



Oral History Interview of William Bulger (OH-014)

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Oral History Interview of William M. Bulger

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Interviewed by: Robert Allison, History Professor Suffolk University and Joseph McEttrick, Suffolk University Law School Professor

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Interview Summary

William M. Bulger, former Massachusetts State Senate President, discusses the career of Congressman John Joseph Moakley. President Bulger discusses his friendship with Congressman Moakley; running for political office in South Boston; the evolution of politics during his career; Congressman Moakley's 1970 and 1972 congressional campaigns; his thoughts regarding Boston busing in the 1970s; the Saint Patrick's Day breakfast in South Boston; the development of the city of Boston over the years; and Congressman Moakley's constituent service and political leadership.

Subject Headings

Boston (Mass.)

Bulger, William M.

Busing for school integration

Curley, James Michael, 1874-1958

Massachusetts Politics and government

Moakley, John Joseph, 1927-2001

South Boston (Boston, Mass.)

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This interview took place on Wednesday, August 20, 2003, at the University of Massachusetts President's Office at One Beacon Street, Boston, MA.

Interview Transcript

(feedback noise)

PROFESSOR JOSEPH McETTRICK: We were trying to get some background on yourself and Joe Moakley, and then your perspective on Joe's legacy. It's just a conversation that's going to be a tape, and will sit in the archives, and presumably will be a resource for people in the future.

PROFESSOR ROBERT ALLISON: We'll have it transcribed, and you can take a look at it.

WILLIAM M. BULGER: Oh, good.

ALLISON: I know you've spoken a lot about Joe Moakley. In the book,¹ you talk about that encounter with him where he says how political cards interested him more—

BULGER: Oh, that's right. Yeah, that's right.

ALLISON: Do you remember your first meetings with him when you were kids growing up?

BULGER: Well, I remember the Moakley brothers. They were, as you know, at 51 Logan Way and we were at 41 Logan Way [in South Boston]. And I remember them as young fellows, bigger and a bit older than I. They were very friendly, easygoing people. I remember their father and their mother. The father was a big, gregarious, outgoing fellow. He seemed to know everyone. There was a little bit of that, I think, in the congressman-to-be, Joe.

Joe was just a very, very nice person. And again, he had a little more mileage on him than I at that early time. I always remember my mother noting that she had learned of the bombing of

¹ Bulger, William M., *While the Music Lasts: My Life in Politics*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1996.

Pearl Harbor from Bobby Moakley [Robert F. Moakley, Sr., Joe Moakley's brother]. So that tells you how long ago we knew each other, back in nineteen hundred and forty-one.

And the friendship, by the way, with Moakley was such an easy one that it was always picked up, even though we might not see each other for a while. He came in suddenly, one day. He was sitting in my own office here, and sitting over near the desk, just wanted to chat. He said he had been driving by, and he asked the person who was driving him to find a way to park somewhere around. He just wanted to come up and chat about some matters. It was about as free and as easy as that.

Then the fateful call that he made to me—I think it was in February of the year that he died—in which he said that he had fought all of these terrible battles with his illnesses, but that there was no chance whatsoever, the doctors told him, that he could be rescued again. And he asked if I would put together some little remarks—he didn't use the word eulogy—just remarks for his funeral. It was a shocking thing. And I remember it so vividly. I didn't know what, really, to say to it. And that was it.

I still remember going over to have dinner with him, just the two of us, in one of the local restaurants, and his saying to me that the problem of dying was not so easy; it was complicated. All of his affairs seemed to need some straightening out, and he didn't know how anyone managed to die without at least six months notice. (laughter)

He remained cheerful. I always recall that he said that he slept well and he ate well. He handled it as well as anyone ever could, at least on the surface. There was no doubt that he was at peace with the world. He had done his best. Having given his best to things, he knew that he could move on with a degree of confidence.

McETTRICK: Well, I did read your words at Saint Brigid's.² And there was a sentence in there that really did catch me. I was going to ask you a question about it. So, since you brought it up, why don't we go to that?

² Moakley's funeral took place at Saint Brigid Parish in South Boston on June 1, 2001. Mr. Bulger gave the eulogy.

You said, “And he was a man of memory. He recognized the danger of forgetting what it was to be hungry once we are fed. And he would, in a pensive moment, speak of that tendency to forget as a dangerous fault.” I was just intrigued with that thought. I was wondering if you wanted to elaborate on that, or what that meant.

BULGER: I think it was very clear, in his actions and in his words, that he saw great value in being in kind of direct contact with the constituency. That was the reminder. He would be quite concerned about the fate of someone who was now relying upon him. It would be a person who has absolutely no political weight or a person of—it would not have to be someone who was a contributor, or a very, I don’t know what the word is, but something that suggests a political heavyweight.

There would be no need for that. It would be just the sense that it was Mrs. So-and-so, and she had inquired, looking for some help. And the Congressman was going to try to make sure that it went well for her in that regard. That was important. He’d be embarrassed by this, but I’d say that he could see the intrinsic value, just some good deed. It would be probably—this is where I embarrass him, by saying Mother Theresa. She wasn’t there to eliminate hunger, poverty, or whatever, disease, but rather to give her best to some individual in a single moment, and that there is value in that. In and of itself, that’s worth doing.

He had a bit of that in him, Joe. I’m not sure he was very conscious of it. But he just thought it was great to do that. I see the practical sense of it—your question leads me to it—is that this keeps you in touch. You kind of know how things are running at a certain level, in this world, where the more weaker and the more ineffectual are—where they spend their lives.

And he knew that, by helping out in that fashion, he would give them a boost that might, oh, give them something to talk about or feel good about for the rest of their lives. There was the habit on the part of people who lead these quiet lives, I think, to recount a story over and over and over again. “And then the congressman called me. And he said this is all set. He squared it away. Never forget it.” “When was that?” “Nineteen thirty-seven,” or something. (laughter) But he

liked that. But there would be little political value in that. I think that's the beauty of it, a little pure act of charity.

McETTRICK: Now, we're very interested in looking at your career and Joe's. And there are these contact points that you were in the same neighborhood. And then I guess, in some ways, you did pursue somewhat different paths because Joe was a little bit older than yourself. And then you went to B.C. High [Boston College High School]. I guess you were in the army in the middle of Boston College. So, I guess you were out of South Boston, actually, when Joe really got elected the first time to the House, but then returned. We were just trying to put that all together. It would be better, I guess, if you just really told us how that went—

BULGER: Now I don't recall—I was in the service from 1953 to 1955. He was first elected in what year?

ALLISON: Fifty-two.

BULGER: Fifty-two.

ALLISON: He first ran in 1950.

McETTRICK: And so, you had been at B.C. for a year before you went?

BULGER: One year at Boston College, probably was not paying close attention to the local contest. But he won the fight. It was state representative. There were two representatives' seats in the ward at that time. And he won one. It was only seven years later that I was running for it because he has now announced his candidacy for the State Senate, and I'm running for his vacant seat, and I won it.

You know, I do remember coming back from the service, meeting him at Andrew Square. I forget who he was campaigning for. But he asked if I could give a vote. And I had the nerve to say to him—again, we were old friends. I said, "Oh no." I said, "I think this is the one time I'll

ever see James Michael Curley's³ name on the ballot. And I'd like to vote for him." (laughter)
 And Joe wouldn't have that same you know sentimental notion. He'd say, "What are you?" But no matter what I think he'd get me the ride. And I went down to the precinct—Ward Seven, Precinct Seven is where we all voted at that time. And I voted for Curley that day. But again, he would understand it. But I don't think he'd be so—he was much more practical, Joe.

