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*U.S. Senate*

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# Ten Comparisons, Then and Now

by Angus King

I was sworn in as a U.S. senator 40 years to the day after I went to work as a staff member in the U.S. Senate, on January 3, 1973. So, I have an interesting perspective on politics then and now from having worked for Senator Bill Hathaway of Maine in his 1972 campaign; then going to work for him in Washington; and now, unexpectedly, finding myself back there 40 years later. I would like to share with you some comparisons between politics then and now.

## MONEY

Bill Hathaway's campaign in 1972 was the most expensive campaign ever run in Maine to that point, and it cost \$212,000. My campaign last year cost \$3 million, and it was the cheapest winning campaign in the United States. In fact, a friend from Washington called during the campaign and asked, "What's your budget?" I said, "Well, about three million dollars." He replied, "What a quaint number!"

Money has become a huge problem in American politics, huge because there is an insatiable demand for it. My campaign cost three million. There was probably another million and a half or two spent on my behalf by outsiders, and then there was six or seven million spent against me. Do you remember the ads with the little crown on my head? My granddaughter loved those ads. She said, "Look, there's granddad with a crown on." She thought it was really cute; she didn't know they were spending millions of dollars to assassinate my character.

I think we have a good measure of what all that spending was worth. When I ran for governor in 1998, I got 59 percent of the vote; this time I got 53 percent. They spent \$6 million on negative ads. I figure they spent a million dollars a percentage point to take me from 59 to 53 percent. That's a rough figure for what it was worth. I'm just glad they didn't spend \$50 million.

Here's the problem. I spent three million, and there was probably ten million spent in total. In Massachusetts, where Elizabeth Warren was running against Scott Brown, the expenditures were \$42 million apiece. That's \$42 million on each campaign.

Massachusetts has a larger population than Maine's, but it's not that much larger. Today, to run for reelection in a competitive state, the average U.S. senator needs to raise between \$8,000 and \$10,000 a day, every day, 365 days a year, for six years.

Think for a minute: \$10,000 a day, every day, seven days a week. You very quickly run out of friends and family. Where does all that money come from? Unfortunately, it tends to come from people who are interested in what you are doing. I remember former Congressman Barney Frank saying a few years ago, with typical wit, "We have the only political system in the history of the world where perfect strangers are expected to give you large sums of money and not expect anything in return!"

It is a scandal waiting to happen. It's a real problem, not only in terms of the amounts involved and where you get it, but also in terms of how much time it takes. I see my colleagues who are up for reelection next year, who are spending hours and hours every day on the telephone, asking for money. On top of this, we have this terrible case, where people can give all this money anonymously. It's one thing if you know where it's coming from, but now there's no way to know.

The six or seven million that was spent against me? Nobody knows who gave that money. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce was at the bottom of the "crown" ad, but we don't know where they got the several million they spent. I believe it was Senator John McCain of Arizona who said that they had become kind of an identity-laundering organization, and I think that's a real problem.

In the *Citizens United* decision, the Supreme Court invited Congress to require disclosure. Congress hasn't done it yet, but it's something we should do. You cannot go to a Maine town meeting with a bag over your head. You have to say, here's who I am, here's what I believe, and here's who I am contributing to.

We in Maine, in New Mexico, in California, and everywhere, are being battered by these advertisements, without any idea of who's behind them. There are no limits. It can be a single person with millions and millions of dollars. In 2012, one man backing Newt

Gingrich for president wrote a check for well more than ten million dollars—one person. That’s not good for our democracy. So that’s a big difference between politics then and now; \$10,000 a day—just think of that.

### GERRYMANDERING THE U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Gerrymandering is a term that dates back to Governor Elbridge Gerry of Massachusetts in the early nineteenth century. It refers to the purposeful drawing of election districts to exclude certain voters and include others, so these become “safe” districts for the party in power.

Half or more of the House districts today have been gerrymandered to the point where they are politically safe seats. This means that the primary election in that district is the election. If you win the Republican primary in a Republican-drawn district, you are going to be the congressperson. There’s no contest. The Democrat doesn’t have a prayer because the lines have been drawn in such a way that it’s going to be 60 or 70 percent Republican, and vice versa. And by the way, there are safe Democratic districts, too.

