

C-SPAN Interview

Guest: Sen. Russell Long (D-LA)

One hour interview (selected quotes below)

Air time: December 25, 1985

9:30 am, 7:00 and 10:30 pm and 3:00 am EST

BPL: "Sen. Long, some people when they come to the Senate, stay 'til everything breaks down. Others leave on their own time. It seems like you've done that. Why?"

Long: "I just think that 68 would be a good age to leave the Senate.... I can still do some things that might be useful for the country or useful for myself. I'll just decide what that's going to be after I leave the Senate.... I didn't want to be hauled out by the way of a casket. I much preferred to go out while I was in good health."

BPL: "Did going from the majority to the minority make any difference to you?"

Long: "Oh, it makes a big difference. There's not near as much burden on you. You have a lot more free time (if there's such a thing as free time in the Senate these days when you're one of the ranking members.) But it does make a difference. You have less power, but then on the other hand, you have more time to call your own."

BPL: "What's the difference between the House and Senate? You've watched these two institutions over the last many years."

Long: "I never did serve in the House to give the House a fair appraisal. There are a lot of differences. The House is such a large body (435) that they cannot and don't accord the rights to the individual member that you have in the U.S. Senate. There's no such thing as a person in the House being privileged day in and day out, to talk as long as he feels like talking on the floor. We (the Senate) limit that right, but we do only with the consent of the senators. The House doesn't have that free debate. The House has these rules: strictly limit the number of amendments offered, who can be recognized and how much time they can speak. I'll turn that TV monitor of the House chamber on, and see this thing day in and out and of some fellow asking for recognition. And the presiding officer asks, 'For what purpose does the senator rise?' It'd be hard to ask that of a senator. In effect, saying that the chair will recognize if the chair's interest is there and wants to recognize him. But he (the presiding officer) first wants to know what he (the representative) wants to talk about. That's not how it is in the Senate. When a person asks for recognition, ordinarily, you talk about whatever he wants to talk about, and make whatever motion he wants to make."

BPL: "Is there a difference in being a member of the 'club' and not being in the 'club'?"

Long: "The Senate, the way it is today as it has always been in my time, that is when you make that speech out there, you should be making it to influence senators and to change votes. There are all kinds of speeches you can make. Many times people are not making speeches of course for home consumption -- to tell the folks back home something that would help people think favorable of them. But if you are really trying to serve your people to the best

Sen. Russell Long (D-LA)

(con'td) Long: advantage of the people whom you represent, you oughta be saying those things that would persuade others (senators) to vote the way that would benefit those in your state."

BPL: "The early days, '48 until now, have you seen things change much?"

Long: "A lot."

BPL: "Good or bad?"

Long: "Both ways. The worst thing is the Senate has drifted more and more away from respect for the rules. We have rules. Let's take one single example, you pass a bill in the Senate, you pass a bill in the House. Usually there's a lot of differences between them. If it's a very important, controversial bill, you part members from both Houses to come together and try to workout the differences. They're not supposed to come back with any legislation in those bills, that was not any of the House bill or Senate bill when they workout their differences. Sometimes they (bills) do. Just the other day we came back, and there were a lot of changes that were as they say, 'beyond the scope of conference'--wasn't in their bill, wasn't in our bill, and wasn't a reasonable compromise of the language in controversy. The majority leader managed to pass that conference report by moving to overrule the chair when the occupant of the chair was doing his duty in ruling that conference report was out of order. And he, in doing so, that presiding officer sought the advice of the parliamentarian--sweet, decent conscientious man--doing his duty as the good Lord gave him the right to see it. So, in effect, we stulify ourselves. I didn't. I voted to uphold the chair and uphold that parliamentarian. We stulified ourselves by doing that. By exceeding the authority that the senators had to bring in something to compromise the difference between the two houses. Now, under that precedent, one could pass anything. It could be a bill that started out to simply say that it was against the law to drive without having your seat belts buckled, and wind up being something against the law to sell candy at interstate commerce or something like that. It has nothing whatsoever to do with what you started out with. That completely violates the right of the individual senators to oppose something every step of the way if they don't think it's right. Now, that type of thing would have been unheard of when I first came to the Senate. You just wouldn't do things that way. And more and more, this is a rule rather than an exception of the chair, most of those senators vote not on whether the chair is right or not, but they will vote on whether they want to see the end result. If I'm voting down the presiding officer and overruling the chair and the parliamentarian (they're doing their duty as sworn by law and by their conscience.) But to vote them down in order to pass a bill, which is out of order at that point. People just do it regularly based on whether they're for the bill or against the bill. But you shouldn't do it that way. You oughta do it based on whether that presiding officer made a fair call.

