

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

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**Blue to Red Oral History Project**

Shane Broadway  
Interviewed by John C. Davis  
March 8, 2021  
Little Rock, Arkansas

## Objective

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

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

## Transcript Methodology

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

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

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

### **Citation Information**

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**Shane Broadway was interviewed by John C. Davis on March 8, 2021, in Little Rock, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

John C. Davis: Here with me today is Shane Broadway, vice president of University Relations for the Arkansas State University System. Mr. Broadway has graciously accepted an invitation to participate in the Pryor Center project to chronicle the dramatic shift in partisanship in Arkansas, particularly over the last fifteen years. Shane, thank you so much for sitting down with us today.

Shane Broadway: My pleasure, John. Thanks for the invitation.

JD: So, Shane, you were aArkansas House of Representative from the late [19]90s and the early 2000s, served as a speaker in the General Assembly. You were in the Arkansas Senate from 2003 to 2011. You have a wealth of experience and knowledge in Arkansas politics and political history, and you're still actively engaged in the policy-making side of state government with your role through ASU. Tell me your earliest political memory.

SB: Oh, probably—actually, I always said when I was in kindergarten—and I used to kind of jab him a little bit. The man who was my state representative, who I would end up replacing, Larry Mitchell, went to my church, First Baptist Church in Bryant. And

so when he first ran for the House, he worked at Alcoa, and back in the day in Saline County, everything evolved around Alcoa or Reynolds, the aluminum plants. And so Larry worked at Alcoa, went to our church. And so I was, you know, captivated by that. You see signs around town. And I remember sittin' there at one of my parent's best friend's house listening to the election results on the radio when Larry won his first election. So that's probably my earliest memory, and I always used to kind of gig Larry after, you know, I got elected and said that, you know, I started campaigning for Larry Mitchell when I was in kindergarten.

[*Laughter*] He didn't like that as much. It wasn't as funny to him as it was to me.

JD: And what was his party ID?

SB: He was a Democrat. Served, oh, twenty years, I guess, from the time I was in kindergarten till I replaced him. Maybe longer than twenty years.

[00:02:10] JD: Well, sounds like at an early age, you were politically engaged already, very civically minded. Did your family discuss politics quite a bit growing up?

SB: Not really. My mom was a stay-at-home mom most of the time after I was born. She'd worked in the school cafeteria. My dad worked for the highway department, so you weren't politically

active workin' for a state agency. I do remember him comin' home one day and saying that Governor Clinton, on his comeback tour, had actually stopped by his little building out at the highway department when he was campaigning. And I—you know, it's one of those things you just remember, that the governor came by your dad's office, you know. Especially when he worked at the highway department so—but really not active. Didn't have any family of mine who were involved in politics in any way. It was just an interest, like I said, that I had early on with Larry servin' in the legislature. So it doesn't—my interest never came from anything from my family or anything like that.

[00:03:16] JD: Presumably those interests grew over time to get you where you are today. And could you discuss with us your more formative years, high school, college, and sort of how and when you became more experienced in party politics?

SB: Party politics never really—I was never in the party side of it. More just interest in the politic side of it. So Boys State was a key. I—that's where I really, you know, got the bug for public service and in politics and really where I gained my first appreciation. [00:03:49] My dad served in World War II. Lied about his age, the only lie I ever knew my father to tell was—so he could join the US Navy in World War II. He was obviously—I

was a late-in-life baby for my parents, so my father was older, had served in World War II, had lived in the Great Depression. And that's where a lot of his, you know, beliefs and if there were discussions about politics, came from was living through the great—growing up, you know, in the Great Depression. Which I think was a—for a lot of people in Arkansas at that time kind of where their politics maybe came from was that experience.

