

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

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Arkansas Memories Project

Governor Mike Beebe
Interviewed by Scott Lunsford
March 17, 2008
Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

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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. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

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 16th 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;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.
- All geographic locations mentioned in the transcript are in the state of Arkansas unless otherwise indicated.

Citation Information

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Scott Lunsford interviewed Governor Mike Beebe on March 17, 2008, in Little Rock, Arkansas. This interview a continuation of the interview with Governor Mike Beebe recorded on February 12, 2008.

[00:00:00]

Scott Lunsford: And, you know, one thing I would—I don't want us to forget is—um—how you and Ginger [Beebe] got together and all that story. So I don't know when that happens in this chronology but . . .

Governor Mike Beebe: Oh, it happened way before that.

SL: It did?

MB: Uh—yeah.

SL: Well, maybe we ought to step back and look at that.

MB: Well, Ginger and I met in Searcy. Uh—she was working—uh—at ASU-Beebe [Arkansas State University, Beebe] and—uh—so—uh—you know we dated for—I think we dated for a year or two—uh—maybe couple years before we got married.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: We got married in—on March the second—see I know my date . . .

SL: That's good news. [*Laughs*]

MB: . . . nineteen seventy-nine. Uh—and—uh—she had two children

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—by a previous marriage—uh—David and Tammy. Uh—they were—uh—'bout [about]—uh—eleven and nine, somethin' [something] like that. Uh—and then so I helped raise them. And then, of course, Kyle was born in April of [19]80 about—oh, a little over a year after we got married. And—uh—so that was the family, David, Tammy, Kyle, me, and Ginger.

[00:01:06] SL: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Di—uh—did y'all meet at a Jaycees [United States Junior Chamber] thing or . . .

MB: Yeah. Uh—there was a—you know, it's hard to remember all of those events

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: . . . but—uh—Jaycee events—uh—probably—that was probably the first time I ever saw her . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: . . . was a Jaycee event. Uh—but—uh—you know, Searcy's a small town. Uh—White County is—I say a small town—by Arkansas standards it may not be a small town but—uh—most everybody knows everybody, and—uh—so—uh—you know, there's a lotta [lot of] interaction with people. And—uh—'course [of course] her mom and dad—you know she was adopted?

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—and her dad had died—I guess her dad died when she was in college.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—and—uh—her—she had an aunt who—who was her mother's sister, and they were very close, and the aunt's husband was deceased as well.

SL: Hmm.

[00:02:00] MB: So the biggest part of her family was—uh—in fact the only part of her family—uh—virtually—uh—was her mother and her aunt, and—uh—they quickly became part of my family—uh—you know, they—they—uh—were very gracious and accepting. And—uh—uh—then she had a sister—uh—who is also adopted—uh—who's seven years older. And—uh—so that, in effect, became the new family. Uh—I kinda inherited the family—uh—since I really didn't have much of a family and what family I did have, you know, wasn't anywhere close.

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: I had an aunt that lived in Tuckerman—uh—two cousins that lived—uh—off, one in Chicago [Illinois] and one in Idaho. And then my mother was livin' [living] in Jonesboro, so—uh—uh—there was a limited amount of family and what there was was

not extraordinarily close to Searcy. So—uh—it was a—it was a warm group.

[00:03:02] SL: How—um—how active was she politically? I mean . . .

MB: Well, you know, I—I—that's hard to say. Uh—politics has never really been her thing . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: . . . but she was never—uh—it wasn't anathema to her.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—she never was opposed to it. 'Course, I wasn't in politics then.

SL: Well, that's what I'm wondering. What was . . .

MB: Uh—I was—that was before I ran for the [Arkansas State] Senate.

SL: Okay.

[00:03:24] MB: Uh—now I was on the board of trustees at the time, of ASU [Arkansas State University System, Jonesboro].

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—so it was a political appointment and, as I'd indicated was my first, probably—uh—exposure to Arkansas state politics to the extent that board of trustees members interact with legislators or governors or . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—but it wasn't an elected office. I was appointed by Governor [Dale] Bumpers to the ASU board in 1974, served till—uh—1979. So I was on the ASU board, but I had not run for office. I did not run for office until—uh—started running in—uh—I guess—uh—the summer of [19]81 after a redistricting. And—uh—it was the [19]82 election. And so was sworn in in January of [19]83 to the Arkansas Senate. So my first elected office came—uh—four years roughly after we were married.

[00:04:23] SL: So—um—did y'all have any idea what you were gettin' [getting] into once you started runnin' [running]?

MB: I'm not sure she did.

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: Uh—you know, and you'll have to ask her this. She—she is by her nature—uh—more private . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—somewhat shy.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—she's not a—a person that would run out and grab a microphone or be comfortable with one. Uh—she's not somebody who relishes—uh—a lotta limelight. She's not somebody who is naturally—uh—outgoing to the extent that you

would think that politics would be, kinda—uh—of great interest to her. I, on the other hand, liked all that stuff. [*Laughs*]

SL: Right.

MB: And—uh—and—and—but—uh—she was always supportive. Um—she never—she never indicated any reluctance. Uh—she knew it was important to me, and she was totally supportive. Uh—but, you know, she—she was great—was and is—a great mother.

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:05:27] MB: And—and her focus—her primary focus was raisin' [raising] children and—uh—keepin' [keeping] the home—uh—the way it needed to be and—uh—uh—doin' [doing] a lot of volunteer work. She always did quite a bit of volunteer work. And she quit workin' [working] at ASU-Beebe a—you know—uh—probably shortly after we got married.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—she may have worked there a while. I—you'll have to ask her. I can't remember the—the chronology of that. But for virtually all of our life—all our married life—she's been a stay-at-home mom. But she's been very busy because with three kids and . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: . . . we built a house. We were—uh—we were married in [19]79, and we started buildin' [building] our home in—uh—uh—I guess it was—uh—[19]82, in—uh—December of [19]82. Moved in it in July of—of [19]83. So a lot of the early years were spent, you know, planning and—and building, and then—uh—it was—it's a big place, so she had a lotta work to do there. And—uh—raisin' the children and—uh—and bein' [being] a stay-at-home mom pretty well kept her active with—uh—all of the charity work that she did and all the volunteering she did. She was very active in the hospital auxiliary. She became very active in—uh—the Committee of 100, which is the Ozark Folk Festival—uh—fund-raising arm—uh—philanthropic arm.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Uh—she became very active with the CARTI [Central Arkansas Radiation Therapy Institute] organization that was located in Searcy, which ultimately e—evolved into her work with—uh—statewide CARTI, she's on the CARTI Foundation Board. Uh—she's a master gardener.

SL: [*Whispers*] Oh.

[00:07:10] MB: So I mean [*laughs*]—from one thing to another—and then obviously that's expanded quite a bit—uh—since—uh—we've moved in here, and she's taken on additional roles, more

or less—uh—that were already of interest to her. But people knew that and saw that and gravitated to her and have asked her . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

[00:07:28] MB: . . . to be more involved. Children's mental health—uh—uh—domestic abuse, women's issues, suicide—uh—issues. We had a couple of—uh—very close—uh—encounters with that. One, we had a neighbor and a fellow church member who was—uh—our youngest son's godfather, was a physician. A very much loved physician. And without—without a lot of warning—uh—obviously in retrospect you could see the signs, but at the time nobody saw it—uh—committed suicide . . .

SL: Hmm.

MB: . . . uh—in his home across the street—uh—from where we live. He was very close to us. Um—he and his wife and their family were close to us, both in—with regard to the church as well as socially. Uh—and so that was, I guess, our first direct encounter. And then Tammy's husband killed himself.

SL: Hmm.

MB: . . . uh—our son-in-law killed—who—he had significant—uh—issues and problems. They had been estranged for—uh—I guess, about a year, maybe a little longer than that. And he had

been—uh—there was—there were a lot of evidence of problems there—uh—that—that we saw coming. Uh—but there's just so much you can do about it if somebody's—so sh—as a result of those two experiences, I think that's—uh—helped—uh—I think that was the catalyst that helped her try to focus—uh—a lot on trying to prevent suicide and—uh—mental health issues in general but particularly mental health issues as it relates to children. Uh—I guess I'm jumpin' [jumping] around quite a bit . . .

SL: No, no—this is good.

[00:09:00] MB: Covering—uh—covering a whole gamut of areas where she has—uh—really devoted her energy, and—and she would never admit she had any, but her influence as well. Uh—and—uh—been very, very—uh—I think, committed to tryin' [trying] to help others.

SL: She's a great champion for Arkansas artists.

MB: Yeah, that's another area that she has—uh—a—a great interest in—uh—Arkansas artists. W—and—and the mediums are different, I mean, and she's—uh—it doesn't have to be oil on canvas. Uh—it can be bronze. It can be glass—uh—sculptures of all kinds and—and—and certainly paintings. Uh—she's—she wants to showcase Arkansas's talent and Arkansas's artists'

talent. Um—the arts—uh—of virtually all kind, I think—are—are something that she wants to—uh—to be able to highlight in the [Governor's] Mansion. And she's doin' a—a pretty good job of that. And—uh—so she's—she's got a lot of different areas of interest, and—and because of the position that she's in, she's able to, I think—uh—highlight—uh—some of the things—uh—that are positive in that regard as well as highlight some of the shortcomings and some of the need for more activity or more action.

[00:10:23] SL: You know [*phone rings*], people forget—um—um—that politics is about public service. And it sounds like, to me, there's an entire resume—litany—of her public service.

MB: Oh, yeah . . .

SL: So she would never—although she would never say she's in politics . . .

