

**Pat M. Holt**  
Chief of Staff  
Foreign Relations Committee

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**Interview #9**  
**Chief of Staff**

(Friday, December 12, 1980)  
Interviewed by Donald A. Ritchie

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**RITCHIE:** The last time we had gotten to the point in 1974 when you became chief of staff of the Foreign Relations Committee. Can you tell me how your duties and responsibilities changed once you became chief of staff?

**HOLT:** Well, I never got to work on anything substantive after that. Strangers used to ask me what I did and I said I answered the phone. You know, you're responsible for the operation of the staff, so you spend, or you did then, all of your time giving assignments and seeing that they are followed up, and looking at the results, and trying to keep up with what members of the growing staff were doing on their own. So you never really get to do anything yourself. It's essentially an administrative job, as distinguished from a substantive job as a professional member of the staff. I discovered fairly soon that I neither liked administration very much nor was I very good at it.

When Marcy decided to retire, he decided in the fall of '73, he and I went in to see Fulbright. He had talked to Fulbright privately earlier. Fulbright said to me,

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"Well, Pat, do you want the job?" And I said, "Well, I have no great enthusiasm about the damn job, but if Marcy doesn't have it I don't want anybody else to have it because I'm too damn old to establish with somebody else the kind of relationship I've had with Carl." Then Fulbright said Okay, and the committee said Okay, and that was it. But it was not the happiest period of my service up here, to understate the matter somewhat. Marcy used to complain, I think this was one reason that led him to retire, that he spent half his time practicing psychiatry without a license. I found out what that meant. There are an awful lot of large and fragile egos around this place, and a committee staff director is caught sort of between the upper and nether millstones. He is working for a bunch of prima donnas--senators by definition are prima donnas--and the Foreign Relations Committee staff in those days had a good many people with tendencies toward being a prima donna. So you were caught between these things. It was particularly difficult that first year because Fulbright, facing a reelection campaign in Arkansas, just dropped from sight fairly early in 1974, and was scarcely seen or heard of again until after the Arkansas primary. That left Sparkman as acting chairman, and he was very cooperative and agreeable in this

role but he felt very acutely the fact that he was acting and he didn't really want to assert himself very much. That

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left it pretty much to me if things were going to get done. I was not in a position to assert myself all that much either. There really wasn't any place for me to turn for guidance, for support, or for shoulders to cry on. A hell of a lot of people were crying on my shoulder, but to paraphrase Truman that is where the thing stopped.

Then, after Fulbright lost that primary in Arkansas in June, I guess it was, I talked to Sparkman and he confirmed that the following year he would take the chairmanship of Foreign Relations, relinquishing his chairmanship of the Banking Committee. But he also made it very clear, and he was quite emphatic about this, he said, "Listen, Bill Fulbright's chairman of this committee until the 3rd of January next year and I don't want to get in his way." Well, all right, Fulbright came back from Arkansas eventually and he was here during the summer of 1974 long enough to preside over an investigation of Kissinger's role in wiretapping. Then he went to China in August. In the meantime, his wife had surgery, and that distracted him. Later in the year he had surgery himself, which took him out of circulation for a period of weeks.

So '74 in many respects was a lost year, a year of just trying to hold things together. We were sort of the headless wonder around here. Sometime in the late summer or early fall I did get Sparkman to talk a little bit

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about the transition, and he indicated he wanted to make very damn few changes and very few were made as it turned out. Things got better when Sparkman became chairman in name as well as in fact. But by temperament he's not the activist type that Fulbright was. To the degree that he was activist, he concerned himself with administrative details about the committee and the staff which Fulbright never bothered with. So we had the rather peculiar situation in which the chairman of the committee was concerning himself with how the furniture was arranged in the office, as one example, and leaving the chief of staff to decide what the committee's schedule would be in consideration of the foreign aid program, or some damn thing, and I thought that was getting it backwards. No senator likes to say no when people ask him for something, almost regardless of what it is. One of the duties of a staff director is to be the bearer of bad tidings. If the chairman can do what somebody wants him to the chairman tells him that personally. But if the chairman can't do it, or for some reason doesn't want to do it, he sends the staff director. Sparkman in this respect did not differ in principle from any other senator that I've ever had any dealings with. He did differ in degree--it was more pronounced in the case of Sparkman. Towards the end of my

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tenure up here I had the occasion to say to somebody else that so far as I was aware, I was the

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only person he said no to in the last two years. Well, I could ramble on about this forever, but I think that answers your question.