There's an old question, 'do the ends justify the means.' The answer is a matter of degree. Do you need engage in foul play or violate the rights of other people in order to pass a bill that you want to pass? Their answer is practically never. If you offer an amendment and it's ruled out of order on that bill, you can always find a bill on which it (an amendment) should be of order and offer your amendment. On certain types of bills,

(cont'd) Long: for good reasons, example, you shouldn't offer an amendment that had nothing to do with appropriating money and paying for the cost of government on such a bill. And yet, senators do. Then they appeal from the ruling of the chair when the chair has done its duty, and people will vote them and vote the chair down and violate their own rules by doing so. I say they stultify themselves when they do that. They demean themselves and they demean the Senate. It's like voting to say that truth is not what it is, that black is white, that right is wrong. All that does is make a lot more trouble further on down the road. The only way one can expect in the long run that his rights would be respected, and the rights of those whom he represents will be respected, is if he respects the rights of others.

The thing that's better is that we give new senators the right to move on to more significant committees a lot quicker. Most of these senators the day they arrive here, are part of one of those five committees (the five most sought after committees.) When I came here, it was unheard of for a freshman senator to be a part of a major committee when he first arrived. Now, that gives them a chance to make more of a contribution, and I think it's a good thing. It gives him a chance to more effective. We don't have as good a housekeeping nowadays as we did in those days. That's because we do put these junior members into more significant positions when they first arrive."

BPL: "What do you think of the institution itself. Is it still a pretty good place to work?"

Long: "The Senate is still the best job in government. Better job than being governor of the state, better job than being president of the United States, better job than being in the president's cabinet."

BPL: "As you leave the Senate, what warning, or what things do you want to say to your colleagues in the country, that they better worry about. Or from your perspective, and the ways that you've seen things happen in the last 30-40 years, that we're going to be in trouble if we don't do something about."

Long: "The senators are not respecting the rules the way they did when I came here. When you violate the rules, you're violating the rights of other senators. If you want to protect the rights of american citizens, you also expect the U.S. Senate and senators ought to expect it of one another -- to respect the rights of every senator by abiding by their our rules. And that's a rule made to benefit all of us. If you believe in this great government of ours, you ought to want to preserve it. And if you want to preserve the Senate, you should preserve the rules of the Senate."

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SUITE 155
400 NORTH CAPITOL STREET, N.W.
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20001
202 / 737-3220

C-SPAN Interview

Guest: SEN. PAUL LAXALT (R-NV)

Air time: December 25, 1985

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The following are selected quotes from an hour-long interview recorded 12/6/85

C-SPAN Host: Bruce Collins

BC: When did you first think about getting involved in public affairs, elected office?

Laxalt: "...Shortly after I came out of law school, I ran for District Attorney... and was elected, but I didn't intend at that time to establish a public or political career at all. I served four years then went into private practice. Probably when it all started was when a cowboy actor -- I seem to be attracted to those -- by the name of Rex Bell was lt. governor at the time and he was going to run for governor. He came from Las Vegas and, to my great surprise and shock, went shopping up North in our part of the world of Nevada and decided that I should be his political bride. So we ran as a ticket, he for governor and I for lt. governor, and that's essentially how it started."

BC: You talk about staying on (in Washington) until the end of the President's term. I guess you'll remain as General Chairman of the Republican Party?

Laxalt: "Well, I'll stay surely until the end of next year. I'm on now for a two year term and that will be through the end of '86. What I'll do thereafter is still an open question."

BC: In that open question, do you think that the answer will be more politics?

Laxalt: "Can't tell. It's too early to tell. I don't think that I'm going to strip myself completely away from the political scene, I'm too deeply involved. In all likelihood, I'll certainly be involved in the '88 elections in some fashion. I'll continue to be active in the party. So I don't intend to take a political walk and say I'll have no more politics. I know myself better

Laxalt: now. I've just got too much invested in the Republican party, the President and his programs to do that."