This means that the person who runs in the primary is vulnerable only to somebody running on their flank. If you’re in a Republican district and running in a Republican primary, there’s always the threat of somebody running who’s going to be more conservative than you, and you’re pushed to the right. By the same token, for the Democrat, you’re being pushed to be more liberal. So, it is the extreme activists who control the primaries, and in many places, unfortunately, not many people vote in the primaries.

Last summer [2013], when I was running in Maine, the Republicans nominated Charlie Summers with just 13 percent of the registered Republican vote. The Democrats nominated Cynthia Dill with just 9 percent of the registered Democratic vote. If you do the math, it’s like 1 or 2 percent of the people of Maine who nominated the two major party candidates. The activists in each party tend to control these primaries, particularly if there’s a small turnout. This is what produced this immensely polarized House of Representatives and the government shutdown.

I have heard commentators say, “Well, the Republicans in the House are going to cave in soon, because the polls for the Republicans are down.” Remember hearing that? “They’re getting hammered,

their polling numbers are down.” Then I heard, “Well, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the business community are not going to contribute to the Republicans, and that will shape them up.” No! If you’re from one of those safe Republican districts in Georgia, or Ohio, or Wisconsin, or Tennessee, you don’t care about these national polls. All you care about is your district, and in that district, you were being cheered for closing down the government. That’s what they went there to do.

I talked to one writer who said she had talked to some of the Tea Party Republicans, and the calls from their districts during the shutdown were ten-to-one in favor. Do you see what I mean? It’s why the House didn’t care about the polls. What happens nationally doesn’t really matter, if your base is that district. It can work both ways, but right now it’s working more on the Republican side that is so one-sided. It’s the reason that things have pulled so far apart. It’s why the House didn’t care about the polls.

### THE CENTER-LESS U.S. SENATE

In 1972, when I was working for Bill Hathaway, there was an ideological spectrum across the Senate as a body (extending both arms). Among the Democrats, you had Teddy Kennedy on the left and John Stennis, a Democrat from Mississippi and the long-time chair of the Armed Services Committee, on the right of the party. On the Republican side, you had Barry Goldwater on the right and Jacob Javits of New York, a Republican who was way more liberal than Stennis, on the left of the party. There were about 20 people in a broad, middle category, who were liberal-to-moderate-leaning Republicans and conservative-to-liberal-leaning Democrats. There was considerable overlap, you see, at the center.

Today it’s like this: there is, literally, no overlap. Susan Collins, Lisa Murkowski of Alaska, and John McCain of Arizona (sometimes) are over on the more moderate side of the Republican Party. Joe Manchin of West Virginia and I and several others are over on the right side of the Democratic caucus, but generally we don’t overlap. You see the problem? There is no center. There is, of course, our little group of 14, but it is harder and harder to find a center.

I can remember in college, there were political scientists who wrote that “We need more ideologically pure parties; these ‘big tent’ parties just don’t make sense”

(American Political Science Association 1950).<sup>1</sup> It turns out they did make sense, and we are now reaping the whirlwind of having these ideological parties. It makes it so hard to solve problems. That is a big change in the last 25 years.

### BALKANIZATION OF THE NEWS BUSINESS

When I was growing up, we all got our information from essentially one person, Walter Cronkite, or at most, from a relatively few national sources. Today there is a news source to fit your biases. If you're a liberal, you watch Rachel Maddow on MSNBC; if you're a conservative, you watch Fox News; and if you can't make up your mind, you watch CNN. The point is, it's human nature to seek out sources of information that agree with our biases. We tend to read and listen to those sources and commentators who already agree with us.

The problem is we end up living in alternative-reality universes, where we don't share the facts. I found when I was governor that if you can get people into a room and have a common understanding of the facts, it's often easy to find a solution; it becomes self-evident. It's when different people have different versions of reality that it's almost impossible to find a solution.

Here are two examples from my experience in Augusta. One was forest clear-cutting. Remember the big clear-cutting controversy? Jonathan Carter of Lexington Township had his version of what was going on in the woods, and the paper companies had an entirely different version about the facts—about how many trees were growing, how fast they would grow back, and all that. So, it was virtually impossible to find a middle ground for a policy solution.

On the other hand, we decided with the New England governors and the eastern Canadian premiers to do something about transported mercury pollution. Instead of starting with a prescription about what to do about it, we assigned our environmental commissioners to spend a year quietly studying the problem. Where is the pollution coming from? What is it doing? How bad is it? We established a really good scientific basis and ended up with a piece of legislation that passed the Maine legislature almost unanimously—because of the facts. We agreed on the facts.

Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the late and great senator from New York, once said, "Everyone is entitled to his own opinion, but not his own facts." One of the

problems now is the multiplicity of information sources that create these alternative realities and make it virtually impossible to find agreement. As we go into the upcoming budget negotiation, that is going to be one of our major hurdles.

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### SOCIAL MEDIA

One of the most important things in my campaign last year was Facebook. At the end of the campaign we had something like 45,000 people following our Facebook page. For a politician, Facebook is like going door-to-door without having to walk between the houses. It's an amazing way to connect with people, to have a certain kind of direct communication with them.

I see people all the time who say, "I love your Facebook page, thanks for keeping us up with what's going on." It's the kind of connection we all crave. Of course, Twitter and texts and those kinds of things are the same: they have changed politics and are making a huge difference. There are specialists in Washington now who do nothing but tell you how to maintain your Facebook page, how to get more viewers, how to get a higher ranking in Google, and all that. By the way, I don't know about you all, but I feel pretty cool to have been alive at the invention of a new verb, "to google." Social media in 1972, when I was working for Bill Hathaway, was calling your mother-in-law and asking, "How's it going here?" That was about it.

### EVERYONE GOES HOME

Nobody lives in Washington anymore. When I worked for Bill Hathaway, almost all the senators lived in Washington. Bill Hathaway lived in McLean,

Virginia; his kids went to school there. His wife was there, his family was there, and they hung out. Members of Congress played golf, they had dinner together, and there was a lot of socializing among them. Now that's almost all gone because everybody goes home. Even my friend Michael Bennett of Colorado goes home every weekend; his wife and kids live in Denver.

Washington clears out, and the work schedule now accommodates this. The work schedule of Congress is generally from Monday afternoon to Thursday evening, which means you can go home Thursday night; stay Friday, Saturday, and Sunday; and come back Monday morning. A lot of the time at home is spent campaigning and fundraising; it's not just kicking back and relaxing.

The point is, the center of gravity of these folks is away from and not in Washington. This has diminished the kind of personal relationships that are necessary to make a complex organization like Congress function. One of my friends in Augusta once said, "You can't hate someone if you know the names of their kids." There is a lot of truth to this. Right now, we don't much know the names of each other's kids.

I'm doing my best to crack this. Mary and I have a little place that's within walking distance of the Capitol. I don't even have a car, I walk. There's a rib house two blocks from my house, and in the last few weeks I've had seven, eight, or nine senators in for ribs. I don't have to cook, we just pick up the ribs and go home. We've got to try and crack this business of not knowing one another, and all of these people have fascinating stories.

The highlight of my week is often Wednesday morning, the Senate Prayer Breakfast. The reason I like it is it's nice to have a little time for a spiritual something, but it's also the only truly bipartisan event of the week, where Republicans and Democrats are together. We have breakfast together. The Senate Chaplain, retired Admiral Barry Black, gives a prayer, we sing a hymn, we say a prayer, and then one of the senators tells a story. It involves their faith, but it also reveals who they are.

One of the things that has struck me is how many of these people come from unexceptional circumstances; in fact, almost all do. A remarkable number of them come from single-parent homes, a disproportionate percentage it would seem. Lindsey Graham of South Carolina grew up above a bar and pool room owned and run by his parents, both of whom died when he was 19 or 20 years old. He raised his 13-year-old sister and

adopted her so she could get benefits and put her through college. Tim Scott of South Carolina had a father who was an alcoholic and died when Tim was 16. Joe Donnelly of Indiana lost his mother when he was 10. His father raised four children.

Someone has asked me, "What are your biggest surprises?" One of my biggest is that these are, mostly, just regular people. (I mean, Jay Rockefeller? Okay, but he's a wonderful guy.) These are interesting people. Many of them are wealthy, but virtually all of them, with the exception of Jay and a few others, achieved their wealth on their own, later in life. They weren't born into it. It's not some kind of aristocracy, and that's kind of reassuring, but the problem is, people don't live in Washington.

