

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Blue to Red Project

Jeffrey C. Weaver
Interviewed by John C. Davis
August 18, 2020
Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio and video recordings in addition to the transcripts to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.
- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing; and
 - annotations for clarification and identification.

- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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John C. Davis interviewed Jeffrey C. Weaver on August 18, 2020, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

John C. Davis: I am speaking with Mr. Jeff Weaver, currently the vice chancellor for advancement and the chancellor's chief of staff at the University of Arkansas at Monticello. Jeff has kindly agreed to discuss with us his considerable stint in Arkansas politics and government, stemming as a staffer on both campaigns and congressional races and eventually being the campaign manager of one of the most significant and expensive races in Arkansas campaign history in 2014. As we've discussed, this project, the Pryor Center's Blue to Red initiative, investigates and catalogs the history of Arkansas politics, particularly in the last twenty or so years, when we've seen a significant shift, arguably one of the biggest and most dramatic shifts in partisan politics history at the states level in the US going from roughly 2005 to 2015, where you see a significant sea change in constitutional, state level leadership, Senate representation, as well as House membership. Both chambers of the state legislature go not only from majority Democratic, but supermajority Democratic to majority Republican to then supermajority Republican in just a few election cycles. And Mr.

Weaver, we appreciate you taking the time to speak with us today and helping us record this history. We've organized the project in essentially three generations of the GOP in Arkansas. And looking at it, we're seeing that basically there—the first generation in sort of this modern electoral era in Arkansas starts in the 1960s a little bit before, of course, Governor Rockefeller's significant contributions to the party, to the two-party system in Arkansas. We then see the Big Three, as Diane Blair noted in a piece in the 1990s where she reflects on the impact that Bumpers and Pryor and Clinton had in Arkansas politics, but also in the impact they had in sort of stemming the tide, if you will, of Republican politics for quite some time. And we're really seeing that push us into the 1980s and into the early 1990s. And that's roughly the end of that first generation. [00:02:46] The second generation, as we're organizing it, is roughly early 1990s to early twenty-teens, a little bit after 2010 where you see a growing momentum in the Republican Party. You see Southern states around us, around Arkansas, going rather consistently Republican. You see Arkansas voters with a heavy preference and a consistent preference for Republican presidential candidates. And somehow Arkansas Democrats build up essentially a wall for several election cycles, despite the

successes and the gains made by Republicans in certain pockets of the state, certain elections in the state, and certainly at different levels, such as the state legislature and the governor's office. And so you're in a unique position in that you're really covering a large swath of that second generation, the 1990s, the 2000s, up until 2014, 2015. And so we really do appreciate you discussing your background as a congressional staffer and someone who has been involved in Democratic politics at the state level for several years. [00:04:05] So, Jeff, you grew up in Dumas in Southeast Arkansas. And if you would, just tell us a little bit about one of your first political memories in—sort of in the context of Democratic Party politics in Arkansas.

[00:04:21] Jeff Weaver: Sure. Happy to do that. Dr. Davis, first of all, let me just say thank you so much for allowing me this opportunity to kind of talk about a career that I had, which is a pretty long career in terms of political work, government work, working for members of Congress and that sort of thing. You know, most of the time people do that for two, four years at the to—at tops. And I was very fortunate to get to do that for a long time. I also would really like to thank the Pryor Center for making the time and resources available for doing this.

Cataloging this part of Arkansas's history is something that is

just absolutely fascinating to me. And I'm sure it's fascinating to a lot of people whether they're politicians, or history junkies, or if they just really are interested in the way this all went down. One day future generations will see this and learn about a sea change in Arkansas that was very fascinating. I got a—like you said, I got an opportunity to be on a windshield tour of that change. And it was very fortunate to get to do that. [00:05:32] So I did grow up in Dumas. A proud Bobcat in Southeast Arkansas most of my childhood life until I went to the University of Arkansas, Monticello. My father—you know, I really wasn't exposed to politics. I didn't grow up in a political family. My mother is a social worker. My dad is an electrician. And really didn't get interested into partisan politics or any kind of politics or government service until I got to college, until I got to UAM. Like many first-generation college graduates, it was a whole new world for me. I had a mentor that put me under his wing. He happened to be the dean of the social science and behavioral—behavioral social science department here at UAM. And he gave me the opportunity to see, you know, some things that I'd never seen before or hear things I've never heard before. So from him—I honestly didn't know—I assumed congressmen and senators had staff people. Somebody did that. I just never

thought in a million years I could do that, or I would have that opportunity. So one of my earliest political memories is probably watching Jay Dickey and Mike Ross debate each other in [19]99, 2000, somewhere around that time, in the Green Room in the University Center at UAM. I watched that debate, walked out of there wanting to try to help Mike. Little did I know a few years later, he would hire me to be his state director and a dear friend of mine. But at that time I just, you know, pulled a staff person aside and said, "Hey, would you be willing to let me put out yard signs for you?" And they said, "Sure." You know, "Absolutely."

[00:07:21] Another early experience I had was I got a chance in college to go to the Arkansas Political Science Association meeting with a professor of mine. And we had—Dale Bumpers was a speaker there. And so I had an opportunity to, of course, to meet the senator, and that was really neat. But I had lunch next to one of his staff people who later became a friend of mine, and you know, that kind of ha—put that in—bug in my head that, "Hey, you could really become a staff person. You could really do this." And so my idea was, "I need to get to Little Rock. I need to volunteer for the state party. I need to just get involved. I just wanna be a part of it." It seemed interesting to me. I had a young daughter at the time, so I

didn't wanna move to Washington. I wasn't part of that Clinton world that a lot of people in my generation were in, and a lot of them interned in the White House, and I just never had that opportunity because I wanted to stay in Arkansas for other reasons. So I went to graduate school. I was working toward my master's degree in public administration and putting up yard signs for Al Gore. And that was in [19]99, 2000. Kind of volunteering, you know, fielding phone calls and knocking on doors and that sort of thing. And that's when I really, really got the political bug.

