Tell me about your relationship since you've both been out of the Senate.

Daschle: As I was making my plans for post-Senate life, he called me one day and asked if he could come by. I joke with audiences that at the time he was a spokesman for Viagra, and I was wondering if this was going to be a sales call. But nonetheless, he came by to talk about the fact that he had joined a firm about a year earlier and liked it a lot, and that they were hoping to have a Republican and a Democratic leader in the same firm, so this would be something that he would be very interested in pursuing with me if I wanted to think about it a little bit. So we talked a couple more times about it, but he was extremely encouraging and welcoming and supportive of my effort to come to the firm, and that's the way he's been ever since I've been here. We've worked on many projects together. In fact, next week we're going to be releasing the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Agricultural Project report that we've been working on for almost two years, and we're very excited about it. I think it will be reasonably newsworthy. But he's been a true friend and a great partner.

Smith: You both have the experience of sort of abruptly leaving the Senate. Is there a period right after that, a period of adjustment where you wonder if there is life after the Senate?

Daschle: Oh, totally. Yes, absolutely. It's kind of like—I can recall whether you're skiing or skating or anything, if you've been doing it for a while or running a marathon

like I've done a couple of times, when you're doing anything for a long period of time and you stop doing it, you want to keep doing it. Well, that's been my experience in public life. I've been in public life for so long that you just feel totally like a fish out of water. You hear about it. It's truly a shock to the system initially, because you're used to life as you've adapted to it for so long. I think for him, he knew exactly what he needed to do for that year, whatever length of time it was, in running for the presidency, so he was completely absorbed into his new role. But I'm sure after that he had the same experience I did. So his was delayed for a little while, but after the election, there he was. He had to decide what he was going to do with the rest of his life. So for a while you're just trying to adapt and trying to figure out "How do I put the pieces together?" I'm sure in many respects we probably looked at it much the same way. We talked to a lot of people, "What advice would you have? How do you do this?" If you work at it, eventually you find the right formula and it works out just fine.

Smith: Did you ever have a conversation with him?

Daschle: I did. Oh, many times.

Smith: About this?

Daschle: Absolutely. You bet, yes.

Smith: Finally, how do you think he should be remembered?

Daschle: I think he should be remembered in many different ways. First as a person who sacrificed a lot for his country physically, and he never forgot the commitment made to veterans. He was the chairman of the World War II Memorial, and I know as he considers his life, that accomplishment is something that he holds to be very special. So you start with that. You start with this kid from Kansas who, living on the plains, developed an appreciation for his country and his community, and that I'm sure made the indelible mark on his character that we see in Bob Dole today. You see him as a hard-charging political leader for a long period of time, who evolved into a hard-charging

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national statesman who cared deeply for accomplishment, who was not afraid to endure the criticism of people in his own party oftentimes to do the right thing, reaching across the aisle, even to a period after his time in the Senate, where he reached towards me. So I believe that history is going to reflect very well on the career of Bob Dole.

Smith: In some ways time has been good to him, hasn't it. I mean, sure, if you run for president, you'd like to win, but if you don't win, it's not bad to have had the life that Dole's had since '96.

Daschle: He's had a great life. Win and lose. I don't think life ought to be nothing but a succession of wins. That's easy for me to say that because I've been very lucky in life, too, but I've had some losses that have had a profound effect on my life. I think you put together the columns of wins and losses for Bob Dole and the wins exceed the losses dramatically, but you can't minimize the losses, like his physical loss and his loss of his presidential campaign. But all in all, if you look back and it's like somebody designed it. He's had an incredible life, and I don't think he'd change much of it.

Smith: Thank you.

Daschle: My pleasure.

Smith: I can't thank you enough.

Daschle: Good, good.

[End of interview]

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