South Carolina Political Collections
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Interview

with

“Bubba” Meng

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Interviewer:

Herbert J. Hartsook

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Mr. Meng’s office, Columbia, S.C.

Synopsis:


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Herbert J. Hartsook and Andrew Daniels
[Interview begins]

Hartsook: I was watching C-SPAN the other night and they were showing the President [George H.W. Bush] going through a receiving line and he was doing the same kind of thing that I've seen Senator Hollings do. When he'd meet someone, if they could make any kind of a connection, he would start recalling people they might know.

Meng: You know an interesting thing about Fritz is if he ever meets you, he does not forget. I mean, I have seen him run into people that he had not seen in ten years, and immediately call them by name. And when you're talking about the volume of people that he sees and meets, that was an amazing thing. I enjoyed so much doing the first campaign with him and to see...because he had been out from the governorship, so he has really not had month-to-month contact or anything with the people. On Main Street, he'd walk into department stores and he'd remember who owned them and who was working in there and stuff and he'd ask about them. And that has an amazing impact.

Hartsook: I think you joined Olin Johnston's staff in about 1960 or 1961. How did you happen to become a Washington staffer?

Meng: Liz [Elizabeth Johnston Patterson] and I, that's the Senator's daughter, who's now a congressman, lady, we dated in college. Liz was at Columbia College and I was at Carolina and we became very, very good friends. When I graduated from college--that would have been in 1961--I went into the military for six months. That's when Fritz was running against Senator Johnston [in the 1962 Democratic primary for the U.S. Senate]. I was stationed at Fort Jackson and I would do my stuff at Fort Jackson and at night I came and worked for Senator Johnston's campaign. So I got to know him well.

I got out of the Army in December of 1961 I think, and my telephone rang in Winnsboro. Of course, I didn't have a job or anything, didn't know what I was going to do, and it was Senator Johnston on the telephone. And he said, "Bubba, I understand you just got out." And I said,
"Yes, sir." He said, "Well, I'd like for you to go to work for me." And I said, "Sir?" And he said, "Yeah."

At that time they had, off of the Senate floor, the room where if you were going to visit a senator and you were going to call him off the Senate floor you would go to a desk and say, "I'm Bubba Meng from South Carolina, and I'd like to see Senator Johnston, reference so and so." There were three of us. I would go in, and I would say, "Senator Johnston, so-and-so is out front and would like to see you." And if he wanted to see you he would come out. It was basically a patronage type thing. My plans at that time were to go to Washington and go to law school. So it worked pretty good that I could do that, because you only worked while the Senate was in session. But it was a great education in itself because, first of all, you had to get to know the senators fast. Anybody came, be it from Montana, New York, or whatever, you had to go through the three of us to get to them. A boy by the name of Kenny Allen was one of them, and he was from, I think, Louisiana, myself, and one other. And so I got to know senators fairly good.

Jimmy Konduros, who is a law partner with Bob McNair, was Senator Johnston's legislative assistant. And about three or four months after I was there, Jimmy Konduros was hired by IBM to be one of their chief lobbyists. I think it was IBM. And Senator Johnston called me in the office and he said, "Bubba, I want you to be my legislative assistant." And I said, "Senator, I don't have a law degree. I don't feel like I'm qualified to do that." He said, "I'm not worried about that. You can handle it, I've seen that." Because I did do some work in the office and that type stuff. I said, "Well, I really want to go to law school." And he said, "Well, you can go to law school at night."

Well, to make a long story short, he was number three or four in seniority, which is very, very powerful. Back in those days he had Post Office/Civil Service Committee, and that was a strong constituency because the postal carriers had a strong following. If you built a post office in your state you had to go through him to get it, so you had a lot of friends in the Senate because at election time they'd all come to him because they needed post offices built. "Well," I said, "I'll try. And see." Well, what it would take probably somebody eight hours ended up taking me twelve hours because it was all new to me. But I think I became a pretty damn good legislative assistant. And, I think I had that reputation on the Hill.
I didn't have the hours to go to law school at night, so I never did do that. But I did become a fairly good legislative assistant, in particular with my being his legislative assistant when he died. So much of the end of his life, when he was really not able to be there and you did pairing of votes, I did all of that for him. It's a very common practice, if a person is outside of Washington and couldn't get back, for them to pair with you. You know, "If so-and-so was present, they'd vote this way, and I would vote no," so therefore you cancel the vote out. And I did all of that in the latter part of the last year of his life.