[00:04:30] And so I learned a lot, you know. But Boys State was really that first appreciation for those who served, the freedoms we have, the willingness to sacrifice everything. And so it really, you know, peaked my interest. It was not my childhood dream. My—actually my childhood dream was to be the voice of the Razorbacks, so I went to ASU. [*Laughter*] Which I always—was always one of my gr—my commencement speech lines, you know. My high school years were not the greatest years in terms of my academic career. Some of the greatest years of my life, but academically not so much. I always say I was in that half of the class that made the top half possible. [*JD laughs*] That's actually my best commencement line that I still use to this day. So I was not as focused in high school. But Boys State really kinda helped turn a corner for me in terms of my interest. I still wanted to pursue being a sportscaster, broadcaster, and at the

time that's where you went was to ASU. A lot of the long-term sportscasters, you know, Craig O'Neill or Steve Sullivan, a lot of those guys had gone to ASU. Scott Inman and I were in college together. And so that's where you went if you wanted to go into broadcasting at the time. Beth Hunt and I were in college together. [00:05:46] So to—but I still had that kind of interest in the back of my mind around politics because of Boys State. And I was involved in high school and student senate. I was a class officer. And so I still had, you know, kind of dabbled in it, I guess you would say. And when I got to Jonesboro, I got involved in student government through my fraternity. My big brother and—one of the other fraternity members that helped recruit me was actually student body president that year. So they—our fraternity at the time was very involved in student government and so they—it was kind of some expectation that you were gonna get involved in student government, and so I became a freshman senator, and it just kind of, you know, went on, and ended up bein' vice president of the student body my junior year, and then student body president my senior year. So that was really where I had kind of—after my first semester—I made the joke earlier about I was radio-TV major for a semester. So I kinda decided, you know, my parents were older. I was not

wild. I had kind of figured out to make it in that TV business you were probably gonna have to start somewhere out of state. You were gonna have to move and go away and move to various stations to eventually come back to Arkansas. It's a rarity that someone doesn't do that. And my parents were older, and I thought, "You know, I really don't wanna be too far away from home. I love Arkansas. I don't wanna be too far away from them." And so I went to an advisor and said, you know, "What do you think?" He said, "If you've got the voice, you can always be a sportscaster. You know, go take the courses, learn how to do the film and the editing and those kind of things. But go major in something else." Because I think he talked about, you know, at the time Peter Jennings was a political science or a history major. You know, I remember that stickin' in my head. [00:07:42] So that's when I decided to go and change my major to political science. I still kept some of the courses in radio-TV, but that kinda is where the change occurred was probably my—between my freshman and sophomore year of college and then—so it just kinda—the interest, you know, really started to grow there. And then I decided between my senior year and—my junior and senior year of college—actually Senator David Pryor was on campus for an event. I don't even remember what the

event was. But one of his aides was an ASU graduate, worked on his staff, fraternity brother, and he—we got to talkin' on the stairway as the senator was leaving campus. And he said, "You know, you ought to think about applying for an internship." I didn't know what that was. My family—you know, we weren't political. How was—why is a US Senator gonna select me, you know? My dad works at the highway department, you know. We don't have any money. I drive a—I got a Ford el—1976 bicentennial edition Ford LTD out back. *[JD laughs]* The thing is canary yellow. It's got an AM radio. Why would *[laughs]* anybody select me to be an intern in Washington, DC?

[00:08:58] And so I applied. Just, you know, take a shot in the dark, and I still have the letter when I was accepted. It was just kinda pretty amazing. You know, a kid from Bryant that barely got outta high school, had been admitted to college on probation. I mean, I was on probation when I entered ASU just 'cause of my grade point and ACT. I took every remedial course known to man at the time. For me it just had not clicked academically. And I go back to Boys State when it actually did and when I really started emphasizing and spending more time on my studies and those kind of things. And so that's why I always say it's never too late to start, but you gotta ha—there's gotta be

something that kinda, you know, drives you to that. [00:09:45]

And so I got to spend the summer of 1993 on Capitol Hill interning for Senator Pryor. It was President Clinton's first summer in the White House, so if you were from Arkansas, it was pretty cool. Everybody wanted to know, you know, "You're from Arkansas. You know, tell us about everything, you know." And so I was a Capitol tour guide. Spent most of the summer touring every Arkansan who came to DC [*laughter*] that summer because that was the thing to do in the summer of 1993 was to come to Washington, DC. But very honored to be selected and to work for Senator Pryor. I mean, you go around Capitol Hill, and you'd ride the tram, and there'd be Senator McCain or Tip O'Neill, you know, whoever, and they would always ask who you were interning for 'cause it—you know, they could spot you a mile away that you're an intern. And you'd always tell 'em David Pryor, and the remarks you always received were just, you know, "One of the best guys I know," you know, "Just the nicest person you could ever want to be friends with," and just a great representative for Arkansas.