ALLISON: So you did go to Curley's event that night. I heard you tell this about—

BULGER: Well I went to the Curley event at the Brunswick Hotel. And it was a swan song. And I think I had a little premonition of the last hurrah idea. And I can remember him telling the audience at the Brunswick Hotel—now he was so far behind John Hynes⁴, he could never catch up. It was hopeless. But he had a crowd that was so devoted.

I remember John MacGillivray was there. John had one arm, had lost it in Europe in the war. He won the Congressional Medal of Honor. And he was a friend of the whole Curley group there. And I remember Curley asking them to set the microphones up. [He said,] "Surrender," you know, "Sounds of defeat in the air. None of this for us. Like John Paul Jones on the deck of the burning *Bon Homme Richard*, of the ancient. Surrender! We've just begun to fight," or whatever. And he went on. By the time he got finished, they would have marched on City Hall, (laughter) taken it over, at least for the night. But it was great.

And I still remember Curley around, and the contest, and Moakley, myself. He was in a big automobile. Wherever he went—Flood Square. There was a water trough there where the horses—and he'd stand up on the top of that. Then each one of us could get up and have the same audience, and speak. But he would entrance them, Curley, mesmerize the audience.
 (laughs)

³ James Michael Curley (1874-1958), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston for four non-consecutive terms: 1914 to 1918, 1922 to 1926, 1930 to 1934, and 1946 to 1950, and as governor of Massachusetts from 1935 to 1937. He also represented Massachusetts' Twelfth Congressional District in the United States House of Representatives from 1911 to 1914 and the Eleventh Congressional District from 1943 to 1946. He served jail time in the late 1940s for official misconduct, but remained in office as mayor during that time.

⁴ John B. Hynes (1897-1970), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston from 1950 to 1960.

McETTRICK: Now was that pretty much the last era of the curbstone political speech?

BULGER: Well, it was running out. It was running out. When I ran in 1960, it was one humorous part of it. There was a hurricane looming. So we sent a sound truck out, performing a public service, warning people to stay indoors (laughter) because this hurricane was coming. I think it was coming in the morning. But I think we wanted everyone to stay indoors. I think we made it sound much more imminent, and also much more threatening. Well, pretty soon, there were sixteen people running for representative in my contest.

McETTRICK: Now that was for the two seats in the ward?

BULGER: Yeah. And we were running. It was a hot and heavy battle. Pretty soon, O'Leary's truck was out there warning them the same way. A kid named Collins, James Michael Collins, he was warning them. Everybody was warning them. (laughter) They must have been frightened to death to have all these soundtracks. (laughter) And it sounded like something official. But it was only these public-spirited candidates.

McETTRICK: So you got elected to the House. And then Joe eventually got into the Senate. I guess he was rep, and then it took him a while to get into the Senate.

BULGER: He ran for Senate in 1970 [sic—1960]. He, I think, lost that contest against Powers.⁵ But in that moment, he left the [House] seat vacant, and I ran for the Senate and won. Then shortly thereafter, he did go to the Senate. And ultimately, he went to the Congress the same way.

McETTRICK: So you were in the House and he was in the Senate, both representing South Boston for a number of years. And you must have had occasion to really work with him fairly closely.

⁵ John E. Powers (1910-1998), a Democrat, represented South Boston in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1939 to 1946 and in the Massachusetts State Senate from 1947 to 1964. He served as Senate President from 1959 to 1964.

BULGER: Oh sure, yeah. Whenever there was anything at all, he was—and he was good about being inclusive. I might have really not deserved it, but he'd include me in the credit for an achievement. He was sort of big brotherish, without a word. You never had the sense that there was some debt that had arisen from his generosity. It was more that he just thought that was—

McETTRICK: But there's been a tradition, really, in South Boston, generally, for the legislative delegation to work together, and try to help out, and move things along.

BULGER: Oh sure, yes, absolutely.

ALLISON: Do you remember any of the particular issues or fights you might have had in the sixties when you and Joe were both in different houses of the legislature?

BULGER: Yeah, I do recall that, in the sixties, I had a bill that called for the reporting of suspected cases of child abuse. At that time, it was more physical child abuse. And there were two other states—Tennessee and California had researched it, and discovered that it was because the doctors were now using sophisticated X-ray methods. They could discover breaks that had been healed on a child's leg or something, and realized that some other terrible trauma had been inflicted upon the baby or the child who can speak, but won't ever implicate the parent.

And so the doctors began to have—were able to show that this was not just a rare occasion, but something that happened, and with a degree of regularity, in fact, in some places. And so I filed a bill that would require those doctors to report such. It received opposition because I was also granting immunity to the doctor. If he were wrong, then no, he could not be sued for his mistake. This would encourage him, of course, to act.

And there were some people who thought that we were putting too many things beyond the reach of the litigators. So they opposed it. And it lost it in one year. But the following year, I was very anxious to get it through. I went to Moakley and asked him if he would help me, if I could

get it out of the House and into the Senate. And he did. We got it through the Senate. And Governor Peabody⁶ signed it.

McETRICK: Well, you've alluded to Joe's empathy and contact with constituents. You also mentioned in your eulogy that even President [George W.] Bush mentioned Joe Moakley, and that it was really a reaction in the House. So he was always very popular, and held in high regard by his own legislative colleagues. I was wondering if you could tell us something about that. What made Joe effective among other legislators? Why was he so well liked? How was it that he met with the success that he did?

BULGER: One of the keys is—I don't know all of these reasons. We're talking about things that are matters of opinion. But I think a lot of it lies in the fact that Joe was not some sort of a maniacal ideologue. If you try to characterize him as a liberal, or a conservative, or whatever, he'd have a hard time giving you the definition. And he certainly wasn't trying to fulfill any definition, I don't think, consciously. He just had a sense, on an ad hoc basis, that this should be done or that should not be done. It brought him out, I think, into a fairly FDR, bread-and-butter liberal, I guess.

But it enhanced his relationship with people because he wasn't off-putting. You could be talking to him about what you—and usually it's a specific problem. He would like, by the way, to tell, even away from legislation, the stories that came—were our experience. (laughs)

There was a fellow who he had got out of Charles Street Jail. And he would come around and tell you, "I just got out. I live on Pilsudski Way. But I just need a few bucks to get me started." And you'd find a way to give him a few dollars to get him started. Then the fellow went over to the Senate. And he saw Moakley. And then later, Moakley saw him talking to Senator Joe Ward. And Joe Moakley said to Joe Ward, "What's the story with him? How do you know my constituent?"

⁶ Endicott Peabody (1920-1997), a Democrat, was governor of Massachusetts from 1963 to 1965.

“Oh,” he says, “he lives up in my district in Fitchburg. He just got out of jail. And he needs a few bucks to get started.” (laughter) And Joe says, “Oh, is that so?” Because he had moved across both the House and the Senate, this fellow.

And ultimately, we both knew him because he had been arrested for stealing typewriters in the state house. He’s a big fellow. I still remember him. He had thick glasses. And I said to Joe, “Have you been taken by him?” “Oh yeah,” he said. “We’ve all been.” I doubt that he would be in a rush to go and call the police. He’d just know that next time he must not be so gullible. But I forget your last question.