**RITCHIE:** In connection with the staff of the committee, I read a quote from you in a recent book, Thomas Franck and Edward Weisband's *Foreign Policy By Congress* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979). They quoted you as being critical of "policy entrepreneurs" on the committee staffs. You said that "staff forget that they don't represent a single United States voter." I wondered if that was a reflection of any experiences you had with the staff of the Foreign Relations Committee?

**HOLT:** Oh, sure, I didn't make that up out of the air! Going back to when I first started to work up here, and continuing uninterruptedly from that point, it was always one of the cardinal principles of staff behavior on the committee to keep that particular point in mind, both because it was a hell of a good way to stay out of trouble with the committee and its members, but also and more fundamentally it goes to the way the American government is supposed to operate. There is supposed to be public accountability, and the staff is not publicly accountable. Well, I think one reason also people around Foreign Relations felt so

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strongly about that was the experience which some other committees had with staff in the '50's. The famous [Roy] Cohn-[David] Shine team of the old McCarthy committee being the most spectacular example of that. Well, as the staff grew it became more difficult to observe this.

The matter was complicated by the centrifugal forces that I mentioned last week that became particularly evident after Sparkman became chairman. I don't want to overemphasize Sparkman's role in this. Those forces were unleashed around the Senate in general at that same time, and early '75 or late '74 was the year that the House went through the revolution of reform and at least the outerfringes of that hurricane were felt at the Senate side of the Capitol. But one of the consequences of this was the proliferation of subcommittees, their growth and their independence, the tendency of certain members of the staff and certain senators to identify with each other, and so far as the staff was concerned this meant looking to a particular senator rather than to the committee as a collegiate body. So the situation became more difficult and complicated than it had been before.

**RITCHIE:** That was the period when the concept of a professional staff which served everybody was broken down. There was a minority staff and then sort of by definition the rest of the staff became the majority staff, I guess.

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**HOLT:** Well, there really wasn't a minority staff at that time. That didn't come until later, after I had left. But there was the beginnings of it in some of the subcommittees, particularly the Subcommittee on Multi-National Corporations. There was also a greater insistence on the part of senators on both sides to appoint people to the staff. Some of the people who were appointed as a result of this were very good people, but you know they felt a responsibility to the senator who had appointed or sponsored them, greater than their responsibility to the committee as a whole.

**RITCHIE:** Do you think that in the long run this is a detriment to the work of the committee?

**HOLT:** Yes, I do. One of the problems the Senate faces in dealing with the executive branch as a separate branch of the government is that there is a very weak institutional or collegiate loyalty in the Senate to the Senate as an institution, as an independent coordinate branch of the government. To a considerable degree this is inherent in the fact that the Senate is an elective body and every senator thinks about his own personal political situation before he thinks about the institutional position of the Senate, and that's perfectly natural. But it does get in the way of building up the Senate as an institution.

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It might be interesting in this regard to trace briefly the development of the staff of the committee. For all practical purposes we start with the Legislative Reorganization Act of 1946, which for the first time provided for professional committee staffs and said they were to be hired and fired solely on the basis of merit. I think it also said that professional staff members were not to have outside interests, employment, etc. So that their whole loyalty would be to the committee as a committee. Vandenberg, who was the first chairman when that act became effective, took it seriously. Connally, as a matter of fact, voted against the damn thing when it passed the Senate in '46, but by the time Connally became chairman again in '49, he was also taking-it seriously, and George and the whole damn committee did. That's the way we operated, and this was spelled out in some detail in the rules for the staff that were adopted along in '57 or '58, as a consequence of the work mainly of John Kennedy. These rules said that the staff as a whole worked for the committee as a whole. I don't know if this was ever written down, but one of the things that Marcy particularly was emphatic about was that one of the most important jobs of the staff was to see to it that senators on whichever side of an issue could make the best case possible for their side, the

theory being that the more vigorous and informed the public debate, the better policy there was likely to result from it.

