John Gabusi

John Gabusi was born in Florence, Arizona, in 1941 and raised in Clifton. He studied and taught political science at the University of Arizona before co-founding Behavioral Research, a public opinion polling firm, with classmate Earl DeBerg. In 1966 he began working for Arizona Congressman Morris K. Udall in a variety of capacities, including managing his 1976 bid for the democratic presidential nomination. He left Udall’s employ in 1977 to work for the Community Services Administration. He was then asked to help organize and establish the new Department of Education, where he later became assistant secretary for management. After Republican Ronald Reagan assumed the presidency, he went to work for Control Data Corporation in Minnesota. In 2002 he accepted the job of Vice Chancellor at Pima Community College in Tucson, where he has remained since.
JG: [unclear] system until then. So anyway, Rick was a young guy who worked for George McGovern, and who had been hired and was mentored by Gary Hart. So after McGovern blew up, Rick came to us and said that after the convention, that they could use our help if we were interested—that’s Terry and I.

JF: You mean after Muskie blew up?

JG: Well, McGovern was the *fait accompli*. That would have been the summer, I guess—June, July, whatever, I don’t know.

JF: Let me back up a minute. What did you all do for Muskie? Were you actively part of the campaign staff?

JG: No. Terry probably would be the most active on the press side. He probably was dealing with the press on what a good guy Muskie was, and Mo really liked him. Mo was very active. Mo traveled with him, had fundraisers for him, and that sort of thing. But I was not involved, other than just being there, and if Terry needed something on the press side. But we were not like we were with McGovern. But anyway, with McGovern, after we asked Rick what he had in mind, he said that what they wanted was people who would be willing to go in and set up a troubleshooting operation for the campaign. And the rationale at the time, as I remember it, was that the ascendant—it was sort of like the Dean campaign. The radicals won. McGovern was going to be the nominee, and yet all these established state parties and others, who were very skeptical and had to be talked to—had to make friends with, had to do something. So they asked Terry and I if we would be willing to take on that role in the western United States, to go to the various states, and to troubleshoot for the McGovern presidential campaign, on assignment.

JF: To some extent was this winning over prior Muskie people?

JG: Well, it was that, and it was also firing McGovern people so that the establishment could take control. I mean, I could tell you some of the stories. So what we did is, in Tucson we had the Udall campaign, storefront operation. Right next door, there was an office that was a mirror of a campaign office, with no signs. That was the McGovern western United States troubleshooting office, with telephones and all the stuff, and it connected Terry and I to that part of the McGovern campaign. Nobody even knew about it. People for the Udall campaign were volunteering right next door, and they knew that John and Terry had some office over there, and that was it. So what would happen is—and Rick Sterns was our boss. Rick was now the Number Two guy in the campaign to Gary Hart. An example: Rick would call up and say—this is one he told me, that I always liked—he said, “You gotta go to Las Vegas, Nevada. We’ve got the county chairman up there,” whatever, whatever. “He’s gotta go. And he’s gotta be replaced with So-and-So and So-and-So.”

JF: That doesn’t sound like a very pleasant job.
JG: No! it wasn’t! What it was, was you go in and you go out. Go in and say, “I represent the McGovern campaign. We’ve made some personnel changes.” And it’s always the candidate, “Senator McGovern would like Jim here to become the new county chairman. And we’d like you to step aside. And I represent the national campaign.” So, see, an individual who’d just been screwed over had no appeal. It wasn’t like he could say, “Well, I’m gonna call up the governor,” or something. Who the hell’s the governor going to call, the senator?

So anyway, I went to Las Vegas and I was told I’d be met by “X” representative of the people that were going to replace the other people. I said, “Fine.” These are all names. And I’m just a stranger that arrives on an airplane. And so I get off, and I don’t know if you know what Las Vegas is now, but Las Vegas then was run by union mobsters—union, I’m talking about. And so this guy, who looked like something out of Damon Runyon, and two or three of his henchmen, are waiting for me. And he’s going to be the county chairman. And really, he looks like Mafioso. But it’s the bartenders and hotel—the people who run the casinos. That’s the unions that run Las Vegas.

JF: Hopefully that’s not who you were firing.