McETRICK: Well I think you really did answer my question. It was just the idea of his ability just to work with other legislators. And I think you really addressed that pretty fully.

BULGER: And he would like the stories, a story like that. He would like that, Joe. That gave him a connection with everyone. That’s part of it. He would enjoy—and also a story of someone who might be showing crass ingratitude. We’re not looking for their gratitude. But the ingratitude could sometimes be— (laughter)

And I think it’s someone who, for example, he helped, and then the fellow came back and is campaigning against him. What was the story here? “Oh no,” he says. And he’d cite some recent thing. “Yours is way back. A full year away,” and that sort of thing. He liked that story. And it would be something—you could tell that—a tone of some frustration about that.

But I would see him occasionally. And it was toward the last few years. And I can remember him going down to the little restaurant on P Street there, which is right around the corner from me. And his diet, I used to joke about his diet. Bacon, potatoes, and everything. This is in the morning. Everyone is having some little sissy thing, and Joe is eating—I don’t think he’d get into the health thing too much. He’d be wondering why others did. He was very happy with his world; very, very happy with it. Well, you would have to be happy with him, he’s such a good person. Ask me whatever else.

McETTRICK: Go ahead, Bob.

ALLISON: He had a sign behind his desk. It said, “Loyalty is the holiest—“

BULGER: Oh yes, yeah. I remember someplace he had used in a speech, “Loyalty is the holiest good in the human heart.” And [*Washington Post* columnist] Mary McGrory had asked him, “Where did you get that? That doesn’t sound like you.” He says, “Bulger.” (laughter) She wrote me a letter and told me that.

He liked that. And he also liked the fact that, in one of my own contests, I wanted to use it. But it was said by Seneca, first century philosopher in Rome. I thought we needed somebody more local. So in my ad, it said, “Loyalty is the holiest good in the human heart—John Boyle O’Reilly.”⁷ And Joe liked that.

McETTRICK: Seneca wouldn’t mind.

BULGER: Oh no, no. Seneca, they’ll think it’s from upstate New York or something. (laughter) But John Boyle O’Reilly. It was only a venial sin. And I used to like it because sometimes the *Globe* would say, “In the words of the great Irish poet, John Boyle O’Reilly.” I don’t know why they never checked the accuracy of my cite. (laughs)

McETTRICK: Now where does Tip O’Neill⁸ fit into this, chronologically? Was he Speaker when you started in the House? How did that all fit?

BULGER: No, no. He had already been the Speaker in the fifties. And he went to Washington, and remarkably worked his way back up, I think, in the eighties, to Speaker.

McETTRICK: Sounds about right.

⁷ John Boyle O’Reilly (1844-1890) was an Irish poet and novelist.

⁸ Thomas P. “Tip” O’Neill (1912-1994), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts’ Eleventh and, after redistricting, Eighth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1953 to 1987. He served as Speaker of the House of Representatives from 1977 to 1987.

BULGER: And Joe was right there, very close to him at that time, and fiercely loyal to the Speaker. So he became—had the position on Rules,⁹ I believe it was. And it was a critical position in the House, given to him by O’Neill.

McETTRICK: Well, of course, the really exciting part of this is when John McCormack¹⁰ left the House, and then they had the great scramble for the representative seat. What can you tell us about that? I mean you really had sort of a front row seat for that era.

BULGER: Oh yeah. Well Moakley ran as a Democrat, and lost to Louise Hicks.¹¹ And he decided he better find another way to tackle it. And as you know, he became an Independent, and ran, and immediately switched back to Democrat. And then I think there was a question about the purity of his membership as a Democrat, down in the Congress. But that was all considered favorably by the Speaker. And everything went okay.

I remember, years later, calling both Moakley and Mrs. Hicks. They both lived on Columbia Road. And we wanted to use each of their houses for a house tour, a charitable house tour in the community. So I got the two of them. And I remember Moakley saying to me, “This is my private place, I don’t let anybody come in. And I’m not going to do it,” he said. He says, “Unless you tell me that I must.” I said, “You must. And you will like it.”

And the fact is, everyone who ever participates in this little venture always enjoys it. I was pretty sure he would, too. And he did. He opened up the house. And everybody came through. They were all curious about his premises, and Mrs. Hicks’. They went through—but I’m sure a

⁹ The House Rules Committee is responsible for the scheduling of bills for discussion in the House of Representatives. According to the Rules Committee website, “bills are scheduled by means of special rules from the Rules Committee that bestow upon legislation priority status for consideration in the House and establish procedures for their debate and amendment.” (See <http://www.rules.house.gov/>) Congressman Moakley was a member of the House Rules Committee from 1975 to 2001 and served as its chairman from 1989 to 1995.

¹⁰ John W. McCormack (1891-1990), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts’ Twelfth and, after redistricting, Ninth Congressional Districts in the United States House of Representatives from 1928 to 1971. He served as Speaker of the House from 1962 to 1971.

¹¹ Louise Day Hicks (1916-2003), a Democrat, represented Massachusetts’ Ninth Congressional District from 1971 to 1973. It was in the 1970 election that Moakley lost his first bid for Congress. Moakley defeated Hicks in the 1972 congressional election when he ran as an Independent so he wouldn’t have to run against Hicks in the democratic primary.

thousand people in each home visited. This was very good because they would buy tickets for a good charity in the district, the Labouré Center.

Moakley enjoyed it. He had someone taking Polaroid pictures. He had a couple of fiddlers in the house who were playing Irish music during the day. The there was—well anyway, he loved it, as we had expected. Then I can remember asking him—the nun there said, “Could you ask him again?” And it was the month of June, or July, or August. And I said, “Would you like to do it one more time, Joe? It’s such a success.”

He says, “Yeah, I’ll do it again. I might as well. The Christmas tree is still up.” (laughter) His wife had passed away. He was living alone. He never bothered to take the damn Christmas tree down. And I’ll never forget going through the house, there was some kind of a reindeer or something, a big plastic reindeer in the bathtub. I don’t know whether there was any significance. I doubt it, but it looked kind of strange.

McETTRICK: Now of course, in Massachusetts, everybody says that politics is one of our favorite outdoor sports. And it must have been really pretty exciting, actually, in South Boston, and then in 1970, and then the ’72 rematch for the congressional seat. What was it like in the community? I’m sure—

BULGER: Oh yeah, torn apart.

McETTRICK: There were people in both camps, and divided. Tell us a little bit about that.

BULGER: I was very friendly with both people.

McETTRICK: It must have been tough.

BULGER: Oh yeah. I mean I am very friendly—I was right to the end of Joe’s life. And Mrs. Hicks has always been a friend to me. So it was a painful thing. I think those of us who were in

politics could at least justify our being away from it because we're busy with our own contests or whatever.

But these are two people—sometimes you hear governors say, We'll put candidates into each fight. We'll do this. I don't think anyone could ever do it. It's the local nature of these contests that can't be met. If somebody comes along who has some sort of an imprimatur from a governor, he's immediately marked as a stranger to the turf, as someone who has a loyalty that will be competing with the loyalty that the legislator should be showing to his constituency. I mean, I would welcome such an opponent, dubbed by the governor to be—it would be very easy. (laughs) So you hear that frequently. But I don't think we'll ever see situations where governors can get into contests.