It was a wonderful experience because I had already, through the working as a liaison between constituents and the senators; I had got to know so many of them. So when I needed to do something and I didn't know -- they, of course, knew Senator Johnston was sick -- it was a situation where they would help me. They'd say, "Bubba, you really ought to do it this way." Or, "Let's look at doing it this way." It's a funny parallel now, Herb. I look at Senator Thurmond and Senator Hollings now...see, it’s almost a reverse situation, because when I was there it was Senator Johnston. He was like [number] three in seniority and Thurmond was on the up. The interesting thing now is that Fritz is in that position. I don't think people realize that South Carolina is the only state in the union that has both U.S. senators in the top ten in seniority; Strom is [number] one and I think the Senator is like five or six now. And that's in the seniority system of...and you watch after your state and get for your state. Because of that and the committees you serve on, South Carolina has fared fairly well. My point being, working for Senator Johnston and his being so strong seniority-wise and with Fritz from day one up to the point that he is so strong seniority-wise; it's been an education to see how that has benefitted the state. Pork barrel or whatever you call it, if there's any way you can get something for your state that's good, you try to do that.

**Hartsook:** What was Gladys like? I've heard so many things about her.

**Meng:** Miss J. was, when I went to work for her, rather sickly. You know, she was not in the best of health. I got to be, and I think probably because of Liz, too, extremely close to them as a person, not as somebody that worked for somebody. That's the same way with Senator Hollings and Peatsy. We had a relationship that was not employer/employee relationship. I don't think I would have ever stayed as long as I did if it were not for the personal relationship that I had.
But, Miss J., smart, God, she was. And you know, Peatsy is very smart, politically. A wife adds so much and to a political agenda. It was no question that when Miss J. spoke, whatever it was, you knew it better be done.

I think that probably had Senator Johnston lived, that would have been his last term because they had bought a home here in Columbia. And they, I think, knew...she had his mind geared that it was time to retire and step out.

**Hartsook:** I hadn't heard that.

**Meng:** I gather you'll probably talk to Liz about that, too. They had purchased a home out on East Shore Drive, East Shore or North Shore, out in [the] Forest Acres area. With the idea of, I think, retiring here.

**Hartsook:** I've had people tell me that she was the brains behind Olin, implying that he was not his own man, that her intellect was a good bit superior to his. My impression from what I've read, and from the bulk of the people that I've talked to, is that they were probably a real good partnership, like what you do see with Fritz and Peatsy.

**Meng:** I really did not get to know them until he was sick, but you look at his history as governor and you look at being elected twice and you look at his history in the Senate. He couldn't be a lightweight and accomplish what he accomplished. But I can tell you she had an enormous influence on him. I think she had a political sensitivity that certainly helped.

I think that probably Senator Johnston's biggest asset was that he really genuinely liked people and he cared about the little folks that nobody else cared about. That was his weapon. I remember when W.D. Workman [William D. Workman Jr., Johnston's opposition in the 1962 general election] ran. That was during the time that Republicanism was becoming the fashionable thing to be. You know, if you were anywhere of a status-wise, you were almost an outcast if you were a Democrat. Senator Johnston never really appealed to that element. He knew that the little guy was who elected him, and I think Fritz found that out when he ran against him. Fritz ran against him, all the polls showed that the Governor was popular.
Somebody was asking me the other day, "Well, what about if Carroll Campbell ran against Fritz?" You never do know this thing, but it is a lot of difference when all of a sudden a person leaves office to seek another office. And if the person, the incumbent, has done their homework, they've built up a constituent base. That's one thing I can say that Senator Hollings, when he was first elected, we sat down...because, see, I ran his state operation the entire time. And I can remember him saying, "I want it just like Olin. I want to help people that need help and if we take care of the little problems, the big problems will take care of themselves." Our state operation has always been if John Doe had a problem with Social Security and came to our office, he knew he was going to get the same attention [as] if the governor of the state came in. And we built a pretty good reputation with that. That was an emphasis; constituent service was a strong emphasis.