JG: No, he’s the good guy. But the guy I fired was just like him. See, all this turned out to be, in the long run, internecine warfare in a given region. So the union guys, who were McGovern guys, had probably given more money, were able to kick out the other guys, because they didn’t give…. I mean, I was never told why they were going. I was only brought in to tell them. I was the “laying on of hands,” of the new guys, and the dismissal of the old guys, with the imprimatur of the Democratic National Committee.

JF: I would imagine that that engendered some pretty bad feelings.

JG: I got out of town! I went to Hawaii. Same thing happened there. Hawaii is more mobbed-up and unionized than Nevada—it was then. Seafarers Union. And the Seafarers were in charge, because in the seventies, the Seafarers were one of the richest unions in the country. The Seafarers International—huge givers of money to difference when it went into the Democratic National Committee.

JF: I never realized that.

JG: So they ran Hawaii. And that’s why Hawaii, to this day, is a Democratic state—it’s mobbed-up, it’s unionized. And so I was brought in to get rid of a whole gaggle. I had to go into an office building in Honolulu, go into this office building—there were probably twenty or thirty people. This is what I was told to do by my masters. “Go in, call Jim Jones and his staff together, introduce yourself, tell ‘em who you are, tell ‘em what they gotta do,” which is leave, and that Tony or whoever would be coming and taking over the operation of the office as the new county chairman, whatever the title was. “And then,” they said, “just leave, and we’ll get you back on your airplane to the mainland.” And that’s what I did. I have no idea what happened after that.
JF: I would think that…. Correct me if I’m wrong, but I would imagine a lot of the people you were firing…. (phone rings, tape paused)

JG: And there were local things. These are some of the more dramatic things. And I’m sure that—see, Terry and I would go our separate ways on the McGovern stuff. I really don’t know—I probably have some vague memories that we talked about. He probably did some writing for Rick he may have done—I don’t really know. But I know we both had the same offices.

JF: But you weren’t doing the same thing?

JG: No, I would always go by myself, and be met by somebody there.

JF: I would just think that the people you were firing might often have been the people who initially organized and got the vote out.

JG: Could have been. You need to understand something else about the McGovern campaign: We all knew roughly, say, two weeks after the convention, that we were going to lose. And one of the things that we had to do was to lie through our eye teeth that we had polls that showed us winning or tying, just to keep people’s enthusiasm up. But we knew that he wasn’t going to win. The leadership of the campaign knew that it would take a miracle for him to overcome some of the numbers that Pat Cadell—Pat Cadell was the pollster then—was bringing in. And Gary and the triumvirate were Cadell, Gary Hart, and Rick Sterns. And Rick would tell us . . . But we would go into these places, and make a pitch. I had to go to a couple of places. I can’t even remember where. I think one was in Colorado, and I had to raise money. And what they did was, they would set up, say, typically a breakfast or a lunch, with fifteen or twenty people with a lot of money—Democratic Party activists. And my job was to baffle ’em with bullshit, so that we could leave with money for the campaign. And we did it with bald-faced lies. But even they were getting suspicious towards the end. But we did that, I did that, and I’m sure Terry did some of that, too. So at the same time, we’re running Mo’s campaign.

JF: Wow. That was quite an experience.

JG: Oh, it was! It was very interesting.

JF: Did Mo have much opposition that year?

JG: This would have been 1972. I don’t know, he may have had. Was it Morris Herring then, the guy that ran for state treasurer?

JF: I think it was Morris Herring.

JG: He tried to claim to be a Mexican. I think we burned his ass bad.

JF: He did not prove to be a factor, I don’t think.
JG: No.

JF: Did you work on the campaign finance reform?

JG: Not really. Terry did that with John Anderson and David Stockman, who went on to be OMB with Reagan—remember? (JF: Yes.) But Stockman was a liberal Republican staffing John Anderson. That’s how he and Terry became good friends. We never would have thought he would have turned into a right-wing asshole, but he did.

JF: But he originated from Anderson?

JG: Yes.

JF: Wow.