[00:10:50] JD: Well, that opportunity must've not only opened doors but really inspired you because just a few years later, you're running for your first elected office.

SB: Yeah, well, you know, it really wasn't intended that way. I had always, obviously, been intrigued, because Larry was in the legislature, with the thought of serving in the General Assembly. And really, that was it. You know, obviously, people ask you after you run, "Are, you know, are you gonna run for governor, are you gonna run for this, you gonna run for that?" I never really had that interest. You know, you got—you have people, though, who I think grow up with the idea and thought that they wanna be governor or they wanna be US Senator. I never had that thought. My only thought was that I really wanted to be in the legislature. For some reason. And you know, I don't know what drove that thought, but that's really all I wanted to do was serve in the legislature. There's something about—I was a page for Larry. [00:11:40] Actually was a shadow for then Senator Beebe. I always joked with him about that, too—because of a class I was taking in American government. You had to do some kind of shadowing of somebody, and so why not an ASU graduate who's in the senate? And so spent a day down there. And so the process fascinate—the legislative process really intrigued me. And so I think that's what led me to make that decision.

[00:12:11] When Larry called me to tell me that he was gonna retire, he had two more years left before term limits would've

kicked in, and so he called to tell me. And I was actually working for Marion Berry, who was running for Congress at the time in Jonesboro. I was livin' in Jonesboro during the week. And but Larry called and said, "You oughta think about running." And so I came home right then and started kinda makin' the rounds. I mean, I was twenty-three, I was about to get married. My wife was—to be was livin' in DC, workin' on Capitol Hill. [00:12:43] So but we made the decision together. Got married on Saturday in the Capitol Rotunda, walked back into the Capitol Rotunda on Monday and filed for office. Would not recommend that [*JD laughs*] to most people to run for oh—get married, file for office, buy a house, all those things, move somebody back from DC in the same year. I don't know how we did it. And I still to this day do not know how we lived. She had—because she worked for a member of Congress, she had to take leave. So you know, we got by. I mean, we lived in this tiny little apartment until the fall, and we probably lived off a credit card is the only thing I could ever imagine how we survived for those few months. [00:13:26] But it was what I wanted to do, and she supported every minute. Debbie has always been by my side no matter what I wanted to do, and I hope I've done the same for her. But she knew of my interest, you know, for runnin' for the legislature. I just don't

think she thought it was gonna be the Monday after we got married. [*Laughter*]

[00:13:46] JD: Well, tell me a little bit about that race. Did you face a primary opponent?

SB: Yeah. Yeah, and it was kind of interesting. That's—of course this is back in the day before social media and all those things, and so I think a Bryant city councilman had filed and another gentleman I really didn't know that well had filed. But back in Bryant in the day, you had kind of the Broadways and the Boones. And Boone Road and then Boone family—very close friends. And so I got married on Saturday, filed on Monday, and left for DC. Well, Rick Boone didn't know I had filed. And so he goes up and files because the filing deadline was quickly approaching, and so he filed. So I didn't know until I got back from loading everything of Debbie's and moving it back to Bryant that he had filed. And so we were like, "Wait. I didn't know you were gonna run." [*JD laughs*] "I didn't know you were gonna run!" And so it was kind of strange for both of our families. I mean, 'cause they're so intertwined and so—but it was great in that we kept it civil. You know, it was always that way, and we knew one of us was gonna likely lead, you know, the primary. And whoever won, whoever did that was likely gonna endorse the other. And so we worked

hard. I mean, that was old-school politics. I mean, that was retail, knockin' on doors, goin' to fish fries and pie suppers and barbecues, and we would stuff newspapers, newspaper boxes, you know, put fliers in there on election morning. Get up at three o'clock in the morning and move signs to the polling places and—I mean, it was just straight-out retail. You didn't have a lot of money to do TV advertising, and in Saline County it really made no sense because most people watched Little Rock TV, and at the time, it was kinda expensive to buy TV, and so you're running local cable ads, you know, if you did any kind of commercials. [00:15:47] But so it was a lot of retail back in the day, and I miss that. That's a huge thing that I miss is that you had to go out and meet people and talk to 'em and understand their concerns and their ideas and what they want to do. I kinda ran on three things. One was puttin' a stoplight at the top of the hill in Bryant. It was just a traffic nightmare tryin' to get into the school. Little did I know at the time that the legislature didn't have anything to do with stoplights, but that didn't matter at the moment. We needed a stoplight. It eventually got done. I had to go around several different routes. The other was a Boys and Girls Club for Bryant because our kids couldn't go to the one in Benton. Benton had a great one, but it was too far for our kids to