It's funny, Strom, you hear more people comment on the fact that Strom does such good constituent work, but if you take down and analyze election returns, Senator Hollings always, percentage-wise, does better than Strom does. Since the first election he's always been in the sixty percentiles and higher. I can remember when fifty-two per cent was considered a landslide. And somebody said, "Well, maybe he hadn't had strong opposition." Then if he hasn't had strong opposition, why is that? I attribute that because he does his homework. Because his offices are geared. When he was elected, we put an office in Spartanburg, Florence, Charleston, Columbia, and later Greenville, and that was an enormous state operation. I can remember him saying many times, "You know the folks that I represent, they can't get to Washington. I'm going to have me an office in these districts where they can get to when they've got problems." And I really think it has paid off for him.

I would have loved to have known Senator Johnston in the Ben Tillman days because, you look at what he did with the Highway Department; it would have had to have been fascinating. I don't think politics is fun today like it used to be. I mean, you don't have your stump meetings that are attended, and you don't have your fiery oratories going on and all that kind of stuff.

Hartsook: Well, and you don't have very many politicians willing to go out on a limb and say, "This is what I think we need to do and this is what I propose." That's one thing that attracts me to Hollings.
Meng: Agree or disagree with him, you know where he stands. He does not make a decision on what he's going to do because of politics. That is the one thing that was rewarding in working with him, because I tended to always look at when you do this it will help this way you know. I think that's probably part of the reason I was in the position I was in, is because I did look at the political end of it. But I can tell you his thoughts on legislation, be it Persian Gulf, be it Panama Canal, be it you know, what you've got is controversial as hell, and when he would do it I would just go under the damn table because the phones would start ringing and everybody was irate. I've had him tell me many times that when I put my head on the pillow, got to be able to go to sleep. I admire that particularly now, looking back.

Hartsook: Getting back to Olin, who would he go to for counsel? I know he would talk things over with his staff and of course people like his wife, but, do you know, were there other senators who he would turn to?

Meng: No. See, I really only was with him two years. When I was with him he pretty much would rely on the staff and that's about it.

Hartsook: How about Senator Hollings?

Meng: Oh, I think that could certainly be a difference in the age thing, but Fritz just loved...he'll have five, six or seven people feeding him the information on the same subject, including staff and never let the right hand know what the left hands are doing. Because he thirsts, loves that. I think Senator Johnston, when I worked for him, had mellowed. He had his place and he knew what he was doing and he was well versed and that's all he was interested in. Senator Hollings is not like that at all. He looks at it as a challenge and he likes to be informed. If you're going to walk in and debate him on something, you'd better damn sight know what you're talking about, because I can tell you, he's going to know. He doesn't walk in unprepared. He would get any source that he could find.

Hartsook: So there's not some small group of people that you could identify...?
Meng: I would think that he would not rely on just one person for his information. I think he would rely on it from many sources, analyze it, and then make up his own mind. Pieces of this, that, and the other.

Hartsook: I get the impression that's unusual in the Congress...?

Meng: I think because the demand is so great now, where before, when I first went there you were in session eight months. The other time, you were out and you were home. I mean I would come home. Now, we would travel the state some. But Senator Johnston's thing was to get back home and see your friends and let's stay in touch with them. I have seen it [the session] go up to Christmas eve, now. They just work constantly, but, it's just the difference in the time and the demands are so much greater and the scope is so much larger. I also think that most of your senators would find a niche or an area that they are interested in, and they will concentrate on that. Senator Hollings has a lot of areas of interest, and he likes to know a lot. And, believe it or not, he remembers it. He can pull out facts and figures and [of] course you can't question him because, hell, you don't know them, but he'll throw them out right and left.

Hartsook: Let's talk a little bit about the 1962 campaign. Your memories on that for Johnston will be as good as anyone's.

Meng: Well, not really. I was in the military. All I remember is the fact that with Fritz being governor, they used a great deal of, well, that he was trying to get elected as the [candidate] of the rich man, with the little fellow. Here he's got this airplane. When he bought that airplane, it was the first state airplane that was ever bought for industrial.... I mean, it was a horrible old plane.