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I remember in connection with the first coffee agreement, which was fairly controversial, this would have been in the early 1960's. the committee had a minority view, which was something that didn't happen very often then. I was the guy who was handling the coffee lip agreement and I wrote both the committee report and the minority views. During consideration of the coffee agreement, Senator [Karl] Mundt, who I guess hadn't been on the committee very long at that point, called up and said he wanted to talk to the minority staff man, and I said there wasn't one. That surprised him a little bit, and he said, "Well, I want to oppose the coffee agreement, and where can I get some help?" And I said, "From me." He sounded a little skeptical about that but asked me to come around and see him, and I did, and gave him the case against the coffee agreement, and wrote a speech for him, I guess. He later said to Marcy that he was very satisfied, to his surprise.

During the '60's the Republicans in the Senate generally began to agitate for more formal designation of minority staffs, and a 2:1 staffing ratio, and so on. Carl Curtis, I think it was, offered an amendment to I guess the legislative appropriations bill to provide for this, and Hickenlooper went to him and said, "Look, Carl, if you want to do this for other committees in the Senate, that's okay with me, I'll support you," he said, . . . if

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you leave Foreign Relations out of it. We're getting along just fine with the arrangement we've got." So that's the way we operated until about the middle of the '70's when it began to break down under pressure of all the things that I've described earlier. I resisted this as best I could; got into some trouble, as a matter of fact, by writing a letter to the Rules Committee! But, you know, I was just out of tune with the times.

**RITCHIE:** Well, the Foreign Relations Committee had ranking Republican members like Hickenlooper, and Aiken, and Clifford Case, who seemed to be basically in agreement with the Democratic members. There was a spirit of bipartisanship there, wasn't there?

**HOLT:** Yes.

**RITCHIE:** So that reduced the need for a minority staff, than say had the Homer Capeharts been more prominent or ranking members of the committee.

**HOLT:** Well, I think one of the things that contributed to this, so far as the Foreign Relations Committee is concerned, was the irritation of both the Johnson and the Nixon administrations at the staff of the committee. Johnson and Nixon were really irritated by the committee, but they inaccurately tended

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to hold the staff responsible for some of the things the committee was doing. The notion developed downtown that the staff had a whole lot more influence on the committee than in fact it had. You know, the influence was running in the other direction. But this was inadequately appreciated downtown. In '73, I guess it was, Robert Griffin of Michigan, the Republican Whip, came on the committee. He made it part of his interest to do something about the staff. The state of the law or the rules at that time was that when a majority of the minority members of a committee ask for staff, a limited number of them, they were entitled to get it. Griffin inspired a majority of the Republicans to do this. I think eventually all of them went along with him. But this was something which Aiken did not like worth a damn, and resisted it as long as he could.

When he couldn't resist it anymore he compromised with it by designating Bob Dockery as the minority staff man. Dockery got along with Aiken fine, and Aiken was very satisfied with that arrangement. Dockery did some things also for other Republicans on the committee, but they were less satisfied with the arrangement than Aiken. When I became chief of staff, I felt a need to find somebody who would take over what I had been doing with respect to Latin America. Dockery was the obvious choice for this, but I thought that Dockery because of his duties as minority staff was not available for it, and I started trying to recruit some other

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people, and ran a couple by the Personnel Subcommittee, which did not have as high an opinion as I did of the merits of these people, and turned them down. Finally I said, "Well look, what are we going to do about this?" And Aiken said, "Oh, why don't you take Bob Dockery?" I said, "I'd be delighted to take Bob Dockery if you'll let me have him." And he said, "Well, he can do both jobs." So Dockery then moved into Latin America in a big way and he continued on paper anyway to be the minority guy, but that arrangement sort of dribbled off. It was probably unsustainable over a long term, inherently anyway.

**RITCHIE:** Still, I imagine it must have put some strain on the staff to try to wear two hats. You described writing a majority and a minority report for the same bill. It would seem to be easier for a staff member if you were identified with one side or the other.

**HOLT:** Well, I guess that's the prevailing view up here. Certainly as things became more contentious there were some members of the staff who had great



difficulty doing this. I did not. It struck me as a perfectly straight forward exercise of the kind one finds in academia or in the better journalism. You just say, in effect, you embellish it a little bit, but in effect what you are doing is saying the reasons for ratifying the cof-

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fee agreement are as follows; and then the reasons for not doing it are as follows. One of the things that was always insisted upon in the '50's and '60's was that members of the staff ought not themselves to become emotionally involved in issues that were before the committee, that we were supposed to be detached, dispassionate, objective, etc. Well, as the emotional content of issues mounted, primarily in the first instance over Vietnam, this became increasingly difficult to do, even for me, and much more difficult for some other people. It's a matter I think, of temperament more than anything else.