JG: Yes, he was John Anderson’s legislative aide. He and Terry were counterparts. So Terry’s active involvement—I think Terry’s involvement in the campaign bill had more to do, that he became good friends with some of the reformers who were lobbyists, like the National and State Committee for an Effective Congress, some of the environmental groups, all those who were pushing. And he became part of that group. I never was involved in that, because frankly, my work with Mo was much more blue-collar politics, to be honest. I handled all the union stuff, I handled all the campaign money of any significance—that kind of stuff. More operational stuff. So pure policy involvements were minimal. I would be involved in campaign reform only to the extent that Terry and I and Roger and Mo would sit around and talk about elements. “This bill will be up for committee sections, and this is what I’m thinking about doing.” And I would be more of an advisor. If I went to one hearing on it, that was one hearing more than I remember.

JF: Was that also the case with the Post Office Reform Act?

JG: No, no—that was a horse of a different color, because one, it was a committee I was responsible for; two, I was…. One thing you’ve got to know about the Post Office Committee is the Post Office Committee was one of the most lucrative committees that you can get money from lobbyists on the Hill. The postal unions were the most—and probably still are, with the exception maybe of the NRA [National Rifle Association]—most active lobbying groups, giving away millions of dollars, because they have all those postal workers who donate—involuntarily—money into their PAC every paycheck. So they had enormous dollars.

JF: I never realized that, that they were that powerful.

JG: Oh yes, right now [unclear] Association of Letter Carriers, Federation of Postal Clerks. And then there were the supervisors and there were the mail handlers, were run by organized crime. There were a bunch of them. I was the principal contact for all of that stuff, whether it was political or if I needed something, one of the great perks of the
Post Office Committee was one of our unions was the ones that were the Customs inspectors when you came into the country. So anytime Mo or Ella or anybody was traveling internationally, I’d call up the lobby and say, “Make sure you get ’em through Customs.” And they would be met at the goddam foot of the airplane by these Customs guys who would whisk them through in no time, only because they just were told by their bosses in Washington, “Take care of Udall and his party.” That was one of the perks.

JF: That’s great! (laughs)

JG: So anyway, when the time came that Nixon—they decided to create this corporation, what became the U.S. Postal Service, it was an agenda of the president’s. They had a post master general named Red Blunt, and their lobbyist, just like any agency, had come through the committee on normal business, but Red Blunt and Mo had a meeting, and Red said, “We want to create this postal corporation. And here’s the benefits to the employees, and here’s this and that. We’d like you, Mo Udall—” who is not the committee chairman. Committee chairman was an old machine Democrat from Buffalo named Thaddeus Dulski. He was about as bright as his name suggests. So they came to Mo to ask him to lead a congressional initiative to create it, and Mo agreed. So that immediately put him in the forefront of a major policy initiative that Nixon had pushed as part of Nixon’s effort to get the hell out of the Vietnam War, because they were doing anything they could to change people’s views. That was my take. But at the time, it was a major initiative. So I was made responsible—since it was my committee, and I knew the lobbyist for the post office, and I knew the union lobbyist, in particular, because there was going to be some impact on them legislatively—to in the end developing the bill. And I worked with other postal lobbyists, staff, that sort of thing. And the post office, we wrote the bill, the first bill—or law, as a matter of fact. And so if you look at the Postal Reorganization Act, the statute, my footprints are probably on 80% of it.

JF: Okay. Well, that’s what I had thought.

JG: Yes. It’s the only legislative thing I ever did of any significance, and it was because of this circumstance of politics and the postal unions. Because what happened was, is the unions got very upset, “A,” that it was a Nixon initiative, and “B,” it upset the status quo, and it might change their status and mainly lose money or something. So they were very skeptical. And they were very skeptical, although trying to still be Mo’s ally. If they’d have had their way, they would have opposed him. But because he also had the ability to screw them on things they wanted on other issues, so they would come to me, and they would say, “We were lookin’ at this section of the proposal, and we’ve had our lawyers look at it. Could you go talk to Mo about it?” because they didn’t want to confront him directly. So I became an intermediary for the unions, which are big unions—unions that have half a million members, 400,000 members. That meant a lot of clout.

JF: Very significant.