It's very local. And Joe recognized that. And Tip O'Neill, of course, always [said], "All politics is local." And that's valid. They all know it. And the fight between Hicks and Moakley was very, very much a local, personal, tough little battle. Mrs. Hicks, I think her own enthusiasm for the job may have been on the wane. She would say to me occasionally, "You would like this job. But for someone like me, I want to be home with the family. The other responsibilities of home, they beckon to me, and I should be there." So I'm not sure that she had the same zeal to win that she may have had in the first instance, after two years in Congress.

ALLISON: Were there bad feelings between—

[Tape ends]

END OF PART 1

(Casual conversation off camera)

MARILYN WILCKE: Before the congressman died, I think, Joe [McEttrick] interviewed him. And that interview was spliced down into a smaller piece, and ran in the exhibit in the Moakley Gallery.¹²

BULGER: Right. I remember seeing it over there, yeah.

WILCKE: Part of the nature of the archive is to have continuing exhibits, and to tell the story of Joe. So I think people that we are interviewing over these next several months could very well, at one time or another, be a part of an exhibit, and certainly be made available to scholars and to people really interested. It's not intended to be an exercise that goes in a vault at media services. That's not what Joe wants.

ALLISON: I was really struck in doing the editing of that, just how profound many of the things he said were.

BULGER: His observations.

ALLISON: And the last question that Joe asked him was if he had any advice for future members of Congress. And he had this wonderful statement about being in Congress is like living in a neighborhood. You live with the people upstairs, downstairs, and over the back fence.

McETTRICK: It was poetic, really.

BULGER: He liked that, yeah. Yeah, I remember all of his "the people over the back fence."

(interruption)

McETTRICK: Well, I guess one question is, since you really saw Joe in action for so many years, and since you served so many years in politics as an elected official, what are your

¹² Ms. Wilcke is referring to the Adams Gallery at Suffolk University Law School, where the Moakley Archive and Institute displayed the exhibit *John Joseph Moakley: In Service to His Country* from November 28, 2001, to April 7, 2002.

thoughts on the political style or expectations as they existed then, versus the current political environment today? What changes do you perceive? Or how have politicians changed? Or how have the voters changed?

BULGER: I think there's been a shift. I think that the people who report on politics take larger liberties. They want to influence the actions of people who are elected. (interruption)

McETTRICK: Mr. President, you had the chance of watching Joe Moakley in office for many years. And you had some experience yourself as an elected public official. What are your perceptions on the way things were done or the political expectations of an earlier era compared with the situation today? How have the politicians changed or the voters changed? Or how has the political environment changed?

BULGER: I think the political environment is a little rougher, a little rawer. And for somebody like Moakley, he just had never called press conferences. He didn't think that that was something he should be doing. The message of his performance was to be discovered in his actions. He never wanted to be too much of a showboat. And I think he even liked to use the show horses versus work horses, and all of that. He would speak of that. So I don't think it would be fatal. But I think he'd suffer from that unwillingness to do it.

Presently, because of electronic media particularly, there is almost a game of personal destruction that can come into play. So if you leave the void, if you're not talking and making them happy with you, but others are, and sharing tidbits of information that might tend to embarrass or whatever, then your usefulness, your attractiveness is diminished, even to the point of being nil. Others enjoy a big advantage because they, themselves, will indulge themselves in even reckless charges, and the rest. And if you're not dealing with them on a daily basis, you could lose.

I used to tell the classes of the legislators that the end purpose of all education, if you had to boil it down to a sentence or two, it would be something like this, that—it's the effort to develop the

capacity to make a good judgment, if you had to boil it down. Now that, of course, is being over—oversimplifying all the purpose of education. But to make a good judgment would be.

And it seems that if people have worked hard to achieve that purpose, the ability to make a good judgment, a prudent judgment, then this madness to just throw it away because editorialists tell you you should go this way, and you should go—it's better to ignore it if, in fact, you disagree with it. I think you should be polite, listen. I mean that's part of the prudence of arriving at a good decision. But you should not be overwhelmed because somebody can do you damage for your failure to comply with their requests or demands.

But I think the tendency is now for these folks to insist that you be more compliant. And then they have many cases where they've exacted these media folks. I'm talking about the more unscrupulous ones. Most of them are not engaged in this, but some are. They can do such a job on you on a daily basis. You'd be paying no attention to it because you're not going to be listening or reading it. And after a while, it has its effect on the more undiscerning public mind.

So, what about that? I think that somebody like Moakley would not have the luxury any longer of just saying, "Well, I'm doing what I think I should do," and obeying the—in a certain sense, Moakley understood. He wouldn't sit around and quote Edmund Burke's famous admonition to lawmakers. He said, "Your representative owes you, not his industry only, but his judgment; and he betrays you, instead of serves you, if he sacrifices it to your opinion."

Well, I think Moakley would recognize that; his duty was to come to some good conclusion. "I'm here. They're all elsewhere. They're relying upon me to think for myself, and I'll do it." That becomes perilous if, in fact, it runs counter to the wishes or the beliefs of some of the more strident or unscrupulous media people. And I don't think, in the past, they were that intrusive or that personal. I don't think. But now it exists in a very large degree.

And so, you wouldn't see people forming the way Moakley did over the years. It wasn't his job to please everyone, as I saw. It was his job to benefit them. And sometimes you can't even explain it. It's just the whole issue has become so complex, or whatever. All you can do is have

their confidence, their trust. And he had that in abundance. They knew that, even when they would disagree with him, he was coming to his own conclusions. He was acting in what he perceived to be their best interest.

McETTRICK: What would you say to somebody today who's interested in a career in public service? The Moakley [Institute], one of its purposes is to encourage people to get into public life. In light of your observations, and with Joe Moakley as an example, what would you say to somebody who was interested in that? Is there value in it? What lessons should they learn from—?

BULGER: Well first of all, make up your mind in advance that you're going to have it that way. You'll be more ready for it. And know, also, that you can be defeated, but it's not the end of the world. It's better to be defeated, I think, and to have struck your own course, than to have allowed yourself to be buffeted by every little wind that blows, and then last longer. It's the price that's not worth paying.

So I would give the advice that—well, [Winston] Churchill recognized it. He said, "Politics is more exhilarating than war. In war, you can only be killed once." And I think, again, Moakley understood that. See, I don't think that the storm clouds were as threatening during those times. I don't think, anyway. Maybe it was, but I just didn't see it.

McETTRICK: Can you tell us something about some of the principal political figures of that era? Yourself and Congressman Moakley would have to interact with whoever was Speaker or governor at a given time.

BULGER: Oh sure. Well, John Thompson.¹³

McETTRICK: Who are some of the figures that come to mind?

¹³ John Thompson (1920-1965), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts State House of Representatives from 1948 to 1964. He served as Speaker of the House from 1957 to 1964.

BULGER: We had Speaker John Thompson. He was a great person who became the Speaker of the House. His legs had a lot of shrapnel in them. And he was in pain. He had never had a drink before he arrived in Boston, as I understand it, from let alone Massachusetts. But he began to drink. And he was drinking.

And I remember Joe Moakley's friends. Moakley had now moved on to the Senate. And I said, "I would love to be with Thompson. But boy," I said, "he's irresponsible." And I remember Dave O'Connor who was a particularly nice guy. He was a funeral director in Mission Hill. And he said to me, "No one is better than he is when he's sober." I said, "But I haven't seen him sober; it's been a couple of years." (laughter) But John, he had a huge problem, an addiction. And a very good man. His heart was totally in the right place. But Moakley was much more friendly, by the way, with John Thompson. They were contemporaries. Each of them had been in the Second World War. And they were older.

