A: Okay today is June 25th, 2000 (-) Excuse me. Hi, today is June 25th, 2003 and we’re interviewing Rich Arenberg. Um, now Rich we were going to talk some more about Paul Tsongas. (R: Right) And you had sent me a couple of stories that you thought might be good to preserve on tape. (R: Right) So the first one you had talked about is regarding the Ethiopian Jews, and their, (R: Right) the meeting that um, in the Middle East.

R: Yah, I was thinking about that. It just was you know, a particularly dramatic moment, and one that always seemed particularly characteristic of Paul to me. We were traveling in the Middle East, and we went, you know partially because of his connection to Ethiopia, and his affinity for, he had served in the Peace Corps there.

A: Right.

R: He wanted to go see the Resettlement Camp. There was a Resettlement Camp in Israel for these, (A: Right) the ah, they call them Falashas, (A: Right) who are Ethiopian Jews that, at least at that time were being secretly rescued by Israelis out of Ethiopia where they were being persecuted.

A: Now what, what was Israel doing, flying helicopters in to rescue these people, or?

R: I think at different times the methodology was different. (A: Yah) They were you know, leading them some of them were trekking across the deserts. (A: Really) I mean it was quite a
dramatic thing. And these Falashas were particularly interesting, because they were almost like a lost tribe of (--) 

A: Yah, one of the ancient tribes.

R: Tribes of Israel, right. (A: Umhm) And they practiced a very sort of ancient form of Judaism. And they, they knew for some time, for a long time they were in the dark about the existence of Israel, you know, and they still, they still said things that were traditional in the, amongst Jews like “Next year in Jerusalem” without necessarily knowing where, much about Jerusalem, (A: Really) you know, in the modern era. (A: Yah) But, and the other thing that was interesting about them is that they had priests, what are called “kohein,” and you may know that Rabbi are not priests, they’re ah, the word Rabbi I believe means teacher.

A: Okay. So they’re more like lay people, right?

R: And there haven’t, right, but there haven’t been any priest since the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem. And you know, it’s part of the religious thinking that until the Messiah returns they temple won’t be rebuilt. And until then there won’t be any priests, any kohein, but this group having these ancient roots, they, they had not rabbis, but kohein. So that it was kind of interesting. In any event we went to visit them. We got there late one evening and they were sort of gathered in a function room to meet Paul. And they were, they were just very excited and agitated, and anxious to meet him, because to them the Israelis who were helping to resettle them in Israel and were teaching them the language and the culture, and everything, they were you know, almost like, I mean they were so thankful to them. They were almost god-like, you know. And now here with this figure coming from this far off land of America, that these Israelis were very excited about looking up to. And so it was like this huge figure was coming. And so we had this meeting. You know, Paul would say things and then the Israelis would translate it, you know, and into almost like a, like a school-like Hebrew, (A: Okay) you know, they could understand and that you know is going back and forth. And then at some point Paul just suddenly turned to them and began to address them in Amharic, their native language, which of course he knew from his Peace Corps days. And it was like, I almost can’t describe that moment to you. It was just, these people lit up like you know, like a Messiah had come down from the mountain, you know. That this exulted figure that they’ve been hearing about his arrival for weeks was suddenly speaking to them directly in their native language, was just you know, beyond. It was just, you know, it was such a wonderful moment. (A: Now um) And he was so caught up in it that he sent me back to the car to get a gift. You know, he’d carry these gifts. It’s sort of traditional for, you know, when a Senator has a meeting like with the Head of State, and we were going to meet with Mubarak, [President Hosny Mubarak of Egypt], and we were going to meet with Begin [Prime Minister Menachem Begin of Israel] in Jerusalem and on that trip he was going to King Hussein in Jordan, you know. And so we were carrying these, they’re really kind of token gifts, but it was something like a Senate ashtray, or a candy dish, or something symbolic of the Senate, you know. And usually when you go on these foreign trips you’re carrying several such gifts for I think in this case it was for President Mubarak, you know. And Paul sent me back to the car for one of those gifts, and he gave it to the kohein. So in Amharic
he made this presentation and the kohein you know, put his hands on Paul’s head and gave him a blessing, you know. And it was just, it was such a remarkable moment. And you know, after we were, the first session we had on the phone a couple of weeks ago, it just got me thinking about Paul and some of the wonderful moments I spent with him. And that one just came flooding down you know.

A: What do you know about Paul’s time in Ethiopia, in the Peace Corps? Did he talk about that much?