JG: Oh, yes, huge. People don’t realize it, until you get into the business. And that doesn’t even take into consideration the transport, the UPSes of the world. FedEx was
just coming into being then. John Smith—no, not John—what was Smith’s first name? The founder of Federal Express founded Federal Express with a group of Marine buddies. One of those Marine buddies that helped him found Federal Express was a lobbyist in Washington, who was also a Marine, who was a very good friend of the office. He represented some other elements. So you had the big nonpostal delivery systems and their lobbyists all involved, UPS being the biggest at the time—but FedEx, Airborne Express, all that stuff. So you had a real conglomerate of business [and] labor converging on what is a multi-multi-billion-dollar industry. Forget that it’s called the post office—it’s a goddam industry. And so that’s what they were looking at. So they were looking at this legislation that was in the business side’s mind was going to free up them to make more money, be more efficient, whatever they used. And you had these unions, hundreds of thousands of members, being very skeptical. And you had Mo as the champion for Dick Nixon doing this in a Democratic Congress with Democratic leadership, who themselves are highly skeptical. We had a lot of leading Democrats oppose the bill.

JF: Why did they seek out Mo to sponsor this bill?

JG: Because the chairman of the committee was a machine Democrat. Typically, you would go to the chairman of the committee and say…. But Thaddeus Dulski, a real nonentity if there was one….

JF: But was Mo the next in line?

JG: No, he was chairman of his committee at the time. But you’ve got to look—the Post Office Committee in those years had a lot of machine Democrats on it, because it was widely viewed as a union committee—just like Education and Labor. So like you had a congressman from New Jersey—what was his name?—a very Roman-looking guy—and he was on the committee. You had Dulski from Buffalo, you had…. Well, you had the guy who just died, from Detroit, Congressman…. Little short guy, chaired Education and Labor before the Republicans took over. Anyway, you had a lot of machine Democrats, very few from…. Jerry Waldy [phonetic] was one of the few from the West. So Mo was probably put on the committee, for all I know, because Speaker [John] McCormack was pissed off at him, or something. I mean, you don’t know in those years. But he was on the committee, because Interior was considered his major committee, even though in the parlance of the House, Interior is a minor committee. But that was his major committee. So what he did was—he didn’t say it as explicitly as I do—is he figured that this was a vehicle, if you’ve got a lemon, make some lemonade. And what he did is, he turned the Post Office Committee apparatus into a way for him to get more staff. So he became a subcommittee chairman, he became chairman of the Franking Commission, all under the Post Office Committee. So he racked up these things through the Post Office Committee, even though he never has been a chairman of the Post Office Committee.

JF: Now, in him doing these things to get more staff, what was the purpose of the more staff?
JG: Well, I guess maybe Parkinson’s—I mean, not him, Parkinson’s law—you know, work expense to fulfill your personnel, versus…. Form doesn’t always follow function. But I personally believe that part of it was ambition on the part of Terry and Dick, that they were always looking for ways to expand the staff. And another part of it I think was there was a plan, if not articulated, that as we got more specialized and more competent, his national aspirations…. Because remember, Mo ran for president in 1976. He ran for majority leader in, what, 1974?

JF: No, majority leader was 1970.

JG: Gee, was it that early?

JF: I believe so. He was running against John McCormack in 1968.

JG: I remember McCormack, I remember Hale Boggs. So he ran for majority leader two years after McCormack?

JF: Right.

JG: So then there was an interregnum where he turned his attention to planning to run for president.

JF: Right. You weren’t in the office when he ran for the Speakership yet, were you?

JG: No, it was right before I got there. But I was there for the majority leader thing.

JF: Right, I did want to ask you about that, too, what your memories are about that race. I know, from what I understand—well, one, whose idea was it? Was it entirely Mo’s idea, was he encouraged by the staff?

JG: Oh, I’m sure he was encouraged by the staff. I think he was also encouraged by…. There was a group of reform Democrats. They were called the Democratic Study Group. These had coalesced after—I guess after the McCormack election. I remember there was a guy named John Brademas, who was a congressman from Indiana, who founded it. And Mo was a founding member. And this was a group of members, reform Democrats—that’s what they called them—who would meet and talk about policy, legislative issues before the Congress. They created a formal organization, hired an executive director, who started putting out legislative bulletins, analyses of bills, position papers, that members could use—supporting the members who were in the caucus. All Democrats were focusing on those who were in the Democratic Study Group. Mo was very active in that. We paid money; we took money from our clerk hire and used it to pay part of the executive director. Things like that.