MB: Yeah, she's—she's definitely into public service, and—and everything she's ever been in has always been volunteer work.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: I mean she's never—uh—been on anybody's payroll—uh—received any money or salaries for any of that activity—uh—with the possible exception of that stipend that they pay you as a poll worker. [*SL laughs*] She was always—uh—I mean for years and

years and years, she worked the polls. And I was always on the ballot but never had an opponent. So she could work the polls since I was in an uncontested—uh—position and—and—and really looked forward to it. She looked forward—I mean I think—uh—some of the people she saw on election day, both primary election day, school election day, and then general election day—uh—that was the only time that she saw some of 'em [them] and always looked forward to that interaction. But, yeah, she was always committed to—uh—to causes to help the public good and public service is a good description of what her activities have been. But—uh—they've been broad and varied, from—uh—from local work at Searcy to statewide work.

[00:11:45] SL: Let's—um—um—thank you for all that stuff because I'm gonna [going to] be talking to her later this afternoon . . .

MB: Sure, this gives you . . .

SL: And I can . . .

MB: Well . . .

SL: And I can now bounce around a little bit . . .

MB: Well, and you have to pull some of it out of her . . .

SL: Well, that's what I'm suspecting.

MB: She's reticent. Uh—now she may open up . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: . . . but she won't be as easy an interview as me [*SL laughs*]
because she's—she's a little more private . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: . . . and—uh—and—and a little more reluctant to—uh—to talk
about all these things.

SL: Well.

MB: Now she'll talk about me . . .

SL: Well, that's good . . .

MB: But she'll—she'll—she'll have—uh—more difficulty, I think, talkin'
[talking], about herself.

SL: Before we move on from—from—from you all . . .

MB: Mh-hmm.

[00:12:22] SL: Um—do remember the—how you proposed to her?
Was it . . .

MB: No, and you better not put this in the film. [*Laughter*] I—I—I
don't. She probably does—uh . . .

SL: [*Laughs*] Okay.

MB: You know, but we dated for quite awhile so . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: . . . it kind of evolved . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

MB: . . . from the standpoint of—uh—and I don't have—uh—it's not

like it was—uh—three weeks after we met and—uh—and was all of a sudden . . .

SL: So you're not gonna testify you got down on your knees and
[laughs] . . .

MB: No, I don't—I don't—I don't—I certainly don't remember doin' that.

SL: [Laughs] Okay.

MB: I'll take credit for it though, so may [laughs] . . .

SL: [Laughs] Okay. All right. Well I'll ask—I'll ask her about it then.

MB: Sure.

[00:13:01] SL: Okay—um. You know—uh—we were talking about—um—that—uh—[Gillett] Coon Supper across the street from Marion Berry's . . .

MB: Sure.

SL: . . . the little gathering you had before . . .

MB: Sure.

SL: . . . and all the pins that got distributed. Um—let's just spend a few minutes and talk about Marion Berry—uh—a little bit more.

MB: Sure, sure.

SL: Uh—interesting story. Uh—so—um—he kind of launched you—helped launch you into your first race.



[00:13:29] MB: Yeah, you know, Marion was not the political

member of that family. I know that sounds strange now since he's a congressman, but at the time, I mean he was a pharmacist—uh—and is a pharmacist by—uh—education, but he had—he hadn't practiced pharmacy very much. He went back—I think his family had some—uh—some—uh—farmland—and he—his—his last—uh—vocation was in agriculture. He was a farmer.

[00:13:56] His little brother was actually the—uh—the political activist in the family. His little brother was a lawyer—is a lawyer named Rusty in Dewitt and—uh—was the one that I first got close to and who introduced me to Marion. And—uh—but—uh—Marion's, I guess, introduction into politics came after I was elected in the senate. [00:14:19] He expressed interest in trying to be on—appointed by the governor, who was Governor [Bill] Clinton, to the [Arkansas] Game and Fish Commission. And you know Governor Clinton, he always had more people—uh—uh—promised something than he had positions available. Uh—and so I started working—uh—on tryin' to get—uh—Governor Clinton to appoint—uh—uh—Marion to the Game and Fish Commission. And—uh—he—uh—he never did commit, you know, for a long time. And then—uh—one day—uh—after I'd been workin' on it for several weeks, and I know Marion had

probably done some work on it—uh—I'd gone to the barbershop in Searcy. And when I got back to my law firm, my secretary said that Governor Clinton had called from a airport in Atlanta [Georgia]. [00:15:09] He and—uh—Hillary [Clinton] were on a trip to—uh—Russia, as I recall, obviously a trade trip, and they were changin' [changing] planes—planes in Atlanta and—uh—the message left was that—uh—Governor Clinton was gonna take care of the Marion Berry thing, which, you know—uh—we all took to understand that he was gonna appoint Marion to the—uh—Game and Fish Commission. At which point, you know, I happily communicated the phone call and—uh—and the news to Marion. Uh—well, Hillary [Rodham Clinton] wanted Tommy Sproles, actually—uh—to be appointed to the Game and Fish Commission and—uh—two weeks in Russia with Hillary resulted in him—uh—[*SL laughs*—deciding to appoint Tommy Sproles and—uh—not appoint Marion. And, 'course, I was—uh—mad. Marion was mad. We pouted, and—and we were hurt. And—and—uh—uh—it was—uh—it was not a pleasant time. Well, Clinton bein' Clinton—you know, he wanted everybody to like him and wanted everybody to be happy. [00:16:06] So he set about tryin' to go—uh—to find ways to appease Marion and me—uh—even though I was just a freshman senator and—uh—

ultimately ended up appointing Marion to [Arkansas] Soil and Water [Conservation Commission], and Marion had a good background in that—uh—you know, livin' on the grand prairie, understandin' [understanding] water issues that people on the grand prairie understand. And—and—uh—so Marion decided that might be of interest to him, so he was—uh—happy to accept an appointment to Soil and Water Commission and did a great job. [00:15:36] Under—even though he was already knowledgeable, obtained significantly greater degree of knowledge with the workings on—on that commission so much so that when Clinton was elected [United States] president—uh—he asked Marion to go to Washington [DC] with him as an ag—agriculture liaison—soil and water liaison—on his staff.

[00:16:56] And so Marion goes to Washington—uh—looks around and sees the makeup of the—the [United States] Congress and decides that he can do that [*SL laughs*]. And then ultimately runs for Congress and—uh—and wins, and now is one of the more—uh—influential members of the Congress—uh—seated on the appropriations committee [Committee on Appropriations, United States House of Representatives].

[00:17:15] So he takes a lot of credit for—uh—for helping launch my career with—uh—the Coon Supper story and the

Beebe pin story—uh—that—that—uh—was initiated at his house. And, of course, I take a lot of credit on the other side for launching his political career by—uh—failing to get him appointed to—uh—Game and Fish [*SL laughs*] and then successfully—uh—getting the consolation prize, as we thought it was at the time, with Soil and Water, so—uh—the rest is history.

[00:17:44] SL: You know, freshman senator—um—you—you mentioned how y'all kind of pouted [*MB laughs*] and were really upset about losing that—what you perceived was gonna be a sure deal . . .

MB: And it wouldn't have been as bad if we hadn't understood that it was—that he'd—uh—decided to do that.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: I mean that—that's what really, I think, was the biggest disappointment is, you—you know, when you don't have a promise to get somethin', you can't be that upset about it.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: But when it looks like—uh—you're going to receive the appointment—or he's gonna receive the appointment, and then it's taken away—uh—that creates—uh—I think, the angst.

SL: Hey—just one second. I wanna [want to] fix this coat. It's kinda—there we go. All right. Um—[pause] I—w—it's funny

how politics works.

MB: Oh, yeah.

[00:18:39] SL: But—but when—as a freshman I just—I've just never really heard of you really getting angry or . . .

MB: Oh, yeah, we all did. But now, you know, I was rea—I was lucky.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: I've been lucky all my life. Um—there—there's something to be said for being lucky. I mean I've been very fortunate. I know we had all those discussions of a difficult childhood and movin' around a lot . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: . . . but since—since adulthood I've been fairly fortunate. And that was also—that carried over to comin' in the senate. Uh—the senate only has thirty-five members. We had eleven freshmen. It was a generational sea change in the senate.

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: Now in the days now of term limits, that's—you know, people see that more often, but in those days that was highly unusual. People stayed for a long time in the legislature in their respective houses. And so eleven out of thirty-five, virtually a third of the senate bein' freshman [*clock chimes*], we were courted, in

effect, by the powers that be.

Kris Katrosh: Let's wait on that—just wait on that . . .

SL: Thanks, Matt.

KK: We still need to wait.

SL: So—we good?

MB: No—it's . . .

KK: Just wait till the chiming stops.

SL: Oh, it's gonna be ten, huh?

KK: [*Laughs*] Yeah.

SL: It's ten o'clock.

KK: Sorry.

MB: That clock is the—probably the rarest thing in this Mansion, built six years before the Declaration of Independence . . .

SL: Wow.

MB: . . . in Waterford, Ireland, 1770.

SL: Waterford.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:21] MB: But at any rate, the senate had been in a internal fight before we got there. In fact, it really manifested itself most in a special session in [19]81—or the regular session of [19]81, I can't remember. But anyway it manifested itself in a division between the old guard heads, which were personified in Max

Howell and Knox Nelson, and the kinda young Turks at the time, which were led by Nick Wilson. And they had been, in effect, a power struggle that ultimately resulted in a chunk of money that was left on the table that the old heads wanted to go to prison expansion, and the young Turks wanted to go to colleges and universities. It was such a stalemate that they ended up with just leavin' the money in the treasury. And so both factions were courting the freshmen. So the eleven freshmen got way more attention than we would have normally expected to receive and had more of an opportunity for leadership and involvement and a voice than freshmen in the past. You know, when you got thirty-five senators, and one or two freshmen come in each time, they don't pay a lot of attention to the freshmen. But when you have thirty-five senators, and those thirty-five are divided and in a internal power struggle, and you have eleven new freshmen, there's a whole lot of courtin' goin' on. And so I was the beneficiary of that obviously—and—as well as my colleagues. And so we had opportunities really early on that I suspect a lot of freshmen never did.