But they used [that issue] very effectively, because it was not a popular thing at the time. It [the plane] ended up being wonderful. But, at the time, they used it very effectively. "Well, we don't have a plane to fly us around." Liz did that very effectively. Senator Hollings will tell you at one time that Senator Johnston couldn't get to this meeting, because he was in another part of the state. Fritz was able to fly and Liz could use very effectively, 'Well, we had to go by slow
car.’ And another thing too, if he were late to something, they would, ‘Oh well, he'll be here in a little bit, as soon as he finishes over at the country club.’ They did a very, very effective job.

Interesting thing is, Fritz will tell you it was his best organized campaign of any that he's ever done. And, do you remember [the] Gillette commercial, that ‘to look sharp to feel sharp?’ [“Look sharp, feel sharp, be sharp; use Gillette Blue Blades!” They used that music there, it's his theme song. "It’s Fritz Hollings, It’s the Man You Need, Its Hollings...." You ought to look at that and you ought to also get a copy of "Keep Rolling with Olin." Liz would probably have it. Both of those were used in that election. It's interesting to see the comparison.

[Tape 1, Side 2 begins]

Hartsook: [What did Senator Johnston] think of Hollings as an opponent? In your time with him, did that appraisal change at all? Because he [Johnston] hadn't faced opposition like that for a long time.

Meng: I think probably there was a lot of bitterness. Senator Johnston was the type of politician that he would hold a grudge. The campaign really got kind of nasty. I think there was some leftover bitterness afterward. Fritz, I'm sure, will tell you. The best thing he ever did though, was the way...after he lost. If I had been him, I would have been very bitter. But he had the decency to come down and congratulate Senator Johnston. I'm sure he'll tell you a story about Senator Johnston's brother Bill. Bill had a big influence over Olin, too. They were very much a team. Bill was mayor of Anderson. They were very close. Bill would say, "Now Olin, thank the postal employees for their support," and Fritz walked in and Senator Johnston said, yelling, "And let's don't forget to thank old Fritz, too."

I think there was some hurt there and resentment, probably with Miss J. too. But when Senator Johnston died, Governor Hollings came and saw Miss J. They had a long talk, and as things shook out, it was probably one of the best things he ever did. You say, well, it was, maybe some hard feelings, "I'm sorry for that. He was a great American," you know.

I also remember that Senator Thurmond and Congressman Watson came to the Johnston home here in Columbia and she asked them to leave.
Hartsook: And Donald Russell never did [visit], did he?

Meng: I can't speak to whether or not he ever came to the house and that kind of thing. I would have thought so, but I don't know that. But I do know...you have a certain period, maybe a two month period after a death of a senator, to close his office and reorder, to do all these records. I do know that when he [Russell] came to Washington, he never had any kind of contact with the Johnston office. Now, I think he did with some Johnston cronies, and maybe a few that advised him wrong. There was, I don't think, any contact there with Miss Johnston. And any effort to offer any of the [Johnston] staff any assistance, or ask any of the staff to go with him.

An interesting thing is that when Donald Russell ran for governor, I was his campaign manager in Fairfield County. So you can imagine the resentment that some of us had, [that] there was no, at least, offer [of assistance]. We were all devastated. I see Judge Russell often today and think very highly of him, and I see his son Donnie some. And time heals a lot of things but it is no question that Fritz mending some of his fences and doing some things after Senator Johnston's death, certainly helped the family, and Liz is very close to Fritz now.

It had an impact on his election over Donald Russell, no question. As I remember, that race was not even close. After Senator Johnston's death, I went to work for the Post Office/Civil Service Committee under Mike Monroney for about eight [or] nine months, because I wanted to get three years [of Senate service]. Once you get three years in the Senate credit you are vested. In other words, I could go to another agency if I wanted to do that. Miss J. asked him to do that and Senator Monroney did that for me. I was losing all my contacts back home so I said, "No, I'm getting out of here." So that's when I came back here and went into the real estate business, be it briefly, with [Bob? Mike?] Robinson.

My dad was head of utilities for the town of Winnsboro and was very close to some friends that were very close to Fritz. And they went to Fritz and said, "You ought to look at hiring Bubba." I was going to stay out of politics. I really wasn't going to do that. Lee Reuf, who was our press secretary, is who really first talked to me with that Jefferson-Jackson day dinner, would I not commit to anybody until I talked to Governor Hollings.