go. And then a vocational center. A place for career and technical training for our kids in Saline County because they—there was—they were havin' to go to Metro Vo Tech in Little Rock. Kinda far in a sense, and so they really weren't going. So it was one of the things that educators really wanted. And that was the big thing for me. The reason people lived, continued to live, and started moving to Saline County was because of the schools, and that's what I ran on. And that was—my entire fourteen years of serving in the General Assembly was really focused on education, K-12 and higher ed and those kind of things, because that was the theme of my district. Everywhere you went was, you know, "We wanna make these schools better. We wanna protect the schools we have. We wanna, you know, do this and that." And so that was really the mantra of my whole, you know, public service. [00:17:21] The other big thing that drove me to public service was between my freshman and sophomore years of college, my brother was diagnosed with acute leukemia. And my family, as I said, we didn't have a lot. I always had a roof over my head and food on, you know, my plate, but we didn't have much more than that. And my brother was diagnosed. It was devastating to me. He was my big brother, he was a strong brother, he was the athlete. He was the

brother that I went to watch my first football game two weeks after I was born. And it was devastating to me. And but it was through that time—we all worked jobs. My dad went back to work, but the Saline County community rallied around our family. There were blood drives and platelet drives and donation drives and softball tournaments and anything you can imagine. People were—in that community—the churches were givin' money to my mom to help pay—offset costs and expenses, I was taking care of my nephew, takin' him to ball games. But it was there where I realized how special that place was where I lived. [00:18:38] And I remember the last time my brother came home, knock on wood, through the grace of God he's been in remission almost thirty years. My fraternity bought him, through one of our benefits, bought a recliner for him to come home to. He was skin and bones. But I remember as the church was filling the pantry at his house, looking at my dad and said, "Dad, we're never gonna have the money to pay all these people back, you know, for all they've done for us." And he said, "Son, that's not the point. You've gotta find your way to give back." And so that's really was my intention and my whole reason for running was I found that was my way to give back to the people of Saline County who had done so much for our family in our time of

greatest need. And I'm still givin' back. It's a debt I will always owe. But that was really the main reason. It wasn't a drive that I wanted to be somebody or I had to have a title or those kind of things. I saw it as my way of—because I knew I'd never make the money to give it all back, but I knew I could do something, and that's what I chose.

[00:19:45] JD: What a powerful motivator, certainly. You mentioned the primary race and . . .

SB: Yeah.

JB: . . . how it was vigorous, but at the same time you were civil and very much engaged in retail politics. The policies that you were championing were very sort of local sort of issues that really don't have a partisan tilt to them, certainly wouldn't've back then. Did you face an opponent from the GOP in that election?

SB: I did. I did. A great lady, still a dear friend to this day, Lois Burks. You know, it's one of those deals, you hate when you have people that you end up running against because they're really—you know, you get to know people throughout a campaign because you're all going to the same events. Your families get to know one another, and you really become close friends, and that's really what happened with us and have been ever since. But it never really got partisan. It was still more local—and that's

the way I think for so long Arkansas politics was was—the Tip O'Neill adage, all politics are local. It was about local issues, local personalities, and the like. There wasn't really a partisan tone to it. Or that—you know, "I'm gonna do this or this." And so it was very civil, best I can recall. And I ran—and that's the way I always tried to run my races. When I ran for office, it wasn't about who I was running against. It was why I wanted to be what I was running for. And if I had to go off into that, then I really shouldn't run. I didn't wanna—that wasn't me. And so I always tried to focus on what I wanted to do and why, you know, I wanted to serve, and it always served me well. [00:21:30] But I did have—you know, it was very close. I don't even remember how many votes it was, but it was very close on election night. I'll never forget, you know, after polls close, everybody goes to somebody's house or you go to the courthouse and those kind of things, and I was nervous. I always had a nervous stomach growin' up and so I—you're obviously nervous. And more so not for me. And this wa—that was the way it always was for me on election night. I was gonna be fine. You know, by the time you got through the gruels and grinds of a campaign, at the point you get down to the last week or so, you're like, "I don't care. You know, just get it over with." But I was always concerned about