SL: That's a crash course in leadership, wasn't it?

MB: Yeah. It was—and we had a lot of talent. Allen Gordon, Lu Hardin, Cliff Hoofman, Doug Brandon—there were several folks

in that class—Jay Bradford, Jim Scott—a lotta people in that freshmen class that went on to be very successful.

[00:22:43] SL: [Exhales] So back then how often did you have to run to keep your seat?

MB: Well, you know, senators' terms are four years. But, and this can get a little complex—sometimes you get two years. And the reason for that is every ten years is a new census, and so every ten years after a new census, there's redistricting, and after redistricting the whole senate has to run, obviously, because it's—there are new districts, even if there just changed one township, they're shifted by population. So that means in the two years, whether it's 1972, [19]82, [19]92, 2002, 2012, every two—every election that ends in a two, the entire thirty-five member senate will run. Then to keep the whole senate from—and to keep four-year terms in a ten-year cycle and to keep the whole senate from running at the same time, you, in effect, draw lots or draw straws, or we use ping pong balls to determine half the s gets a four-year term on the front end of that ten-year cycle and half the senate gets a two-year term on the front end of that ten-year cycle. So you either get a two, a four, and a four for the ten years or you get a four, a four, and a two on the back end.

SL: Four, four, and two.

[00:24:02] MB: So that if somebody stayed through a ten-year period from census to census, you would end up with one two-year term in that time frame and two four-year terms. Well as luck would have it, I drew a two-year term the first time, so I had to run again in [19]84. But again I didn't have an opponent. Then I had to run again, I believe, in 1990 in a two-year term because it was the result—they redistricted some districts because of the African American redistricting lawsuit that effected probably—primarily it was around the Pine Bluff redistricting issues. But it touched adjoining and abutting districts. So even though I had a four-year term later I ended up having to run in a two year term, so I only had, like, one four-year term in that first ten. Well, then in [19]92, when we redistricted again, I drew another two-year term [*laughs*]. So every time you had to draw, I always drew the two on the front end, which meant that I normally would have had the four on the back end. That's why when I drew the two in [19]93, after the [19]92 census—that's why I was able to serve ten years in the senate after term limits, rather than eight. Because the court ruled that the two didn't count on the four-year terms.

[00:25:32] SL: Well, do you think the voters figure, you know, you

really should be four years out, and you're comin' up already, and you just got in, and they just—no one just runs against you? I mean it's just remarkable that you didn't [*MB laughs*] have an opponent all that time.

MB: Well, Ginger makes it clear that I might not have had an opponent, but that didn't mean I didn't have a lotta opposition.

[*Laughter*]

SL: Yeah.

MB: Wives can do that, you know—bring you back to earth. But, you know, I was fortunate. I campaigned all the time. I mean y—it wasn't—you weren't askin' for money or officially campaignin', but through constituent work you're campaignin'. And if you're not holed up in your office just content to be elected, you try to get a—I always went to the district—I always went—those first ten years that I had Arkansas County in the district, you know, I spent a lot of time in Stuttgart and DeWitt because they'd had the incumbent senator before me, and I knew that they felt like I was a hundred miles away or eighty miles away on the other end of the district. And, consequently, I didn't want them to feel left out. And established great relationships down there. And so a combination of all those things kept anyone from filing.

[00:26:54] SL: I know that you had a kind of a mentor in—on the

law side of your life. And what was that gentleman's name?

MB: Ed Lightle.

SL: Ed Lightle.

MB: He was my—Ed Lightle was senior partner, had been a state senator, had voluntarily quit. He was a stereotypical southern gentleman, he—much like [former Governor] Sid McMath and [Arkansas Supreme Court Justice] George Rose Smith, that kind of courtly, extreme manners, sense of duty and obligation. He was independently wealthy from inheritance. His father had been a lawyer and a banker, and he had a lot of real estate, but he never acted like it, you know. He didn't—he lived middle class, other than his extensive land holdings. But knew how—he had money but knew how to handle it. Had a sense of public service about him, felt like people in the firm ought to be involved in civic activities and public service. Havin' had that senatorial experience, obviously, could give me good advice when I was contemplating runnin' for the senate. And was a leader in the community.

[00:28:11] SL: Well, I was gonna—where I was going with that was that I was wondering if you did have a mentor or a favorite politician that you kind of would like to emulate, but maybe this is the same. Maybe he . . .

MB: Well, no. I think politically my whole interest was piqued in one—the politician I probably admire the most was John F. Kennedy. You know, it was—he came along at a time in my life when impressions are formed, much like we talked about with the Tigers impression being formed. You know, I was in, I guess, junior high school when he was elected president. So he was president for most of my high school years—he was killed while I was still in high school. But he was a—he was that generational sea change, you know. All those other guys that were in politics when I was a kid before him were old guys with—they wore hats all the time and looked like old guys. [Laughter] And, you know, in retrospect they weren't, but when you're a kid they all look—and here comes this guy that's young, that's got this beautiful wife and young family, and he's got a lotta energy and charm and wit and grace, talkin' about things that inspire people, particularly young people. [00:29:32] So initially the impressions that he formed in my mind, about politics and public service and bein' an elected official were all very positive and one that, I suppose, became a role model for me from that time forward. Still, in my opinion, the one who—if you had to try to emulate somebody that would be who it would be.

SL: 'Course, that influence happened to you before you knew you were gonna be in politics.

MB: Absolutely. It's probably subtly implanted. But long before—that's—you know I'd gone through several things at that—before I ever thought about politics, but chief of which was the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] . . .

SL: Right.

MB: . . . desires.

[00:30:24] SL: Well, so once you get in, wha—who are your closest allies?



MB: Well, you know the guy that mentored me in the senate was Knox Nelson. 'Course, you know, the press didn't like Knox. And he was the old school. And had—I mean he was not the darling of progressives or most of the media. But he did run the senate, he and Max. He actually did more of it. Max got [*coughs*—excuse me—a lotta credit for it. They were a pretty good team. But Knox was relatively uneducated and was inarticulate. Didn't have much in the way of oratory skills. And it's hard to know, but you woulda—you would believe that on an intelligence scale he was, you know, probably about average. He wasn't brilliant. But he probably had the best God-given, natural-ability talent for leadership. And, you know, I mean you

couple all those negatives, those things that didn't exist, that high education level—he probably just had a high school education. May not have had a high school education, I'm not sure, but I don't think he ever went to college—together with his lack of oratorical—oratorical skills, it's surprising that he would be able to wield the kind of leadership that he wielded. And he wasn't heavy-handed with his colleagues. It really was leadership. I mean he had something about him that caused people to wanna follow him. And he was a good teacher, good teacher about the process, someone good to watch. Max, on the other hand, who I also liked, was pretty heavy-handed. A lot of people thought he was a bully, and he could be. He was—could be very abrasive. He was loud, and he was well educated. He was a lawyer and, I think, a war hero, too. But was as boisterous as Knox was kinda low-key.

[00:32:53] SL: Interesting dynamic. But . . .

MB: Yeah. And then, of course, you had Nick on [*laughs*—and Nick lost a lot of his allies in that election that I was elected. Bill Walmsley and Dooley Womack were two of his closest allies. And they were both defeated. Nick and I really [*laughs*] started off on opposite sides and stayed that way forever and ever. But I have to tell you, Nick Wilson was brilliant—is brilliant.

Tremendous natural ability, intelligence-wise, hard worker, and for the most part, did a lot of good things. I mean, you know, he was—he cared about folks. It was that other stuff that sometimes got him in so much trouble. Bookout had a great metaphor for it, the late [Arkansas state] senator Jerry Bookout said, "Nick is a charming and engaging fellow. He's the kind of guy that invites you to—out for an ice cream cone. What he doesn't tell you is you're gonna knock off a liquor store on the way." [Laughter] So I mean it's a—you know, all that's well documented.

SL: Right.

[00:34:12] MB: But it was an interesting dynamic. I used to think—you know, in the early [19]90s, I told the story that the senate had kind of divided up into Nick Wilson people and Mike Beebe people. And I think a fair and accurate breakdown of it would be that there were about twenty-four that considered themselves on my side, about six on Nick's side, and about five that you really never could tell what was going to happen. But with it bein' twenty-four to six, it was about even because that's—he had that much talent, and he worked at it all the time. I mean that was his full-time job. I was in Searcy tryin' to make a livin' and practice law and didn't spend eighty hours a week worryin'

about the internal workings of the senate or working on state government eighty hours a week. I devoted a lotta time to it—constituents got their money's worth outta [out of] me but not full-time like Nick did. You couple that intense work ethic that he had, devoted completely—now we know more about why but—with his natural ability, and he had tremendous ability, very high IQ, very intelligent person. Then you can see why he was as formidable as he was.

[00:35:35] SL: Let's talk about victories and losses . . .

MB: Hmm?

SL: . . . in the senate. What—and—I'll—do you have a couple of your, you know, what you consider your best, your proudest victories?

MB: No.


SL: You don't?