I'll never forget, Miss J. called on the phone and said, "Bubba, I want you to do something for me." And I said, "Yes, ma'am." And she said, "Brother Bill is going to come out and endorse Governor Hollings [for the Senate]. I can't come out and do that. All of our friends
would know if you would go to work for him that I want him to be U.S. Senator. And I want to ask you to do that." As I said, she's like a second momma to me so, you know, I would have had a hard time telling her no, because I, perhaps from hurt of the Donald Russell thing, had geared in my mind that I was going to help him [Hollings].

Purvis Collins was a member of the House of Representatives from Fairfield County and is now head of the South Carolina Retirement System, a very smart grassroots politician. I went to Purvis with the idea of just kind of feeling him out about what he thought. And I said, "Purvis, what do you think?" And he said, "Well, are you looking for a job or are you looking to make money?" I said, "Well, I really don't know that. Probably for a job." And he said, "Well, if you're looking for a job, go with Fritz. If you're looking to make money, go with Donald Russell." Well, that was telling me that he felt like Fritz was going to win. And I think that generally was the consensus among the politicians. Because the Johnston crowd was so upset....

At the dedication of the Post Office up at Spartanburg, I think Mrs. J. walked off the stage. It was just really some bitterness there. But there were folks around us that were in the Johnston inner circle that later on were found out advising Donald Russell, but they certainly advised him wrong.

Hartsook: Who might…would you care to...?

Meng: I'm not sure that my recollection would be right. I want to a fellow by the name of Roy...

Hartsook: I think Roy Ashley was on Olin Johnston's staff in 1962, and there's a Roy Riddle who was in the Senate Post Office, I believe.

Meng: I think Roy Riddle is who I'm talking about. I think Roy Riddle and Bill Gulledge and perhaps Tom Chadwick. You would have to do some checking into that. He was our press secretary. Bob Alexander went to work for Bob McNair. Bob Alexander was Senator Johnston's executive director; Baxter Funderburke was his administrative assistant, who really ran the office. But there was a lot of play with and bad political advice, in my opinion, that I'm sure some folks were trying to protect themselves and were feeding to the Russell crowd that were really wrong.
Hartsook: A lot of people have talked to me about the Johnston "machine" and that the machine worked for Hollings in that campaign against Russell. Is it fair to talk about a Johnston "machine"?

Meng: Oh, I think that Miss J. asking me to...there were certain people that, you know, if they were for someone, you knew that they had the blessings of the Johnston family, yeah.

Hartsook: And so if I were a postal worker in Heath Springs I would say, ‘That's my signal.’

Meng: Absolutely. We very effectively used that. I was the person that used it, and I knew all the carriers and also Evy Dubrow who was head of the Ladies Garment Workers. I'll never forget, she was down here [for] the convention. The Russell crowd had courted her quite well. I was on the panel with her. And I'll never forget her saying, "Well, I can tell you what. I don't know who you will send back but anything you send back is better than what you presently have." And that had to have been an endorsement to Fritz.

And it became my role; I think I took almost every step that Fritz took down Main Street, South Carolina. We'd go in stores or if we'd run into a post office, he would often say, "Bubba, come here and meet this fellow. Bubba used to be with Senator Johnston." We used that effectively. At mill gates -- I can remember this, too, in the campaign -- God, would we work from five [o'clock] in the morning until one every night. I mean, when you talk about beating yourself up and down the streets, meeting mill shifts, making civic talks, toward to the end I'd say, "I just want to win or lose. I just want to get the damn thing over." But we would make mill shifts late into the night, and I can remember if it was dark, I wasn't ever Bubba Meng. I'd say I was Michael Hollings, and, "I appreciate you voting for my daddy." I'd work one gate and the Senator would work the other gate. We had a pretty effective campaign.

Hartsook: And then of course you win, and then you have to face [a candidate] who turns out to be a terrific opponent, Marshall Parker.
Meng: That was, Herb, what I was telling you earlier. I really don't know Marshall Parker well, but from everybody I know that knew Marshall Parker, they liked Marshall Parker very much. But Marshall Parker was not getting elected on the fact that he was Marshall Parker; he got the vote that he got because he was a Republican. The times were changing.

Hartsook: And of course he changed parties just for that election, didn't he?