Moakley was very friendly with Maurice Donahue.¹⁴ Maurice Donahue was a rather somber fellow who became president of the Senate, from Holyoke, Massachusetts. But I think they used to call him Batman. He never smiled. But he was very friendly with Moakley.

We were both friendly with Kevin White, the mayor. And he had been mayor sixteen years. Collins, John Collins was—we all knew John Silber [president of Boston University] in those days. I campaigned for Silber in 1990 [in the MA gubernatorial race] against Governor Weld¹⁵ and I enjoyed that contest. Silber, he could really cause a conflagration at any turn. And one time, when I was asking him, I said, "You can hold to your opinion; I admire you for that. But there must be an easier way to state it." And I was trying to get him to just tone down the manner of speech. When there was a question about where you put your health resources, in the young or the old, he quotes Shakespeare, "Ripeness is all. Goodbye if you're ripe." (laughter) And you can imagine the reaction coming in from senior citizens groups, and it was wild, you know.

¹⁴ Maurice A. Donahue (1917-1998) served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1948 to 1950, then in the Massachusetts Senate from 1950 to 1971. He served as Senate Majority Leader from 1958 to 1964 and as Senate President from 1964 to 1971.

¹⁵ William Weld (1945-), a Republican, served as governor of Massachusetts from 1991 to 1997.

And I can remember being with Silber, who I have such admiration for, in my own office and saying, “And we just have to tone it down. I think most people would agree that the policy and most of the resources should be there, but not to the detriment or whatever.” And he says, “You know, if you had your way, Lincoln never would have discussed slavery.” (laughter)

McETTRICK: Maurice Donahue, was he in a governor’s race for a Democratic primary, and one of his tag lines was that there was nothing to smile about? That’s how they explained the severe face.

BULGER: I think he was in a battle with Kevin White.¹⁶

McETTRICK: Yeah, that’s right.

BULGER: Well let me see, we were both—Moakley and I were with Eddie McCormack¹⁷ when Ted Kennedy ran [for the U.S. Senate in 1960]. Now he was to us, Ted Kennedy—I’ve since had a huge admiration for Ted Kennedy, but he was the younger brother of the president and a big deal. Moakley and I said, Why are you people—McCormack and—we would say things just to get the ire of the audience, something like, “Well, because obviously anyone from South Boston is better than someone from elsewhere.” (laughter) Things like that, you know, that you’d see the words printed out, just to be—

McETTRICK: You must have been there for the debate then, at South Boston High’s senatorial race?

BULGER: No, I was not inside South Boston High.

McETTRICK: You weren’t there—?

¹⁶ Kevin White (1929-), a Democrat, served as mayor of Boston from 1968 to 1984. He ran unsuccessfully for governor of Massachusetts in 1970.

¹⁷ Edward J. McCormack, Jr. (1923-) served as attorney general of Massachusetts from 1959 to 1963.

BULGER: I was around, I heard it, and I got the message as soon as I walked into my house, my mother at home. And I said, “Well,” I said, “didn’t Eddie McCormack do a great—” She says, “He sounds like a very cheap South Boston politician.” (laughter)

I said, “We’re both in very, very serious trouble.” And I was already in the legislature. I can remember having lunch with Ted Kennedy, with his group, at Locke-Ober’s [Restaurant], because he was asking us—everyone at the table, they had a little sissy sandwich or something. I told them I had never come to Locke-Ober’s—which I had never been to before—without having my Lobster Savannah. Someone told me to order—it was a huge lobster, stuffed lobsters. It was huge; it looked like a leg of lamb or something. I was working on that as they were coming around the table, and each person was swearing fidelity to Ted Kennedy. And when they got to me, I said, “I’m awfully sorry.” I said, “The McCormacks are neighbors.”

And Gerard Doherty said, “Well, could you at least look up and talk to us for a minute?” And I was impolite. And Ted Kennedy, to his everlasting credit, said, “Don’t bother.” He said, “We can’t afford to feed him.” (laughter) But again, those are things I’d be telling Joe about. And we really enjoyed it. I just have to tell you, it was a joy to be in it.

McETTRICK: Well, you know, when we interviewed Congressman Moakley, he had alluded somewhat to the busing difficulties in South Boston. He was really very saddened by the whole thing because of the effect that it had on the community, and lifelong friends and acquaintances that he had with people who would have thought this way or that on it. And also, I guess, Kevin White was really in the middle of all this, as well. There was a lot of damage taken, politically, by a lot of people. How does that all look to you now, thirty years later?

BULGER: Well, I may be stubborn in my point of view, but I think the whole thing was just so contemptuous of people at that level, where their right, with their children, even to be wrong, should have been respected. And to pit black people against white people, and all of the people who are unaffected—all proponents, you have to remember, were unaffected. No one who was affected favored it. There may have been someone, somewhere, but I never heard of him or her.

The idea of uprooting people from their—where community was very important to them, and to ship them all over the place based on skin color just seemed to me to be about the worst thing they could do, and to pit them. So I would have—I just think it was just badly devised, and would ultimately prove counter-productive.

But the additional insult of it, I think, was that to take a position against it was, therefore to be part of the Ku Klux Klan or something. That was, again, part of the unfairness of the proponents. And I used to joke about the *Boston Globe*, they knew everything about it, and Tom Winship [late editor of the *Boston Globe*] would always be writing about the urban situation from his home in Lincoln. And I would say, “How did you know, Mr. Winship, what was happening in the city? You’re such an expert.”

He says, “We have an urban team, and I asked the urban team.” I says, “Making this up.” And then I said, “Oh,” I said, “how can I communicate with them?” He said, “Call them during the day, 288-8000.” Or at night, dial ‘1’ and then their number.” Their home number! The idea that they were all from elsewhere; it was just too bad. And you have to remember that there were no—people would think it’s almost juvenile to be a bit attached to the community, to be that community-rooted, or family-oriented as these folks were. And they couldn’t be—

But I think that they were the strength of the city and furthermore, on the ground, running their own relations with people of color, and the rest were pretty good. In fact, very good. I don’t know, I just remember inviting a judge, David Nelson from Roxbury—he became a federal judge, but he had gone to law school with me—bringing him over to my—it’s the Holy Name Society of Saint Monica’s—to talk to people about these things. This is beforehand; things were going, I thought—maybe never at anybody else’s pace, as they would have it—but I thought we were doing okay.

But along came the unaffected federal judge [Judge Arthur Garrity], and he said, “Now you have to do this; you have to do that.”¹⁸ And then he’d be lionized by the press, none of whom were in

¹⁸Mr. Bulger is referring to the June 21, 1974, opinion filed by Judge W. Arthur Garrity in the case of *Tallulah Morgan et al. v. James Hennigan et al.* (379 F. Supp. 410). Judge Garrity ruled that the Boston School Committee

town at that time, anyway. So it was a hopeless cause, to argue against it. And somehow, to argue against it was also to be an advocate for either resistance or something. I never knew what you could advise somebody to do. My contention always was that it is a bad idea, and I still believe, of course, that it is and was, and should not have been embarked upon.

And by the way, most people, again, of color, they were very good with it—even if we were in disagreement; I’m not even sure how much—but they were great. The opposition and the anger always came, again, from the unaffected person living in Weston or Wellesley. They never could get over the fact that you took this position. Intolerant, you know.