So after the majority leader thing—and they were very active in it—in the interregnum period I think it was encouraged by many of those members. That’s where
Dick Kolbe [phonetic] was. In fact, Dick’s recently retired staffers’ last job was running the Democratic Study Group.

JF: So he was encouraged by the Democratic Study Group to run for majority leader?

JG: Not as a group, but these individual members, who became very good friends of his. There was a group of them, you could identify them by name. And I think over those two years…. Because they formed also the core of the members who wrote him the letters saying, “You should run for president.”

JF: Okay, they were the same core people?

JG: That’s right.

JF: What happened with that race, because as I understand that you and Terry were very confident in a certain amount of votes (JG: So was Mo.) and those votes didn’t come.

JG: No. We were relying on, first, Mo. Mo was talking to every member individually, and he had the same counts, which means that Mo was being lied to, he was lied to. But Terry and I were also talking to their staff people. And of course we were getting a very positive response. But later Terry and I analyzed this that the staffers are always more liberal than their bosses, and they desperately wanted Mo to be majority leader. We think they were reflecting their hopes, and probably weren’t listening as closely to their bosses as they thought they were.

JF: Do you think these two failed seniority system challenges in the long run hurt Mo or helped him?

JG: Well, helped him or hurt him to do what? See, the thing about Mo is that to the press, he was a winner, because he’d taken on the establishment, and he was getting beat by people who the press felt were old reprobates anyway. So it was the establishment screwing the reformers again, in a place that desperately needed reforming. So if he’d won, it would have been a great victory. But if he lost, he didn’t lose that much, to the press, the national press. And a lot of this at this point, you were focused on the national press. How is Time magazine going to play it? Or how is the long piece that Larry King did for Mo in Harper’s, and that kind of stuff.

JF: I understand there was a short period after the race where Mo considered going other directions, possibly coming back here and teaching law, or running against [Paul] Fannin for Senate.

JG: Well, that’s somebody else’s fantasy. I mean in the sense that Mo might have said it in a moment of disgust. But no, Mo was wedded to the House.

JF: So he had no serious ideas of running against Fannin for Senate?
JG: Oh, no. I don’t think we ever had a conversation about even doing any polling. I mean, it never got to the stage of, “Let’s go check the polls.”


JG: And he never thought much of the Senate anyway—institutionally. Mo was a man of the House.

JF: As I understand it, about two weeks after he lost the majority leader race, you wrote a memo in which you voiced the idea of possibly looking to presidential politics. I assume by then—I guess . . . backing up, when did the idea of Mo running for president first surface?

JG: This would have been 1972?

JF: Well, 1970 was the race, so it would have been 1970 that you wrote that memo.

JG: Are you sure it was that early? I mean, it’s entirely possible. I mean, Terry and I were very ambitious for Mo.

JF: I’ve just got “one week after losing to Hale Boggs,” that you’d written a memo.

JG: Well, that’s about right.

JF: So was that you and Terry, for the most part?

JG: I wrote the memo. I know the memo. I think I may even have a copy of it somewhere. But yes, I remember, and I remember we talked about it. I think I even laid out some tactical information as to why it would make sense, from the Electoral College standpoint, I think, and how we might make it happen. And this had to do… How did it come up? Gosh, that’s a long time ago. Well, I remember that.

JF: This may not be accurate—this is based on . . .

JG: See, I still have a memory of it being later, like 1974, somewhere in there. But anyway, if it says “two weeks after Hale Boggs beat us,” that would have been what it would be.

JF: Okay. Well, that can be verified. But had Mo been thinking along those lines as well?

JG: No. Not in a way that I noticed it, from a staff standpoint. We were totally focused on the majority leader’s race. Mo had always wanted to be president, in his mind. One of the things about Mo is, he’s closed-mouthed. Even to his staff. Policy and all, that is great. But his own ambition and how he sees things happening, he generally keeps it
close to the vest, until there was a reason for it to germinate, or for him to bring it up. So I don’t have any memories, early in those years, of him talking openly that really, we ought to think about running for president.

JF: But you and Terry definitely had that in mind?

JG: Oh, yes—and Olsen, but less so. And Roger hated it. He didn’t want to talk to us about it. He said, “He’s a congressman!” He’d storm off and go to the cafeteria or something. Roger and I became good friends in those last three years or so, and we would go and have breakfast almost every day together, before the workday started, and talk about things. We became very good friends.