Meng: That's right. He and Fritz were very good friends prior to that. But the thing was, you could see him gaining. He wasn't out-working us. You couldn't out-work us. But you could see him gaining on you, and there wasn't a damn thing that you could do, because of the times. And look at the difference in the vote in just two years. Fritz won by eleven thousand votes or something like that. Two years later, he won by one hundred and fifty-five thousand votes. It just was that the times were that Republicanism was the thing to do.

Hartsook: But Parker was a pretty good choice to run. I mean, if you look at his biography, he does look like a good...?

Meng: But those people weren't looking at that. I don't any more think that Marshall Parker got the votes that he got because people looked at his biography and thought that he was the better choice of the two. The people were voting protest. There was a lot of racism in it. That, to me, is why Carroll Campbell is governor today, is when you add the ----- along with what you can get because you're just running as a Republican, racially. I don't understand why we Democrats don't wake up and realize that's what is happening in this country. Even though it's hard to say, I look at W.D. Workman and I look at Mr. [Drake] Edens and some of the founders of the Republican Party, they were very honorable, good people. But I think that they would never have been able to accomplish what has been accomplished with the Republican Party in this state had not the Harry Dents and some of these people come along to take advantage of the issues, the racial issue. And damn effectively they did it.
**Hartsook:** Was there a feeling in that first election against Parker that you weren't so much fighting South Carolina Republicans as you were fighting the National Republican Party? I assume that they financed, or contributed to the financing of, Parker's campaign in 1966.

**Meng:** Back then, no. I don't think back then you had that much national involvement, monetarily or otherwise. I wouldn't think that. But, also, you didn't spend the magnitude of money that you spend now. The only thing I do think he took advantage of was that was when they were running as a team effort. I do think that certainly helped him. As they were forming the Party, it was always a team effort. I think now not as much so as it used to be. When you saw the billboards, they had the pictures of everybody that was running.

**Hartsook:** Did you ever think what you would do had he lost?

**Meng:** As a matter of fact, I had no intention of staying with him after he won. I was going to go back into real estate. But with it being so close, he asked me would I stay at least for two years, for the next election. And I said yes, and, you know, once I did that.... Politics, if you're in it for money, you're in a hell a fix. But if you like the challenge, and I love the challenge of travelling...when we first had our state office it was only Martha Payne, Claudia Cooke, Doug Dent, and me. There were just four of us. And we travelled the whole state, night and day. But, hell, I was young then; it was a fun thing. Towards the end, January of two years ago, when I retired, I was burned out. I was burned to a frazzle. Twenty-six years is a long time.

**Hartsook:** I've always thought it says a lot about Hollings and the people he chooses that he keeps his staff. You don't see the kind of turnover in the Hollings office that you see in the Thurmond and so many other offices.

**Meng:** First of all, the Senator is very tough. He's very demanding. For someone like me, that was probably very good for me. The lawyer would always come out. Like when we were going into a county, I learned very early that he was going to ask me, "All right, who do we need to see? Tell me about this person." Now he might know an epistle on him, but what he was trying to do is find out what I knew. I remember we used to always prepare black books, and we'd have
the names of the individuals, the wives, we knew the children, you know. It finally got to the point where he wanted everything. Also, we kept a black book of who we had helped in the county, and what we had done. So if he was speaking to a civic club, and they had gotten a water and sewer grant, or a HUD grant, or something, he would know that. If the local news media was there, he could comment on that.

That's something that today does not exist like it used to. Your local paper for one, [would gladly run] your newsletter. You don't do a newsletter now. They would run anything that you sent them; they won't do that [now]. And that's really bad, because it takes away the involvement on the local level. And I hate that. I think that's wrong. I think that politics is better served when more people are involved and when you [receive], just like in the campaign, money. I would take ten $10 dollar contributions any day over a $100 contribution, because if you can get those folks interested in you, in giving you $10, they're going to be for you. They've got a vested interest in you. It's gotten too expensive now to talk about being elected U.S. senator in South Carolina, that you could spend upwards to $3 million to do that, and I think probably the Senator would have to be in a position that he might have to do that this next election. But that's wrong for it to get that way.

Hartsook: Well, and I think that when you talk about those kind of numbers, it makes the general public feel like it's not their campaign, that their $10, not only wouldn't it matter, but that...?