R: Yah, well he always described it as you know, as a, as a formative era in his life. That a lot of his thinking particularly about foreign policy and America’s place in the world came together during his period in the Peace Corps. You also remind me, you remind me of a, in asking that of a funny story he always used to tell about. He was, he was stationed in the Peace Corps out in some remote village where he lived in a mud hut basically. And they had, they had dogs around that they would keep, you know. And he got into the habit of, you know, when he finished, when they finished eating whatever, they had chicken, or something like that, they’d throw the remainders on to the dirt floor and let the dogs have them, you know. And at some point I think towards the end of his first year in Ethiopia, all of the Peace Corps volunteers in Ethiopia were invited to Addis Ababa, the Capital, (A: Right) to meet with the U.S. Ambassador. And so they had this almost like it seemed like a formal dinner. It was in the formal dining room in the Ambassador’s residence, you know, with the linen and the fancy china, and all of that stuff. (A: Yah) And they’re sitting around and talking and everything And Paul describes this moment where he picks up a chicken leg and just, not thinking, tosses it over his shoulder and it landed on the floor, you know, because he had this habit of sharing with the dogs, you know. He always told it as one of the most humiliating moments in his life, as everybody sat there looking at this greasy chicken leg lying on the highly polished Ambassador’s dining room floor. [Both laugh]

A: Oh boy, you can’t take the guy out of the village, huh?

R: Yah, really, that’s true.

A: What was Paul doing in (--)?

R: Let me put you on hold for just a second.

A: Absolutely. Okay, rolling again. What did Paul do over there? Did he teach English, or was he building farms, or do you know what he was doing in Ethiopia?

R: You know I don’t really recall too much about you know, I think a lot of it was, was physical.

A: Irrigation, or something like that.

A: Yah, okay.

R: He didn’t have a technical background or anything, but I think, but, but you know, you know obviously to him you know, being involved with that culture and understanding, you know, coming to understand, he retained a very strong affinity to not just Ethiopia, but the continent of Africa for the rest of his career. He was the first Peace Corps volunteer ever elected into the House of Representatives. (A: Really) And you know, he was fond of saying on the House floor he was the only member who had ever lived in Africa.

A: Yah, yah.

R: And then when he came to the Senate, likewise he was the first Peace Corps volunteer ever elected to the Senate until Chris Dodd came. Dodd was the second one.

A: Okay.

R: But he, and as a result, when he became a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, he sought the chairmanship of the, of the Africa subcommittee (A: Okay) because he had that interest. And he was (--) Among the things that he was very much involved with legislatively was the sanctions against Rhodesia and then later against South Africa.

A: Yah, and I think before he ran for council he was very active in a group of kind of pro-democracy South African issues.

R: Right. Yah, that’s something you know, he retained that throughout. And he had a very good (--) It’s sort of an interesting thing that he had a particular really close relationship with Anwar Sadat. (A: Okay) You know, several times when Sadat was in the United State he met with Paul, and he used to tell Paul what he liked about him was he was the only America politician that he ever met with who was more focused on the horn of Africa, and Egypt’s role there than necessarily he was on the Middle East. I mean that, you know, for Sadat when he came to the United States, of course everyone talked to him ordinarily (A: About Israel) about Israel and Jordan, and you know, that area of the world, but of course Egypt’s role and relationship with places like Ethiopia and Sudan are (--) 

A: Somalia, or (--) 

R: Or Somalia, right. Are you know, also very important to them, and of course that’s, Paul had a very deep interest in that area of the world.

A: Was Paul in the Senate and active in the time that the Ethiopian famine and war was happening?
R: Well they you know, there had been several famines in Ethiopia. As it was, he was involved, you know, by the time, by the time of the war in Somalia and all that, he’d left the Senate by then.

A: Yah. Yah. Now this trip that you guys took in ’82, (R: Right) what was the purpose of that trip?

R: Well it was a, it was a fact finding kind of journey. It was, it was around the period that the, of the Israelis incursion up into Jordan. (A: Okay) I remember that. And he was very active on that issue. He was, he was a, in that instance he was a prominent critic of the Israeli’s action in shelling Beirut for example. In a very you know, his concern about it, I mean he was a very strong supporter of Israel. (A: Okay) It was his concern for the, the underlying philosophy behind Israel and the strength of its position as a Democracy, and so forth, that made him very concerned about that particular action that he thought was, was in Israel’s self-interest. And you know, you know, one of the things I keep saying about him is that he just was the most candid person I’ve ever known. He knew full well that it was politically volatile thing to do (A: Right) for him to be outspoken on that, but he was. And I think over time was, was well respected in the Jewish community in Massachusetts for having, for having done that for the right reasons.

A: Yah. Did you remember any stories of him taking flack for speaking out against (--) 

R: Well there was a lot of concern, yah, you know I do (--) You know right after he first did that there were a whole series of meetings. I remember going back to Massachusetts and meeting with a whole bunch of organizations, different places around the state.

A: Like [Banai Brith] and people like that.