MB: No. I—you know, I've been asked that time and again—what—I mean you can go look at the record about the legislation that I sponsored or pushed. And a lotta times—well, let's put it this way. I wasn't as prolific with introducin' pieces of legislation or putting my name on pieces of legislation as most of my colleagues. I did relatively few numbers of bills. There are very few things that ever went through there of any substance of

significance that we hadn't worked out and worked on. If you really wanted, I guess, to highlight some of them, probably two constitutional amendments stand out. I helped and led, with three or four of my colleagues, the school funding amendment that's now, I guess, Amendment 84 [Editor's Note: Amendment 74] that established the ability for money to follow the child, established minimum millages for maintenance operation for public schools, and finally solved what was then *Lake View I* [*Tucker v. Lake View School District No. 25*] issue, before *Lake View II* [*Lake View District No. 25 v. Huckabee*] added criteria other than just maintenance and operation funding for schools. That was long and hard-fought—required the people to adopt a constitutional amendment. [00:37:12] You may recall that's when [Governor Mike] Huckabee and I got on a helicopter in a bipartisan effort and went around the state, explaining to the voters the need for it. And that was certainly a substantive highlight. And then fashioning the property tax amendment, relief that gave homestead property credits and froze property tax increases for seniors in an effort to stave off that anti-property tax revolt that was at the time occurring was somethin' that I helped craft and obviously lead. But there were, I mean, there were countless bills—bills on juvenile justice that we

helped try to bring the system into the twenty-first century and change things. And we could go back and look, but none of 'em really stand out from the standpoint of p—that's the thing I'm remembered for. I don't think there's one thing I'm remembered for in the senate. [*SL exhales*] [00:38:11] And as far as defeats, you know, I'm sure I had my good share of those. I remember as a freshman I voted some way that I thought my life was over. [*SL laughs*] Regretted the heck out of the vote. Today I can't remember what the issue was or what the vote was. It was—but as a freshman, you know, you think that everybody's watchin' everything you do and that the whole world's going to be mad at you for whatever vote you just cast. And come to find out, nobody knew or cared. But that's—it takes experience to realize that—that you're not near as important and your votes aren't near as followed as sometimes you think you [*laughs*—as sometimes you think they are. And the world's not gonna come to an end if you vote for somethin' five people are mad about or twenty people are mad about. And even if it did change, as you get a little more experience, sometimes it's worth it. Freshmen have a tendency to be afraid. But that's not exclusive to politics of the [Arkansas] General Assembly. Anybody in a brand new business tends to have

trepidation about what they're doin' or how they're doin' it, a lot more than somebody with more experience.

 [00:39:28] SL: When you first got in—or—from the time that you first got in to the time that you left the senate, do you feel like you lost any ideals? Or do you feel like . . .

MB: No, I . . .

SL: I mean there's a maturing process that's going to happen . . .

MB: No, you know, I don't know that I lost any ideals. I was [*laughs*—I've been—some of the pundits and columnists say that I'm not idealistic enough, that I'm too pragmatic. And by nature, I am much more pragmatic than I'm an idealist. I see a problem; I want to fix it. I see a need; I try to meet it. I see wrong and try to right it. I mean you go about tryin' to solve people's problems and make their lives better. That's what this is all about. And we all have our ideals, you know. We all have certain things that are basic, core beliefs. But there are those people who are so idealistic that sometimes they're not pragmatic enough, and then I suppose I'm probably guilty sometimes of being too pragmatic. But—so I don't think I lost any idealism in the senate. If anything, I think, I had some faith restored that these people are a lot better than a lot of people thought they were. [00:40:40] I'll tell you a funny—oh, it's not


a funny story it's, I think, a revealing story. I guess it was in the [19]93 session. Fay Boozman, Republican [state] senator from northwest Arkansas who ultimately became head of the [Arkansas] Department of Health under Governor Huckabee and who was—died in an accident on his farm, was a—was elected from northwest Arkansas. He was a physician, ophthalmologist, and a conservative Republican who came preconceived that the legislature was bad and that politics was bad and term limits was the best thing that ever happened to America and the best thing that ever happened to Arkansas, and nobody that he was gonna meet down there had—he was prepared to think that there was very little integrity and very little competence. [00:41:37] And after several months and toward the end of the session, he came up to me one day, and he said he was wrong. He said these people are better than he thought they were—he was talking about the members of the senate. He said they care more about their constituents and tryin' to do right than he thought and that they were more competent and more honest than he thought. He said there are some exceptions [*SL laughs*], and there always are exceptions. And that's what you read the most about, the crooks and the bad guys. But I think that was telling, and I think to some extent, that happened to me, too. I think I have a

greater appreciation for a greater number of good people tryin' to do a good job for the right reasons than I would have had when I first went in there. Sure there are bad guys. And sure there are folks that steal money and are in it for the wrong reasons. Just in it for themselves. And don't work hard or don't really care about the consequences of their actions. But I think they're in the minority. [00:42:44] You know, like a lotta "one-issue" people. "One-issue" people bother me, you know, because life's more complicated than that. Representing your constituents is more complicated than that. If you're a house member, and you've got twenty-five thousand constituents, you can't tell me they all agree on every issue or that there's only one issue that's of importance to that district. Senators—you know, eighty thousand people in their district—you can't tell me that a senator can be a "one-issue" person, but some are, very few, but some are. And they end up not being, I think, the best public servants. People that come—like, for example, you'll get somebody that'll run on "my whole thing is no taxes," a no-tax pledge. Nobody likes taxes. I don't like taxes. I don't like to talk about votin' for a tax. Don't like to raise taxes. [00:48:38] Having said that, there is no source of money for the government except taxes. So if you want schools, if you want



policeman, if you want nursing homes that are there when people don't have any money to take care of their grandmothers, if you wanna lock rapists and murderers and armed robbers up in prison, if you want colleges and universities, you don't get—if you want highways, you don't get any of that without taxes. It's the only form of—the ability to be able to pay for that. Some people come down and say, "I'll never vote for a tax." Sometimes they're the first ones that want that highway. We got folks right now that don't want to support a severance tax, even though we're—we have the lowest severance tax in the country and even though the industry itself has now agreed that where we are is unfair and needs to be raised and have agreed to a level to raise it. You still got people that won't vote for it because it's a tax increase, and they're against it. They'll be the first ones that want that highway that these monies would go for. They'll be first ones that s—that would want a four-lane into their town. But they don't want to vote for a tax to pay for it. That's not good public service. If you don't want to vote for a tax 'cause you think it's too onerous or an improper type of tax, or you don't like where it's gonna to be spent, or you think we've got plenty of money, and we don't need it, that's fine. [00:45:13] Those are good reasons to vote

against a tax. And I've voted against some taxes for that very reason. But just to take "I'll never vote for any tax period because I don't believe in taxes" is unrealistic if you understand that some services are essential and basic, primarily education. I don't know if folks realize it, but out of every general revenue dollar in Arkansas, ninety-five cents goes to three areas. Ninety-five cents out of every dollar goes to education, human services, and prisons. Roughly seventy percent of that ninety-five, seventy percent of the total goes to education. So where do you cut? You close schools? You close colleges? Do away with pre-K programs? So my idealism probably is roughly the same as it was [*coughs*—excuse me—when I first went in the senate. Which on a scale of idealism versus pragmatism is probably below fifty.

 [00:46:15] SL: [*Laughs*] That's good though. I mean that's good that you see—that you are pragmatic that way. And that's probably why people . . .

MB: Oh, I'm idealistic from the standpoint that I think that this country is founded on principles that allow a kid to come from the home and the background I came from to be where I am. You can't do that and not be idealistic. You can't do that and not have some idealism in there. An—the idealism is that we ought

to have a system that allows merit and hard work to provide our people with virtually any opportunity that they are able to—that they want to pursue, that there should be no artificial barriers, there should be a pathway if they have the work ethic and the desire to achieve something wonderful. And I've been the beneficiary of that, and it's because of this country. And it's because of this state. And it's because of a lotta people helpin' along the way. And that's idealism. And that's—I'm replete with that. That runs in e—in my marrow. Totally idealistic about the philosophy of government and the system of government that we have and the opportunities that it creates, probably as idealistic as anybody you'll ever talk to. But once you get past that, now how do we solve problems? That's where the pragmatism comes in.

[00:47:43] SL: Have we got—how 'bout some stories. [MB laughs]
Let's tell some stories.

MB: Well, I could tell you a coupla [couple of] lulus.

SL: Let's talk some good stories. [MB takes a drink] You know, I don't want to limit you to the stories you can tell, but have you got any that involve any former notable politicians or are there—is there anybody that really influenced you? I guess I'm just looking for some—for a good story . . .

MB: Anecdotal information . . .

SL: Anecdotal stuff. Yeah, that . . .

[00:48:23] MB: Well, I'll tell you the first time that I ever met John Miller.

SL: Okay.

MB: John Miller, a state representative, long-time, state representative from Izard County, very knowledgeable, very powerful in the [Arkansas] House [of Representatives], may be—may have been the most powerful person in the house because speakers [of the house] rotated—more ceremonial than anything else. He was the house chairman of the Joint Budget [Committee], and you know, where the money is is where most of the power resides . . .

SL: You bet.

MB: And Budget is where the money was. John Miller was an ASU graduate. I was a young member of the ASU board. Really young, in my mid-twenties, late twenties. And my first exposure to the Arkansas legislature was pulling John Miller's shoe out of my rear end, I think. [SL laughs] We had named Ross Pritchard as President [of the Arkansas State University System]. Dr. [Carl R.] Reng who had been the long-time president of ASU for thirty–thirty-five years retired and announced his retirement a

year or two in advance. But—was my first year on the board, so within the first meeting of me bein' on a five-member board, which is a very small board . . .