JF: When you worked with Muskie, and then later with McGovern, did that have something to do with sort of being a hands-on experience for running a presidential campaign? Did you and Terry have in mind using those to get the experience?

JG: Not at the time. Actually, when we were really ramping-up for the presidency in 1970, that would have been—Kansas City Convention was 1974, right? Or was it 1975? When was the midterm? It would have been 1974.


JG: In the period, say, the late summer of 1974, leading up to the Kansas City Convention, which we used as a dress rehearsal, if you will, for a mock convention kind of atmosphere. We had recruited members of Congress and staff to—whatever the hell they did, some sort of a mock…. I don’t remember the details. But it had to do with McGovern reforms from the McGovern Commission. I don’t even know if they do it anymore, but they did then. It was in that period of time that we actively were talking about that Mo would be a candidate for president, telling people that. So that means we had prepped for it, going back probably eight or nine months before that. So probably all of 1974, leading up to the midterm, that period. And then we were active into the campaign in 1975. When did Mo announce? Probably in early spring of 1975.

JF: 1974

JG: He had announced by 1974?

JF: He announced two years early. He was the first ever to do that.

JG: Yes. Well, that would make sense, based on the Kansas City Convention. We were raising money then, I remember. We hired our first staff.

JF: Well, I remember I went back there in January of 1974, I think it was.

JG: Before the midterm. So you were in Kansas City?
JF: I was not at the Kansas City thing. I did go to a Young Democrat convention at one point, but you all hired me for Washington, with the presidential campaign in mind.

JG: So that would have been 1974.


JG: Right. Is that when Susan came back?

JF: That was later, because I then worked in the congressional office for a year before moving over to the campaign, and I was the first one in the campaign office, and then it started filling up with Susan and….

JG: You and Ed Coyle?

JF: Actually, Ed came later. I was there by myself with about four phones for a while. (laughs)

JG: Is that right?

JF: How did Ella feel about all of this?

JG: Well, I have to say that Ella and I had an artificial relationship. I don’t think she ever liked me or trusted me, and I never liked her or trusted her. So what you did is you had a level of politeness, camaraderie. I’d been to their house many times, smoked dope with her, and all that, but Ella had a very vindictive streak to her. And what I was most conscious of, as was repeatedly told me by Terry and Dick Olson particularly is “don’t get on her bad side.” So what I did is I just focused my attentions when she was around, to stay on her good side. If she wanted some weird-ass thing, then I would make sure that it got taken care of. Those were the easy things. It was the hard things that caused me heartburn with Ella. So how she felt about it, Ella wore everything—she loved being the candidate’s wife, and all the perks, as she saw them, that came with it. She came to expect things: there would always be a car for her. If needed there would always be this or that, you know, because she was the candidate’s wife.

JF: She had an assistant?

JG: Yes, she had two! She had Dee, who became that; and then she had this other tall blonde who worked in some other congressional office, who was a friend of Mo’s or something. Was it Frank Thompson? She worked for one of these machine Democrats from Baltimore, Maryland—I don’t remember which one. She was a big tall drink of water.
JF: I remember her, but I can’t think of her name.

JG: But those three. They were all blondes, they were all that peroxide blonde, and that was her entourage. She loved it. I mean, that was the part she liked. And I just stayed out of her way. What I would get would be a phone call from her about some outrage. There was the time that she wanted me to authorize spending a huge chunk of money for her to go shopping for clothes in New York on some weekend thing, because she needed them for her appearance at the convention—all these new clothes, which, by the way, included a—she wanted a fur coat. These clothes and all this were in the range of maybe upwards of $10,000.

JF: And what budget was this supposed to come out of?

JG: The campaign. That’s why she was calling me. And we had devised—well, I had devised, telling Dick and Roger about it, in particular, that whenever Ella would call me about money, meaning she wants more or something, which was not an unusual occurrence, my immediate response, if I couldn’t deal with it would be to say, “Well, I’ll have to check with our campaign treasurer.” We had a campaign treasurer named Stanley Kurz. Did you ever know Stanley?

JF: I remember a lot of stories about him.