my family, you know, what kind of impact it would have on them, on Debbie or my mom and dad and them. And so you know, everybody obviously is nervous. And so I didn't wanna go to the courthouse. I wasn't that wild about bein' around a lot of people at the time, you know, until—so I locked myself in my bathroom and stayed in there, and then my wife knocks on the door and says, "You got a phone call." And I thought it was somebody callin' with results, and it wasn't. It was David Pryor. [00:22:46] And Senator Pryor—he told me [*laughs*—he said, "I'm only makin' two calls tonight." Now I don't know if it was true or not, but said, "I'm callin' you and President Clinton," 'cause we were both on the ballot the same day. And he stayed on the phone with me until the results were all in and I had won. And that—I think that's the only way I made it through that night was sittin' in my bathroom talkin' to David Pryor on the telephone until election results came in. So it was a special night, obviously, to win your first election. [00:23:19] And then I wake up the next morning, and my colleagues called me—I'm thinking I need to get up signs, I need to go do all this, that, and the other. He said, "Budget. Nine o'clock. See you there." So I'm at the capitol the next morning sittin' in joint budget hearings. We had to—you know, thankfully my family and all that next weekend we got the

signs up, but we went straight to work the next day. And I was the youngest member comin' in. I was gonna be twenty-four. The oldest member was Ode Maddox. He was eighty-four. And there were a lot of jokes about they had underwear older than me. There was a baby bottle, big baby bottle, put [*JD laughs*] on my—in my chair on the opening day. We're still tryin' to find that thing. It's somewhere in the capitol still to this day, we just don't know where. So I had to endure a lot of the young jokes when I came in.

[00:24:14] JD: So once you're elected to your first term in the general assembly, you're coming up in politics at a time when the Democratic Party had been the leading, really dominant party perennially, really, well over a hundred years. And the Republican party would sort of operate in fits and starts. By the late 1990s, they've got a US Senator elected, the first Republican in Tim Hutchinson elected US Senator in the state's history. There's a Republican governor in Mike Huckabee, who comes into that office under sort of unusual circumstances with Jim Guy Tucker, Governor Tucker stepping down, resigning. Explain to me what the dynamics were like in state politics and state government at that time when the overwhelming majority of people in elected office were all Democrats, but yet there were

probably still factions and other challenges in governing.

SB: I think, you know, when I first came in in [19]97, that was gonna be the last term of all of those members who had been around for years. John Miller, and Lloyd George, Ted Mullenix, Charlie Stewarts, Carolyn Pollen, several of them who had been around for many, many years. This was gonna be their last two-year term. And I always said I was very blessed that I got to spend my first two years and their last two. And so for me, you know, it—the dynamic was really trying to learn and gain as much knowledge from all of them before they went out. So it really wasn't partisan, in a sense, for me, it was—the thing I figured out early on—I remember a member coming to me saying, "What do you wanna do in your last term?" because that was—term limits was starting. I said, "Third term? I've only been here two weeks." And you had to start thinking about, you know, what do you want to do? Do you want to chair a committee, do you wanna be Speaker of the House, what do you want to do? So you know, politics and the partisan side of it, in terms of the internal chamber, really weren't that—as big of an issue.

[00:26:32] You did have politics in terms—especially with a lot of those older members because you had a new Republican governor. Obviously he had been not treated the be—the

greatest. I remember when he was, you know, sworn in as lieutenant governor, he went down, and I think McCuen had nailed the doors to his office shut, and so he had reason [*laughter*] to be suspicious of other people. And I've always said that about Governor Huckabee. His first several years, he was probably watching, you know, everybody around him to see who was trying to come after him. And he had never been governor. And so it's different, you know, going from that to actually having to govern. And that's one thing I've always said about the difference between politics in the campaign and actually governing. And not everybody gets that. Not everybody makes that transition. He eventually made it in terms of understanding the role of what a governor does. But you gotta keep in mind, too, Democrats had controlled the governor's office for so long, there wasn't many people who had ever been a staffer that were Republican in a governor's office, so they faced an uphill battle, an uphill climb, in terms of learning curve. And they're learning and understanding the process for the General Assembly, many of whom had been there for ten, twenty, thirty years, who knew every inch of that building [*laughs*], every inch of every statue and every budget that had ever been passed. So they were comin' in at a huge disadvantage, you know, to begin with.