**RITCHIE:** We talked about the Nixon and the Johnson impressions of the committee and the strained relations between the committee and those two administrations. We haven't really mentioned much about the Ford years and the Ford and Kissinger foreign policy, which would have corresponded with the time when you were chief of staff. Did relations grow any better between the committee and the administration at that point?

**HOLT:** Yes. Even in the last year of the Nixon administration, attributable principally to Henry Kissinger becoming Secretary of State in name as well as in fact. One of his first priorities was to pursue a policy of detente with the Foreign Relations Committee, and he had some success with it. To a degree this was

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cosmetic, but anyway it reduced some of the strain that had been evident before. Of course, when Ford became president one of his first priorities was to reduce the strains that had developed throughout the government and indeed the country. And that helped too. You know, differences of policy continued, but things weren't as tense as they had been earlier.

**RITCHIE:** Still, the committee and the Congress handed the Ford administration a number of major defeats on foreign policy issues: the cut off of aid to Vietnam and Cambodia, to Angola, a number of strong slaps on the wrist. Was that a sign that the administration was weak in foreign policy?

**HOLT:** Well, I don't know that I would characterize it as either weak or strong. As a matter of fact, if I remember right, the controlling cut offs of aid with respect to Southeast Asia occurred in the last year of the Nixon administration. Ford had to live with the consequences of this, but they antedated his arrival in the White House. The Angola thing I think was sort of sui generis. It was attributable in part

to the disenchantment with Vietnam, more practicably it was attributable to the Hughes-Ryan amendment, without which Congress never would have learned there was something that needed to be stopped!

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**RITCHIE:** There was cut off of aid to Turkey, too.

**HOLT:** Yes, there was, to the great distress of the administration. But this, too, or at least the seeds of it, antedated Ford. The Cyprus invasion which led to that cut off occurred in the summer of 1974 while Nixon was still president. The irony of that whole thing is that the cut off was required by the law as it existed prior to the invasion of Cyprus. If Kissinger had acted within the executive branch to cut off or suspend aid to Turkey, as the law clearly required him to do, without any further action from Congress, after a decent interval he could have negotiated a resumption of it and a great deal of the steam would have been taken out of the Greek lobby on the Hill. But by choosing to fight the damn thing--by choosing first to ignore the law and then to fight congressional efforts to reaffirm the law--Kissinger just got a lot of backs up, particularly among ethnic Greeks in the United States, there aren't that many of them, but boy there's a Greek restaurant in every God damned congressional district! So you had the long and troublesome debate over that, which ensued. This is speculative, of course, but I think it could have been avoided.

Another defeat, or at least a pseudo-defeat, which Congress handed the Ford administration, was in the early part of 1975 with respect to supplemental aid for Vietnam and Cambodia, as the situation out there was collapsing. I

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said pseudo-defeat because I've never really been sure how much Gerald Ford really believed in what he asked Congress to do at that time, and how much was sort of cosmetic for the sake of the governments in Saigon and Phnom Penh. The situation really did pose a very acute dilemma for the Ford administration. If they had not asked for supplemental aid, they would probably have brought about the fall of those governments sooner than the fall occurred in any event. On the other hand, it was pretty damn clear, from the view up here anyway, that the additional aid would not be decisive in any means anyway. Ford did feel an obligation of some sort towards Saigon and Phnom Penh as a result of long United States associations, to at least go through the motions of trying to help them. Congress felt that obligation to a much smaller extent.

**RITCHIE:** You said that you were reading Kissinger's memoirs now. In dealing with him did you find him to be as impressive a tactician as his public image is? You mentioned a couple of instances where Kissinger perhaps created himself more trouble than he would have had otherwise.



**HOLT:** Well, he's smarter than hell, there's no doubt about that. He's also very witty. But despite the efforts he made with respect to Congress, with some successes, I had the feeling fairly early that

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these were more cosmetic or tactical if you will than anything else. And as I have reflected on this since then, I don't think Kissinger ever really understood Congress as an institution, how it worked, what motivates people up here, and so on. It was something which was largely foreign to all of his experiences. Although he could charm a bunch of senators in personal contact, it sometimes proved to be transitory.

**RITCHIE:** One other question about John Sparkman as chairman of the committee. When I first started to work for the Senate he was the chairman of the committee and my recollection is of often seeing him dozing. It struck me that he was a man who had been in politics for a long time and got the chairmanship perhaps after he was past his prime. Do you think he was too old for the job by the time he got it?

**HOLT:** I'm not sure. I think he was too old by the time he left it. The business of dozing that you referred to was not in his case really a function or reflection of age. He was doing that back in the 1501s! But the last year I was up here it became apparent that he didn't grasp things as quickly or as readily as he once had. You had to go over things more frequently with him and repeat, and that sort of thing.

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**RITCHIE:** Would you say that this is a weakness of the seniority system, that it forces people to wait so long in their careers before they finally obtain such a position, and that perhaps less senior people might have served better than the senior person?

**HOLT:** Yes, I think so. There are other weaknesses of the seniority system as well. These have been ameliorated somewhat in recent years. Seniority doesn't mean as much around here as it used to, and I think that's good. I think serious consideration ought to be given to applying to all Senate committees the rule that applies to the Intelligence Committee for rotating the chairmanship at stated intervals. I've forgotten what it is, two years I think on Intelligence, something like that. Maybe it's not a rule, maybe it's just a custom that [Daniel] Inouye began, but anyway I think it's a good custom. And you might even think about limiting the service of any member of any committee.

There is limitation on members of the Intelligence Committee, how long they can serve. The argument against doing that is that you lose experience and continuity

which can be a very great loss indeed. You know, by sometime in the middle or late 1960's, the senior members and senior staff of the Foreign Relations Committee had been dealing with the foreign aid program a good deal longer than any of the senior officials in the executive branch had been

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dealing with it. This resulted in what in my view was very healthy skepticism when the executive came up here with its recurring proposals to reorganize the damn program. It frequently turned out that we'd been through this at some point before that nobody downtown remembered. Well, people up here remembered it. That particular kind of experience is not something which one would want to dispense with lightly.

**RITCHIE:** We talked about Ford and Kissinger, and in an earlier discussion you mentioned Jimmy Carter's first appearance on Capitol Hill as president elect with his marathon sessions with the Foreign Relations Committee. The Carter administration has gotten a reputation of having poor relations with Congress in general. Did you find that true after he became president, with the Foreign Relations Committee.

**HOLT:** Well, I think so. But I guess I really ought not to talk about it because I overlapped with him a total of one week, I think it was, or ten days. And that is scarcely enough experience to base a judgment on. But from reading the newspapers and talking to people I know up here in the interval since I left, I'm sure that's right. He had terrible relations with Congress, despite the initial efforts he made to have good ones.

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**RITCHIE:** Even though you weren't on the committee at the time, I was wondering that given your long interest in Latin American affairs, what you thought about his legislative handling of the Panama Canal Treaty?

**HOLT:** I think the Panama Canal Treaty is a landmark in the foreign policy of the United States. It was just something that had to happen. Carter brought to conclusion a negotiation that had been going on for thirteen years, for God's sake. I think it's in major part a consequence of this that the Canal is operating today as smoothly and trouble-free as it is. Having said all that about the treaty itself, it is my impression that the Carter administration damn nearblew it in the Senate. The Senate gave its advice and consent to that treaty at least as much in spite of the Carter administration as because of it. That really was one of the Senate's finest hours.

**RITCHIE:** In what particular ways would you say they nearly blew it?

**HOLT:** Well, in sort of complicated ways. The problem which they faced in the Senate with respect to that treaty came down to a group of senators who were not personally or politically strongly committed on either side. There was one group up here that recognized, whether they liked it or not, that this treaty was some-

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thing whose time had come, and the consequences of rejecting it would be unsupportable for American foreign policy. There was another group which believed deeply and passionately that it was a damn bad treaty and that all kinds of disasters would follow upon its coming into effect. In between these two groups were senators who were either open-minded, willing to be shown, or who sort of kept their own counsel, waiting to see which way the wind might be blowing, and one of the criteria they used for judging which way the wind was blowing was what else they could get out of the administration, or out of somebody, else in the Senate for that matter. The administration handled clumsily the whole the matter of dealing with this group of senators. Senators who committed themselves to the treaty early on, complained that senators who held out got more concessions from the administration than the early birds had gotten. Some of these concessions, in the folklore of the Senate anyway, had nothing to do with the treaty, they had to do with public works projects and such as that. Other concessions did have to do with the treaty.

If any one thing almost blew it, it was the president giving his blessing to the [Dennis] DeConcini Amendment towards the end of the debate. After the Senate had adopted that with respect to the security treaty, the most elaborate contortions and negotiations were necessary to find a way to undo it, in effect, in connection with the

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Canal treaty. At this point the matter was largely taken out of the hands of the administration by the Senate leadership and the Panamanians. The compromise on DeConcini was negotiated by the Senate leadership and Bill Rogers, who at the point had the status of a private citizen practicing law in Washington, who was brought in sort of to use his good offices as between the Senate and the Panamanians.

I think it set a bad precedent in that you had senators negotiating directly with foreign governments, not only with respect to how to undo DeConcini, but even earlier Howard Baker went down and talked to [Omar] Torrijos about changes that would have to be made. I think this, as much as anything is what led to the favorable Senate vote on the treaty, but it has to raise the question in the minds of foreign governments about who in the United States government do they negotiate with. I believe very strongly in the prerogative of the Senate with respect to treaties, but the time to involve the Senate in the negotiation of treaties

is during the negotiation, when they can be advisers to the executive branch negotiators. Well, in the case of Panama, you couldn't find a senator to touch the damn thing with a ten foot pole before he had to, and maybe there wasn't any other way to handle it than the way Baker did. It certainly brought a good result, but the precedent does worry me a little bit.

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**RITCHIE:** One other chairman of the committee whom we haven't discussed so far is one you didn't actually work under as chairman but you worked with as a member of the committee, and that was Frank Church. I wonder if you could give me some of your impressions of Church on the Foreign Relations Committee?

**HOLT:** I've forgotten when he first came on it.

**RITCHIE:** 1959, I think.

**HOLT:** He was one of the earliest to express his disquiet about Vietnam publicly, even before the overthrow of Diem, which I guess was '63. Later, of course, he became one of the leaders in the anti-war movement up here, the Cooper-Church Amendment and all that kind of thing. I guess it was '69 he succeeded Wayne Morse as chairman of the Latin American Subcommittee and I began to have more to do with him. He began with that subcommittee by having a series of private, off-the-record meetings with the press corps that is concerned with Latin America, and with various prominent Latinos who were passing through Washington, and so on. That didn't last for too terribly long. And we've talked earlier about his interest in the public safety program of AID, and so on, and the genesis of his interest in the problem of multi-national corporations.

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I had a great deal of trouble with the Subcommittee on Multi-National Corporations, not so much because of what the subcommittee did as because of what it did not do. It confined itself almost entirely to uncovering scandal, which it did very adroitly. I didn't have any problem with that; if there was scandal, uncover it. But I never could get either the staff or the chairman of that subcommittee to focus on what I thought was a more fundamental long-range problem, namely how does the United States, or the world for that matter, deal with this new animal which has burst upon us essentially since World War II, and which I think raises all kinds of questions about responsiveness to political or social control. These are very complicated questions which they never addressed in any fundamental sense. As chairman of that subcommittee, Church was one of the principal of the centrifugal forces that I talked about earlier. I said to him once that "one of these days you're going to be in a position where maybe you want to pull these centrifugal forces back to the center of things, and the way things are going it's going to be awful hard to put Humpty-Dumpty back together

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again." He said in effect, "Yes, I know, we'll meet that when we come to it," or something to that effect. But what he was like as chairman I just don't have any feeling for.

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**RITCHIE:** You once said that not enough time was spent on "thinking and planning" about foreign policy. I was wondering if looking back or looking forward, either way, you have any suggestions about how the Foreign Relations Committee and the Senate could solve that problem?

**HOLT:** Well, there are two or three things, some of which are more practical than others. They could go back to multi-year authorizations for the foreign affairs agencies of the government, State, USIA, AID, which would free them from the annual self-inflicted torture of reviewing these things and reauthorizing them, which takes an enormous amount of time on the part of both the staff and the committee. They could stop shooting off in all directions, reacting to the headlines, having a hearing today on Zimbabwe because it was in the news last week and having a hearing next week on the Persian Gulf because it's in the news this week.