### THE RISE OF GOVERNMENT LUDDITES

Remember the Luddites? They were the people in nineteenth century England who hated the machines that were taking their jobs and set about to break them. There is a bunch of people in Congress today who hate government. Now, it's an odd thing to run for government if you hate it, but there are a lot of them. That is the other reason the recent government shutdown was so hard to deal with—because there were many people for whom it represented success. They came to Washington promising their constituents they would shut down the government. They don't want to govern, and that makes it hard. It's easy to negotiate with someone if you share the goal of governing effectively, of taking care of the people's needs.

If you are going to buy a car and I'm going to sell my car, you may want the car and I want to sell it; in the question of setting a price, we share a common goal. But if one side has no interest in governing, and really wants the whole thing to fail, that makes it difficult to govern. It makes it difficult because of the way our Constitution is designed.

Our Constitution has two operating principles that are in constant tension with one another. The one is governing. After a Senate hearing two or three weeks ago, I ran into one of my college history professors, whom I hadn't seen in 47 years. I asked him, "Larry, is there any precedent for this totally chaotic situation that we're in now?" He replied, "Of course. It was during the time of the Articles of Confederation," the period after the Revolution and before the Constitution.

It was so chaotic, disorganized, and ineffective that the framers came together to write the Constitution. The Articles of Confederation didn't create a functioning government; it created the occasion for the Constitution, to govern ourselves.

Then, the framers also said, "Yes, but we're afraid of government, we don't want it to abuse us. We're afraid of concentrated power, so we're going to create all these checks and balances, and make it complex and hard to get things done." These two forces, you see, are always in tension, but if you take the governing part away, it's really easy to screw up our system. In fact, it's ridiculously easy to bring it to a grinding halt if you don't share the common goal of getting to a conclusion that's beneficial to the American people.

This is a new development in my experience. I've dealt with plenty of conservatives in the Maine legislature and throughout my life, but to say we don't want government to work, we want it to fail, we want to destroy the government, is a new experience for me. I'm sure there's always been this undercurrent in the nation, but to have it be a significant political force in the country is something that we didn't face in the 1970s.

If I may, let me say one thing more that is related and really bothers me. It's about public service in America today. There's a mood in the country today that denigrates public service. I mentioned Carl Levin of Michigan. He and I went to Turkey and Jordan in July [2013] to learn about the Syrian situation. We met with all kinds of people, the Syrian opposition and the Turkish politicians. We also met with these incredible young Americans in the State Department, in the intelligence community, and in the military who are idealistic, hard-working, and doing great good in dangerous situations. They haven't had a raise in three years; they have been furloughed once and they had just been furloughed again. These people are doing so much for our society. Then, there's an attitude out there that's so negative—you know, "those bureaucrats!"—and it really bothers me.

When I got back and Mary asked, "What did you think of the Middle East?" I said, "The thing that struck me most is the quality of these young people we have working for us over there under the most difficult circumstances, and we're not treating them properly for the incredible contributions they make." I wish I had a crisper answer, but I really think that may be at the heart of it.

## ABUSE OF THE RULES

Lyndon Johnson of Texas was Senate Majority Leader from 1954 to 1960. In six and a half years, he dealt with cloture motions on six filibusters. In the last six and a half years, Majority Leader Harry Reid has dealt with cloture motions on 400 filibusters. That's not right. That is just not the way the system was designed to work. Of course, the way the senate filibuster rule works is, you have to have 60 votes to break it.

To give you an idea of how this has changed, I was on the floor one day and listened to Senator Ted Cruz of Texas, who's a very smart guy, with an amazing family history. His father was born in Cuba and went into the mountains at the age of 14 to fight with Castro's army. He was captured by the dictator Batista, was tortured and put in jail; he escaped from Cuba, went to Texas, and raised a family. Anyway, Ted Cruz said something—without any sense of irony—and I remember sitting there being shocked by it: "This amendment should be subject to the *normal* 60-vote requirement." It's not a normal 60-vote requirement. It wasn't normal for more than 200 years; it's been normal for just the past five or six years.

There's a mood in the country today that denigrates public service.

When I came in January, there were 46 senators who had been in the Senate for six years or less. Does this surprise you? You think of the U.S. Senate as a place where people go and stay forever, but there are almost half, with six years or less. One of the problems with the filibuster is that these people all think this is the way it's *supposed* to be. Not doing anything is the norm because that's been the way it is. I went in as a firebrand, saying "Let's change that filibuster rule." I was ready to vote for it with Majority Leader Reid back in January. I'm probably still there, but I'm less enthusiastic than I was before. We could spend a month writing a filibuster rule, but if people want to abuse the system, they're still going to do so.