McETTRICK: Well you know, people, when they talk about Joe Moakley, will talk about the Big Dig, the waterfront development, cleaning up the harbor [Boston Harbor].

BULGER: The courthouse.

McETTRICK: Well, you’ve been in South Boston all along, watching all of this, the courthouse. How do you see South Boston evolving over time?

BULGER: Oh, it’s changed.

McETTRICK: How does the future look for South Boston? Is it an upbeat picture?

BULGER: Well, I think so; I think it’s good. It’s good, but it’s quite different. But it’s inevitably to be. I mean, it’s a changing scene. It has all the problems of every big-city neighborhood. I always liked the idea of “neighborhood;” I would argue that it’s worthwhile because people, they know each other, they have a sense of identity there and all these good things about it.

had “intentionally brought about and maintained racial segregation” in the Boston Public Schools. When the school committee did not submit a workable desegregation plan as the opinion had required, the court established a plan that called for some students to be bused from their own neighborhoods to attend schools in other neighborhoods, with the goal of creating racial balance in the Boston Public Schools. (See <http://www.lib.umb.edu/archives/garrity2.html> for more information)

And I can't think of a more—back to this, but the horrendous assault on it than to destabilize one of its most important institutions, the school, and to ship people around. You can't do that in an affluent community; the people in the affluent community just get up and leave the school system. You have to pick on only poor people; it can't be done anywhere else. And so there was something annoying about that. By the way, I would alienate just about everyone I would come in contact with who brought up the subject, so they stayed away from us sometimes. (laughter) Even relatives, if they lived elsewhere they'd be saying it.

McETTRICK: But how can it be that such a relatively small community can really have such a great impact and generate so many strong political leaders that have had a lot of influence? What is it about the community? Because that's what South Boston does.

BULGER: Well, because it was a community. Because it was a community, there was a sense of devotion to it among the people there. I don't know whether I romanticize it overly, but people cared deeply about it. All of their teams and all of their activities, they have plenty of people who give everything they can to it. The parishes in the community always had a whole lot of life to them. Moakley shifted from Saint Monica's to Saint Augustine's, and then finally the both of us ended up at Saint Brigid's. And we used to joke about that as, "We think we arrived here," you know, "at City Point." That's not the case at all, but that's a—

So there was a lot to it, and by the way, it cuts both ways. It can make you want exclusivity, which is not good because you have to be respectful of everyone's desire to come and go as they please. We're a free country, so you have to be careful with that. But there should have been the same kind of respect given to them; that would have been really good. I really think we just got ourselves bogged down in a terrible mish-mash. But again, social planners.

McETTRICK: When you spoke of Congressman Moakley in your eulogy, I think you said at one point, or pointed to both his pride and his humility.

BULGER: That's true, yeah.

McETTRICK: And that they were really two sides of the same coin, and really an expression of South Boston in a way. Tell us a little bit about that, how you see Joe in relation to the values of that community he came from.

BULGER: Well, he has that small-town view, the here and the now, the immediate. And he doesn't have any big, big opinion of himself; doesn't pontificate, doesn't even do what I do, throw around Edmund Burke or anyone else who might come in handy. (laughter) None of that from Joe; much easier to listen to. And he has this wonderful pride in all the things a person should be proud of, loyalty. If I were having any kind of a problem, or if he thought I were taking it on the chin, I can always remember him calling me up and saying, "Let's go to [Anthony's] Pier 4 [Restaurant]." I said, "You don't want food; you want to show the flag."

"No, no," he said, "I just want everyone to know you and I are—." And it would be like that. Those are later years but he would always do that. He sought to be a pal, and he was. He knew the meaning of friendship.

ALLISON: One of the institutions that you and he really created was the Saint Patrick's Day Breakfast. Can you talk a little bit about its origins?

BULGER: The Saint Patrick's Day Breakfast just came about, really, I think it's like the late forties or fifties, where everybody would go to Dorgan's, and then there would be good humor. And I can remember Leverett Saltonstall¹⁹ there, the United States senator, he'd been the Speaker of the House and went to the United States Senate, very dignified fellow, whose son served with me, Bill Saltonstall. And one day he claimed Irish heritage, and Sonny McDonough said, "It's on the chauffeur's side."

And he would get chided about the fact, that joke about Senator Kerr and somebody else, each talking about their big ranch, one in Oklahoma, the LBJ in Texas. "And I have my place," he

¹⁹ Leverett Saltonstall (1892-1972, a Republican, served as Speaker of the House of the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1929 to 1937, as governor of Massachusetts from 1939 to 1945 and represented Massachusetts in the U.S. Senate from 1945 to 1967.

says. “It’s only four acres, but it’s known as downtown Boston.” (laughter) But they would all have these stories, and it was a good time.

Then I took it over when I went to the Senate, when in 1970, but prior to that—because again, I’m not sure whether or how I should—I enjoyed the thing, the event. And oh, I’d sing songs. And Moakley would always say, “Listen, you take this over, I’ve had enough.” And so someplace midway, after he had satisfied whoever he had to acknowledge in the audience and the rest, I’d end up with the microphone and we’d have a grand old time.

So I was much ready for it when it became the senator’s prerogative in 1971 when I went to the Senate. And it was much fun, we’d make—I mean, everybody called us, from President Bush, President Clinton and President whoever, I don’t know. Everybody participated in the event. President Reagan, he loved it from afar. And I can remember President Bush, the first President Bush.

And I was chiding my friend, Michael Dukakis,²⁰ and Michael has a very good sense of humor but it’s a dry sense of humor, but I can remember telling him, “President Bush,” I said, “wait until you hear.” Because he was going to be the challenger, of course, of the president. And I said, “We have a scandal here.” “Oh,” he says. “I’m happy to hear that.” And I said, “And it involves Governor Dukakis.” “Oh!” (laughter)

And there was this silly thing about low license plates. A friend of mine had received one. “And now,” I said, “the governor has people out, finding out where that came from.” “Well, it came from me,” I said, “but then he sent the state police to the house.”

And my friend called me, and he says, “The state police are here, they want that plate back!” And he says, “I’m supposed to go to Europe in the morning. What shall I do?” I said, “Take the plate with you.” And so, Dukakis—“Oh, this is good,” says Bush.

²⁰ Michael S. Dukakis (1933-), a Democrat, served in the Massachusetts House of Representatives from 1962 to 1970, then as governor of Massachusetts from 1975 to 1979 and from 1983 to 1991. He was the Democratic presidential nominee in 1988, but lost the presidential election to Republic George H.W. Bush.

And then even when Silber had lost in 1990, President Clinton said, “Tell me, what happened?” “Oh,” I said, “Mr. President,” I said, “have you ever heard of a woman named Natalie Jacobson²¹?” (laughter) So the inside humor, they’d like that. But that was great fun, too.

McETTRICK: How was it that Lev Saltonstall was so highly thought of in South Boston, being a Republican and all?

BULGER: Well the famous Curley did that, you know. He foolishly said—somebody said something about his face, a South Boston face. And then foolishly, Curley suggested that he wouldn’t dare show it in South Boston. Before you know it, Leverett is showing up at every tavern in the district, much to the enjoyment of all. He defeated Curley that year. But Curley could talk himself into trouble, too.