I have suggested somewhere that the things Congress as a whole tries to do are beyond its capacities, either physical or psychological. You know, it takes pretty much a whole Congress to deal with a serious tax reform bill or welfare reform bill. The Senate spent from February to April on the Panama Canal Treaty. If it had proceeded to SALT II, or if it ever proceeds to SALT III if there ever is one, that's going to take the better part of a

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session of Congress. I think Congress would be more effective if at the beginning of every Congress each committee established priorities for itself for the following two years and said we're going to let other things slide. But the temptations to avoid doing that are very great around here.

**RITCHIE:** Do you suggest anything like your own experience of taking a sabbatical?

**HOLT:** I think it would be a great thing. I think it ought to be institutionalized. Paradoxically, in the Legislative Reorganization Act, in '71 I guess, Congress did authorize professional training for committee staff. 'Having done that, it then backed away from it. At one point the Foreign Relations Committee staff wanted to send Jim Lowenstein to a seminar at Harvard, which would have lasted a matter of several weeks or a few months, and put it to the committee, and my God you'd thought we suggested dismantling the dome of the Capitol! But I think it ought to be institutionalized and regularized so, as happens on college faculties,

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a fellow can count on the fact that he gets a year off out of every five or ten or whatever, to do within limits what ever seems reasonable. I know the Foreign Relations Committee got much better analysis of Latin American problems out of me than they would have otherwise.

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**RITCHIE:** You spent twenty-seven years with the Foreign Relations Committee. Looking back, in what ways has the committee changed over that period? How different was it by 1977 than it had been in 1950?

**HOLT:** It was a hell of a lot more independent and skeptical and assertive and better informed, all of which I think was good. It was more fragmented, which I think was bad within limits. I don't want to put too much emphasis on this point about unification, because it can be carried too far too. I think the staff was a whole lot bigger, I think too big. In 1950 the staff was too little. In the process of correcting that, they overdid it. At the time I left I think we had sixty-two people on the staff and I thought then that forty-five would have been about right.

**RITCHIE:** One of the reasons you mentioned why the staff had increased was because in 1973 you adopted a very elaborate computer system. I wonder if you might mention what the reason was for that and how well it's worked out?

**HOLT:** The reason for it went way back, although when the reason for it developed we didn't know what it was going to lead to. The reason for it was that from time to time a senator would say, "I remember

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somebody, I think it was Dean Rusk, one time saying thus-and-so. I don't remember when and where it was, but you find that for me." Well, with the accumulation of committee hearings and transcripts and so on over the years it became increasingly difficult for anybody on the staff himself to remember these things. We'd gotten away with doing it that way here in the '50's, but by the '60's it was getting to be more complicated. So Marcy said, "Gee whiz, we've got to index all this stuff." At one point we hired somebody to index them, and she labored at this for a year or two and wasn't even keeping even with current stuff, and how were we ever going to catch up?

We used to fret over this and have staff meetings about it and chew our nails and so on, and finally the Rules Committee made it possible for us to bring in a couple of outside people, not to solve the problem but to tell us what the problem was and how to solve it. They spent weeks in the bosom of the committee talking to staff about how we were doing things, and came up with a recommendation for computerization. In the meantime, I guess, Morella Hanson and I had a long session with some people from IBM about how it worked--that was really my



introduction to computers. I guess this also coincided with the [Sam] Ervin Watergate Committee, which was the first Senate committee to use computers, or to computerize its data. We thought, by God this was the answer. The Water-

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gate Committee really had a good computer staff and did a good job on that. We talked to them, and the Rules Committee was concerning itself more with this too, thinking of a Senate-wide system. When the Watergate Committee went out of business, the Rules Committee offered us the opportunity to take over their computer staff. We leapt at it because it was something already put together. Well, it didn't quite work that way, but it did get us a little bit ahead of the game. We hired not from the Watergate Committee but from the outside a very bright young woman named Marty Dey to run this thing, and we were using the Library of Congress hardware, and programmers I guess. All we were doing really was abstracting.

There was a problem of interface between the computer staff and the rest of the committee staff. I never could quite reorient the rest of the staff to use the computer as it should be used. There were a bunch of people around who were addicted, as I had been and am again now, to keeping their own files, and by God they would remember a clipping from the New York Times that they had seen last April, and they could go to it in a reasonable time, and they were just a lot more comfortable doing things like this than using the computer. The computer people felt that they were underutilized and underappreciated and so on, and to a considerable extent that was true. At the time I left they had been going for two or three years,

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maybe longer, and I was not totally satisfied with the way the thing was working. What's happened to it since then, I don't know.