[00:28:00] So there were some partisan things, I think, in the beginning between legislative and executive branch. Obviously legislature—and some would see it as politics, some would see it as, you know, in terms of the coequal branches, in terms of the power that each branch had, so the legislature obviously wanted to take back control of the—what would become the general improvement dollars. That was in my first session. I was taking that because you didn't want to have to approach the governor any time you had to get something for your district. You didn't want to have to go through the governor's office. The governor had sole control, but the general assembly had some say in that. And that debate is actually—it cycles—it goes in cycles. And so you know, so my first, really, session and time there was more about the House itself and its transition in terms of leadership. And you had a lot of those long-term members who were willin' to give up leadership positions so the newer members could learn the process. So for me it was more about the institution than politics. [00:29:14] The other thing I learned from a lot of those, including Jodie Mahony, was you gotta be willing to work. They didn't care what party you were in. If you were willing to commit the time and the energy to whatever policy it was we were trying to figure out, they didn't care who you were as long

as you were willin' to work because they were gonna work night, days, and weekends. And that was the first thing I figured out. If I'm—you know, I'm twenty-four comin' into this group. I've gotta figure out a way to where I can become engaged and involved. So I just went to work. And if you will show up and be willing to work, then they were willing to accept you and put you into those positions. [00:29:56] And so it wasn't as partisan. You know, that—in fact, most of my time in the General Assembly—campaigns would be, and they started to grow more partisan in terms of the campaigns, but at the time I still remember everybody putting that aside. When it was over, it was over, and it was time to go to work. Now I was in there in an era, too, where you're dealing with Lake View, which took several years, which wasn't a partisan issue. So a lot of issues at the time weren't partisan. And so, you know, Dave Bisbee and I, Republican from Rogers, cowrote the state school funding form. I didn't do it with Dave because he was Republican. I did it because he was the best math guy I knew. And so you worked with members based on their expertise and experience. When I was Speaker of the House, the people I appointed, it didn't matter what their party was if they—if I knew they could do the job. And that's really where I became less partisan. If I ever

was partisan, becoming Speaker will change that for you because you're the Speaker of the whole House. And every member—your goal is to ensure that every member has an opportunity to succeed, to do what they wanna do and accomplish for their districts, to help their people back home. And so it was more a po—I became really then more policy centered than I did politically centered. And I think some of that's just maturity. You grow—you kinda grow up, and you start to understand. And that was what, I think, serving with all of those individuals really did for me was it was more about policy. They didn't really care about the politics side of it.

[00:31:42] JD: You talked a little bit about these seasoned veterans that really helped show the ropes to you and educate you in the process early on. Going back a few years to 1992, Arkansas voters enacted what were at the time and continued to be for quite some time some of the more stringent term limits via constitutional amendment that was—could be found in any of the fifty states. What effect did it have? You know, as far as partisan, there's some studies that suggest that there is a relationship between basically the party in power at that time losing it—it's always hard to sort of really unpack and tease that out. But what would—just your thoughts on that. Could the

Republican party have made the gains it made years down the road had it not been for the term limits that took effect at, really, the start of your career in this state?