And I remember, by the way, I was trying to open up beaches. I’ve always thought that—I won’t get into that, but I tried to open the beaches up at Manchester-By-the-Sea. I went up there one time. Senator Saltonstall was campaigning and I said—I was talking to them about this effort on my part; they didn’t like it. And I said, “Well, I can’t seem to get it through anyway, because your senator, Senator Saltonstall, seems to stymie my every effort, every single year in the Senate.”

Oh, good for you, Bill, they said. And I was walking out, he says, “You’ve just re-elected me.” (laughter) He wasn’t even in, and it wasn’t a conspiracy, it was just—and then one time on Saint Patrick’s Day, he was such a gentleman, Bill Saltonstall. I said to him, “How do you think I should go up there in Manchester-By-the-Sea?” He says, “Perhaps incognito.” (laughter) But that would be the kind of humor; it was—by the way, Moakley could not tell a joke or anything. He would just gum it up, every single time. But that became the funny part. And I can still remember, there’s one tape in which he’s constantly—this feedback or something from a microphone. And the place is—he’s getting very impatient with this, because he’s got a story to

²¹ Natalie Jacobson was a reporter for a Boston news station who interviewed John Silber during the 1990 gubernatorial race. When Jacobson asked Silber what his weaknesses were, he responded in what many perceived to be an argumentative manner. It has been widely suggested that this response contributed to his defeat in the election.

tell, whatever it is. And it's some silly story, I think everybody must have known in advance, because that's how he would tell it. He said, "Well I have to tell this." And I said, "Well yeah, why don't you get up and tell it because you did it very, very well last year."

But he could be terrific. I think he blamed my friend, Fran Joyce. Joyce was handling the controls and Moakley must have thought we must be—

[Tape ends]

END OF PART 2

(Casual conversation off camera)

ALLISON: Joe Moakley also told us the spy story.

BULGER: The spy story, he loves the spy story.

GEORGE COMEAU: And he got it all balled up, just like you said.

BULGER: Yeah, he gums it up.

McETRICK: Oh, so what's the spy story? How's that go?

BULGER: Oh, there's a silly story about some people, is it the Germans or something? They know they have a spy on the Connemara Coast and his name is McDonough. And they come along and there's a million McDonoughs.

ALLISON: There's a code phrase: The moon is high, the grass is green, the cows are ready for milking."

BULGER: Yeah, “The cows are ready for milking, the grass is green, life is good.” And so that’s their—and so they come and they say that. And finally, when they say that to people, they don’t—no, no, they go along and they say, Do you know someone named McDonough?

And they say, Well, do you mean McDonough the farmer, McDonough the fisherman, McDonough the whatever?

“No.” And then finally the fellow says, “The sky is high, the grass is green.”

“Oh,” he says, “You’re looking for McDonough the spy!” (laughter) Yeah, see, that’s the joke, and Joe Moakley tells it, and he gums it up every time. Now I don’t even know how to tell it myself. He gummed it up every time.

And he and Jimmy Kelly²² had some silly story, and to this day I don’t know whether he was serious in his effort to tell it. But he would stand there each year, get up. “Now this is good,” he says. “Just listen for the punch line.” You had to wait for the punch line. (laughter)

McETTRICK: It’s in here somewhere.

BULGER: They would have a great time, and it would be their telling of that story which would just rock the place.

McETTRICK: So how have the Yankees fared over the years, at the Saint Patrick’s Day breakfasts, Weld was in there?

BULGER: Well of course, the Yankees, well, Weld, we’re guilty of really serious—it’s a stereotyping; it’s not fair but it’s nevertheless something they submit to voluntarily, and they are good sports about it. And that was the one thing Weld—he said, “Please,” he said, “I don’t care what you say. You can pick on me, you can tell everyone that I remind you of the fellow who—”

²² James M. Kelly (1940-2007), a lifelong South Boston resident, represented South Boston in the Boston City Council from 1983 until his death in January of 2007. He served as city council president from 1994 to 2001.

I don't know, in the movies, I forget. "But no matter what," he said, "the one thing," he said, "I don't like to hear from you is, 'Isn't he a good sport?'" He said, "I feel like a big sap, a rich kid who comes in to get beat up and every now and then you say, 'Isn't he a good sport?' You really mean, 'Isn't he a sap?'" But Weld loved all of that stuff. We traveled to Ireland a couple of times, he and I. Can I tell you one on Weld?

McETTRICK: Oh, sure.

BULGER: Oh, sure, unless he runs again. But one day he called, and I was in the car, and he said, "I hate to see you're leaving, but," he says, "how about one more trip to Ireland?"

"Oh," I said, "That's a very good idea." I said, "But what are we going for?"

He says, "Don't worry, I'll think of a reason." And within a couple of days I started hearing about this big trade mission that I would soon be joining him on. (laughter) We went to Ireland, and we did talk to people there. But again, he would spoof all of these things. Weld had a wonderful, wonderful sense of humor, he was really good at it.

And he [Weld] just loved all of that thing on Saint Patrick's Day. He overdid it. He would be so—his office would be closed down for about four days as he and Bob Crane were practicing. They had a piano down there and everything, and he would be practicing some sort of a song, whatever you call it, songs with the lyrics. And he'd be doing all of that. "I'm getting ready, getting ready for this year. They'll put me right in my place where I deserve to be." But Weld liked that.

McETTRICK: Now did you have much contact with Frank Sargent?²³

BULGER: Oh, sure.

McETTRICK: What was Frank like? From a distance, he seemed to be a great guy, as well.

²³ Francis W. Sargent (1915-1998), a Republican, was governor of Massachusetts from 1969 to 1975.

BULGER: Oh, Frank Sargent was top-notch, yeah. He was very good, Sargent. He, again, he liked the role, but he was more of a back-slapping, gregarious fellow. And I remember in his final days, visiting him at his home in Dover. He would wax nostalgic about those events and all of that. I don't know, he liked one particular joke. Somebody, Elliott Richardson²⁴ or someone, was claiming Irish whatever. And I said "I don't know whether I should say this," but I said, "Yeah, but you go to a wooden church," which means, you know. But those guys were good sports.

Elliott Richardson came one time, and I had this headline from the *Boston Globe*. The headline said—he was running for, I think, maybe governor. "Vote Elliott, He's Better Than You." (laughter) Then he lost. And about five months later, the snow was blowing outside my window at the state house. The phone rang, it was Elliott. He was calling from the islands and he said, "Oh, it's beautiful down here," he says, "but I have to retire my campaign debt." He said, "If you'll go on and be an emcee, because I always think of that *unfortunate* headline." And the way he said, "*unfortunate* headline," ah, the poor guy. So I, of course, agreed. And the fellow who writes in the *Globe* was on the island—what's his name? He's the comic writer, he goes to Martha's Vineyard all the time.

McETTRICK: Oh, Art Buchwald?

BULGER: Yes. He and I were—we did it, we packed them in and retired the debt in one night at the Park Plaza. But I was very bipartisan in doing those things, because everybody would be asking. But we kept—there was a good spirit. I hope it will return sometime.

McETTRICK: I guess one topic that we really kind of missed on the way by, since we're kind of finishing up—you've been very generous with your time—would be the Big Dig.²⁵ I mean it's really kind of the Boston Punic Wars, really, with the Big Dig. And you were Senate

²⁴ Elliott Richardson (1920-1999) served as lieutenant governor of Massachusetts from 1965 to 1967 and as attorney general of Massachusetts from 1967 to 1969 before he was appointed to President Richard Nixon's cabinet in 1970.