**RITCHIE:** Another new program that the committee adopted about 1973 was the publication of its previously closed executive session transcripts. Bob Blum started that first series. Could you give me some of the background as to how the committee got into that project?

**HOLT:** Gee, I really can't. I'm sort of blank about that. My impression, which maybe erroneous, is that it was Blum's idea and he sort of began it, and after we saw it we thought it would be a good thing to continue, and borrowed a fellow from CRS [Congressional Research Service] to do it. We had a little difficulty selling it to the committee. There was some reluctance on the part of members. I remember at one point, after Chalmers Roberts left the Post, this was in the '70's, I guess, he was writing a book and he asked very properly in a letter for access to the executive transcripts of the Eisenhower years. The committee turned him down, mainly because Aiken had the notion that if the committee gave him access

it would be turning over the records of the committee to somebody to write a book which could make money for the author of the book. It totally escaped the other point

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that it would contribute to scholarly research and add to the sum total of human knowledge. However, Aiken's objection didn't apply to something the committee published itself. There was a little reluctance, but it wasn't anything that couldn't be overcome, because the project has continued.

**RITCHIE:** Every once in a while Roberts will write an article for the Post and he does quote from the Historical Series executive sessions. I particularly remember one on the Formosa treaty, which he compared to Carter's actions towards Formosa. He cited Dulles' testimony in one of the executive session transcripts, so he's clearly been using the material.

**HOLT:** Yes. I see him every once in a while and we talk about this, and how valuable those things are to people like him and me.

**RITCHIE:** We talked about how the Foreign Relations Committee changed over the years that you were here. I was wondering what your impressions were of the changes that took place in the Senate as a whole?

**HOLT:** To a degree, the changes that took place in the Foreign Relations Committee also took place in the Senate. The average age of senators dropped substantially over that period. The power

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structure of the Senate changed. Indeed, one can now scarcely speak of a power structure in the Senate, it's so dispersed. The Southern barons who were the subject of so much attention in the 1940's have long since gone. I guess Russell Long is the only one left who would fit that description. I think the changes in the nature of American politics have brought about some changes in the Senate. You know, television has made an enormous difference in the way senators campaign. Court house politicians aren't as important to them as they used to be. Public exposure, public images become more important than personal friendships, contacts, and so on. I don't want to say those are unimportant, but relatively they're less important than they used to be. The growth of air transportation has seriously complicated senatorial lives. It used to be that a senator from California or even Texas would get on a train in January and spend three to five days coming to Washington, and then get on a train again in June or July and go back home. Now the poor devil is expected to get on an airplane Friday afternoon, make a speech in Los Angeles that night, make two or three other speeches, and come back to Washington on Sunday. I remember a professor of mine in the late '30's saying that positions of leadership in the Senate

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ought not to be held by senators from states like Pennsylvania and New York, they were too close

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to Washington and there were too many constituents. Well, that distinction has long since been wiped out. A senator from the West Coast is subject to the same constituent pressures as a senator from the East Coast.

So this has been reflected in the whole nature of operation of the Senate: the proliferation of unanimous consent agreements, the understanding that there won't be a roll call. The practice has grown up that there won't be a roll call before two o'clock on Monday, for example, to give people time to get back here on Monday morning from wherever the hell they've been, that kind of thing. The scheduling of roll calls and the practice that they last fifteen minutes or ten in some cases had grown, and one effect of this has been to put senators on notice that they don't need to be in the Senate chamber. This has had a desultory enervating effect on Senate debate. The Senate used to have some really very good unscheduled debates on the spur of the moment, and that doesn't happen anymore.

**RITCHIE:** So in a lot of ways it's a different institution than the one you first saw?

**HOLT:** The way it operates is certainly different in a lot of ways. But I think it's a more influential institution than it was when I first knew it. It certainly is more assertive. It, and the House too for that matter, have used the legislative veto a whole lot

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more as a device to give them a chance to second-guess the president. I never shared the uniform view of every president since FDR that that's unconstitutional, but I do think the Congress is in some danger or over-doing it, because it has the effect of re-opening a variety of issues, and this is a distraction from doing other things that might be done. It takes an awful lot of time.

**RITCHIE:** Well, I want to thank you very much for this series of interviews. We've covered an incredible amount of territory.  
[End of Interview #9]