BC: Is it rewarding to you personally, the work of the Senate?

Laxalt: "It is in some respects, but it's frustrating too. There's a high level of frustration in the Senate -- we spin our wheels a lot around here. And it (the frustration) is reflected by the fact that many, many Senators have decided to leave and that is unfortunate. But it's (the Senate) very complex, it's very busy. You have a sense of 'deja vu' -- we constantly vote on the same things all of the time. So I think to that extent, lately at least, it hasn't been all that satisfying an experience for several of us, including me."

BC: What would make it better?

Laxalt: "I would think that if they simplified the process, that would help greatly... If you take a controversial issue like the MX or any of the social issues, you vote them on the Appropriations process, you catch a vote on the Authorization process, you catch it on a Budget resolution -- so as I say, it's sort of like sitting on a ferris wheel or merry-go-round...these same figures keep coming around and 'round and 'round. You're constantly doing all these various votes that you've done many, many times before. I think the process has to be simplified and hopefully in time it will be...I predict to you that the level of frustration is so high around here that it's going to happen."

A few days ago...all the Senators, Republican and Democrats alike, congregated in a room to talk about the quality of life in the United States Senate. And the essence of it was the uncertainty around here...the great frustration of the Senate is the uncertainty...you never know where you are around here. You never know interms of scheduling, you never know when you can be with with your family, you can't reasonably schedule a night, and you don't know whether recesses are in place. There's constant uncertainty and this applies even to our leadership. They attempt to straighten it out, but the fact is the strength of the Senate -- which is 100 very capable, independent people -- is also the source of much of its problems. There's too little institutional spirit here now...there's no institutional memory...we've had a huge change in the United States Senate post-Watergate...you lost the old timers...now over a period of time you have people who are really -- as Senator Eagleton (D-MO) said on the Senate floor the other day -- you have

Laxalt: 'incipient legislative anarchy' and he's absolutely right. Everybody's on there own. It's one-on-one, 'hurray for me' and to hell with the institution -- it's unfortunate...My own view is that as many of the Senators mature and as many of them realize the Senate is not functioning well now -- and you can't find one Senator to tell you it is -- when they come to the realization that the quality of life is being endangered, the institution is being endangered (and) as a result the country is suffering, (then) you're going to find some meaningful reforms."

BC: Did you ever want to be the Majority Leader of the Senate?

Laxalt: "No I never did...I think the Majority Leader is probably one of the most difficult jobs anywhere...a Majority Leader is sort of like a den mother. You have to massage 99 other massive egos...That's the kind of job I just don't want. My temperament doesn't suit it at all."

BC: Did you ever want to run for Vice President?

Laxalt: "Never. No. There was a lot of speculation about my wanting to run for Vice President. I asked to be taken off the list, but the President wouldn't permit it. So, I went in on the last laundry list, but I had no aspirations then, nor do I now, to be Vice President."

BC: (Will you run) For President?

Laxalt: "Well, that's something that I'm reserving an opinion on -- and I'm not trying to be coy about it. A lot of the 'Reaganauts' around the country with whom I've worked a long while have implored me not to close the door and I'm not. So I've left it on the basis that I certainly cannot do anything as General Chairman of the (Republican) Party during that period. So at least through '88, I'll do nothing and haven't done anything at all. In '87 I'll take a look at the field and see whether or not one of our many good candidates is taking hold. My principle interest would be really to see that we've got a strong, viable candidate to carry on the Reagan legacy. If it appears that no one is taking hold, then we'll take a look at it."

BC: Explain the flap over the funding of a recent RNC poll of '88 candidates.

Laxalt: "...The RNC (Republican National Committee) becomes a focus of controversy in all presidential campaigns...Frank Fahrenkopf has indicated to me, and we've made it clear in writing to all the various candidates -- the ones we know about -- that the RNC is going to be neutral in this campaign. As far as these polls are concerned and things of that kind, we're going to establish

Laxalt Interview cont'd --

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Laxalt: a structure so that each of the presidential campaigns will have representatives working directly with the RNC, so that we can minimize this kind of conflict. We want to keep the RNC out of '88 completely. Its (the RNC's) business is party building and working on the state and local candidates."

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