R: Right, to try to explain you know, without the explanations of what, you know, what his thinking was, there was, there was great concern about it. But as I say, over time he really kind of laid that to rest.

A: Yah. Now also on this trip you guys went to Jordan. (R: Right) And there’s that story about the Allanby Bridge.

R: Right, yah. Well (--)

A: If you maybe set the stage up a little bit first.

R: Yah. We had, we had been in the region. We were in Israel. We were traveling to Amman. He had hoped to meet with the king. And again, at this point Paul was a very, he was a member of the Foreign Relations Committee in the Senate. And because he’d been sort of prominently featured with respect to his views on, on what was going on in Lebanon and everything, other leaders in the region, Mubarak in Egypt, and King Hussein, and [Prime Minister] Begin in Israel, were anxious to meet with him and discuss the matter. So he really wanted to meet with the
king, but as the timing worked out when we got, when the only days we were able to be in Amman, King Hussein had been, he had been in the Soviet Union I believe it was. I think he was coming back from Moscow, and his mother was in the hospital in Amman, she was ill. He went directly to the hospital. And we were meeting with the king’s brother Hassan, who was at that point he was crown Prince.

A: Okay.

R: And it appeared that this meeting was going to be in lieu of a meeting with, meeting with the king, because the king was delayed at the hospital, and so forth. At some point during that meeting we got word that the king was very anxious to meet with Paul, and if there was any way that we could delay our return to Jerusalem, that he would meet with Paul later that evening. (A: Yah) And the difficulty with this, we quickly realized we had to be back in Jerusalem that night. We were due and there was some big event that he was due at. So the difficulty was going to be returning across the border after dark. And at least at that period of time the Allenby Bridge was closed every night. Had been since you know, I think going back to the six day war. And you know, no one had ever crossed the Allenby Bridge at night. You know, there was an electrified fence, and you know, it was the whole thing. So Paul pointed out that the only way he could stay and meet with the king would be if it could be arranged for the Allenby Bridge to be opened for him. (A: Really) Well in Jordan this was a simple matter, you know. The Crown Prince kind of clicked his fingers, and you know, their Minister of Defense just appeared. Hang on a second while I get my (--) 

A: Yah now, (R: Yah, so. So the) so there’s a lot to be said for a dictatorship, right?

R: Yah, there not exactly a dictatorship, (A: No, no) but you know, it’s a kingdom anyway. And the, (A: There’s a lot to be said for royalty) the minister, the Minister Defense immediately appears and they immediately agree that this could be arranged, and so forth. Well then we get on the phone to try and get the approval of the Israeli government.

A: Umhm. It goes into twelve subcommittees.

R: This is a different matter, right. This is a democracy with a bureaucracy, you know. And so we start burning up the phone line. And the problem is at this point in time there are no direct phone lines between Amman and Jerusalem. (A: Wow) And so we’re calling Washington. Washington is calling the U S Embassy, which of course is in Tel Aviv. Tel Aviv is calling Jerusalem, you know, and this is bouncing back and forth. And this goes on. And we’re even getting Jewish community groups in the United States involved in trying to help us on this, you know. (A: Really) You know the, Lenny Zakim was on the trip with us.

A: Oh really!

R: You know the name. Right.
A: Sure, from the bridge.

R: Now the famous bridge, yah. And Lenny was back in Israel, because as an official of ADL, at that point in time they didn’t travel into Jordan because of travel restriction that Jordanians imposed on Israel. You couldn’t carry, you couldn’t carry a passport that had an Israel stamp on it (A: Oh really) and cross into Jordan. That was part of the whole Arab boycott. (A: Yah) And usually on official travel from the United States, we finessed that by carrying both our tourist passports and our official passport, and using one to go into Israel, and the other you know, to go into (--) Other Arab states.

R: Right. And, or we used the diplomatic passport, you know, but in any event that for an official of a Jewish community organization like the Anti Defamation League of B’nai Brith, they didn’t want to sanction that by crossing into Jordan. So he stayed back in Jerusalem when we made that trip. But we got those organizations involved in trying to help us with the Israeli government, as well as the direct appeal. And finally there was an approval. And so we were very happy about that. We had a, we had a memorable meeting with King Hussein. You know, I have photographs I took of Paul with King Hussein on that occasion.

A: And crossing over the bridge you talked about Paul having kind of a reaction.

R: Right. Oh yah, right. So we finished that meeting, and we get into a Jordanian police car you know, the flashing lights and the whole thing. We’d go screaming down to the bridge.

A: And could you describe the bridge?