[00:08:50] JD: It must have been an interesting time, too, to be at a moment where you've got these very influential figures. You've got an Arkansan in the White House, a decade long—a really—two stints in the Governor's Mansion, Bill Clinton, before he goes to DC. You've got a certain age group of folks around you, as you said, who've gone to DC, who are working in the state. And you also had—once you got into being a congressional staffer, you were working with Democrats who were regarded as those who were maybe more moderate to even conservative on certain issues of national interest. And it seems that Arkansas—one way that Arkansas Democrats were able to sort of stave off a lot of the gains made by Republicans in

other states was to try to moderate or maintain a level of sort of moderation to even conservatism on certain issues. Could you expand a little bit on your time with different members of Congress from the Arkansas delegation who were Blue Dog Democrats, and maybe explain what, to you, that means, to be a Blue Dog Democrat . . .

JW: Yeah.

JD: . . . during that time period?

[00:10:05] JW: Well, I think the reason that Arkansas was able to kinda hold off the Republican wave for so long was a couple of things. I don't think it was one particular thing. Certainly we'd elected a president of United States, so with that there is a lot of emotion around Arkansas. It's a small state, it's an inexpensive state to politi—to play in politically. TV time here is inexpensive compared to some other markets. I mean, if you had a statewide Senate race in New York or California—much more expensive, or Texas even, much more expensive than buying time in Arkansas. You also had a lot of people who played in national politics who had moved to Washington with the Clinton administration. And so there was an affinity for Arkansas politics in there. We had a—we had great candidates, fantastic personalities. I think that we really, really worked really hard in

pressing the flesh and attending, you know, the Pink Tomato Festival and the Hope Watermelon Festival and the Gillett Coon Supper. And you know, those—Arkansas is small enough where you can still make a difference doing that, I think. [00:11:27]

We had a—you kind of called it a wall, but I kind of think of it as a bank. We kind of had a savings account of people who were former staffers, people who had been involved in politics from a young age because of the Clinton world and the Bumpers world and the Pryor world. You had people who were connected or who were one or two people removed. So you know, it was a time—it was a really exciting time for almost anyone with a political science degree or anyone who had an interest in politics for the long haul or for a career—or for a short time, a year or two, or even for a career, that they really had an opportunity to be involved and make a difference. [00:12:08] Then, like you said, most of the members that I worked for, or all the members I worked for, were, except for Mark Pryor because he wasn't in the House of Representatives, wa—at some point was a member of the Blue Dog Coalition, which is—there's a caucus, the Blue Dog caucus up there, and they mostly focus on fiscal issues. But they took a couple of more conservative stances, but just generally speaking, Blue Dog Democrats are more conservative

Democrats. When I worked for Marion Berry, he used to give a speech and say they're Blue Dogs because they feel like they been choked to death by the progressive side of the party. And they turned blue. And but, yeah, and I think that because of those things I mentioned—also, like I said before, we had really good candidates. So I worked for Senator Blanche Lincoln for a short time. I worked for Congressman Marion Berry. I was Mike Ross's state director for a long time. And then I ran Senator Pryor's campaign for reelection in 2014. And I think that what we saw out of all those is that they worked really hard, they stayed on the road. They kinda had several point people in every county or every town in Arkansas. And they made sure that they touched base with those people often. They attended all those little festivals and parades and things that you need to attend. And they held town hall meetings. And I had one boss tell me that, "You know, if you just show up a couple times a year, if they're upset with you, they'll chew on you a little bit, then they'll let you go, and you're their person." [00:13:51]

And so you know, that was kind of how we approached a lot of that is like we just, you know, we—especially when I worked for Congressman Ross, we would show up to every town of any size in our district at least twice a year, hold town hall meetings.

And yeah, you get a little bit of that, but you also get a lot of support from that. You end up in the newspaper a couple of times a year, and people say, "Wow, he knows where Paris, Arkansas, is at. He knows where Dermott's at. He knows where, you know, Monticello is at." So you know, that—just doing those little things got you a long way in politics at that point.

[00:14:28] JD: You mentioned that your background with—you had a time with Senator Lincoln's office. Also that you've worked under Marion Berry as a staff person for his district, which at that time was growing due to population loss, but mainly hugs the eastern part of the state. And then of course you had several years with Congressman Ross in a district that's more South Arkansas and then sort of meanders up north of Hot Springs and more of the southwestern to western portion of the state. So different demographic groups, different geographics, but same party. And course, if you wouldn't mind talking a little bit about how those differences may have resulted in different levels of staff work both on the sort of party and government side, but also in the campaign sector?

[00:15:26] JW: Sure. Sure. So you know, the—I didn't spend as much time in the Ozarks as I would've liked to but—so most of

my work—obviously Central and Northwest Arkansas because any—regardless of where a member of Congress represents, they're gonna get pulled into projects in Little Rock and Northwest Arkansas and Jonesboro and the larger population areas. You know, we—when I worked for members of the House, we had a pretty good spread of offices, and I'm not—well, I guess they probably still do that now. But we kind of had to make sure that we were in all the population centers. And so—and sometimes we inherited offices from the previous congressmen. You know, you—last thing you wanna do is go in office, and you're elected, and then you snatch one of the offices out of these—one of the towns that, you know, worked hard to convince you to build—put an office there. And so you know, the level of staff work is pretty much the same. And you know, you're dealing with Social Security issues and Medicare-Medicaid issues, veterans benefits day in and day out. A lot of what I did was work on special projects like grants and things like that.

[00:16:49] When you got into some of the Ozark area, you would have a lot of water projects and grants and things like that for water. I'm sure that broadband projects are very—taking a lot of the staff's time right now. And then you spend a lot of time, you know, just attending the regular meetings that,

you know, the regional economic development groups put together, different community leaders. And what's great about Arkansas, and I don't know if other states are like this but, you know, we have a lot of people in smaller towns that—they are the people who wake up and go to bed thinking about their little town. And they put together groups of people, they'll put together other towns and cities, get them together, and meet regularly, and talk about recruiting industry, making life better, making the roads better, water projects, just whatever you can imagine that they wake up and go to sleep thinking about. And a lot of those people take little or no pay at all. And some of them are legislators, some of them are previous legislators, and some of them aren't. Some of them are just, you know, people who care about their community. And so that, you know, that's one thing is—that I really miss is really the people that we worked with every day. There were a lot of them, certainly in South Arkansas, particularly. But did I answer your question?

JD: Oh, yeah, yes.

JW: Yeah.