SL: Small.

[00:49:44] MB: . . . I was twenty percent of the decision-makin' process for a new president for ASU in my first meeting. And then in subsequent meetings, it took about six or eight months after the—before it was resolved, and we appointed Ross Pritchard, who was a Rhodes Scholar, a [University of Arkansas] Razorback football player in the old days—scored the first touchdown in War Memorial Stadium but had gone on to the Peace Corps—and I'll tell you a funny story about that too 'cause it's a great story about Kennedy—and was a very accomplished person. He had been a professor and was hired as our president. Now in private I didn't vote for him. I had voted for Gene Smith but thr—it was a three to two [3-2] vote in private, and then in public—you have to take those votes then in public, and I voted for him. And Larry Brewer would not. So it was four to one [4-1]. We wanted the whole five to show, you know, unanimity. But Ross had a big family and a different lifestyle than Arkansas was used to and demanded some things, and we gave in and did it and talked about it. Ended up buildin' a seven

or eight thousand square-foot addition to a seven or eight thousand square-foot mansion that was the president's home at ASU. And John Miller went nuts, couldn't imagine why he'd spend that money or wanna spend that money, couldn't imagine why he'd demand it. And took his wrath out on the board, includin' me. And I was a novice—you've got to remember I'm, what, twenty-five years old, twenty-six years old, and it was my first political activity, albeit appointed. [SL laughs] And he scared me to death. You know, he was a lot older, and he was slow talking, a slight built man. But he was powerful. [Laughs] And so my first exposure to the Arkansas legislature was John Miller chewin' me out for being a board member who had voted to help expand the president's mansion for Ross Pritchard. But you wanted to hear a story about personalities. He told this story—Ross Pritchard told this story, and it's a great story about staff work and the force of personality and JFK.

SL: Okay.

[00:52:16] MB: Ross was, in 1960, a professor at Southwestern College in Memphis [Tennessee]—it's now Rhodes College, a very fine, small liberal arts school in Memphis. And decided he wanted to run for Congress and in 1960 did run for Congress, and back then in Memphis, the elections were over in the

primaries.

SL: Right.

[00:52:41] MB: There were no Republicans in Memphis in 1960, or at least not enough to worry about. And so Ross ran and was defeated in the Democratic primary for Congress. And as—is not unusual human nature then didn't want anything else to do with politics since politics had just—the voters had just rejected him. So he went back to teaching at Southwestern, and come November [1960] JFK gets elected president. [00:53:12] He's got this great idea about this new organization called the Peace Corps. And he's got his brother-in-law, [Robert] Sargent Shriver [Jr.], heading up the Peace Corps. He's puttin' his administration together. He's puttin' his team together. And he gets sworn in, and his team starts trying to recruit talent for the administration. And they did a pretty good job of getting' a pretty eclectic group of talent in that administration across party lines. Somebody had identified Ross Pritchard as somebody they wanted on the ground floor, high up in this new organization called the Peace Corps, and so they started courting Ross Pritchard to join the administration as a deputy director of the Peace Corps, and Ross would have nothin' to do with it. He was disillusioned with politics and didn't want to listen to 'em.

[00:53:59] Well, as luck would have it, three or four months into the Kennedy administration, he had a speech in Nashville [Tennessee]. And then he had another speech somewhere farther out west. So they arranged for a whistle-stop sort of, Air Force One landing in Memphis for a tarmac press conference, but the real reason was for Kennedy to say something to Ross Pritchard, who he didn't know from Adam's off-ox. You knew he didn't know Ross Pritchard. But the staff had determined that this is somebody they needed. [00:54:32] So Kennedy lands in Nashville and makes whatever speech he's gonna make and gets back on Air Force One for the fifteen minute, ten minute flight to Memphis, and they give him a briefing book complete with pictures and biographical material about Ross and Emily Pritchard. Emily's his wife. She was—her name was Emily Gregg, an old-time, Memphis family. And so Air Force One lands in Memphis, and they don't even have—they don't even come up to the gates or anything. They've got the ramp and the red carpet, and they've got all the televisions stations and the news media. They've got a US Senator and a congressman and the mayor and they've got all this line of dignitaries lined up to meet the president of the United States. And Ross and Emily Pritchard are several people down in the line, and the president of the

United States bounds off of Air Force One, passes everybody in the line-up, walks right up to Emily Pritchard, who he's never seen in his life, grabs her hand, and says, "Dear Emily, I do hope you'll change your mind and join us in the Peace Corps." Well, 'course, it was over. [SL laughs] They immediately accepted the offer. [00:55:37] He went on to be the deputy director for the Middle East for the Peace Corps. Spent twenty years in Tehran when the Shah was in Tehran, in Iran. And ran the Peace Corps for probably a sixth of the world for Kennedy and beyond—through numbers of administrations. And it's a great testament to, number one, great staff work and to, number two, the force of a charismatic personality.

[00:56:08] SL: Well, and I'm sure he did a great job.

MB: Oh, I'm sure he did. I'm sure he did. And we were—he was a good guy from the standpoint of his ability. He had difficulty with some of his people skills with some of the constituencies, and some of his demands got some of us in trouble early on but a very talented man, very talented.

SL: You . . .

KK: It's time to change tapes.

SL: Oh, okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:56:30] SL: We're rolling now, so . . .

MB: Okay, sure.

SL: And then, you know, didn't you mention Archie?

[00:56:38] MB: Archie Schaffer [III]?

SL: Yeah.

MB: Yeah, Archie was a fraternity brother of mine at ASU and was the connection—the significance of that in politics was he was Dale Bumpers's nephew and chief of staff—for lack of a better word—for awhile. And, I think, had significant influence on gettin' Bumpers to appoint me to the ASU board which got me started when I didn't have a dime and didn't know Dale Bumpers and hadn't done anything for him—didn't deserve any patronage. But Archie's lobbying, I'm sure, was one of the—with his uncle inside the governor's office was probably a factor. I mean, I don't know—I wasn't there. But I have to assume that that had some degree of influence on Governor Bumpers 'cause he didn't know me . . .

SL: Well, you know, I always heard that Archie gave up going to med school to manage Dale's campaign . . .

MB: I don't know.

SL: . . . that he was asked to manage and he was on his way to med school and gave that up.

MB: And I don't know the answer to that.

SL: Okay.

SL: Any other story—any story 'bout Arch? Arch is one of our [the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History Advisory] board members so . . .

MB: Yeah—no. I mean Archie's always been kinda low-key, slow talkin' but always involved. [*Laughs*] I mean he's always kind of been in the thick of things, you know. And he's a very knowledgeable person. He's somebody that in college you never would've un—believed at the time that he would end up where he was ended up. I thought he was gonna be a football coach. But obviously went in a different direction, and I'm sure that givin' up med school and helpin' run Dale Bumpers's campaign probably changed his whole direction. He probably got exposed to some things like I did and changed his mind like I did about the FBI.

SL: Got the fever.

MB: Yeah.

[00:58:50] SL: What about Dale Bumpers? I mean did you ever develop any kind of a . . .



MB: [*Laughs*] Dale Bumpers—oh, yeah, you know, I adore Dale Bumpers. [*SL takes a drink*] I just—you know I give him

significant credit for even gettin' me started in politics. Dale and David [Pryor]. I'll tell you a Dale and David story that I—and I like 'em both . . .

SL: Okay.

[00:59:10] MB: . . . but it epitomizes the difference between 'em.

Dale is enormously talented—should've been president.

Should've been president of the United States. Would've been a good president. Courage, intellect, oratory skills. I think he was better than Clinton as a "speechifier," if you will, in his heyday.

And that's high praise 'cause I think Clinton's one of the best that's ever been, so that tells you the esteem with which I hold

Dale Bumpers's oratorical skills. Obviously Clinton feels the same way—he wouldn't have asked him to be his lawyer in closing arguments in the impeachment trial. But Ginger had planned this trip to Washington, DC, ostensibly for Kyle. It was really for Ginger. Kyle was what—let's see—George [H. W.]

Bush the first was president, so it was in the late [19]80s. Kyle was probably eight—seven, eight, nine years old—somethin' like

that. And so we were going to spend a week there and she—I mean she had it all mapped out. She had done a lot of work, you know. And she had meetings set up and tours arranged.


[01:00:28] And one day she had a meeting with Bumpers in his

office, and the next day she had a meeting with Pryor. So with Bumpers we met in his office, and it was when Tiananmen Square was going on, so whatever year that was. So Bumpers and I spent an hour or forty-five minutes. And we talked about politics and world affairs. We talked about Arkansas politics and national politics, international politics and relations. Had a great time, just had a great time. Ginger and Kyle sat over on the couch, and I'm sure they were bored to death. [*Laughter*]

[01:01:14] The next day we have lunch in the Senate dinin' room with Pryor, David Pryor—she's got all that arranged. I don't think David's talked to me yet. [*SL laughs*] He didn't talk to Ginger much. He spent the lunch hour tellin' Kyle about—"This is Senator [Dan] Inouye's table, where he normally sits, and this bean soup goes back to seventeen-whatever, and Senator so-and-so sits there, and that chandelier came from thus-and-such, and that mantle is this old, and by the way, let's go on down to the vice president's office, Dan Quayle. He's never here anyway, and we'll put you in his chair, and here, take some of his pens and pads, and by the way, this desk over here outside the vice president's office is the actual desk that the Emancipation Proclamation was signed on by Abraham Lincoln and—oh, and Kyle come over here and look at this balcony."