R: Well you know, the River Jordan, how does the song go. The River Jordan is something and wide, you know, and you know, Michael row the boat ashore. (A: Yah, okay) Yah, something and wide, but and let me tell you, it ain’t very wide. It really looked like a stream you know, and it’s pretty dry most of the year. But there’s a bridge, it’s not a huge bridge, it’s more you know, I kind of remember it almost as a wooden bridge, but I wouldn’t swear to it being you know, it might have been more substantial than that. But it was not huge, and it was not long. When we got there the police car stopped well shy of the bridge on the Jordanian side, and the U.S. Ambassador was traveling with us, and a few Jordanian officials, and you know, nobody really wanted to go down to the bridge with us, because (--) Oh, there’s my boss again. I’m sorry.

A: Sure.

R: So we (A: Now) were just getting to the bridge. So the Ambassador (--) Yah, and you said nobody would walk down with you.
R: Yah, well because although you know, we’d had these phone conversations, and we knew it was approved, you know, there was no way of being absolutely certain that the Israeli soldier on the other side, on the other bank is going to know this, you know. And it was kind of a no man zone.

A: Now was the Allenby Bridge the symbolic Berlin Wall of the Middle East?

R: Well yah, it was certainly, it was the crossing point between, across the Jordan River between Jordan and the west bank. (A: Yah) So it, it was a, it was a pretty significant signal that we were crossing this in the dark, you know. And so there were three of us, Paul and myself, and Dennis Kanin who was Chief of Staff, and later ran his presidential campaign. (A: Yah) And we, so we walked down, you know, we were literally carrying our bags over our shoulders you know.

A: And the Ambassador didn’t go down with you guys?

R: No, no, no, no, he said, “Bye,” and you know, “Thanks for coming.” Shook hands, you know, all of that. They didn’t, nobody was really acknowledging why this was, but you know, they weren’t walking us across the bridge I’ll tell you that. So we sort of walked down there kind of you know, slowly and so forth. I always, I always kidded him that we were trying to kind of slide behind him without making it clear that that’s what we were doing. But we, we did kind of walk down there and it was a, it was a beautiful night. The stars were out and everything. And I remember as we were crossing the bridge, Paul saying this is kind of an historic moment. Take in the sky and the stars, and this view, and always remember it, you know. And we got to the other side of the bridge and there was a huge gate. You know, maybe it was, it was like a chain link fence, but it was I don’t know, ten or twelve feet, maybe more, tall. But I just remember there was a locked gate at the end. And no one apparent in sight, you know. And so we’re kind of standing there, and it’s sort of like, well what now? And so we’re literally going you know, “You hoo!” Sort of in a falsetto so that we’re not making, we don’t want to make loud threatening sounds, and yet (--) 

A: “Hey, open the gate!”

R: Right. We do want to call attention to ourselves enough that if there’s someone there to open this gate. So after doing that for a while, finally some Israeli soldier that we hadn’t seen comes out of the nearby tree line, or bushes, or whatever it was, comes over to the fence. Then he kind of looked skeptically at us, and you know, I say, “This is United States Senator Paul Tsongas. You should be expecting us” And he kind of looks at us, and he kind of looks at his watch, and he says, uh hah. We expected you at 9 o’clock, and it’s, I don’t recall. It’s maybe 8:30, or something like that. (A: Okay) And he says it in kind of like in a way, he just says that, where it’s sort of the implication is, “So go away and some back later.” You know, so one of us says, well, well we’re here now. And it’s like you know, it wasn’t clear what, whether the fear was if he opened the gate at the wrong time, the Jordanian army was going to come in behind us, or what? But in any event he wasn’t making a move to open the gate. So we kind of, this went back and forth for a little while. And finally he said, “Well I don’t have the authority to open it
now.” And he, he disappears, goes back to what we later saw as kind of a listening post
communication hut that was back on the other side of the tree line. And finally he reappears, and
he comes and opens the gate and we go through and follow him through.

A: And so this incident, was this almost um, how do I want to phrase this, Paul trying to force
the issue of having (--) You know, when he, when he went through, when you guys went through
all of the motions to get approval on both sides (--) 

R: Yah, well I think he, yah, I mean I think it was part of, (A: You know what I’m trying to
to say?) Yah, I think it was part of the effort on a very, on a very small level. You know I don’t
want to make this grander than it was, (A: Yah) but on a very small level it was his way of
saying you know, he had a view of the world that if, if rational men of good will could sit down
and talk together you could work things out. And he was always working in that direction. And
so that was it. I mean the kind of bureaucracy of all of this seemed kind of silly to him. And if
there was an opportunity to talk to King Hussein, and carry a message back to [Prime Minister]
Begin who he was meeting with the next morning on a personal level, he wanted to do that. And
so you know, it was exactly the kind of bureaucratic complication that Paul had no patience for.
(A: Yah) And was always, you know, he was always trying to cut through those things whether
it was in the Senate or in the U. S. Government, or in foreign relations, or anywhere else. He had
a very kind of almost casual man-in-the-street kind of approach to these things. And that’s what
it was like. It was kind of like you know (--) 

A: Don’t sweat the small stuff?

R: Well we’ll have to open it (--) Yah, and you can almost picture Paul Tsongas with that kind
of rye grin of his, kind of you know, kind of shrugging his shoulder like, what’s the big deal
here. And that’s sort of what it was like at the gate, you know. It was like he was, he was almost
laughing, because it just seemed so absurd that this was so entangled you know, and yet all we
were doing was crossing the bridge.

A: Yah, yah, so kind of a disarming way of (--) 

R: Hang on for just a second. I apologize. It’s just another one of those moments.

A: Yah so would you describe Paul’s, you know some of Paul’s political strategy to be kind of
disarming then?

R: Oh I think so. Yah, absolutely. I mean it was just kind of a straightforward candor. You
know it was, in the world of diplomacy it was particularly disarming, you know, because he was
just very candid and very straightforward, and spoke in a very straightforward kind of plain way.
And it was almost the opposite of what typically goes on in these different meetings.

A: Yah. How much time do you think Paul devoted to national issues verses issues on Lowell?
R: Well it’s hard to say exactly. I mean you know, it was an interesting mix in that you know, as I said to you the last time, he had a, he was so committed to what he wanted, you know, what he saw as Lowell’s future and the role of the Park and all of that, that he, he spent a lot of time on that, and thought about it, on it a great deal. I used to kid him that Lowell, Massachusetts was the only city in America that had it’s own Senator.

A: [Laughs]

R: So in that sense it was, it seemed almost disproportionate, you know. But he did, look he was the author of the Alaska Lands Bill. (A: Yup) He played an important role in a lot of, on a lot of foreign policy issues, (A: Okay) and a lot of other accomplishments, which were the opposite of parochial. I mean people would ask him you know, how can you spend so much time? How are you so deeply interested in the Alaska Lands Bill? And he would say look, this is ah (--) You know, Jimmy Carter called that legislation the conservation bill of the century.

A: Really.

R: It, you know, it put more land into protected national park status, and other things, national monument status, wild and scenic rivers, national forests, wildlife refuges, than any other piece of legislation in the history of the United States. And he saw this as part of the legacy for the future. You know, definitely as a national issue. But it, it was hardly a parochial Massachusetts issue. So he had, you know his career had a very interesting and broad mix of those kinds of roles. In many ways he was very much a national figure, a national Senator. And his later ability to translate that into a run for the presidency, (A: Right) you know, is testimony to that. (A: Right) But you know the other side of that coin was, Lowell was always there. He was often you know, he could be at a hearing somewhere and he’d be doodling on the side of a page about redesigning a statue for downtown Lowell, or something, or what the street, you know what the street, the light poles were going to look like. I can remember him (--) I don’t remember what point that was. I’m sure it was after the Park, but I remember him being deeply involved in redesigning the lampposts in downtown Lowell. [Both laugh]

A: And we’re paying this guy how much per years?

R: Yah right, right.

A: How about Paul’s energy policy, or energy vision? (R: Right) What was that all about?

R: Well of course you know, the point where he first came to the Senate was during the energy crisis. And we all remember those gas lines, or those of us who were [unclear].

A: No, I remember them as a kid.

R: Yah. And he really, he was, he really believe in alternative energy sources, solar energy. He was really one of the early voices for that. And he was interestingly (--) Although he was very
skeptical about nuclear power, he was, he often surprised people in that he was very straightforward about comparing the environmental degradation posed by increased use of, with reliance on coal burning (A: Okay) with, with the alternative of generation of electricity using nuclear power. Not that he ever, that he pushed for nuclear power, but just it was, you know, he was very clear-eyed about it. And it was one area where he and Moe Udall were very similar. Udall was the chairman of the, within, at that point it wasn’t yet the Energy Committee. It was then called the Interior Committee in the House. (A: Okay) And they were among the few sort of very liberal democrats who were very strong proponents of alternative energy sources who also were not reflexively hostile to nuclear power. (A: Okay) So it’s one of the interesting things about him. And as (--) Also you know, he held the first, we now talk so much about global warming and the greenhouse effect, and he held the very first hearings that were ever held in the Congress. He chaired a subcommittee on the House Interior Committee. I think it would have been as early as 1975 or ’76 that he held those hearings. You know, long before it, it really had gotten on sort of the national agenda, the thing to talk about, and even now you know, it’s still a very controversial issue. (A: Right) But I can remember there was an editorial cartoon in the Lowell Sun after he held those hearings, and it was labeled, “The Greenhouse Effect”, and it was a drawing of Paul with a flower growing out the top of his head. So that was their view of the greenhouse effect, you know.

A: Yah.

R: Of course it was characteristic of Paul that he immediately asked for a copy of it and hung it on his wall in his office. He was proud of that.

A: That’s one way to deal with the SUN.

R: That’s right. That’s right.

A: Did Paul ever tell you any stories about the attempt to build an oil refinery here in greater Lowell?

R: Yah. You know it came up in the, in the campaign in ’74. (A: Okay) And it was prior to that. I think it must have been (---)

A: I think it was around ’71, ’72, or something.

R: Yah. Yah. And I can’t remember many details about it, except that in the campaign we, you know, he was, he was strongly opposed to it. And he thought that the, that the proposal was not well thought out, and he was (---) I recall him ridiculing the Congressman Cronin for having so strongly supported it.

A: Yah.

R: You know I, but I don’t recall, I don’t recall any (---)
A: Many of the minor details?

R: No, I don’t remember too much about it.

A: Okay. You had another story about George Tenet.

R: Yah. I couldn’t recall whether I told you that in the first session.

A: I don’t think so.

R: This was kind of a personal one, but you know. George had worked for, for John Heinz. Funny all of these connections, (A: Yah) but he was John Kerry’s wife’s first husband, the Senator from Pennsylvania. (A: Sure) And George Tenet was, had been his energy LA back then. [Now Director of Central Intelligence CIA].

A: He had been what?

R: Energy Legislative Assistant. (A: Okay) And Heinz and Paul were both on the Senate Energy Committee together when Paul first came to the Senate.

A: Okay.

R: And the only importance in this is that, is that George got to observe Paul a little bit in that role from the distance, and he always sort of admired him. (A: Yah) And you know, George Tenet is a Greek-American, so he shared that heritage too, and always really wanted to meet Paul. (A: Yah) Well then a number of years later I was working for George Mitchell, who was then the Majority Leader, George Tenet was the staff director, he worked for Senator Boren from Oklahoma, who was the chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee. (A: Okay) And George was the staff director. And one of the things that I did for the Majority leader was the liaison with the Intelligence community. Because we had learned from Iran Contra that legislative officials, the legislative leaders had to keep kind of a close eye on what was going on in the world of secret particularly covert actions, you know. And so that was one of the things that I did for Mitchell. And so I had a very close relationship with George. I spent a lot of time on the Intelligence Committee. We worked on a lot of things together. He always, you know, he would always bring Paul up and say, “I’d really love to meet him sometime.” And I’d say, “Oh, it’s no problem. He often calls me for lunch when he’s in Washington, and you know, one of these days I’ll just take you along.” So a day arrives and I get a call from Paul and he says, “Dennis and I are in town and we’re going to have lunch over at the,” the name of the hotel just popped out of my head. Anyway, it’s on Capitol Hill, and “Why don’t you come on over and we’ll have lunch in the lobby.” (A: Yah) There’s a little open, sort of an open restaurant in the lobby of the hotel. And so I said, “Fine.” “I’ll see you, I’ll meet you at noon,” and so forth. And that morning I had a meeting with George over in his office in the Intelligence Committee. I said, “You know what, I’m having lunch with Paul Tsongas today, why don’t you come?” (A:
You know, “I’m sure he’d love to meet you, and they’ll be no problem.” So noon comes and I pick up George, and we walk over to the hotel and we arrive, and I introduced him to Dennis and Paul, and we sit down at lunch. And there is I’m telling you virtually total silence for this entire lunch as we’re eating, you know, minimal of conversation.

A: And Rich Arenberg is talking about the ballgame and the weather.

R: Oh yah! Oh it’s you know, it’s excruciating. And so we have this, what seems like interminable lunch, [unclear], and we leave. And we were walking back and you know, George, it was so obvious, George says to me, “Didn’t he like me?” (A: Yah) What, you know? And I said, George, believe me, I know Paul extremely well, like a brother you know, and I’ve never seen him like this. Something was troubling him. Maybe they had, you know Dennis at this point was one of his law partners. So I thought, well maybe they had a difficult meeting with a client, something happened just before we got there and he was upset, or distracted. You know, I can’t explain it, but I’m sure it has nothing to do with you, and we’ll do it again sometime and it will be entirely different. I felt certain of this. (A: Yah) And so we get back and the phone rings. Ten minutes after I get back to my office the phone rings, and it’s Paul again. (A: Yah) And he says, “Can you come back to the hotel, I’ll meet you in my room.” (A: Yah) So I trudge back over there, and I’m thinking, oh God, you know. You know, it must be cancer again, or something.

A: Oh yah. Yah.

R: You know, I’m just thinking the worse. I can’t imagine what, what could possibly be an explanation for this. So I get back there and he opens the door and I come in the room. He and Dennis were sitting there. And Paul looks at me and he says, “What would you think about my running for President?”

A: And this (--) 

R: And of course, you know, (--) 

A: And you couldn’t bring the janitor along for that lunch meeting.

R: Yah, right, exactly. Someone he’d never met before, I mean that was, that was it, you know.

A: And he was dying to tell you about it.

R: He didn’t want to discuss this in front of George, which we didn’t know. (A: Right) And couldn’t, and you know. And so it was a source of much humor later on when we all talked about it. It turned out George you know, David Boren, who George worked for was one of, was probably Paul’s closest friend in the Senate. (A: Oh really) So, and was the only member of the Senate who endorsed Paul’s candidacy for president. So after Boren, you know, so George even
gave him some advice on intelligence matters later on in the campaign, and so forth. You know, and ironically then later on ended up going into the Clinton administration.

**Side A ends.**

**Side B begins**

A: Now?

R: So I just tell you that story for its humor value I guess, but you know, and he, he you know, the (--) I had one piece of advice. I thought it was a wonderful idea for him to run for president by the way. You recall at that time everybody thought the first George Bush was invincible. (A: Yah) He was just coming off the first, first Gulf War, (A: Sure) and he had 90% approval rating.

A: And the end of the Cold War. I mean.

R: Right, right, and the rest of the Democrats were running away really, all of the, what they thought were the top tier democrats, you know. The Al Gore’s and the Gephardts and those people were, were declining to run. And so the time when Paul stepped forward, because he had a kind of, he had a kind of personal courage really that just you know, I mean I described his position to you, when we talked about his running for the Senate seat. (A: Yah) Just you know, when he was committed to something those kinds of calculations didn’t faze him. And in this instance he, he had written that book that he wrote, that he later distributed in his presidential campaign, you know, his (--) A: *A Call To Economic Arms.*

R: Yah, that’s exactly right.

A: Yah. I think Frank Keefe actually wrote most of that.

R: Yah, that may be. But you know, Paul had pulled it together, or directed it, or whatever he did, but, and he had gone through a period of trying to sell it as a platform to all of these first tier candidates, you know. I don’t know whether he met with Gephardt and Gore, and I don’t know who else. You know, I don’t know the details of that. And you really couldn’t get, probably for obvious reasons he couldn’t seem to find any first tier Democratic potential presidential campaign candidate, who wanted to campaign on Paul Tsongas’ platform. When you think about it it’s kind of funny, but (--) A: Rich, Rich hold on one second, will you?

R: Sure.

A: Hi, sorry.
A: So did you help out on that campaign?

R: Well really, really no, because I was at that point (--) Well one of the personal reasons was I was in the midst of a divorce with my first wife, and so to (--) I was not in a position where I could leave my job and go off and join a presidential campaign or anything. And I was working for the, you know, for Mitchell who was the majority leader. And so (--)  

A: Keeping pretty busy there.

R: I really couldn’t involve myself in any formal way in the democratic primary process, you know, because he was a Democratic leader in the Senate. But just on a kind of personal level I would sometimes, I would often talk to Dennis, and sometimes talk to Paul. But what I was going to say, the one piece of advice for him I had in that meeting in his hotel room was he said, you know, he sat down and he said, “I’m thinking about running because no body else wants to run on his platform.” He said, “I’m not so much interested in being president of the United States. I just think this is the right, this is the right direction for America.” And I just, if nobody else will put it forward I’m going to. And I said, I said to him, hang on just a second.

A: Sure.

R: …piece of advice was, that’s a wonderful thing, but don’t ever, don’t ever tell anyone publicly that you’re not that interested in being president of the United States. Nobody is going to vote for someone for president who doesn’t have a burning desire to be president.

A: Or their only goal is an economic agenda, you know, when there’s thousands of people that could care less about the economics, right?

R: Yah.

A: So what’s your Monday morning quarterbacking on the presidential campaign of Paul?

R: Oh I think, you know, I think he ran a marvelous campaign. And I personally think, and this has always been my view about it, that had he had the kind of early start in fundraising that would have, if he’d had the kind of financial footing that Bill Clinton had, he might very well have won that contest and would have been the nominee. He really, after New Hampshire, after you know, he went down, he won in Maryland, he really had a head of steam. And you know, he ran into, he really ran into a buzz saw, because then you know, you have a big primary in Florida, and I don’t recall, but they’re something like nine, or ten, or twelve major media markets in Florida you know, and suddenly it’s a very expensive state to run in.

A: I see. I see.
R: And you know, Bill Clinton had been building a war chest for a long time, and had millions. And at that point Paul was doing pretty well raising money pretty well around the country, but you can’t, in this day and age, even less so today, but even then you can’t run for president you know, raising the money as you spend it. It’s just not possible. The costs are too big, you know, it’s just not possible to do it. And so you have to have, you have to build up this kind of financial footing. And I think, but I think in terms of conveying to the, you know, in the states he went into, I think they did a terrific job of getting across who Paul Tsongas was. I think, when I, even today when I deal with people all across from all over the country and everything, and I, people ask me about my background and I mention Paul, you know it’s amazing the high esteem that he’s held in by people all across the country.