[00:18:18] JD: So during this time period in the early 2000s—and we can get to the election of 2008 and the years following, when we certainly start to see a real groundswell of sort of grassroots

involvement, both at the state level but also in more national, organized levels for the Republican Party in Arkansas. But just prior to that, if we're looking at your time with Congressmen Berry, with Congressman Ross, a lot of this time overlaps with a time in office when we had an eventually two-term Republican president in George W. Bush from Texas, a presidential candidate who competed and was very successful in the South, despite in 2000 having a Southerner from Tennessee in Al Gore compete against him on the ballot. [00:19:14] Tell me about how that probably—or in your opinion, how it may have affected just the day-to-day operations, both as a staffer on the government side for a Democratic elected official in a state that was, at least at the presidential level, very much in favor of Republican candidates and had been really since the—even the late 1960s, early 1970s or early 1970s. Also on the political side, as somebody who would work on campaigns from time to time, how did that influence the messaging, the campaigning? And did you run into any real issues being a Democratic messenger, if you will, in a state that was more middle of the road to maybe even more conservative, nationally speaking?

[00:20:02] JW: Yeah. To put it bluntly, it's pretty complicated.

George Bush carried Arkansas easily. And so politically

speaking, we—bosses that I worked for couldn't vote with him all the time. But also [*chime in background*—excuse me, sorry about that. Did you hear that? My . . .

JD: I did. It's okay.

JW: . . . my computer. All right. I'll start back over. So to put it bluntly, it was very difficult. We knew that George Bush carried Arkansas easily. A lot of his policy were exactly where my bosses were at the time or close to it. So you had to find those differences where you had to draw differences with the administration. [00:20:55] So a good example of that was Congressman Ross and I were driving by the Hope airport one day, and there were hundreds of FEMA trailers out there. Hundreds. And Mike looked at me, and he said, "What in the world is going on?" He said, "We gotta figure this out. I don't know what this is." And at the time we didn't know they were FEMA trailers, we just knew they were mobile homes that were parked out onto the Hope airport which—Hope airport was an old World War II airport which had a lot of asphalt. I mean, it's a huge airport for a smaller town. But so we dug into that a little bit and realized that FEMA had been buying up surplus mobile homes. And we said, "Wow, that—what are they doing with them?" And then summertime rolled around, and they were just

sitting out there and deteriorating and dropping in value every single day, and the federal government owned these trailers. So certainly, Congressman Ross thought, "Well, I mean, this is something we can make some hay over." And I think that he did an effective job of really showing the amount of waste that was being brought on the American public by purchasing those trailers and just sitting them out there. And I think the idea originally was that FEMA was gonna stage those in different areas of the country so if we had another Hurricane Katrina or another big fire or an earthquake or something like that, well, they could then move those manufactured homes out to different parts of the country. But the fact of it is they were just sitting there. And you know, they were gated, and they weren't being used. [00:22:37] So it was—he eventually could draw a real distinction between himself and the president there. And that was just one example of that. But policywise, for the most part, they drew some real differences in the spending, a lot of spending bills, and in things like that. You know, being part of the Blue Dog Coalition, Congressman Berry and Congressman Ross both felt that the spending in Washington was out of control. I'm sure now it's really out of control. But I think that they were looking for those things to kind of draw differences in.

And it was a delicate balance for sure because at the end of the day, the majority of their constituents voted for the president to be in office. And so I think you—you know, the mirror side of that is what you saw with President Obama and the exact opposite. So you knew the majority of your constituents did not vote for President Obama, and so you had to draw differences with that administration as well. So Arkansas Democrats have always had to walk a fine line with national politics.

[00:23:45] JD: And that brings me to another thing that—as you say this, I think about in terms of—we're focused right now on the district electorate and, in this case, maybe Representative Ross or previously Representative Berry's districts. But really, there's a whole network of fundraisers and party officials at the national level as well as at the state level. And so did Congressman Ross politically have it sort of difficult on both sides in that—in maybe supporting the president at that time, a Republican president, President Bush's initiatives. As a Democrat in Arkansas, did that make it harder for him politically to perhaps raise funds or garner support from either Democrats, his colleagues in Congress that are maybe a little more to the left, or maybe their donors or supporters, nationally?

[00:24:40] JW: Yeah. So the same with constituents, you had

donors in Arkansas and nationally that had given money to the Bush campaign. And so you're walking a fine line there, but I think they—Congressman Berry and Congressman Ross did a really good job of keeping their seat safe by really listening to constituents, voting their heart, also voted what the constituents wanted at the time. And by doing so and by having a safe Democratic seat, you could make the case to the national Democrats that, "Hey, I'm holding onto a Democratic seat. And if I'm out of here, there probably won't be another Democrat to take my place. It'll probably become a Republican seat." Which, as you can see, that's happened. So you know, you make that case the best you can. Of course, some donors, some Democratic donors, you know, they weren't gonna help you, they weren't buying it. And they didn't help. But a lot of them did. You know, I mean the—both those congressmen had really great careers, and they went out on their own. And so there's something to be said for that too. They weren't—they didn't go out in defeat. So they really did a good job of threading that needle with constituents and donors.

[00:26:01] JD: Well, and you said something there where you were talking about how both representatives, Berry and Ross, both Democrats, both members of the Blue Dog Coalition in Arkansas,

both, again, in a state that is surrounded by a sea of red, if you will, during that time period, they both had safe seats. So if you would, talk to me a minute about that one-party electoral dynamic, where after Congressman Ross defeats incumbent Jay Dickey, he really doesn't face strong Republican opposition. And I think the same can be said for Marion Berry, looking back. How did the political dynamic at that time—which really may have been, historically, you sort of wait your time, you run as a Democrat, you battle it out in the primaries, and then really between the primaries and November, you're already sort of looking ahead to serving, whether it be in DC or in Little Rock, depending on the office. You were probably near the end of that time period. But did you see any of that dynamic at play?

[00:27:07] JW: I did. You know those—when I started with that, they were both pretty safe Democratic congressional seats, no matter who held them. Congressman Dickey, when he held that seat—you know, I think the polling kind of showed that he was vulnerable and that he could be beat. And so there was always a sense—Marion's district, the 1st Congressional District, was probably a stronger-performing, Democrat performing district than the fourth district, but nonetheless, both of them were pretty safe Democratic seats. And so, yeah, when I started, it

was pretty much who could get through the primary. You had—once you became an incumbent, you were able to raise money nationally. You made connections nationally and in Washington, you could have fund raisers inside Arkansas and outside Arkansas. But you know, they also garnered much of the Democratic base in Arkansas also. And so you know, when you—I know we'll probably talk about the Democratic Party of Arkansas, but the strength of the party at that point was the candidates that kept getting elected over and over and kept building up war chests and kept building up connections. And certainly the Big Three kind of paved the way for that. And to some extent we were on their coattails. But also I think that the people that I worked for did a good job of keeping that going for another, you know, fifteen years or so.

[00:28:48] JD: That's—and you make a great point there in referencing recruitment and party dynamics and party organization. And that gets us to our next topic. What role did you see the Democratic Party of Arkansas have in terms of candidate recruitment, sort of building a bench, if you will, fundraising, maybe even sort of unofficially endorsing candidates in the primaries? These are things that we oftentimes neglect to really focus on in state politics across the US. But what effect

did the Democratic Party of Arkansas have on politics in the state during this time period?

[00:29:26] JW: Yeah, they were pretty influential. And it certainly depends on who the chairman was and their—and that chairman's style. It also depends on the loyalties the chairman has. You know, the chairman could have loyalties to a senator or a congressman and not to others and that sort of thing. I'll tell you what I did see. I did see two things that was interesting. Number one is everyone wants to be with a winner. That's just a fact of life. So as we were winning, we were successful and had been for 130 years. No one knew any different. And so the young people coming up into politics for the most part wanted to become Democrats. If you want to effect change, if you want to affect policy, if you want to make your state better, the only way you can do that is to win an election. And the only way you could do that at the time, excluding a few places, was to be part of the Democratic Party of Arkansas, which was a great legacy. And again, you know, I think that Senator Bumpers and Pryor and President Clinton really helped build the party before Jeff Weaver showed up, or a lot of the people that I'm talking about. Now, ironically, Congressman Berry was the chairman of a local county party before he went to work for the Clinton White

House. And so he was part of that grassroots organization before he was ever even considering running for office, I think.

[00:31:03] To answer your question on the money side, having candidates helps you raise money. Winning elections helps you raise money. Losing elections does not help you raise money at all. I mean, no one wants to throw money at a losing candidate or at a party that they don't think will be successful. And I think that the Democratic Party can still have some success. It's gonna be harder, it's gonna be a dog fight because we've lost our momentum, and we've lost some of our bench. But there's some really, really talented people out there that consider themselves Democrats that—and consider themselves Blue Dog Democrats that would run—want to run for office one day.

[00:31:48] I didn't see the party get involved with primaries very much. They—for the most part, they tried to stay out of that. I saw a lot of their focus really on the bigger picture. I think that they—you know, the large statewide races. So for instance Jimmie Lou Fisher's race with Mike Huckabee, Mark Pryor's race against Tim Hutchinson. They looked at the congressional races. They also looked at the legislature in general, the state Senate map and the state House map and how they could influence those. But you know, keep in mind—I

mean, I guess the biggest revenue source that the party has in Arkansas was filing fees. And our filing fees were steep. And if you ran as a Democrat in a county, as county judge or county clerk, you paid filing fees back up to the state party. And I guess that's still the case now. But that's—you know, I think that the parties sometime can lose focus on those more local races by looking at the big picture races. And certainly the race that I ran in 2014—I mean, the spotlight was on Arkansas, and we had a great opportunity to raise a lot of money and to bring a lot of attention to the state. There were a lot of people interested in it, and it was really the watermark of where Arkansas was gonna be for the—for a very long time. But so I worked closely with the party during that race and saw that they were very effective in doing some things. They're less effective in doing others. [00:33:28] For instance, we worked really closely in running a field operation where we knocked on doors, we had offices. A lot of national money went through the party to support the entire ticket up and down, from the Senate and the governor's race all the way down to the state House races and the county races. They were effective in organizing volunteers. They worked really hard, and they already had, you know, county chairmen in all seventy-five counties. And they

were working really hard in getting those people that—you know, kind of like the people that I mentioned before that are just believers in the cause. They weren't staffers. They were just people who cared about it, and they showed up to the meetings, and they did what they needed to do, and they helped to put out yard signs, and they would tell you what intersection is the best one to put whatever sign, you know, out there. And so the party was very effective in doing those kinds of things when I was around.

[00:34:30] JD: So at the time, what was the perception of the Arkansas Republican Party as an organization? We know now in hindsight that they were growing in infrastructure, they were beginning to more actively recruit and, as you said earlier, build a bench.

JW: Yeah.

JD: They were working uphill. It took years to really bear fruit. And that alone wasn't probably the catalyst that really put them over the top. And we can talk more about that here in a little while. But what was the perception when you were engaged in these sort of—especially the electoral campaign politics side of things with what they were doing as your sort of counterpart for the Democratic Party of Arkansas?

[00:35:15] JW: A sleeping giant. So they had glimmers of statewide election success. You know, Governor Huckabee was governor for ten years in Arkansas, Senator Hutchinson won a US Senate seat. Now Governor Asa Hutchinson, who was a congressman but he had some—he had a very prominent role in Washington while I was working for congressmen. And you always knew—and certainly Lieutenant Governor Rockefeller. You always knew they were knock, knock, knocking on the door. And it was just a matter of time. You know, you mentioned before that Arkansas was one of the last Southern states, if not the last Southern state to turn Republican. And but we knew—I think everyone that was involved with Democratic Party politics at the time knew the day was coming. I think we were able to hold it off by a couple of things that I mentioned, you know, personalities, and really working hard, raising money. We had a deep bench, things like that. [00:36:28] But the Republican Party—you could just tell it was coming. It was on its way. There was, you know, there was not a lot that could really stop it from happening. Some things could slow it down. You had, you know, figures nationally, prominent Democrats nationally, that could bring the South a little farther into the Democratic Party side, but you didn't get that. You went—you got the—you went

to the other side, you went further to the left and—nationally speaking. And so by doing that, you just knew they were knocking on the door and it was going to be a matter of time.

JD: Let's go forward to . . .

[00:37:13] JW: John, I think to answer your—to further answer your question, I think what we saw in Senator Boozman's race against Senator Lincoln was the first time you saw, "Wow, it's here." The national Republicans are bought in. They know that—they know they're gonna win. They're gonna put together an effective ground campaign. They're gonna put together an effective ad campaign. They're gonna raise money. They know they can pick up these seats. And then, of course, the national politics played the way it did. And yeah, it was a foregone conclusion.

[00:37:48] JD: So let's back up just a bit from that. So you're talking about the election of representative—then Representative Boozman over incumbent US Senator Blanche Lincoln, who was on her way to enjoying seniority rank on the Agricultural Committee, it was believed at the time, you know, going into the 2010 elections. So if we back up a bit to 2008, we see a Democratic governor that is—his polls would indicate one of the more popular governors in the United States. We would have on

a map there two US senators in Blanche Lincoln and Mark Pryor that are enjoying electoral success and not even really bringing many challenges at this point from their own party or outside of the party. And then we look at the state legislature, both the state House and the state Senate and constitutional offices that are overwhelmingly Democratic. And that doesn't change between 2008 and 2010. [00:38:54] But maybe explain your observations during that time period and what may have precipitated a change, especially after 2010 where we see Republicans make some significant gains, one being the success of Representative Boozman coming out of a—historically the only really competitive and you would even say successful Republican enclave, really, in Northwest Arkansas as the US House of—member following Representative Hammerschmidt's years in office. Then taking—you know, running a statewide race and running a highly successful statewide race in 2010 against, again, what we would consider an entrenched incumbent with significant advantages.

[00:39:46] JW: Yeah. So put this in perspective. Mark Pryor ran 2008 unopposed by the Republican Party. Unopposed. I think he had a Green Party candidate and maybe a Libertarian. So we went from that in 2008—and certainly Mark is—was very, very

popular—to losing a Senate race with Senator Lincoln that—you know, the polling—the public polling, anyway. I wasn't a part of the campaign or anything. I didn't see the internals. But the public polling showed that the race was never really close. Once Senator Boozman was fully in the race and they were off and running, I think Senator Lincoln lost ground consistently through that race. And like you said, she was on tap to be the chair of the ag committee on the Senate side, which Arkansas has never had. We've always really wanted that. Obviously it's the biggest industry in Arkansas. So to be part of the—not just part of the leadership, but to be the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee was a huge opportunity for Arkansas. So we thought—you know, you think you have those things going for you until you don't. [00:41:04] But yeah, I think that probably one of the biggest changes in the electorate was—or just the public opinion was the health care bill that the Obama administration passed. Highly controversial. Democrats were out-messaged. They were certainly out-messaged in the South. It wasn't even close. And I think that that was one of those—if people were already—people voted against President Obama in Arkansas. Then there was this kind of underlying, you know, "They're gonna change our way of life. Progressives are gonna

take away our rights. We're gonna—we're going to lose our health care." Then when the health care bill passed, then it was just that—you know, it just really threw gasoline on that fire. And by 2010, it was done.

[00:42:06] JD: So again, you say, you know—and even in 2010 we see a groundswell, not only in Arkansas, but a groundswell in the South, the Midwest, and even some states that would historically be a little more to the left of Arkansas that really didn't have sort of the need for or perceived need for conservative Democrats to be in office. We see massive sea change in 2010, the midterm elections, Republican gains across the board in nearly historical proportions taking over the US House in particular. But even then in 2010, we see a governor in Mike Beebe, a governor, a Democrat, former state senator from Searcy, run and win every county in the state of Arkansas. And so there's sort of this mixed message there. Could you talk about that a little bit?

[00:43:02] RB: Yeah, I think that's one of those things where, in Governor Beebe's instance—I mean, he certainly defied gravity in terms of public opinion and what people thought Arkansas was and wasn't. It also showed that populism is still prominent in Arkansas, and it's a small enough state where a good politician can really get out there and see folks, and the message can

really resonate. You know, it's almost hard to explain how that happened, but I think the national politics overwhelmed the federal candidates. Congressman Berry left office in—what was that, 2010 he left office, I think. And so you—you know, and then Mike Ross left office in 2012. So you—nationally speaking—and those guys were in pretty safe seats, both of them. But I think that what you saw was that this sea change was so overwhelming—you know, I think we all knew that what was gonna happen eventually—our seats weren't gonna be safe forever.

[00:44:24] JD: So up until 2008, Arkansas Democrats had been very successful in stymieing real significant progress by the Republicans in the state. And as you've mentioned, Democrats knew that those gains were coming, but you'd been able to sort of stall the process with the politics of personality, with retail politics, just sort of an ingrained sense of identity that the Democrats in Arkansas had, the kind of identity that you build over, as you've mentioned, a century of electoral dominance. So in 2008—put me back there in that spot where nationally we see then Senator Obama of Illinois become President of the United States. We see that he does not perform well in Arkansas. And how that may have contrasted to your experience working for

Representatives Berry and Pryor—Berry and Ross and eventually in Pryor's campaign with George W. Bush, right? Previously with Berry and with Ross. And then how 2008 complicates things, if it did, following the election of Barack Obama.

[00:45:44] JW: Yeah. Well, you know, in 2008, I think there was a lot of excitement in Democratic circles. Hadn't had a president in eight years. Very excited about that. He's young, he's polished, he's articulate, he's so smart. He can give such a great speech. Frankly, Democrats and progressive Democrats were fired up. And they were really excited about that. Now, we knew in Arkansas that it was gonna give us trouble, nationally speaking, for federal candidates because, you know, just the way Arkansas swings. Arkansas voted against Obama pretty strongly. And you know, there was still some hard feelings there. So we had to figure out a way to differentiate ourselves from President Obama and his administration. We didn't know exactly what the policy was gonna look like, but it wasn't too long after that we figured out the health care bill was coming. That was a very divisive deal. It was an important piece of legislation, but politically speaking, we knew that it was really gonna split Arkansas. We had no idea that it would, you know, birth the Tea Party and some of the other things that we saw

later. [00:47:02] But to put it in perspective, in 2008 Mark Pryor ran unopposed. He—well, I say that. I think he had a Green Party candidate. But he did not have a Republican opponent. So we go from no Republican opponent to Mark Pryor, to 2010, Senator Lincoln is in a serious dog fight with then Representative Boozman. And I don't think that Senator Boozman ever lost ground in that, I think, that election. Every public poll I saw, he was gaining momentum as we got closer to election day. And to top it off, Senator Lincoln was poised to be, or she may have already become the chairman of the Senate Agriculture Committee, which Arkansas has never had. Largest industry in Arkansas. So that was really a big change from—between those two years. And I think that many of the people that I worked for at different times—Congressman Ross was the person I was working for during that time. You know, I think that we saw it's gonna be more and more difficult to win over evangelical voters, even though Mark was good on—or Mike was good on their issues. He supported the Second Amendment very strongly and a lot of other—their platforms, he was with them on. The national politics made it very difficult. [00:48:29] Then in the state, you had Governor Beebe. And Governor Beebe—like you said, he won all seventy-five counties, he was

incredibly popular. He was able—which he was a governor. So he was able to claim the things that were going on in the state of Arkansas and kind of build a wall between himself and those national politics that were so unpopular. And he would speak out about the things that he didn't believe were right that were going on in Washington. Whereas the congressmen and senators from Arkansas, they kind of owned some of those things because they—even if they voted against them, it was the national Democrat platform that was, you know, passing health care and some of these other things. So even if the members voted against it, they still, you know, in the voters' minds probably owned some of that. Just by being in Washington, they became a part of Washington.

[00:49:35] JD: So tell me a little bit about this. Am I right in thinking that there may have been a switch in the ability for Congressman Ross to differentiate himself from the National Democratic Party in DC? It may have been more of an easier thing to accomplish prior to having a Democrat in the White House. So when George W. Bush was president as a Republican, it may have been easier to distance himself from other Democrats, where it seems that it was harder to avoid being painted by a broader brush with Democratic policies coming out

of the White House and trying to maneuver that national position of the Democratic Party, with health care reform being probably the largest example, most significant one—to being able to continue to do the constituency service, the sort of conservative Democratic stances on fiscal issues. So would—could you talk a little bit about some of those challenges?

[00:50:39] JW: Yeah, I mean, I don't really think that he had a problem differentiating himself from it. I don't think that—you know, we certainly saw a lot of other Democratic congressmen around the country that were also Blue Dogs that were struggling, or they were getting beat. But I think that he was in a very safe seat, in a safe position and—due to the things you mentioned before, constituency service, but also his voting record was strong. I mean, he was who he was. And I feel that was—the only way that he would have had a problem was if he had an opponent who could articulate, you know, those—that he was part of that national Democratic platform. And you know, we never had an opponent that could really persuade folks about that. And they also couldn't raise a lot of money to get that message out. And so we were in a pretty good place. I think Mike could have held his seat for a lot longer had he wanted to.

[00:51:46] JD: And it's worth noting that in 2010, with even all the

national gains Republicans enjoyed, Congressman Ross had a successful reelection bid against I believe it was Mrs. Rankin out of his district in Southwest Arkansas, who had been a former Miss Arkansas, if I'm not mistaken, and had . . .

JW: Yeah. And a Mike Huckabee staffer, and you know, and a very popular—Mike Huckabee endorsed her during that race. And yeah, it's—and we still won pretty handedly.

JD: And then that gets us sort of back to Governor Beebe's success in that same election again. Maybe few of the—the only bright spots for Democrats, perhaps nationally, but certainly even statewide in 2010 where you see Governor Beebe carry all seventy-five counties. And as you've mentioned, it may have been that it was easier for a state official to avoid some of these national issues that were so unpopular with Arkansan—Arkansas voters in 2010.

JW: Yeah.

[00:52:47] JD: Moving on a little bit past 2010 and probably looking then more at your involvement in the 2014 election, talk a little bit about that time period bet—before and sort of the lead up to Senator Pryor's reelection against who was at the time the person who had replaced Congressman Ross, Tom Cotton. Co—Tom Cotton wins in 2010, 20—no, 2012. Sorry. Tom Cotton

then wins in 2012 and is a US House member for just shy of about a year before he announces his run for the US Senate seat that was held by Mark Pryor. Senator Pryor had beaten Tim Hutchinson in 2002. The—and Tim Hutchinson had the distinction of being the first popularly elected Republican to the US Senate from Arkansas. So Mark Pryor had been in office for some time. As you said, he did not draw an opponent in 2008. So lead us into sort of the lead up to that 2014 election.

[00:54:00] JW: Sure. Well, I was in a really unique position in—at the end of Congressman Ross's term. I served as his chief of staff and basically shut down his congressional offices and handed the keys over to Tom Cotton, which was an interesting—we didn't know how the future would play out. But and Tom and I got to be friends a little bit, and we met several times. I took him around to the offices, he met the staff. And so leading up to that election, Senator Pryor reached out to me and hired me to be his campaign manager for what would be the 2014 race. So I started working for him in January of 2013, and after really not having much of an election in 2008 because he was unopposed, there wasn't a lot of infrastructure there. That was a long time to go without lists and emails and phone numbers and that sort of thing. So we had to spend a lot of time building that up. And

then lo and behold, freshmen congressman announced that he was running against us. We assumed that it was gonna be—there would be a primary, and there would be more than one person in the Republican primary, and there wasn't. So that was surprising. And we knew pretty quick on that we were gonna have our hands full with Senator Cotton in that race. Incredibly articulate, very disciplined, had the ability to raise money, and I mean, a lot of money. And we did too. We had the Pryor name, he was an incumbent, he had a good name in Arkansas. His family had a good name in Arkansas. Polled very well. He was attorney general. He passed a number of pieces of legislation regarding consumer protection and things like that. So we felt that we had a really good record to run on, but it was also a record. [00:55:59] So leading up to that race, you know, Governor Beebe was still very popular. But we were starting to lose House seats, Senate seats, in the state legislature. And we knew that that wave that we were fearing was coming. But the—2014 was really gonna be the watermark for what the narrative is for Arkansas. So is Arkansas a blue-red state, or is Arkansas a red state? And I think that a lot of people in my circles thought, "Well, you know, we can hold onto this for a little bit longer, maybe ten more years. And it'll be a blue-red state,

kind of a purple state, like when you look at Ohio or some of those other states." Which, you know, may mean that we get some attention from presidential races. Which means money, organizations, staff people, those kinds of things. Those purple states that are always in play every four years, they kind of are able to kind of keep a organization or a framework in progress all the time because those states, you know, they really never go out of the interest of the national politics. And so we were hoping for that, and 2014 would be the telltale sign. Mike Ross decided that he was not gonna run for governor. He went to the private sector. And then he was convinced to come out and run for governor and to be on the ticket. [00:57:37] So leading into the 2014 race, we felt like we had a great slate of candidates for Congress, for the US Senate, the Arkansas governor's seat, and House and Senate races throughout the state. And I feel that Democratic Party in Arkansas really put their best foot forward to have that last fight to see where we stood in Arkansas. You know, soon after—I mean, Election Day, it was obvious to everyone how one side of the state was gonna be for a while. And after we lost our race and the down-ballot races as well, it was pretty apparent that Arkansas would be a red state for a while. They picked up majorities in the Arkansas House and

Senate, or they picked up supermajorities in Arkansas House and Senate. They won all the congressional races. They ran—won the governor's race and then the US Senate race as well.

[00:58:44] JD: So that was the—between, you know, 2010 and 2014, as you said, you see this sea change of historic proportions, the intensity, the—just the strength behind this wave that we see during two election cycles, more or less, really is not—it goes without comparison if we look at other states that have . . .

JW: Yeah.

JD: . . . party switches. Which is not that uncommon to see majority status switch. Of course, we see it regularly in DC, at the state levels. As you mentioned, we have competitive states where it oscillates back and forth every few cycles. Other states might be more traditionally one way or the other. Arkansas had been a one-party-dominated state from really the end of Reconstruction to another century into the early 2000s. And you could go as far as 2010 and argue that it had . . .

JW: Yeah.

JD: . . . continued to be a one-party state. Even studied as such in the 1940s and 1950s by political scientists who said, this is—as V. O. Key says, the one-party state in its most undefiled form.

It is a solid one-party state, so much so that it's not even terribly organized. It is . . .

JW: Right, right.

JD: . . . sort of in the Will Rogers context—Will Rogers who says, "I'm not a Democrat—I'm not a member of an organized party. I'm a Democrat," right.

JW: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:00:11] JD: And we get all the way to another millennium. We get to, you know, early 2000s where you see Democrats, as you've mentioned, such as Berry and Ross and Beebe following the sort of the step—footsteps and you might even say the momentum of the Big Three in Bumpers and Pryor and Clinton. And then you see a Pryor, in his own right, having electoral success in Arkansas and even avoiding really stiff competition until his reelection bid in 2014. So you see this momentous change, and I think you touch on it there in the 2014 election returns that really no Democrats in Arkansas had a good night in that process.

JW: Yeah.

JD: And Arkansas voters could have woken up in—on Election Day of 2014 and gone to bed on election night of 2014 and seen a really completely different political landscape in the state of

Arkansas. [01:01:11] Where do you think we stand today? And if you could predict the future, what do you think it looks like? Do we see another sort of moment of one-party domination that might be akin to something we would have seen twenty, thirty, forty, certainly sixty, eighty years ago? Or are we in a time period where Democrats will find a way to regroup and we'll have what, really, Governor Rockefeller would have wanted all along, early on in the [19]60s, a two-party system that was highly competitive?

[01:01:46] JW: I think we're looking at—we're gonna be a one-party state for a while. I think that Arkansas—the people of Arkansas have spoken. And as long as the national politics are what they are and—the two national parties have really shown themselves to be very different ideologically. And I think as long as that happens, I think that Arkansas will remain a conservative, red, Republican state. That being said, if the right politician came along for Democrats, you may possibly pick up a seat or two. Depending on how the congressional districts are drawn, you could potentially pick up a Democratic congressional seat. But I think those hopes are few and far between. I think for the most part, we're a Republican state for a pretty long time.

[01:02:54] JD: If we could back up a bit—for editing purposes, of

course, they'll—we'll know to do this. But you know, one thing that we talked about a little bit in 2014 was you said it was sort of the last stand.

JW: Yeah.

JD: Could you talk a little bit about how—that campaign seemed to harken back to maybe better days for Democrats. And again, having David Pryor's son Mark running for reelection. I recall some of the memorabilia for the campaign. The campaign literature using logos sort of reminiscent of that time in Arkansas politics where . . .

JW: Oh yeah.

JD: . . . David Pryor was really political royalty. And maybe touch on some of the issues that Mark Pryor tried to sort of use to evoke sort of memories of his own independence within his own party, nationally speaking, and how those . . .

JW: Yeah.

JD: . . . may or may not have resonated with Arkansas voters?

[01:03:49] JW: Yeah. Yeah. So, well, to talk about some of the things that we did on the campaign to kind of reminisce from the Pryor days is—I was very fortunate. I had, really, two candidates. At that time, David Pryor and Miss Barbara Pryor were fiery, and they were ready to go. And so I had them in

Arkansas every single day. Seven days a week, they were on the road. Mark often had votes in Washington as US senators do. That's part of the job. So I had Mark, you know, and when he had votes in Washington, he was there. I had David on the ground here in Arkansas and Miss Barbara. And then when Mark was here in Arkansas, they were all on. They were all going in different corners of the state every day. So that was a really neat opportunity to get to work with all of them. And I can say that Senator David Pryor and Miss Barbara put their hearts and souls into that campaign. They worked really, really hard. And so I'll always be grateful for them, for the way they attacked that race. They really, really worked hard. They certainly didn't have to, and they just wanted to help Mark as best they could.

[01:05:04] So yeah, you know, the Pryor logo has changed somewhat. When David Pryor had it—we call him DP—when DP had it, it was a round circle with red, white, and blue, and had Pryor in the middle. Like, super simple graphic design. When Mark ran for office for the first time, he updated it. And he put the red, white, and blue with the Pryor in the middle in the outline of Arkansas. So they didn't change it much. They just changed it just enough [*laughter*] and just a little, so it was different. But so yeah, we did do some things like that. We did

lots of events with David Pryor. Of course, at that time, President Clinton was very available to help as always. We had—so we had David Pryor. I think that our kickoff event in the Peabody Hotel at that time was the last—it could have been the last public event that Senator Dale Bumpers took place in. But at that event, we had President Clinton, we had Senator David Pryor, we had Mark Pryor, obviously. We had Senator Dale Bumpers. And who else? Jim Guy Tucker was there. We just had a slew of, really, the old guard of the Democratic Party. And it may have been the last time that you saw the Big Three on the stage together. I don't know that for sure, but we raised about a million dollars that night. And that was kind of a big part of our campaign with—certainly with Arkansas Democrats is to remind them of what we should be as a party and what we could be again as a party. And nobody denied that we'd lost ground in—since 2008, but we had an opportunity to seize the moment, and that's what we were really trying to work toward. So some of our literature was like that. You mentioned some of the ads that we did with Mark. Some things that we did to kind of separate him from the National Party is, you know, we did some hunting stuff, some Second Amendment ads. We did an ad called North Star that was one of my personal favorites. He

talked about where—the Bible, the Word of God was his North Star, his compass, and he would never lose sight of that. That was a really good ad. We also talked a little bit about his legislative experience. I've mentioned before the consumer protection bills for children's toys coming out of China. We talked about that. [01:07:46] So and then we had an ad with Mark and David, and I'll never forget this. It was a health care ad. And Mark, for the first time, talked really about his cancer. And David Pryor was joining him. And how Mark said that if he hadn't had insurance, he doesn't know that he'd be alive today. And which was just a phenomenal ad, in my opinion. And we kind of hit the right tone because health care was such a huge issue. We kind of want to put it in perspective that it is a big issue, but it's also a personal issue. It's also a deeply individual issue. And that we didn't wanna lose sight of just a guy and his dad, who just happened to be both, you know, US senators. But just a guy and his dad talking about, you know, the son having cancer and how they could have lost him.

[01:08:35] JD: And that was likely an appeal to voters that Senator Pryor was a familiar Arkansan, that he was an Arkansan, he had Arkansas values. And so you mention the Second Amendment and gun rights, his Christian faith. And these were things that

may have been intended to sort of stave off some of the national labeling, if you will, or characterization, maybe, of Democratic politics and . . .

JW: Yeah.

JD: . . . Democratic politicians. And how did that compare to what you saw from then Representative Cotton, but Senator Cotton's efforts in the campaign level—or I'm sorry, in the campaign season and maybe even his fundraising structure and sort of behavior on the campaign trail? Did he sort of continue those sort of traditional traits of retail politics, or was his campaign somehow different?

[01:09:36] JW: Yeah, he did some of that. Not—I wouldn't say that he did as much as we did in terms of retail politics. But Senator Cotton—he was very effective at raising money. His message was pretty easy, that he was not Barack Obama. He would never be Barack Obama. He won't vote with Barack Obama. And so it was a pretty—it was an effective campaign. It was a pretty easy message to pick up on. He really didn't do much on Mark's voting record. It really wasn't about that. It was really about the national politics and how, if elected, he would be a player on the national scene for conservative values. And he did talk a lot about growing up on a farm in Dardanelle. He talked

about his parents in some ads and things like that. And I think those were very effective ads also. I feel like we had to make a—it was more difficult for us to make that case than it was for him. I think his conservative bona fides were already established.

[01:10:51] JD: So looking back and knowing where we are today, what do you think were the primary drivers—we've talked about the things that you think probably led to a prolonged Democratic presence in the state of significance, of majority status in state chambers, more or less dominance at the state level with exceptions of Governor Bill White in one election after he beats a young Bill Clinton, and then also, of course, Governor Huckabee, who assumes office under somewhat unusual circumstances, but then wins reelection in his own right and is very popular. With exception of some of these individuals and some regional strength in the state of Arkansas, from about the 1980s to 2010, we see mixed results at best for Republicans. And Democrats are able to sort of hold off that tide, as we've said. And you've mentioned retail politics, constituency service, sort of that Democratic brand tradition in Arkansas being parts of the things that helped stave off Republican gains. What is it, do you think, that Republicans did, maybe beginning in 2008, 2010, that

overwhelmed those efforts?

[01:12:08] JW: I think they got a lot of attention nationally from different groups that can raise money and different people that can organize. And I think that they—I think they were on the downhill side anyway. But with money and an operation and then winning some elections—like I said before, people wanna be with a winner. And so I think those kinds of things kinda helped just kind of push that thing even quicker down the hill to where they—you know, and then, lo and behold, they have young Republicans that are very active again and young people. Then they have staff people and a deeper bench. They have business people who are getting on board. And they're, you know, they—it just had a feeling to it like they were putting together a very, very effective machine, and the machine was gonna be statewide. They wanted to compete in every county. I think what you're seeing now is that they are competing in every county. There are some Democratic counties—I would call them Democratic counties up until recently that—even this election cycle that we're in, there will be some very competitive races in Delta counties, which that was unheard of. I mean, the Delta counties were sacred to Democrats, and they were very strong and almost a gimme. And most of them still are, but there are

some that are in question. And so I think what—I think to answer your question, I think what you saw is the ability to raise money, build coalitions, and really build an organization. Create a bench, find good candidates. And they have found very good candidates. And once those candidates get in office, they use that incumbency to their advantage. And I think that—I think you're seeing that now, which is basically what the Democrats did for a long time. And I think the Republicans picked up on that and have figured that out. They've mastered that.

JD: That's great. Is there anything we've left out?

[01:14:17] JW: John, I don't think so. [*Laughs*] I appreciate the opportunity, again. You know, I mentioned the Pryor Center and the Pryors. You know, the benefit that Arkansas has had to have the Pryor family. And certainly the Pryor Center bears their name. And it's certainly just a great thing to have in Arkansas. I really appreciate the opportunity to talk to you all. I appreciate the opportunity to tell this story. And it's such an important time in Arkansas history that I think generations will study this and watch it and appreciate political scientists like you, who take the time to kind of go back—you know, campaigns are never about looking back. Yesterday was yesterday, and you always look forward, and you're always working toward that Election

Day. So it's great to have political scientists and historians look back and say, "Hey, how did that happen exactly?" Because you know, when the dust settles, it's a really interesting story to tell. So I appreciate the opportunity to get to do that.

JD: Thank you very much for your time and for you sharing with us your experiences over the last couple of decades in Arkansas politics. It's very—it's been very insightful.

JW: Thank you. My pleasure.

[End of interview 01:15:51]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]