Meng: Well, and they also feel like the special interests are controlling. And I don't think that's good. But it's nice, even now, when I travel. There's not a county in this state if my car breaks down, that I can't pick up the telephone and call somebody and say, "I need your help." That's one of the rewarding things. For example, I have a lot of friends over the state that through the years, we have counted on them, that if something needed to be done in the county, or if they see something that Fritz needs to know, if somebody dies that was a friend of his, something like that, they know to call the office. If you wanted to talk to me, you could always get with me. And therefore they felt like they were getting him.

I don't know if the name has come up yet, but Mr. Robert [H.] Hicklin was a good friend of ours that owned Hicklin Motor Line down in St. Matthews. Mr. Hicklin was on the Highway
Commission, and I always knew that if my phone rang after eleven o'clock at night, either someone had died in my family or Mr. Robert Hicklin was calling. It didn't matter where he was, and he was a wonderful gentleman, but if he would run into somebody that had a problem, he wasn't going to wait until the next morning to call. He would pick up the phone and call you right then.

But that is, I think, the type of endearment that Fritz had with some of his old-line, close friends that has made him so successful. When you look at his career, other than the Olin Johnston thing, and look at the votes that he's gotten in his senatorial races. That's where people fail to...everyone says, "Well, Thurmond is so popular," and that kind of thing. Thurmond is not controversial. He does what is appealing. But look at the votes and you'll see that Fritz fares better. That's amazing. I do not think that he would have been able to do that had he not...he has a magnetism that he draws from people. He can make you so damn mad, but yet he has a magnetism. I think part of it is his looks, his intellect, his stature. I mean, you know, you want to identify with him. It's almost like the Kennedy thing. It is a magnetism. It was interesting; I went to his fund-raiser here [in Columbia] a couple of months ago. I was so happy to see a young, aggressive crowd there that was involved. Everybody that I could bring on board I've brought on board long since.

Hartsook: Well, there's a physical magnetism, but also an intellectual. If you read a speech or an article he's written or you look at the legislation, he is someone you want to be involved with.

Meng: He's fairly diversified, too. I mean, he has a lot of different interests. In all candor -- you'd have to ask him this -- I don't think being chairman of the Commerce Committee, I don't think that is really the Senator's area that he would like really like to be in, if he had his 'druthers. I think he would much rather be like Strom and do Appropriations.

Hartsook: Winding down, there's one thing I want to cover with you before we quit. You were home secretary forever. What makes a good home secretary? What qualities did you bring to that?
Meng: I don't know that I was good!

Hartsook: Well, I don't think Hollings would have tolerated you if you...?

Meng: Well, I think in particular, in the Senator's case, you had to have a devotion to him, and a real caring for him, or otherwise you could not have done it. I think early on -- and this was when Fritz was married to Pat -- Beverly and I were very close to them. Peatsy, of course, and I were very, very close. And after they were married, it was a situation that when they were in Columbia, they never stayed in a hotel, they stayed with us. They ate breakfast with us, he took off his shoes in our den and we'd sit around and chat just like you and I are chatting. Our son, Boyd, he grew up not knowing the Senator as "Senator," but as "Fritz." We had a relationship that was...I gathered my total dedication to him.

I would do anything that I could to help him, and he knew that. And he knew, in running this office, that I was not running that office to any benefit for me or anything like that, that I would never do anything out of that office that would be a detriment to him. You know, that kind of thing. I think I had an ability with people. I like people. Our policy was that when you walked in there...and certainly it was with Claudia Cooke and Martha Payne. Martha was with the Senator when he was governor, so she knew the players. It took me a while to learn the players. Martha was very helpful with that. I think that he knew that he had in place someone that knew what was going on -- not only me; I'm talking about the team -- in these counties, that knew when something happened that needed to be done, it would get done. He would be informed of it, but he wouldn't have to be bothered with it necessarily, be that a friend who had died, or a friend that needed something, or writing and staying in touch with your friends. We did a lot of that. I'll never forget...

[Tape 2 begins]

Meng: ...indicated to her, because Jimmy Martin was a state senator from Lexington. One day I was in his office and he showed me this thing that he was doing. It was a laminating process, where he would take his local newspaper, and, for example, say your son in Little League had just won so-and-so, he'd laminate that, and he would send it out to the child. It was amazing.
We started analyzing this, and I said, "Well, I want to do this over the state. Can you imagine how many people we can touch by doing that? And I'm not only talking about the recipient of whatever, or that so-and-so who's getting married, the bride, or so-and-so who's had a baby. That's supposed to be the greatest time of your life. We can put this thing together. How about it if it's somebody that the Senator is supposed to know and we write them, 'Dear Mr. Smith,' rather than 'Dear Jack'? We've got to come up with something so we don't make that mistake, but, also, the volume is going to be so that we can't write letters to everybody."