Well, heck, who do you think Kyle and Ginger talkin' about from now on? [*SL laughs*] [01:02:14] David Pryor. And, you know, that's why—and Dale will tell you that David Pryor is the most beloved politician in the state, and it's because of that personal kind of interaction that David Pryor has. And that—and David is totally self-deprecating, and his humor is based on self-deprecation and modesty, you know. He'll tell a story like, "You know, I went to a gas station, and the guy came out and said, 'I know you. You're'"—and David'll say, "My chest swells up," and then David will finally say, "David Pryor?" and he said, "No, that's not who you are, but I'll think of it in a minute." Or, "No, I don't know him, but I'll think of it in a minute." [*SL laughs*]

Whereas Bumpers will go in, and he'll say, "You're lucky to have me here." [*SL laughs*] And make a joke out of it, and people like it. I mean it's—it'll be humor, but you know, "You people are really lucky that I decided to come see you now." And both of them are successful at it, but they're one-eighty [Editor's Note: 180 degrees] opposites in terms of their approach. One of 'em takes a bit of arrogance, cockiness, self-assurance and makes a joke out of it and is accepted. The other one takes extreme humility and self-deprecation and makes a joke out of it, and it seems to work for both of 'em—totally contrasting



styles, both of 'em great senators. [*SL laughs*] Both of 'em do a great job. [01:03:44] One really good illustration of that with Dale Bumpers was—it was the year that—well, Tommy Robinson was still a Democrat. [*SL exhales*] I think it was the years that Ed Bethune [Jr.] ran against David Pryor [for US Senator in 1984]. I believe that was the year. But they had a late—almost like just three or four days before the election—late in the political year rally at the White County Fairgrounds for the Democratic Party. Must've been eight hundred people there, and they were there to see Tommy. It was a Tommy Robinson crowd. Very conservative, very nationalistic, conservative Democrats, and there were a lot of speakers. [01:04:45] And Bumpers was the keynote. Well, he wasn't on the ballot, but he was the keynote. Pryor was up, and Tommy was up. Those folks spoke and that huge crowd, which was pro-Tommy Robinson, got to hear Dale Bumpers get up and start to make his keynote speech at the end, after everybody talked, about the importance and the necessity of foreign aid. [*SL laughs*] And he started that speech, and I thought, "He has—he's gone over the deep end. He's lost his mind. This crowd would hate foreign aid. They wouldn't want to give a quarter to any other country or any other society in the world and can't understand why our

tax dollars are goin' to foreign aid, and he's—and he knows that, and he started this speech about the virtues of foreign aid and what a tool that is in American foreign policy." And I thought he'd just lost his mind. And in ten minutes he had the crowd believin' foreign aid was the greatest thing since sliced bread.

[*SL laughs*] It's the dangdest thing. And I often wondered if he did that just to prove he could do it. But he was that persuasive, and he was that good, and he still is. [*Laughs*]

SL: Yeah. Yeah. They're quite a show together . . .

MB: Mh-hmm. Yes, they are.

[01:06:02] SL: . . . whenever they get together. Well what about Bill Clinton?



MB: Ah! Enormous talent. Tremendous intellect. Bill Clinton's intellect is well known, I think. And a tremendous capacity for soaking up knowledge. Obviously great oratorical skills, very articulate, very persuasive. But you combine that with this unbelievable work ethic—energy—about politics, and it's a formidable, formidable combination. You know, I think that, you know, a lot of this stuff's luck. I mean bein' in the right place at the right time, and a lot of that applies to all of us. I mean certainly you make some of your luck, and you have to have some abilities to take advantage of luck, but I'm not sure—I

know he says he ran to win—I'm still not sure to this day he thought he had a chance of winnin' the presidency when he announced. [01:07:06] I mean George Bush was at a ninety-one percent approval rating after he kicked the heck out of Saddam Hussein and successfully got Iraq outta Kuwait. And here's this governor from Arkansas that's announced for president in a field of five or six Democrats—how you gonna get through that? And then even if you do get through it, how you gonna beat George Bush Sr.? But, you know, it all kinda fell in place for him. But he's always had those skills. His persuasive ability was good—part of your persuasive ability is the office. Whether you're a governor or a president, the office itself creates a credibility and a persuasiveness about it that gives you a leg up in virtually any one-on-one situation, whether it's with a legislator or a constituent, or whoever—a business leader, whoever it may be. And the ability to be able to use that office, that heightened credibility, is important. But taking it to a different level would include the personal skills that the officeholder would have just by virtue of their own ability and their own personality. And he certainly had that. He also had this desire to always be accepted and be liked. [01:08:38] You know, he came from some of the same background I came

from—single parent and some of the same—I think he had it a lot easier than I had [*laughs*—in terms of the economics, but he had a lot of the same stuff. And to a large extent, there's psychologists that suggest when you come from that, you always want to be accepted, and you always want to be—people to like you. Of course, I think that, to a large extent, trait is a pretty common trait among most human beings regardless of where they come from or regardless of who they are. [*Laughs*] But he really sometimes got in—himself in trouble with that because that's back to the wanting everybody to be happy and like him, overpromising sometimes several things to too many people. But very, very—I think able is about as good a description . . .

[01:09:40] SL: Well, I'm sure you had to work with him on legislation.

MB: I did. I did. You know, he came in when I came in. He came back in when I came in. He came—he defeated Frank White and came back in the [19]82 election when I came in as a senator, so I was a freshman senator when he was back in as a reconstructed governor, so to speak, after he'd learned his lesson about bein' young, immature, and arrogant during the—his first term. At least that was some of the criticism that some of the folks heaped on him at the time. So, yeah, we kind of—

our kids were born the same year within—I think, Chelsea [Clinton] was born in August, I mean, in February, and Kyle was born in April. I believe that's the way it was. So had a lot in common there. He was always easy to work with, always easy to work with—sometimes you didn't agree, but he was always easy to work with. We had our fights. I remember a huge fight we had—this is a great story about his temper.

SL: Okay.

[01:10:51] MB: In November of [19]83, which would have been toward the end of my very first year—we'd had the regular session earlier in the year, and we'd gone home. He called a special session, which at the time was the longest—up until about three years ago with the *Lake View* thing—the longest special session we ever had. Called a special session to respond to the first school funding, supreme court-ordered crisis. It was the *Alma* case [*Dupree v. Alma School District No. 30*] that—and it's too complex to go into—but it was a school funding case. His remedy for—and what actually had to happen, you had to divide—more evenly divide the money than was being divided. There's two ways to do that. You could take away money from those that had too much and give it to those that had too little, or you could increase some taxes and raise those up to equalize it out.

And he had that sales tax increase—proposal—to accomplish that. He had a couple of other proposals that didn't get through the house. They got through the senate but—one on severance tax, incidentally, one on corporate income tax but—so he had this special session—that was the same special session as teacher testing . . .

SL: Okay.

[01:12:01] MB: . . . when all that brouhaha was going on as well.

And so we'd been down there thirty days. I mean that's a h—long special session. We were there for virtually the entire month of November leadin' into December. And finally got down to the sales tax vote, after all the other stuff had—and the house kept putting what we in the senate call an "H&R Block amendment" on the sales tax. It allegedly would give some credits on the income tax for some sales tax to people below a certain level, but we said it'd cost 'em more money because they'd have to file a long return and hire H&R Block to do their tax return than they'd save on the credit, and plus [*clears throat*] cumulatively it added up to quite a bit of money for schools, so the senate wouldn't go along with the house amendment. Well, there was a lot of this house versus senate stuff going on—which happens from time to time, and the house

would put their amendment on, and Clinton would run down to the senate and say, "Accept their amendment." And we'd knock it off, send it back to the house, and he'd run down to the house and say, "Leave it off." He didn't care [*SL laughs*] about the amendment one way or another. He wanted the sales tax for schools to get out of the court, to comply with the supreme court order, and get out of the special session. And, frankly, the amendment wasn't a huge deal moneywise, but it was a fight between the house and senate. [01:13:33] Well, Knox and Max—or Knox—decided that after this happened three or four times and that Clinton wasn't showin' much leadership in terms of takin' one position or the other—he just wanted it done—decided that we'd send a message by goin' home till Tuesday—this was on a Friday. And the longest you can adjourn without the other house agreein' is three days. So all the activity that day was down at the—was scheduled to be down at the house, so the governor didn't have any of his liaisons down at the senate, and this all kind of came up at the last minute. And so we adjourned the senate on Friday morning at ten o'clock, eleven o'clock, something like that, until Tuesday, thinkin' that that would force the house into leavin' the dang amendment off. They could go ahead and pass it, and the governor could sign it,

and we wouldn't even have to come back Tuesday, and it'd be a done deal. Thought it was a pretty good strategy. [*SL laughs*]

And so I'm on—I gather my briefcase and week's worth of stuff up and head out toward my car to go to Searcy until Tuesday. Think on my way, you know, somebody ought to tell the governor what our strategy is since he didn't have any folks up there. [01:14:48] And, you know, I could just walk in, that's the way it was back then if you're a legislator, particularly if you're a senator. And so I walk in, and he is standing in that old hallway in the inner part of his office, had an armful of papers, and I start to explain what we'd done, and he exploded. I could remember throwing the papers up in the air [*SL laughs*], and the language he used was pretty colorful. I mean, not that I was offended by it because I've used the same colorful language, but it was bein' directed at me. And so I said "I don't have to take this stuff." And so I turned and walked out, and he chases me out to the outer office's front door and grabs my arm and says, "Come back and let's talk about it." And so we go back in, and he starts it all over again, just rantin' and ravin' and cussing [*laughs*] and—at which point I probably started cussing, too. And so I take off a second time, and he comes and gets me again, and I said, "I'm not goin' back in there if you don't calm

down. I'm goin' home." And so by this time, he'd calmed down a little bit, and we talked about it—he thought it was a terrible idea, thought it would irritate the house to the point where we'd never get anything done, and we'd successfully delayed any resolution for at least three or four more days. And to that end, brought the leadership of the house down. [01:16:19] Now I'll never forget this, John Paul was the speaker of the house—from Searcy, John Paul Capps—and he had John Miller in there, and [sighs] oh, I think probably Buddy Newman—I mean, Buddy Turner and Bobby Newman—he had five or six—and he had Tim Massanelli in there—and he had Jodie Mahony, young, not really a member of the leadership, but Jodie always stuck into everything, you know. [SL laughs] We thought Jodie was on Joint Budget for years. He never was. He just came to all the meetings. Typical Jodie stuff, you know. And so we're sittin' there, and the consensus among everybody in the house—all the house leadership was, "They're mad, governor. They're mad at the senate. They think it's a cheap trick. They'll never vote for this. We might as well send 'em home till Tuesday." The voice in the wilderness was Jodie Mahony. He said, "Governor, we can pass this today." Only took fifty-one votes, the sales tax. And said, "We can pass this today." And so we talked about it a little

more and finally Jodie won over all the old heads and all the established leadership, so they went to try it. So I got up to leave and Clinton said, "Uh-uh! You're stayin' here with me." Said, "If I gotta [got to] do"—and so they settled on a strategy to call six or eight house members at a time, selected ones that they thought they could—they might move their vote on, to the governor's office. So the governor sent out for lunch, so he and I sat there at his desk eatin' lunch. [01:18:01] I'm a freshman senator, and they'd come in five or six at a time, and he'd talk to 'em about votin' for it. And they voted three or four times that day and never could get fifty-one votes. They'd get forty-seven, or they'd get fifty-one, and somebody'd sign the ballot, and somebody wouldn't have been in their seat and somebody else voted them, so they'd strike that vote. But they kept expunging so that you could keep revoting, which is a pretty good indication that somebody really does want it to pass, even if they don't wanna vote for it, they're willing to expunge. And after several hours late in the afternoon, three or four o'clock in the afternoon, after several votes, I think it ended up with fifty-two or fifty-three votes, and it passed, effectively ending the legislative session. But it was a different experience for a freshman senator to sit there by the governor, especially after

he'd been so angry a few hours earlier and watch him talk to all the house members that he'd bring in to—about getting them to vote that way.

SL: That had to really strengthen your all's relationship to go through that together.

MB: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

SL: And there's no question he appreciated your . . .

MB: Oh, I think he did . . .

SL: . . . givin' him a heads-up and then sticking with . . .

MB: Oh, he didn't sound like he appreciated it! And . . .

SL: But the bottom line was . . .

MB: Yeah it didn't hurt. And then, you know, we worked together on things from—I mean, 'cause he was governor for ten years—my first ten years in the senate. So there were always issues and activities of import.

[01:19:29] SL: Let's talk about—real quick—about your fly around with Governor Huckabee.

MB: Yeah. Well, you may remember that the next crisis we had with school finance was the lake—first part of the *Lake View* case. It was in the mid-[19]90s—early [19]90s actually. And when [Jim Guy] Tucker was governor, that's when we were tryin' to resolve it. It was along the lines of the *Alma* case, only expanded. The

court kept changin' the rules . . .

SL: Yeah.

[01:20:04] MB: . . . which courts do—they can do that as things evolve. What was the issue in 1983 with that Clinton special session was resolved and lasted for about ten years, and then the court required even more things to be changed and more equity to exist, more things to be done—in a different fashion in the Lake View—the first *Lake View* case. And so with Tucker as governor, that's when we started tryin' to craft a solution. And part of the solution really involved local effort and property taxes, which were all the way across the board, and the court said you can't do that. And so while Tucker was still governor, we did some statutory things, but we couldn't fix it constitutionally without a constitutional amendment obviously and without a vote of the people. So during that session in [19]95, we crafted the constitutional amendment that ultimately was adopted. Well, at the time, Huckabee's lieutenant governor, and he's runnin' for the US Senate—and I guess it's the US Senate seat that—I can't remember who ultimate—whether that was the one that Blanche Lincoln won or the one Tim Hutchinson won—but it was the [19]96 election.

SL: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

MB: And I think it was when Pryor announced that he was quitting . . .

SL: Mh-hmm.

MB: . . . David Pryor announced that he was quitting, so it had to be Tim Hutchinson, I guess . . .

SL: Yep.

[01:21:25] MB: . . . that ultimately ended up—but before Tim Hutchinson got in it, Mike Huckabee was runnin' for the Senate. Jim Guy Tucker was the governor, and the presumption was Jim Guy Tucker was gonna stay there. And we all know what happened. I guess it was [19]90—the [19]98 election—anyway I can't remember, but Huckabee switched from the Senate once he became the acting governor, and obviously, decided to stay there. [*Coughs*] But when all this came up, he was runnin' for the Senate and was lieutenant governor, and we talked about this amendment, and then Tucker gets in trouble, resigns—gets convicted and resigns, and Huckabee becomes governor, and I start tryin' to talk to him about the need to pass this amendment. And I'm sure he thought it was a trick. At least I got the impression that he thought—how could he be—in effect this was raising local property taxes in some districts that weren't at twenty-five mills, which was required under the

amendment, which was the only way we knew how to comply with the court order on local effort and distributing the money without the state taxpayers just paying everybody's fair share regardless of what they did locally, which obviously created other inequities. And since it was a property tax issue and a local issue, it required constitutional change. And we had drafted it and prepared the proposed amendment in the [19]95 session, but it had to be voted on in November of [19]96.

[01:22:52] And it was in June or July of [19]96 when all this stuff changes, and Huckabee is elevated to governor because of the resignation of Jim Guy Tucker. And I'm sure he thought we were tryin' to trick him into getting' beat or ruinin' his career. It took a lot of persuasiveness to tell him this was a—"You either do this, Governor, and we either pass this amendment, or you're in a world of hurt because the supreme court will, in effect, take over your schools or do something with their remedy more drastic than what this is." And he finally got convinced. And so the way we convinced him was I said, "I'll go with you." I said, "It's not a trick. I'll go with you and put my name out there and my reputation out there, and then you won't think it's just us tryin' to get you in trouble." And so whoever did the PR stuff for the campaign—I don't remember whether it was—I think it was

[pause]—I don't remember who it was but in—whoever the firm was or firms were, kinda latched on to the idea of doin' a helicopter tour to heighten awareness and go out all over the state. So they put me and him in a helicopter, and we traveled the state tellin' people the truth, and we told 'em the truth—about here's what the amendment does, here's what your options are, here's the reason for the amendment, and the people passed it. But I'm convinced to this day that he initially thought we were trying to trick him.

[01:24:39] SL: Well did you enjoy the trip?

MB: Oh, yeah. I mean one day I remember specifically coming back from Watson Chapel, we were going fairly low along the Arkansas River and saw a huge buck and a pretty good size herd—but as big a buck as you'll ever want to see. And we spent some of the helicopter gasoline just stayin' there, watching that big buck. [*Laughter*] We didn't have any weapons in the helicopter.

SL: Right. Or you would have landed. [*Laughter*]

MB: There was no thirty-aught-sixes [.30-06 rifle ammunition] or anything. [*Laughs*]

[01:25:22] SL: Well, what about today? What about go—what's going on in your life today?

MB: Governor is the best job I think you can have in politics. I'm convin—you know, I loved being an attorney general. I loved the senate—never thought I'd leave the senate. I had the best of all worlds. I had a real job back home and a real law firm and a real income and could still be involved politically. And but for term limits, might've stayed there forever. But term limits really helped me [*SL laughs*] because it forced me to make a decision, yes or no, get in or out. And you can do more in less time to improve Arkansas in a governor's chair as—than anywhere else. It is a wonderful job. You can surround yourself with talented people. People who really can go get things done. You have the opportunity to move a state in a direction. [01:26:24] 'Course, we've concentrated primarily on improving the entire educational process and the quality of education from pre-K to the end of life and everything in between as well as economic development opportunities. And we've created—we've bucked the national trend on job attraction—getting jobs from overseas back here—all kinds of jobs, including manufacturing jobs that a lot of people in this country'd given up on. As well as the higher tech stuff and as well as the new cutting edge things, such as in the biosciences field, a lot of the alternative fuels field. We've—we're into aerospace—it's now our largest manufacturing export.

Huge opportunities in some of those emerging sectors for Arkansas. [*Vocalized noise*] The diversity that exists in our state lends itself to the ability to be able to tackle several different arenas simultaneously. But all of it requires increased output in the education product, which we've worked very hard to do and which is receiving national accolades. And they now have us eighth out of fifty states in our system. Now we're not eighth in scores yet, but in terms of what we've done changing our system, putting the pre-K, puttin' the core curriculum, puttin' the course requirements, puttin' the standards in, the scholarship things we've done in higher education, the community college tie-in that we've done with our ability to be able to be responsive to the needs of business and industry in addition to the traditional role in community colleges of affordable and accessible, at least, first two years of higher ed. [01:28:07] All of those things combined now has Arkansas ranked nationally number eight. Who would have ever believed that? Who would have ever thought that? Tied for first—New Hampshire tied with us for first after what we did with—this time with our AP stuff—Advanced Placement courses in terms of scores and proliferation of advanced placement requirement courses bein' taught. Now the model that's held up in the rest of

the country with what we've now done with pre-K, pre-kindergarten, which will ultimately and systematically do about as much as anything in the entire educational process because it'll not only help those kids to be more competitive that needed it, it'll help those kids who didn't need it or got it some other way because the whole class can move faster 'cause you're not spending so much time trying to catch half the class up. And then that builds from the first to the second to the fifth to the ninth to the twelfth. You end up savin' a lot of money in the long run on remediation rates in college, and the ultimate output at every grade level ends up being so much sig—so much more advanced.

[01:29:06] SL: Don't you think your career in the senate and your pragmatic approach to solving problems kind of really has suited you up really well to be governor?

MB: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.

SL: I mean it seems like you would probably know what everybody's interests are, what everybody's needs are, from working with them for so long.

MB: Yeah, you can't—and even if they're new. Even if—with term limits, so many of 'em I didn't work with, they came in after I was gone from the senate—you still understand what they're

goin' through. You still understand some of the constituent pressures that exist. You still understand how this whole process affects 'em. So whether you had personal relationships with 'em from the past and those kinds of acquaintances that allow you to know what they're thinking and what they're feeling. You also just—by the nature of the way the system works—even with folks you didn't know, understand a lot more about what they're goin' through. So that helps—understandin' the process. You know, a new governor that doesn't have that kinda experience is pretty much dependent on his agency heads, on the bureaucracy—especially when it comes to budgetary issues. [01:30:27] Or if he's fortunate enough to go get a great chief of staff that understood it because of where he or she had been, totally dependent on the chief of staff. I don't have to do that. Now I got a great chief of staff—he's my best friend, and we almost know what each other's thinkin'. And he did serve sixteen years in the senate with me. So that makes it awesome and wonderful. But he knows, and I know the answers to most of the questions that a lotta times a governor would be totally dependent. For example, on the head of DF and A, [Department of] Finance [and] Administration about budget issues, or health department, or human services, or prisons, or colleges and

universities, or department of education—we've been there. We helped invent it. We helped direct it. Sometimes we lost on things we wanted to do differently [*SL laughs*], but we've been exposed. It's hard to fool us. Now that's not to say we can't be fooled. [*Laughs*] I've been fooled. And it's not to say you can't—there aren't things that you don't know 'cause there are still things, as complex as it is, that I don't know. But it's certainly a leg up to have had twenty years experience in the senate and four years at the AG [attorney general] helped. It's a different perspective, but it helped, too—to prepare you for the questions, the answers, the issues that you face as governor.

[01:31:56] SL: You know, the faces in the senate and in the house change. The positions change. But the constituencies kind of stay the same, don't they?

MB: Yeah, you know. [*Clears throat*] And that's one of the effects of term limits. Those constituencies are going to manifest themselves in a couple of ways. Knowledge is power, and the lack of knowledge inhibits the power of a person or group. The legislature has certainly lost a lot of power because they've lost a lot of knowledge because they are term limited. I don't care how smart you are. It takes you a while to understand all that you need to know as a legislator. And with six years and you're



gone in the house, it has diminished the power of the legislature because it's diminished their knowledge. If you have a strong and knowledgeable governor, that's where the power goes. If you don't have a strong and knowledgeable governor, you're still gonna have power goin' somewhere—it's like water—it's gonna go somewhere. It's gonna go to some of those constituencies that you mentioned. It's gonna go to lobbyists that represent those constituencies who do have the knowledge because they are not new—they've been there a while. Or it's gonna go to the bureaucrats, the unelected, state agency people who have been there a long time. Wherever that knowledge goes, it increases the power and influence of the holder of that knowledge. And wherever it leaves, it detracts from the knowl—from the power and influence of where it happens to leave. And so constituency groups can, and in many instances, have seen a lot of their influences grow, as you see knowledge go down in the legislature. And that's not a criticism of the legislators. It's not their fault. They're the victims of that very same thing. But that's what the people want, so we'll make the best of it.

[01:34:05] SL: So you may be the last of a era.

MB: [*Laughs*] Well, I was the last of the era because term limits [*SL clears throat*] fully hit the house in [19]97, fully hit the senate in

[20]03. So by [20]03 all us old folks that had been in the senate were gone. By [19]97 all the folks that had been in the house were gone. And [20]02 election was when I left the senate.

[01:34:31] SL: So really this term limit thing is just now gonna begin to really manifest itself at the governor level.

MB: Well, I think it's been manifested totally in the legislature since [20]03. So I think this is—it's been in effect completely, I think, for about five years.

SL: So we're not gonna get a governor that's got all this experience ever again.

MB: You never know. Well, you're not gonna get a governor that's had that much experience in the senate. You may get a governor that spent six years in the house and . . .

SL: Six years in the . . .

MB: . . . eight . . .

SL: ?Right?. Eight years in the senate and . . .

MB: . . . eight years in the senate—that's possible. But the likelihood of a legislator being governor is pretty slim. I'm only the second one in modern history. David Pryor spent two years in the house of representatives, and he was governor. And then I spent twenty years in the senate, and nobody else that has been

governor, in our memory, was ever in the legislature. McMath wasn't in the legislature. [Francis] Cherry wasn't in the legislature. [Orval] Faubus wasn't in the legislature. [Winthrop] Rockefeller wasn't in the legislature. Bumpers was not in the legislature. Clinton was not in the legislature. Frank White was not. Neither was Jim Guy Tucker or Mike Huckabee. So I mean you can go back sixty years, and David Pryor and I are the only two guys that ever went from the legislature—and he didn't go directly from the legislature. Neither did I. He went to [United States] Congress and then to governor. I went to AG and then to governor. But we're the only two people that ever had any legislative experience, so I wouldn't worry about not havin' legislative experience in the governor's office 'cause it never happened before anyway.

[01:36:02] SL: [Laughs] Okay. Well, I—that migration of knowledge and power shifting between constituencies and legislators . . .

MB: The problem has been even with a new governor [*SL clears throat*—when you had a legislature with pow—without term limits, you had some knowledge and power there, and those people were answerable to their constituents. They did get elected. They were subject to re-election or gettin' beat. So

you did have elected officials were—that were the repositories of the knowledge and, therefore, the repositories of the power. If you don't have that, and you don't have a governor with that, then the knowledge and the repository of the knowledge is the bureaucracy and the lobbyists. And that can be okay. If you've got a strong governor who may not have any knowledge but's got good intellect and great people skills, he'll know who to put around him or who to trust in the bureaucracy with tellin' the truth and makin' sound judgments. So you can get by without the knowledge. You just have to have good people around you that tell you the truth, that you've surrounded yourself with and listen to 'em.

[01:37:15] SL: Now when you come to the end of your administration here . . .

MB: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . we've talked about us coming back and kind of looking at where—what you got done and where you're headed from there . . .

MB: Mh-hmm.

SL: . . . just kind of a benchmark. What do you see in the future here as far as your administration and what you're gonna get done?

MB: You know . . .

SL: . . . Just kinda predictions, I guess.

[01:37:37] MB: I wanna finish attackin' the grocery tax. We were able to do something people talked about for fifty years and hadn't ever done. And that is cut the grocery tax—sales tax on groceries. I think it's the most regressive tax we have. And we cut it from six percent to three percent—we cut it in half last time. I wanna continue to cut it. I wanna be sensible and reasonable about it. I don't wanna cut essential services like education to cut it. So I wanna cut it as our revenues let us cut it. But I want to continue to cut it until we get rid of it. So I hope we see the elimination of sales tax on groceries because I'm gonna strive to do that. I want to continue the progress that we've made in education. I think it's the number one priority of state government. Just as defense of our shores from all enemies foreign and domestic is the number one priority of the federal government, education is the number one priority of the state government. And when I talk about education I'm talkin' about everything. I'm talkin' about K through twelve, I'm talkin' about pre-K, I'm talkin' about community colleges, four-year colleges, research institutions, adult education programs, job training, and re-training programs—all of those things, from

cradle to grave, encompasses some aspect of education.

[01:38:54] And then economic development. The opportunity for our people to have good jobs, better jobs, jobs of the twenty-first-century kind of jobs—not just rhetoric about it but really those kinds of jobs that pay the kind of wages that allow us to improve our quality of life. And we're making some significant progress in every one of those areas. Will other things occur that we hadn't thought about? Yeah. [01:39:17] Severance tax is one of them. You know, the one area that we hadn't dealt with in the last session when we were doin' all these other things was a road program. Now we have the opportunity to address a road program because of an economic boom in our state that affords us a reasonable way to do that without unduly burdening an industry, just being something closer in comparison in fairness and equity with sister states and the way they treat the gas industry. In fact we may even be treatin' 'em a little better than the sister states treat 'em. But an opportunity arose for us to be able to actually correct an inequity that existed in our severance tax. All that—you know, they tried that for fifty years—tried it for fifty years! But because it's a three-fourths vote, nobody was ever able to do it. Well, we're gettin' close. Gettin' close to bein' able to do it right now. And if we can do

that, then there's another example of somethin' that people have been tryin' to do for fifty years and couldn't get done, and we got done. And we'll keep trying to do those things that elevate our quality of life.

SL: That sounds good. [*MB laughs*]

KK: You've got my vote.

[01:40:28] SL: [*Laughter*] Yeah, no kidding. Is there anything else that we oughta [ought to] talk about before I let you go? It's about elev—you've given me until almost 11:30. It's 11:25.

MB: I've gotta go.

SL: You gotta go.

MB: I think I do.

SL: I think—you've been very generous.

MB: Yes, I do. I've got—in fact, I've only got fifteen minutes to be out in West Little Rock.

SL: Well, let's go.

KK: Well, there you go.

[01:40:47 End of Interview]

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