²⁵ The Big Dig, or Central Artery/Tunnel Project (CA/T), was the largest public works project in U.S. history and involved the replacement of downtown Boston's elevated highway with a tunnel. The project began in 1991 and ended in 2007.

President for a lot of that, and Joe was on the Rules. Can you tell us a little bit about that? I mean, it's just a fantastic story that we were able to get that kind of federal support for it.

BULGER: Yeah, it was great. He and O'Neill, and the secretary of transportation under Michael Dukakis—

ALLISON: Fred Salvucci.

BULGER: Yeah, Salvucci, Fred, they did a beautiful job. And they had an idea of what they needed there. And they watched—they saw the monstrosity dividing the city, and also deteriorating, and also not able to accommodate the traffic. I don't know whether anything ever does; there might be some truth in the notion that no matter what, and we'll fill it and pave over. But nevertheless, all of those people working together—and I guess huge credit goes to O'Neill and to Moakley. And Moakley was very proud of all of those achievements.

I have to tell you, I run into it now because people in western Massachusetts say, We're so tired of all the money in the state budget going to—that's a constant tension between—and we're mindful of it in the university because the flagship campus is in Amherst, and there's always the sense in western Mass. that they're neglected, and the Big Dig fed that notion.

In any event, it was a mighty achievement. We've had people here who—and Moakley, by the way, had no problem with the idea of “bringing home the bacon.” There was no philosophical discussion; this was just a good thing. And I think you'd be hard-pressed to say, “Well, if everyone is taking that narrow perspective, Mr. Congressman, the whole country”—he wouldn't know what you were talking about. He just thought part of his performance there should involve being right in the thick of the competition for funds for public facilities. And certainly he was successful with it. So he gave it top-notch attention.

You know, here in South Boston we would be so much in the—I can remember sitting with John McCormack the day that a call came that Sam Rayburn²⁶ was just not going to survive this terrible cancer. And I remember McCormack placing his hands on his—he says, “It’s terrible,” he says, “what’s happening to him.” McCormack seemed devoted to Rayburn, but it also meant that McCormack would be the successor, as I recall. And I remember that, just sitting in the office talking with John McCormack that day. McCormack would break out cigars, and we’d smoke cigars. I don’t know, it was a great joy to—he’s a gentleman about it all.

And again, the same with Moakley. I saw a certain peace in both men, in a sense. I think that they thought that—you know, having done his best, it’s time. And it wasn’t important that everyone credited him with it. In fact, that was not important, I think. It was just the idea—again, not to please everyone, but to benefit them. And McCormack had it too, huge.

I remember visiting the British consul on Beacon Hill. It was a lunch; I can’t remember all of the reasons for the lunch, but among the guests was John McCormack. And McCormack wore his hat kind of funny at that time, and he was old, of course. He is no longer the Speaker. The time came to go, and he went out, and I was saying so long to a couple of people. I looked out the door and McCormack had already gone up the small part of the hill and taken a right, and was already headed toward the Boston Common and wherever his destination. Probably he had an office still back at the courthouse in Post Office Square, and that would be, I suppose, where he was going. But very quietly, very happy.

I mean, with the Caesars and with the rest, there’d be suicide or there’d be war, and more horror stories, because no one wanted to give anything up. But for these people, both McCormack and Moakley, I just knew them at their mightiest, and in an exalted position. It can be very heady, very hard to give up. But both did so, and I do remember thinking of that with the Speaker that day.

²⁶ Samuel Rayburn (1882-1961), a Democrat, represented Texas’ Fourth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives from 1913 until his death in 1961. He served several terms as Speaker of the House of Representatives.

And again, the same with Moakley. Here he was—we were sitting in Jimmy’s [Harborside] Restaurant—and saying to me how—and by the way, this is more of this quote business, but at the end he would like to talk about some achievements that were important to him: the Jesuit the murders down in South America [sic—Central America], and how he had run around, he and Jimmy McGovern.²⁷ They had done a fine job and he was very proud of that, and that meant a lot to him.

I can only think of the great observation by Pericles. He’s making this funeral oration; he’s talking about politics. By the way, he, in the same oration, said that we don’t think of people who are involved in politics as bad, or busybodies, or anything. In fact, we think those who do not involve themselves in politics are useless. That was this Athenian, living in a place where democracy is just at its beginning, exhorting his people to know the importance of it, their own involvement in it.

And at some point in his oration he just makes this beautiful comment, and I did, I think, use it in the eulogy. He said, “For it is by honor, and not by gold, as some men think, that the helpless end of life is cheered.” And I can tell you that at the end of Moakley’s life, when he would speak, there was no question about what pleased him. It’s not the accumulation of material things which occupies so many of us for so much of our time, but rather these wonderful achievements.

The Jesuit thing, he’d speak of it very frequently. That night he was talking about it, and recalling how—I think it was Speaker [Thomas S.] Foley had called him in and said, “I’d like to send you there [to El Salvador], and maybe we can get to the bottom of this thing. This is a horrific event and people are pointing at, I think, the training we’re giving people at Fort Benning, Georgia.”

And Moakley said, “That’s not for me. I’m not going any further south than Miami,” and all of that. But he did it; it was dutifully done. And then, I would say it cheered him to think of it; it

²⁷ James P. McGovern (1959-), a Democrat, has represented Massachusetts’ Third Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives since 1997. He was a member of Moakley’s congressional staff from 1982 to 1996.

was something important to him. It speaks so well of him. And I don't want to be too dramatic about it because he'd admonish me about that, and probably will sometime. Nevertheless, all of those achievements, and even talking about individual services to people who had no place else to go. Those were so important to him. He had little stories about people. And he said, "I just think that she had nowhere else to go, except me. So I had to decide that I would give that my best."

And one last thing: I remember the widow of James Michael Curley, Gertrude Dennis. She said, "You should never feel bad for him; he was happy with so much of his life." And she told how, very briefly, bang-bang-bang came the knocking on the door over in the Jamaica Way. And she said, "I went to the door, and there was a woman there and she obviously had been out and drinking, and her hair was mussed up, her face was smudged with"—

And she said, "I want to talk to the governor." No longer governor, but that's the title forever in Massachusetts. So she insisted, and she was going to call the police. She says, "I was newly married and I just didn't know what I could do in a case like this." Then up at the top of the stairway, the famous stairway, is the governor. "Wait, wait." He comes downstairs and he talks to the woman at the door, and he invites her in. He opens the library door, or as she said, he pushed the two doors apart; she sat down, and then she had her moment with the governor. The governor spoke to her and listened to her. Then soon the door opened, and she was going out. And now she was on her dignity; she had just chatted with Governor Curley, barely would even deign to speak to this woman who was about to call the police on her, and proudly marched out the door. (laughter)

And Curley had the same explanation: She had no place else to go. And she was going to sound off, and somebody should just be willing to give her that opportunity. And I know it sounds—but, you know, I think it's a common denominator among many of those people, especially of that time.

McETTRICK: Well that's an interesting triad, though, that you established: McCormack, Curley, and then Joe Moakley in the sense that the expectations of the community or the

example, whatever, must have had some kind of an effect. Well, you've been very generous with your time.

BULGER: Well, I talk too much. (laughs)

McETTRICK: And we really do appreciate it. Well, it's good though, it's nice to have a chance to put some of this on tape. And thank you, I enjoyed it. Nice to meet you.

BULGER: Thank you so much. Okay. A pleasure.

McETTRICK: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW