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Maine - Senior Senator

William S. Cohen (R)

Of Bangor — Elected 1978

Born: Aug. 28, 1940, Bangor, Maine.

Education: Bowdoin College, B.A. 1962; Boston U., LL.B. 1965.

Occupation: Lawyer.

Family: Separated; two children.

Religion: Unitarian.

Political Career: Bangor City Council, 1969-72; mayor of Bangor, 1971-72; U.S. House, 1973-79.

Capitol Office: 322 Hart Bldg. 20510; 224-2523.



In Washington: Celebrated by the media a dozen years ago for his agonizing in the House over whether to vote for President Nixon's impeachment, Cohen manages to project a permanent aura of soulful sincerity that includes well-publicized questioning of politics and his own role in it.

As a House member, he wrote a few years ago, "I wondered why I wanted to participate in this silliness and stupefaction." After one year in the Senate, he published a diary in which he complained that he and his colleagues "careened from ... speech to speech, crisis to crisis, without the time to reflect on whether we have simply doubled our deeds without fixing our destinations."

But whatever one may think of all this public soul-searching, it has not prevented Cohen from operating as artfully in the Senate as others who do not seem to share his doubts.

He still attracts media attention without much difficulty, especially when he appears to be reliving his Watergate role by criticizing a Republican president. As revelations about arms sales to Iran unfolded late in 1986, Cohen was perhaps the most outspoken Republican critic of the way the administration — and particularly President Reagan himself — had handled the affair. The president "should have known" what was happening, Cohen said, warning that the controversy could be more damaging in the long run than Watergate.

Cohen has a prominent forum for espousing those views, as a member of the special committee investigating the Iran-contra affair. That and his role on the Intelligence Committee — even as minority vice-chairman, he is sure to be sought out by reporters — should make Cohen one of the more visible members of the 100th Congress.

In the long run, however, Cohen's more significant contributions probably will be on the Armed Services Committee, where he is a

key member of a centrist group seeking alternatives to Reagan's defense policies. Using a combination of confrontation and negotiation, he has been able to get both the White House and the Senate to make some shifts in their stands on nuclear weapons and arms control.

Cohen did not express much interest in arms control during much of his first term, and had strongly opposed the SALT II treaty. But, early in 1983, he was the first to put forth publicly a new concept in arms control: a nuclear "build-down" with the Soviet Union. Under the concept, the two superpowers would agree to eliminate one or more existing weapons for each new one deployed.

Reagan quickly expressed personal interest in Cohen's plan, but it ran into strong resistance, both from administration hard-liners and liberal arms-control groups. Cohen had a strong bargaining chip with which to pressure the administration — the tenuous congressional support for the MX missile. Working with Democratic defense expert Sam Nunn and others, Cohen arranged a deal in which he offered support for the controversial missile in exchange for administration backing of the build-down idea.

It took months of behind-the-scenes negotiations and public cajoling by Cohen, but eventually the deal went through. Even though the "build-down" plan was rejected by the Armed Services Committee, the administration accepted it, in an agreement some dubbed "the Treaty of Pennsylvania Avenue."

But the Soviets rejected the "build-down," and interest in it gradually faded. Instead, the focus of the arms debate in the 99th Congress shifted to Reagan's strategic defense initiative; there too, Cohen had a considerable impact.

Although he expressed doubts about the pace and direction of efforts to develop SDI,

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Cohen backed Reagan's early funding requests. By 1986, he had adopted a more critical stance. Allied again with Nunn, he offered an amendment in Armed Services to cut proposed SDI funding by 25 percent. More importantly, in the long run, the amendment also urged that the program be directed away from the possibly unachievable goal of a nationwide defense system, and toward the more limited goal of protecting the U.S. missile force from a surprise attack.

Splitting from other Republicans on the committee, Cohen provided the crucial vote that allowed the amendment to carry by a 10-9 vote. Later, the full Senate endorsed the Cohen-Nunn position.

Cohen's other work on Armed Services has focused on more prosaic questions. As chairman of the Sea Power Subcommittee during the 99th Congress, he had a chance to promote the cause of Maine's Bath Iron Works, where the Navy builds many of its ships. He developed a close relationship with Gary Hart of Colorado, some of whose military reform ideas he shared, and joined with Hart to write a spy thriller, "The Double Man," about a moderate senator caught in a web of terrorist intrigue.

Combining interests related to his posts on both Armed Services and Governmental Affairs, Cohen also has sponsored a series of proposals to place stricter controls on government, and especially defense, contracting and procurement. He has pushed legislation to require more competition in the awarding of contracts, to strengthen penalties against use of "kickbacks" by contractors seeking government work and to toughen federal anti-fraud laws.

While those measures attracted wide support, Cohen ran into problems with his bill to make it easier for the government to move against people who defrauded it of relatively small amounts of money. Noting that high legal costs often discouraged the government from attacking small-scale fraud, Cohen proposed that cases involving less than \$100,000 be settled through a quasi-judicial administrative process. That stirred up intense opposition from some defense contractors, who were able to block Cohen's bill from coming to the floor. He finally got its provisions attached to the 1986 deficit-reduction bill, but only after some heated floor debate with senior Armed Services Republican Strom Thurmond of South Carolina.

At Home: If there were ever any doubts that Cohen ranks among the most popular politicians in Maine history, they were dispelled on Election Day, 1984. Cohen won reelection with a higher percentage of the vote

than any other Senate candidate in the state since direct election of senators began in 1914; his 404,000 votes were a Maine record.

Over his years in Maine politics, Cohen has built a loyal following that cuts across party lines and forms the core of one of the smoothest-running political organizations of its kind anywhere. His office churns out newsletters for almost every constituency group, and carefully tends his relations with both the press and home-state politicians. In his television advertising, Cohen balances his reputation as a rising star in Washington with an image as a family man, interested in sports and still willing to help his father in his Bangor bakery. It is a combination to which Maine voters resonate.

The results would have been less lopsided had Cohen faced the candidate Democrats wanted — Gov. Joseph E. Brennan. But Brennan made it clear early in 1984 that he was not interested in trying to take on Cohen.

Into his place stepped state House Majority Leader Elizabeth H. Mitchell, a transplanted South Carolinian who had previously been focusing on a run for governor in 1986. In announcing her candidacy, Mitchell laid out the twin pillars of her effort — she would concentrate on the nuclear freeze, and would accept no money from political action committees.

Mitchell's outspoken liberalism gave her a dedicated band of volunteer supporters, but her rejection of PAC money led much of the state's Democratic establishment to write off her campaign from the start as hopelessly quixotic. She had deliberately sacrificed any opportunity to compete with the incumbent's highly sophisticated campaign.

Two events made Mitchell's problems worse. At a junior high school meeting on the effects of nuclear war, anti-nuclear activist Dr. Helen Caldicott labeled Cohen a "corporate prostitute," a charge that brought blasts not only from the Cohen camp but from newspapers and politicians around the state. Then Mitchell ran advertisements linking Cohen's votes on defense spending with contributions from military contractors; Cohen responded by calling the charges "slandorous."

Even if they were not serious mistakes, as some Democrats as well as Cohen's strategists believed, these tactics did Mitchell no good in the end. Cohen emerged without a scratch.

Cohen all but assured himself of a statewide political future on the day he spoke out for Nixon's impeachment, carving an image not only as a Republican of conscience, but as a man who knew how to give a good speech.

His good looks, easygoing manner and

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careful questioning were perfect for television. As one of just six Judiciary Committee Republicans favoring impeachment, he drew wide media attention, most of it favorable. *Time* magazine named him one of America's 200 future leaders, and the Jaycees called him one of the 10 outstanding young men in the nation.

From that point on, his elevation to the Senate was pretty much a matter of time.

If there had been no Watergate, however, the odds are he would be in the Senate by now anyway. His Judiciary Committee performance merely added to the "rising star" reputation he had carried with him from his high school and college days on the basketball court.

He thought about becoming a Latin scholar, but went to law school instead and finished among the top 10 members of his class. It was less than a decade from law school to the Bangor mayoralty.

Cohen became mayor in 1971, after three years on the City Council. But he did not hold the job very long. Rep. William D. Hathaway was running for the Senate the same year, and his 2nd District seat was open. Cohen won it easily, doing exceptionally well for a Republi-

can in many Democratic areas.

After the 1974 period of Watergate celebrity, Cohen began to think about the proper timing for a Senate effort — he spent nearly a year considering a 1976 campaign against Maine's senior senator, Edmund S. Muskie. Private polls showed him close to Muskie, but challenging the state's most durable Democrat was no sure thing. Prudence dictated a two-year wait and a campaign against Hathaway, more liberal and less of an institution.

Knowing he was in trouble, Hathaway worked hard to save himself in 1978, but Cohen had almost no weaknesses. The personal glamour of 1974 had never really worn off, and state and national media refurbished it for the campaign. Cohen shifted slightly to the right, arguing that Hathaway was too liberal for most of Maine. He also worked for Democratic votes, concentrating his efforts in such places as Portland's Irish-Catholic Munjoy Hill section.

Hathaway had not done anything to offend the voters, but the challenger overwhelmed him. He was held in a three-way contest to 34 percent, one of the lowest figures in modern times for any Senate incumbent.

Committees

Select Intelligence (Vice Chairman)

Armed Services (4th of 9 Republicans)

Protection Forces and Regional Defense (ranking); Conventional Forces and Alliance Defense; Strategic Forces and Nuclear Deterrence

Governmental Affairs (3rd of 6 Republicans)

Oversight of Government Management (ranking); Government Efficiency; Federalism and the District of Columbia; Permanent Subcommittee on Investigations.

Select Committee on Secret Military Assistance to Iran and the Nicaraguan Opposition (4th of 5 Republicans)

Special Aging (2nd of 9 Republicans)

Elections

1984 General

William S. Cohen (R) 404,414 (73%)

Elizabeth H. Mitchell (D) 142,626 (26%)

Previous Winning Percentages: 1978 (57%) 1976* (77%)

1974* (71%) 1972* (54%)

* House elections.

Campaign Finance

	Receipts	Receipts from PACs	Expenditures
1984			
Cohen (R)	\$1,158,160	\$421,451 (36%)	\$1,022,134
Mitchell (D)	\$437,517	\$450 (0.1%)	\$428,990

Voting Studies

Year	Presidential Support		Party Unity		Conservative Coalition	
	S	O	S	O	S	O
1986	78	22	63	33	74	25
1985	63	27	55	38	55	32
1984	62	30	42	53	53	47
1983	66	29	60	36	73	23
1982	67	31	62	36	47	52
1981	76	19	69	25	59	36

S = Support

O = Opposition

Key Votes

Produce MX missiles (1985)	Y
Weaken gun control laws (1985)	Y
Reject school prayer (1985)	Y
Limit textile imports (1985)	Y
Amend Constitution to require balanced budget (1986)	N
Aid Nicaraguan contras (1986)	Y
Block chemical weapons production (1986)	N
Impose sanctions on South Africa (1986)	Y

Interest Group Ratings

Year	ADA	ACU	AFL-CIO	CCUS
1986	50	52	20	63
1985	35	55	45	68
1984	80	45	73	28
1983	45	30	47	33
1982	55	50	27	42
1981	35	47	33	76