So we came up with a little card, that on the front of it, it said, "You're in the News." And when you flipped it up, it said, "I saw this in your newspaper and thought you would like to have it. Best wishes, Fritz Hollings." And we'd just clip it off, and laminate it, and mail it to them. You wouldn't believe the response that that got. Now that's what I'm telling you, Herb, about "nitty-gritty." That's how you get elected. It's, "You helped Aunt Jane with her Social Security," or, "Uncle Bill with his V.A. problem." If you touch base with those type of [matters], it travels throughout that whole family.

I think that's why Fritz is successful. I think that's why he liked me doing what I did, is because, as I told you before, it didn't matter who you were, when you walked in that office you owned it. It didn't matter how busy I was, if you came in there, I saw you. Also, when you left, there within two days you had a letter: "Bubba Meng told me of your visit to the office yesterday, and I want you to know that we're on top of this problem." We couldn't help everybody. We helped, I think, our share. But I think that the Senator liked that. I think, too, that hopefully I had some friends, through college, like I was president of my fraternity. I had a lot of good folks that I brought on board with him. They were his county chairmen. I think all of us contributed to that, but I think through the years he just had that confidence in me, which I'm appreciative of.

But I do think when I retired I realized that I really had contributed about as much as I could. And I was tired. Thank goodness you can recognize that. I didn't realize how time consuming it had been and how much it had dominated my life until I did retire. It's funny, I ended up divorced, and that, along with my retirement, came along about the same time. And all of a sudden, I was bouncing off the walls, because I wasn't as busy as I had become accustomed to. My life was very programmed. It has taken some adjustment for that, but I think it's been a
good adjustment. Right now, I'm very content with what I'm doing and where I am and where I'm headed. But for a while, I kept saying, "God, did you do the right thing?"

Hartsook: And what are you doing now?

Meng: I'm a Duke's consultant [check]. For example, ----- [sounds like "Gym Care"] are clients of mine. I helped them with, first of all, contacts that I had. I helped them secure contracts, you know, construction or architectural design. I have a couple of clients over on the coast that I'm helping, in the cable industry. I'm helping them mostly on the legislative part of that. But I'm doing it when I want to do it.

Hartsook: And you can set your own schedule and take on as much work as you want.

Meng: Exactly. I was in Washington on the Senator's bill, S.12, which my clients are very much in favor of. And that's always nice, you know, to.... But I don't have any clients that are paying me $100,000 retainers or anything like that. It would be nice. Probably if I was in Washington I could, but I'm not interested in living back up there.

Hartsook: Will you be called in to work formally on the campaign?

Meng: I doubt that. I have helped some with the fund-raising. That's something that I did rather extensively for the Senator, most of his fund-raising, the last few years. I will do some of that. I think that it is important. I know who's going to do the campaign. He's good. He will be a big asset, and we are close enough friends that I know if he needs something that he doesn't have that he thinks I have, he'll call me and ask me. I think it's important that I don't interfere with that.

Hartsook: Who is that? Who is going to run the...?

Meng: I don't think I can breach that until the Senator announces that. But you know him.

Hartsook: Well, Tommy Hartnett has certainly been quiet since...?
Meng: They have only one way of winning this thing. If Bush stays in the trouble that he's in, he won't even come close. I mean, it will be a blow-out. But I can imagine that Bush won't really make every effort. And, you know, I mean if the Democrats nominate somebody like a Bill Clinton, it will not be a negative here in the state. That will help Fritz. But if they were to come up with a super-liberal, Hartnett could coat-tail and make a respectable race. I think you're going to see them, because of the money, they will gear up towards the end heavily, and up until that point not much. But that might be a pretty good strategy.

Hartsook: Well, they've just got the wrong candidate.

Meng: He's lazy. Well, you know, "I'm coming back home because I don't like Washington." I mean, you know? Now, all of a sudden, "I'm going back to Washington."

[Interview ends]