R: And of course you know that didn’t come from his Senate career particularly. I mean he wasn’t you know, that visible nationally. It came from that presidential campaign, and people realizing that this is somebody who really shot straight, believed what he said, and you know, told it like he saw it. And so that’s the sense in which I think the campaign was a great campaign. It wasn’t successful in the end (A: Right), but it certainly conveyed who he was.

A: Yah, interesting. When was the last time you saw Paul before he passed away. Do you recall?

R: Yah, it was not too long before, and I’m trying to (--) I know I talked to him on the phone when he was, when he was in the hospital (A: Really) after the second transplant. (A: Yah) And that was, that was not long before he died. And the last time I saw him of course I didn’t know that it was, I didn’t know it was the last time and that it had such great significance. (A: Sure) And you know, I can’t, I can’t quite recall you know, the exact circumstances of the last time, but it, it was in Washington and it was not, it wasn’t all that long. You know, it might have been the last time he’d come to Washington.

A: Yah. What was he doing down there?

R: Well he would come from time to time. There were a number of things that he’d come down and he was involved in some lobbying on. He retained an interest in the environmental protection of Alaska.

A: Really, did he?

R: Yah. And you know, various times when there were questions that came up, some of those environmental groups would ask him to come down and talk to members of Congress, and he would do that.

A: Wow. Well any other tales of Mr. Tsongas?
R: Yah, those were the ones that just particularly had come to mind, and I wanted to, I wanted to relate them to you. But you know, (--)  

A: Well maybe someday I’ll put the biography together, but  

R: Yah, that would be wonderful. Yah.  

A: There is a guy here, and the reason I had asked you about some energy questions, is there’s a guy and I would love for him to take it on, but I just don’t think he’s going to. He’s getting his doctorate from the University of Washington State, and he’s going to do, I think he’s only going to do the ’75 and ’76 election as his, (R: Ah huh) as his dissertation. (R: I see) So he’s got an easier advisor than I do. I mean I wish I could do something so kind of focused, you know. But so he wanted me to ask you about some energy questions.  

R: I see.  

A: But he might be in touch with you later on.  

R: Yah, that’s fine. That’s fine. As you can tell I love to, I love to reminisce about Paul.  

A: Yah. Yah. But somebody should put this thing together, because I think it’s an important person.  

R: Yah, yah, I think that’s right.  

A: Yah. So yah, as you come up with other stories maybe just, just type a paragraph or two, (R: Okay) and you can email them to me and I’ll just start collecting them. (R: Great) And you know, if I put the book together ten years from now when you’re retired, or almost retired, we can talk some more.  

R: All right.  

A: And I do want to catch up with you in the fall. (R: Okay.) I’ll be down in October for the National Oral History Conference.  

R: That’d be great.  

A: So I’ll touch base with you sometime before then.  

R: Great.  

A: And if you’re ever up this way for any business in Boston or anything, just let me know.
R: Yah, I do get up there from time to time. We have a house on the south shore. My wife is up there right now as a matter of fact.

A: Oh, okay.

R: But I do get up there back and forth from time to time.

A: Okay. Well if you have a quiet weekday, and give me a ring. Maybe I can shoot down and visit you for some lunch or something.

R: It would be great fun.

A: Okay.

R: It’s a pleasure to talk to you Ali.

A: All right, and as I said on my email, don’t let President veto anything you’re doing down there. And vote for John Kerry! I don’t know if he’s got a chance to win, but (→)

R: Oh I think he’s, yah, he’s definitely got a chance.

A: I look at the, I look at the crew running and he is you know, he’s got to be in the top one or two.

R: Yah, I think that’s right. I think that’s right. I think he’s got a real shot at the nomination, and you know, I, it’s exactly the words I said to Paul in that meeting, you know, way back when. I said, you know, the nomination of the, the presidential nomination of one of the two major parties is always worth having.

A: That’s right, even if you lose.

R: The election takes place between two people in a political environment that you can’t predict in advance, and things can happen, you know? (A: Yah) So right now George Bush looks pretty difficult to beat for anyone of those Democrats.

A: But George Bush, Sr. looked pretty difficult as well.

R: That’s exactly right. And it’s a long way to that election next November. (A: Yah) And you know, with the shape the economy is in and everything, there’s a lot that can happen between now and then.

A: Yah, good, good. (R: Okay) All right.

R: Great!
A:  Hey, thanks a lot Rich.
R:  Thank you.
A:  Okay, take care.
R:  Okay, bye, bye.
A:  Bye.

Interview ends.