JG: Okay, Stanley was Mo’s army comrade in arms in World War II. They shared a tent together and all that. And Mo remembered him—he had gone on to be a lawyer and accountant, very successful Westchester County guy. Mo prevailed upon him and asked him to get involved in the campaign on the financial side, and Stanley did. He ran through all those millions, it was his job.

JF: He was very protective of that for Mo, wasn’t he?

JG: That’s what I knew! So I would tell Ella, “Well, I have to check with the campaign treasurer,” meaning Stanley. And Ella generally knew that I’d call Stanley, and Stanley would say, “Are you crazy?! It’s illegal. You can’t do this, you can’t do that.” So, okay, I’d go back and tell her and say…. And I know that she wouldn’t do it, because Mo and he were so close. He would just say that. But she would do shit like that. I mean, there were occasions when she wanted to go to a—Mo, say, was going to do an event in Palm Beach. So she would want to go and bring two or three of her friends, and have the campaign pick it up, and they were going to stay at some fancy-dancy villa or something. And if it wasn’t on the campaign itinerary, which was being staffed by Ron Pettine and his staff, I would refer them, I’d say, “Well, gee, this is outside the campaign staff money. We’ll have to check with Stanley.” She grew to hate me and Stanley because…. And then when the American Express fiasco hit, the shit hit the fan that morning. I still remember it.

JF: Remind me of that.
JG: Well, we had been running Mo’s campaign. You have to realize, a campaign has cash flow requirements, just like anything. Our campaign had cash flow requirements that were day-to-day. And that is we had a chartered jet that had to have fuel and labor. We had hotels for staff, hotels for media—they would get reimbursed eventually. But with cash flow, you had to have it up front. There was a particular point in the campaign, towards the end, where Paul Tully—it started in New York. There was a big event in New York where they had put a boat out near the Statue of Liberty or something. They had to rent a boat and all the appurtenances, and Paul got ahold of the credit card that had been jealously guarded by Ron to pay the cash, used an American Express card for all of the stuff. Well, once that card was physically in use by Tully and whoever else, they started charging daily operating costs of the campaign to this American Express card.

JF: Without people realizing it?

JG: They knew. But you see, you know these campaign groupies—they’re single-minded, “We’re gonna win. This is somebody else’s problem. We’re not worried about the bill. We’re worrying about electing Mo Udall,” as they saw it. But these were not thieves. We would have had the money wired up from our—you know. And a lot of it was through a bank note that was predicated on our campaign finance law, where you got reimbursements from the campaign finance law, matching funds, all that. But it was all a complicated set of transactions.

JF: But the problem was, they were spending money, using this credit card that you weren’t keeping track of, because you didn’t know about it.

JG: That’s right. And money was still coming in, and could have paid for it, but of course left hand, right hand. I’m in Washington managing a lot of the operational stuff, the money, a lot of this stuff. And so I had no idea that sitting up there in Weehawken, New Jersey, they were spending $10,000 for a rally, that nobody had sent me a voucher requirement for, for anything. And then later on you find out the reason they didn’t is they were using the American Express card.

So there we are, and one morning—it was a Sunday morning—there’s a knock on the door at Mo’s house. And the campaign, Mo is home that weekend. Two guys in business suits are there, Ella’s there, Mo’s there, and they introduce themselves as lawyers for American Express, and that his balance was being called, that they had to come up with the money. And it was like hundreds of thousands of dollars. And Ella gets this American Express bill for, I forget, let’s say, $200,000. And she about went into a shit fit. I’m at home, I get this call, and she’s screaming at me. I didn’t know about it, because again, it’s a closed circle up there with the guys that were doing it. So what we had to do is, we had to go and—he pulled in Stewart as his lawyer, and had another lawyer in there. I think Tim May might have been brought in. So they negotiated with the American Express people, not to cancel the thing. We gave them maybe half of it right then, and we showed them the cash flow, where the money would come from, in terms of the matching funds and revenue. And so what they did is, they didn’t cancel us,
but they didn’t allow it to be used until we were clear. But it was that episode where Ella just went berserk. I remember.

JF: Did her demands for money or perks decrease after that?

JG: I don’t remember having any great requests from her anytime in the latter part of the campaign. She was traveling with Mo a lot. He would go with her, and they would get a hotel, they would do whatever they did. But I don’t recall….