For example, there's a rule in the Senate that every bill has to be read aloud. Typically, what happens is the bill gets called up, the clerk reads the first two or three lines, and some member says, "I ask for unanimous consent that we waive the reading of the bill." The presiding officer rules, "Without objection, so ordered." But if one senator objected, all we would do is read bills. It would take hours or days to read a several hundred page bill, and there are all kinds of other things that could gum up the works.

The point I'm making is that it's more about attitude than it is about the rules. It's more about institutional respect than it is about the rules. We may end up changing the rules, but I'm not sure that's going to be the answer. Some of the old, stalwart Democrats are very against changing the rules. Carl Levin of Michigan and Barbara Boxer of California, who were there when the Democrats were in the minority, have said, "Oh, no! We don't really want to do this. What if you have a Republican president, Senate, and House, and they decide to privatize Social Security? We would like to be in a position to slow that train down." So they were very passionate. Carl Levin, who is a wonderful guy and unfortunately retiring, was very passionate. He said, "Be careful, because you change the rules and then they can be changed on you. You may regret it."

**There is a deeper discussion going on.... It's about the size and scope of the federal government.**

What really worries me is the attempt by a portion of the House to gain results that they can't gain through elections by using the government as a hostage. I've been criticized for using that word, but I don't know what else to say when somebody takes something, and insists, "I won't give it back until you give me what I want." I was very much against using the shutdown and the debt ceiling to change the Affordable Care Act. The way to change the Affordable Care Act is to elect Republicans to the Senate and elect a Republican president, not use the system to make laws in a way that's not in the Constitution.

It's an extra-constitutional way of changing the laws that I find very, very troubling. It's why the president and Harry Reid were so resistant to what was going on. If this had been successful, it would have become the norm, just like the 60-vote majority. It would have been, "We'll just do this every six months or so, and we'll get what we want." Particularly when you're talking about a group for whom a shutdown is a success. It's a dangerous situation, and it is not the way our system is supposed to work.

If you go to a little book, *How a Bill Becomes a Law* (available at <http://kids.clerkhouse.gov>) nowhere does it say, "If all else fails, take the government hostage and then you can get your law." It's not there. You're supposed to win elections. In effect, what we just went through was an attempt to nullify the 2012 election, and I think that's anti-democratic. That's why I am so concerned about it.

#### THE REAL ISSUE

The current [2013] budget fight is not really about the budget, the debt, and the deficits. There is a deeper discussion going on, and it's really about how big the federal government should be, what should it do, how much it should take in taxes, and how much should it spend; this is an age-old discussion. It's about the size and scope of the federal government. That is really what is at stake here.

I've gone back and looked at our history and found that we've had this argument nine different times since 1787. The most famous, of course, was the Civil War. We fought over the question of the proper role of the federal government and the role of the states. It's a legitimate concern; if we've had it eight or nine times, it's clearly a live question that should be discussed. That is what is going on in the budget debate.

And the real debt and deficit issue is health care costs. That's what is driving the debt; that is what's driving the deficits. If you look out into the future, it is the whole deal. What we call "domestic discretionary spending," not Social Security and Medicare, but all the other things we think of—Pell Grants, National Parks, the EPA, the FDA, farm programs, and all those kind of things—is down as a percentage of the gross domestic product. It is now about 3 percent, the lowest it has been in 40 or 50 years. Defense spending goes up and down when we have wars; it's now around 5 percent and relatively flat.

When you look at the federal budget, the items that are doing damage are Medicare, Medicaid, and medical costs for federal employees and retired veterans. This is where the cost is and where the deficits are out into the future. My view is that we need to talk about this problem more generally and not just in the context of the government. We need to talk about how to lower health care costs across all of society, for everybody.

Right now we have the highest per capita health care costs in the world, and we're seventeenth in the world in terms of results. It's inexcusable. We spend now 17 or 18 percent of GNP on health care; in Maine it is 20 percent. This means that one in every five dollars spent in Maine is spent on health care, and our results aren't competitive with the rest of the world. This is a whole different way to talk about health care, but it means changing the way we pay for it and what the incentives are.

## TWO TO TANGO

The only way anything gets done in Washington is with both parties. It is simple arithmetic, and you would be amazed how few people get this. The Republicans in the House think they run the place. The Democrats in the Senate think they run the place. The president thinks he runs the place. But, if you have a Democratic president, a Republican House, and a Democratic Senate—with rules such that the Republican minority has enormous power—you can just do the math.

In order to do anything, it's got to be bipartisan, or as I'm training them to say, nonpartisan. Occasionally they say tripartisan when they see me in the room. This means that we are stymied if one party tries to assert the answer to all the questions. It just can't happen. What I am trying to do is to work with Susan Collins' working group as I did with last summer's working group on student loans. I had a very heated meeting with the Democratic Caucus on the student loan issue because they wanted to hold out, to have their plan and nothing else. I got up in front of them and said, "Yes, but you don't have the votes. If we're going to do this, we need Republican votes."

We put together a coalition involving Republicans and Democrats, built out from the center, and ended up passing a bill in the Senate and in the House, and the president signed it. This would never have happened if both sides had held to their iron-clad positions.

By the way, it's no coincidence that four of the six senators who did the student loan deal are former governors. I was talking with Mitch McConnell, the Republican leader, about this and he said, "Well, I have found that if you ask a former governor who's now a senator which job they like better, and they say senator, they will lie to you about other things, too!"

As I hope you can tell, I'm a person who is curious, who likes public policy, and who likes to try and fix things. I'm having a great time in the Senate, and I want to thank all of you for giving me this unbelievable opportunity to work for you and for the people of the country.

What we did on the shutdown is by no means a dramatic answer to everything. It may be just a sliver of hope that budget negotiations may work. It's going to be hard to solve the budget, because the two sides are far apart, but I'm hoping that people now realize that nobody can get it all, that it has to involve compromise. Yes, compromise. This U.S. government was built on compromise. The U.S. Senate was created as a result of a compromise at the Constitutional Convention, and that's the way we have to make it work.

## QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

[Editor's note: Many of the questions which related to specific constituent concerns or which were well off the topic of "Politics Then and Now" have been omitted here.]

*Can anything be done about the gerrymandering? Neither party wants to change it. And it is very undemocratic, when one considers that a candidate gets elected to the House and has to become more and more conservative to stay elected. How can we eliminate gerrymandering?*

**KING:** I had hoped we could pass a law, as it's a really serious problem, number two on my list. Unfortunately, it turns out to be a state-by-state matter, and if you've got a state that's solidly in the hands of one party or the other, they're not likely to let go of this power. California has done it. When he was governor, Arnold Schwarzenegger got through a referendum that created a nonpartisan commission to do it on a scientific basis, and my impression is that it's worked pretty well; however, I don't think the Supreme Court will get involved.

*Thank you for speaking up as strongly as you have for the importance of health insurance in people's lives. You were quoted in the New York Times as saying it's immoral to encourage people not to sign up for health insurance. My question is about the issue of campaign finance reform: What can we as citizens do in terms of getting some movement on that?*

**KING:** On health insurance, here's my story. When I worked for Senator Hathaway I had health insurance and went for a routine checkup because it covered annual checkups. I hadn't had a checkup in nine years. They found that I had a malignant melanoma. It's a disease that you either get operated on right away and you're okay, or you don't and you're gone. I'm here only because I had health insurance, so I feel personally passionate about this. I can't figure out how it's fair for me to be here while some other person, who didn't have that health insurance and get the checkup, died. Nine thousand people a year die of melanoma. Between 25,000 and 45,000 people a year die in the UNITED STATES simply because they don't have insurance. Often they put off treatment until it's too late.

On campaign finance reform, this will have to be a national movement. Call your cousins and uncles and aunts in other states. I think everyone in the Maine delegation is okay on this issue. The problem is, the parties are always asking, "Will it benefit me and help my party, or will it help the other party?" You never know when it's going to work one way or the other. The one thing we can do, although it's not going to be easy, is disclosure, so at least people know where all this money is coming from.

Right now you can't give more than \$2,500 to a federal candidate. The Supreme Court is hearing a case right now and there's an even chance that they will declare that limit unconstitutional, and say people can give whatever they want. [Editors Barringer and Palmer note: See *McCutcheon v Federal Election Commission*. On April 2, 2014, by a 5-4 vote the U.S. Supreme Court struck down aggregate limits on contributions to candidates, as Senator King had feared.] That is not what our country was designed to do. The idea that money equals speech, I'm just not sure about, but that's what the Supreme Court has held. Keep active on the issue.

*I, too, am very concerned and disturbed by the corrupting influence of campaign finance. The system*

*we have today can be best characterized as a legalized mixture of bribery and extortion. What can we do? Is there a solution short of a constitutional amendment?*

**KING:** I doubt it. I think it's going to take a constitutional amendment because *Citizens United* is based on a reading of the First Amendment. I don't believe it's a correct reading, but that's now the law. The Supreme Court decided it, and it's going to take a constitutional amendment to change it. This is a tricky thing, a constitutional amendment; you've got to be very sure about how you write it. I don't know how the current case is going to come out, but if they rule that there can be no limits whatever on contributions, it will be a very deleterious decision.

*Since the 1970s, we've had an enormous increase in economic inequality in this country. The average income of a white male has actually declined and practically all of the increase in gross domestic product per capita has gone to a very thin sliver at the top. With the Supreme Court's decisions on money and politics, this thin sliver seems to have even more influence in what goes on, and in the long-run this clearly is not sustainable. We don't want a violent revolution. How do we get out of this dilemma?*

**KING:** This concerns me because the numbers verify exactly what you have said. I'm not a redistributionist, I don't think that's the answer, but I think the government shouldn't aggravate the problem. The tax system and the way our programs are funded ought to be fair and equitable, and I believe in the progressive income tax.

Yes, I worry about it. This is a little bit of an exaggeration, but we don't want to become a country of gated communities. We don't want to become a country where the wealthy are behind barbed wire and everybody else is outside. I worry about violence. A man from out-of-state, who was starting a new business in Maine, once visited me in Augusta and wanted to know where Maine's gated communities were. I told him the only one I knew of was in Thomaston.

I wish I had an answer to your question. The best answer is probably investment in education so that everybody has a chance. You know the old saying, "the rich get richer and the poor get poorer." In the future it's going to be, "the educated get richer and the uneducated get poorer." Education is the opportunity.

*When you were working with Senator Hathaway, Senator Muskie was the senior senator. From what you saw then, has working with senior leadership changed from what it was then?*

**KING:** Senator Collins is my senior, and I've got to tell you, she is terrific. I always liked her and respected her. I knew she was tenacious. I now serve on the Intelligence Committee with her, and I've seen her mind work. She's really smart, well-balanced, and she has guts. It took guts for her to put this nonpartisan group together, to try and work out this budget matter. She took flak from her leadership, from other people, and she did it. I always liked her, but my esteem for her has only grown from working with her. She's really an able senator and we're fortunate to have her.

*I'm a farmer, and as a farmer, there's not a whole lot of power or money in my profession. I would love to hear from you about the role of integrity and accountability in Washington, and how you maintain the values that I hear you talk about.*

**KING:** It is a question of values. Why does one do what I'm doing? You do it because you think you can make a bit of a difference in peoples' lives. I thought long and hard about whether to run for public office again. I was pretty happily retired, teaching, building windmills, and having some fun. It changed my life utterly to do this, but ultimately, here's how I decided to do it. I can tell you the exact moment.

Mary and I decided that, after our daughter went off to college, we would go RV'ing again, and travel the country. Then I began to think about running for the Senate and what a drastic change that would make in my life. How do I make this decision? It finally came to me, how will I feel 10 years from now, looking back, and answering this question: "You might have made a difference for the country—and you decided to go RV'ing?" Once I put the question that way, the answer was obvious. And here I am. 🐟

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#### ENDNOTE

1. Editors' Barringer and Palmer note: The controversial majority report of this committee, including the noted authors of two textbooks on political parties, Austin Ranney and Elmer Schattschneider (later president of the American Political Science Association [APSA]), supported the two-party system while asserting that the parties should be reorganized to represent clear differences on fundamental issues, as conservative or liberal. In the wake of the Populist movements early in the century and the deep partisan conflicts of the 1930s, the majority report argued that democracy would better be served through competition on these issues between parties rather than within their internal structure and processes. In the decades following, the parties weakened in virtually all aspects, leading to the present-day system with polarized parties similar to those advocated in the 1950 majority report. The advent of more ideologically coherent parties has made scholars more sensitive to their potentially unhealthy effects in a separated governance system. A program to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the report was held at the 2000 APSA meeting in Washington, DC (Green and Harrison 2000).

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