

Senator Claiborne Pell

August 20, 1979

I drove from Truro to his home in Newport for 10:00 appointment. About a 2 1/2 hour ride.

I was ushered into a study which is a wing of low slung cape style house which sits above the water with broad lawns and view of rocky shoreline. He has had fever and an ailing foot so he was doing a couple of interviews out of his home. Mrs. Pell's family home is next door and it is a mansion set out on a point of land with ocean all around it. The two homes are separated by rolling expanse of lawn.

I asked him about title of book about father "Brahmin in Revolt." Did it apply to him? "No, I don't think it does. I'm much less revolutionary than he was. He took much more extreme positions than I do."

He said that "It was a well done book and it was a well done title." Thought it accurate for his father.

I said there was a view of suspicion of the rich in the book. "Well, he was rich himself. But he thought his generation had had everything given to them on a silver platter but through their greed, they had squandered their birthright."

Re businessmen. "He thought they were shortsighted and uncultivated. They didn't see the longhaul nations interest. But that wasn't true of all of them. He greatly admired Thomas Watson Sr. He admired Owen Young and John Davis who, of course, was a great lawyer."

Why did he go into politics? "He was not a very energetic man. He always said he liked being Democratic State Chairman the best. He liked the political process. He liked blending people together. He organization into the

Democratic party and he always said he was proudest of the fact that when he took over the State party there was a Republican governor and 2 Republican Senators and when he left the job there were 2 Democratic Senators and a Democratic governor. Of course, he couldn't take all the credit for that. And he didn't. But he used to say that." (The constant fear of making a "strong statement" is present in Pell. Gentlemen don't brag!)

When interested in Senate? "I had always been interested in public service. In college I had briefly thought of the ministry--then writing, teaching, the foreign service. If as I say you want to turn ideas into events and help people--my seven word definition of my goals, then there's no better way to do it than through politics. When you have strong views as I did with the Viet Nam War, you have a chance to put those strong views on the line. If you don't have strong views, you just have the survival matter. I think the Foreign Relations Committee did as much as anyone to grind that war down to a halt."

I asked him about idea of giving back something when he had received much. "Yes, what I like about it is bourgeois oblige, if you want to put it that way. When you have been given things on a silver platter you ought to return some of them. The trouble I find is that if you do your political job you do a sloppy job in looking after your own finances. I wanted to be able to leave my children relatively as well off as I had been left by my father. But I won't be able to do it--not by any stretch of the imagination. From a financial viewpoint, I've suffered. I have done badly, in relative terms. I have confidence in my ability to have done well on the outside. I would have done better, as I had done up to 1960. The only way to make money is to work with it--invest it. But you can't do that in politics. I have made it a rule not to invest in anything in my state. In that way I

can help anybody I want and no one will think I'm helping myself at the same time."

When did you first think of running for the Senate? "I used to think of the House. I had known Senator Green for many years. He had stayed with me right in this house. In the mid 50's I thought it was conceivable that I could pull it off. The thought came to me then. We are a very mobile society. Those five pictures over there on the wall are all of Members of Congress. I had as many forbears who were members of Congress as anyone in Congress. And they all came from different states. (Telephone call from Jack Cummings interrupts here.) About 1955 I started thinking about it. I used to think in terms of the House, but when Green retired I said 'Why not shoot for that job?' If John Fogarty had gone for it, I would have dropped out. He had to make a very difficult decision, and he decided to remain as chairman of the appropriations subcommittee on health. I was a most unusual candidate. I had no experience in politics. I was from the other part of the state. I was not cast in the mold of my predecessors in RI politics. I ran against Howard McGrath who had been Governor and Attorney General and Dennis Roberts who had been Kennedy's campaign manager. I beat them by 2-1 combined. Kennedy supported Roberts, but not very vigorously. He had been his campaign manager."

Then I asked if the 4 campaigns were vivid or blurred. "They were very different. The first was the most difficult. I started out all alone. My wife and I were partners; and I owe an awful lot to her. I was so nervous that my arms shook. My arms twitched so at night that I couldn't sleep. I had to lie on them to keep them still. The next one wasn't much. A lady colonel ran against me. She spent only about \$12,000. In 1972 the Republicans thought they had me beaten. I don't know why. My opponent had been Secretary of the Navy and was a very glamorous fellow. I've been dull and gray. I started out

behind 2-1 in the polls. I won that one. In 1978, we started early. We got the President and the Vice President down here and made a big deal out of it. We scared everyone else out of the race. "

I read him the Reese quote and he said yes that was their strategy--although "I'm not sure we thought about it that thoroughly on the Republican side. Idea was that he thought about scaring other Democrats out of the race, not Republicans. They were not his worry.

I said that anyone who has won 4 times in a highly politicized state must have some appeal. "I'm not sure. I'm not in the mold of Rhode Island politicians. I'm an odd ball. I live down here and not up in the population center. I think people trust me. They know I'm fair and that I do my best. And I have a hard working office--casework.

I asked about trust--in and out of Senate--taking off from his father's comment. In general "I'm a very trusting fellow. I trust others and they reciprocate. If they deceive you, you would withdraw your trust.

"In the Senate everyone is trustworthy. I have nver seen a Senator go back on his word. You can't. If you go back on your word, you have nothing left. Your word is the only win. You would have infinite inflation. I know that's a strong statement--about Senators, but it's true."

Re voter trust. "They know I have no other axe to grind than this. I want no other job. I want no more money. They realize that my interests are the state's interests. I have no personal interests."

Then he said that if I wanted to know more about what voters think I should see polls "no reason why you shouldn't; but check with Jack and Tom."

Strongest supporters? He thought. "I don't know. I'm not sure I have any hard core. I have little cores. But I'm not the kind of person who makes emotional, stem winding speeches. I have little groups that identify with me--

the LWV, Jewish community, the Portugese. Each of them is a little constituency. I've been trying to get a Portugese museum for 30 years, since before I was in politics. I think we've got one now. I have a whole lot of little constituencies--university groups, egghead groups, which is what I'd be doing if I wasn't doing what I am. With the simple people I have a good bit of trust."

Different from Pastore or Chaffee? Not much. "Pastore had very strong support from the business community--it was more than ethnic support, much more. Chaffee is a very popular figure. People feel he is honest and trustworthy." His characterization of others are very bland.

I asked about the idea of a balance between Italians and Yankees and he said no, he'd never heard that. He noted JC was Yankee.

"Now we have two Senators from similar modls. I'm not as Yankee as I might be. Part of my heritage is French. I have lived abroad a great deal. I identify with Europe--Southern Europe. I speak their languages or I used to." He said at a later point "I love Southern Europe." He had been planning to go mountain climbing in Switzerland this month, before he got ill and his daughter-in-law had a heart attack. Said he always did that in summer and was upset that it would be two summers before he could do it again.

I read him Don Matthews' quote about small town. Correct? "No, I've never felt any pressure for conformity. We all wear neckties. It would be fun to turn up in a toga. It may have been true 20 years ago; but I never felt it."

Has Senate changed? "Discipline is far less now. It's more of individual going off in all directions. The system of checks and balances works too well. Congress is completely in balance with every interest checking every other interest. There's no motion. You can see it in energy."

Senate as Club. "It may be called a club, but we see very little of each other after hours. Maybe it's because we see so much of each other when

we are working. We have all been through the same baptism of fire. We know each other personally. So there is some familiarity among the 99 men and one woman. But I belong to quite a few clubs and don't think of the Senate as a particularly clubby group--although there's a common background of experience. We all know what it means to have a colleague that embarrasses you (or to have a governor nipping at your heels.) He told me explicitly to delete the idea of governor nipping at your heels. Is Garraby pushing him? Or was it Chaffee? Anyway, he saw this as sensitive.

I asked if any of his friends were defeated this time. "It's hard to remember which election was which. Haskell I liked. Tunney, was that 1978 or 1976? McIntyre - we weren't friends but we were allies in many ways. Bill Hathaway."

I asked whether they discussed the fallen. "We all feel "There but for the grace of God go I? The defeats are post mortemed a great deal. McIntyre most of all this time. A poll after the election showed him winning just the way the polls showed him winning before the election. The sample was wrong. I think polls are terribly important to tell you what issues are important to the public and what the decibels of emotion are on the issues. But they are not important in telling you who will vote for you. People are too fickle."

"All of us have no desire to change our jobs. We grow old--look at that picture on the wall (with Lyndon Johnson) youthful look and dark hair. But we like it."

Back to post mortems. "That's cloakroom talk. It's what Senators talk about in the Senate lunchroom. There is not a single senator who doesn't get post mortemed after the election. The defeats get more attention than the victories."

Is it true that when Senators leave they are not missed? "Yes, it's like

putting your hand in a bucket of water. When you pull it out, everything looks the same. There is no hole left. The water fills right in. After my father resigned from the party chairmanship he used to say there's nothing as dead as a dead politician. Some people who are characters still get talked about. Green--people still talk about him 18 years later.

Does campaign affect behavior in next 6 years? "Yes, the campaign sharpens your mind on the issues that are bothering people. Your life has a 6 year cycle to it. Six years ago I was not convinced I'd want to run again. Now I'm very fond of the job. I'm doing it well. Now there is no question in my mind of not running. I'll run again. I'm sure I will--so long as I'm in good health."

Why did you think of not running in 1972? "I had a general sense of frustration. I had resentment at doing very hard work and having no time to myself. I had little freedom, no time for my family. I had looked forward to going mountain climbing with my family this month. Now I can't. We only have one chance every two years. It will be two years before we can do it again. I resent that, but not as much as I would have 6 years ago. Six years ago, I might have said it was too much to give up."

Not clear why the change. But I asked him whether Rules Chairmanship made some difference? "A little. The Rules Committee is not one of the most important committees. It's a headache committee. But as Woodrow Wilson said government is government by standing committee and that is still true. You are part of the inner structure--the chairmen meet, the policy committee meets. Being chairman is not a quantum jump for me, but it is a definite, new plateau."

Re running the committee. "I've never been much of a trader or a wheeler dealer. I try to be fair--to give everyone what they deserve whatever position they took on other matters. Senator Cannon ran the committee more tightly than I have. I probably ought to run it more tightly. I'm moving in that direction."

"I don't use the chairmanship as a way of wheeling and dealing. You may gain short term advantage, but in the long term, it won't help. Wayne Hayes carried that to the extreme I guess."

I spoke of his father's comment about specialization. "He was a generalist. He was very disciplined. He was not energetic; but he was brilliant. If we could combine his brilliance and my energy we could really go places. I remember as a kid watching him. He would get up and get dressed--and in those days you really dressed. You put on your spats and coat. He would work and dictate till 12:00. Then he would have lunch and go to the club. He was very much a club man. He travelled a great deal, away a great deal. He was much bigger and fuller and stronger than I am. He was 6'5". That horseshoe over there on the wall is one he broke in two with his bare hands. He had his cars made to order--blue body and red wheels as his ancestors' carriages had been--so that he could sit in it with his hat on. That's a picture of it on the wall. Later, it carried hose for the Lisbon Fire Dept. He left it there."

"I think it's very important to specialize in a lot of small subjects. If you know a lot they fit together. What I resent about the job is that I'm like a bee taking pollen from so many plants. Or, I'm like a barrister. I go to the hearing and I'm given the questions to ask. I know my stuff; but I would like to be more on top of things than I am. It's hardest when you are a senior senator and are chairman of so many committees. My Foreign Relations subcommittee handles electoral reform. Education - I'm on top of that. You get an instinct that helps you handle your job. After 19 years, I feel a degree of confidence I didn't have before. I've served with 6 presidents and have listened to many different executive branch witnesses. There's very little that's new--in most cases."

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My work is
inside*

I asked about umbrella idea, and he agreed with it. But said nothing much. He said that he would be followed on Arts and Humanities, Education and International Environmental Legislation. He said you followed people who had studied subjects--discounting their philosophies, however.

But the umbrella idea is different than "follow the subcommittee." or "follow the experts". There's the idea that some people have national reputations and you can explain your vote in accordance with the company you kept. One conveys more influence than the other.

I told him some of my freshmen were lonely and he supplied word "camaraderie." "It doesn't bother me. I've been a loner anyway. Each of us has his own barony and we run it the best we can in a competitive world. It's very hard work. The public is not aware of that. You work 12 hours a day. It's backbreaking."

Re cycle. "We say in the Senate that we spend 4 years as a statesman and two years as a politician. You should get cracking immediately after the last two years opens up. You should take a poll on the issues, ^{no y pills,} identify people to run the campaign in different parts of the state, raise money, start your PR, etc."

Does this 2 year period influence your voting? "You hope not. You try not to let it. It's a delicate balance between your own thinking, the economic interests of your state, the interest of your party. It would be foolish to say you are not more sensitive to politics in the last two years, but still you hope not too much. My rule is that if it's an economic matter I vote my state's interest. On broad issues, war and peace, abortion, prayer in the schools, I vote my conscience even if it's contrary to what your constituents want. I'm reminded of what Edmond Brooke ^{urll} said--but you have to remember ^{he got} to get defeated. You have to be careful. If you snap the umbilical cord too many times you get defeated."

He talked about his father and the bonus vote. When I recalled "political suicide" comment by father, CP said "He wasn't all that happy in the House."

Then I asked about campaigning and governing. "They are two rather separate functions and they don't always go together. A man can be a good campaigner and a poor Senator or a poor campaigner and a good Senator. A good campaigner is good at gladhanding, and gives everyone the sense of having said yes to them. He basically reflects the wishes of the people. A good Senator should be ~~non~~^{more} reflective of people and reflective of their benefit. We try to combine them. I've been lucky. On real questions of morality like Viet Nam, I was willing to go down to defeat on that basis. But I had just been reelected, so I had a long time to go. On abortion, both sides got mad at me. The anti abortionists are mad at me because I won't support a constitutional amendment. The pro abortionists are mad at me because I don't believe federal tax money should be used to pay for abortions." I then said that as a practical matter, it meant anti abortionists would vote vs. him because he was not p and he said 'yes.'"

I then asked him--is it was winding down (I had said the winning and governing question would be last one--since his family was out on the lawn and he pointed to them and said how much he enjoyed having them around.) I asked him why he was so sensitive to problem of Jewish emigration from USSR. "I remember seeing people wearing yellow arm bands in Europe. And my father was a war crime commissioner. It was he who made the Nazi crimes genocide. I believe that there was really a complicity on the part of all the allied nations to go along with Hitler's plans for the Jews. There was no effort to cut the railroad lines going to the camps. There was no change made on immigration rules. We criticize the Malaysians for putting the boat people out to sea; but we did the same thing to a boatload of Jews from Cuba. I'm trying to convince the State Department or someone to draw all these threads together. We were part of a conspiracy to support the eradication of the Jews.

We should feel a terrible guilt about that. My father couldn't sleep after his experience as war crimes commissioner. He was a gentle person; and he had seen such horrors."

Said he was head of a consulate in Bratislava, Czechoslovakia and saw "a ~~pyogrom~~--a small ~~pyogrom~~--beating up people."

Said he felt all people should be able to stand in a place and say (this is my home) or something like that - he said it in German - but he supports Israel very strongly. It was here that he said Jews want 100%, not 95%, and this bothered him.

Said he was "leading the way" in the Wallenberg search and that he got audiences with Vance for the Russian exiles looking for him. I mentioned his support for Mrs. Scharansky and he acknowledged it but said lots of others were writing for her and him. He thought himself the leader on the Wallenberg search. This man saved many Jews from the concentration camps and was believed captured by Russians; and Jews are now looking for him to see if he's alive in Russia and, if he is, to get him out.

He talked at some point about his two sons. One will run for Newport City Council this year. His wife is now ill. The other "wants to get rich, he makes no bones about it. He has taken his money and owns an automobile dealership in Arizona. He will either have nothing or he will be rich." The family had all come back to the homestead for the vacation and one of his granddaughters was in the study when I arrived.

He asked if I wanted a cup of coffee afterwards and did I want to look around. but turned down the coffee. I wanted to get going on the notes. He had family all around anyway and he was starting another interview. But if I could have talked only with Mrs. Pell, that would have been nice. I'd like to sometime.

Re connection between home and Washington. "There has to be a connection. One reason I feel more comfortable with my wife here at home is that it pulls me back willy nilly to Rhode Island every weekend. If you stretch the umbilical cord too far it will snap, just as it did with Bill Fullbright. It's especially important for me to come home because my interests, the things that really get me charged up and excited are so esoteric. I've been most interested in the international environmental treaties---two have been signed and I think we're going to get a third one through. We've reversed the constitutional process by writing them, sending them to the executive and then having the executive negotiate them. To see those treaties pass is a great thrill, the greatest thrill of my career. And it will have a lot more bearing on what happens to people in the future than most of what we do. But the people of Rhode Island could care less about them. They aren't the least bit interested. So I have to come back and do my casework. The treaties are what get me really charged up. And when you can really help someone, that's exciting too."

The guy who came in after me was the head of the Rhode Island Jewish Community and when he came in, CP asked him to wait outside. We happened to be talking about his strong feelings about Jewish problem and Israel. "I don't think he would like to hear me say that the trouble with his groups is that they want 100% support on Israel and they aren't satisfied with 95%." He had said that in the course of the discussion on his strong feelings re Israel; homeland. But he seemed to think he had made a very strong, private statement when he said that about the 95-100%.