[00:32:39] SB: You know, that's a good question. I think they could have. I think that might've started it a little bit earlier, maybe. They started picking up a few seats here and there when term limits kicked in. It wasn't a huge jump. I think a lot of people expected it was gonna be a huge jump all of a sudden. And it wasn't. And I think a lot of that is because it was still—back to the local thing. Arkansas politics were still localized. They weren't nationalized as they would eventually become and are today. And so it was still about local personalities and local people and whether you knew all the people in your community and were involved and engaged and part of the chamber or, you know, part of the school. So it was still more about that. But they did start picking up, you know, a seat here and a seat there and started getting—I think towards the end of my House time probably had the most they had ever had. You know, and we did that, we s—we had more Republican members. But it still wasn't partisan, you know. To my recollection, and maybe I'm—you know, it's been a while. [*Laughs*] But I still remember that the House—we got along. And some of that's because—why I always

say the House was so much different than the Senate in that we had quiet rooms. We played cards, you know, in between meetings and sessions. You played—oh, I just went blank on what the name of the game was. But you played back in the back, and you got to know one another on a different level.

[00:34:20] And you had events at night and receptions, and you get to know everybody. You went to legislative conferences, and you got to know each other and their families. And so you became closer as a group because you become like family.

That's what I always said about my service in General Assembly.

They're just like an aunt, uncle, cousin, you know, the people I served with are just like my family. I'd do anything for them no

matter who they were or where they were from. And so you know, you didn't really sense—and truly my entire time in the

General Assembly really was more focused on Arkansas and about policy and those kind of issues as averse to the partisan

piece. [00:35:10] I think the Republicans, what they did start doing in that era was very smart. I think somewhat—to some

degree the Democrats got complacent. Clinton was in the White House, you know, and—I mean, what else can you do, what else

can you accomplish, you know, than havin' one of your own

elected to the highest office in the free world. And so sometimes

I think they became complacent. County committees, fewer people were involved and engaged. A lot of that—when I was talkin' about older—that Great Depression era, a lot of them were who were part of county committees. They started dying off, and fewer younger people had been really groomed to become involved and engaged. And so I think one thing the Republicans did smartly, and I said it at the time, they started focusing on local elections, whether it was city council, school board, justice of the peace, and started getting people to run in those elections, trying to groom 'em up to take those legislative seats and the other seats because you had somewhat a compression in Arkansas with Democrats because you had had Clinton for so long. [00:36:21] You'd had Bumpers and Pryor and the congressmen who had served for many years. There wasn't a lot of place for mobility upward for you to run. And so it kinda created, you know, that situation because you weren't gonna take on somebody in a primary, you know. And everything had gone, then, to the four-year term instead of a two-year cycle. That changed in, what, [19]92, [19]90? So that changed the dynamics. And so, again, I think a lot of things at play. And I think, like I said, the Republicans were smart in that they started locally. Either they, you know, they sensed that some of those

older Democrats were dying off and the younger generation was not as engaged politically, partywise. And I noticed it, too. You didn't have people who were partisan, in a sense, becoming as engaged in those local parties.

[00:37:21] JS: It seems like Republicans, too, despite the "Big Three," as Diane Blair first coined the phrase and you've spoken about, Senator Pryor and President Clinton and then Senator Bumpers—these three very influential, at a national and global scale, politicians, elected officials from Arkansas that are Democrats that balance sort of a progressive line while also resonating with Arkansas voters who tend to be a little bit more moderate to conservative on some issues. While you see those three as maybe a reason why Democrats held on for as long as they did, you could also see, and you sort of touched on this, that with Clinton ascending to the White House when he did—and you've touched on leaving sort of a vacuum. Do you think there's anything to the idea that Clinton going to DC actually pulls some of the bench, if you will, out of Little Rock and into DC, which also kind of helps stir the pot a little bit for Republicans? Because you know, what's a funny puzzle is, as you know, Republicans had been doing quite well on the presidential side of things in the state since Nixon with the exception of Clinton and Carter, and it

just wasn't going down the ticket, right.

SB: Right.

JD: So you've touched on the Republican party kind of workin' their way up from the bottom, also securing that top seat with exception of a favorite-son status like Clinton. What do you think about that idea that there's sort of this vacuum being created?

[00:38:54] SB: I hadn't really thought about it until you kind of asked it in that sense and sitting here talking about it. I think some of that is true because so many people went to DC and had opportunities they would've never had otherwise. And then some—a lot of 'em moved on from there and never came back, in a sense. They were able to, you know, get private sector positions that—I know a lot of 'em—I know several of 'em who live in Washington or California or New York or Florida or somewhere who might've been that bench, you know, who might've stayed, if Clinton had not gone to DC might've been someone who's cultivated to run, you know, a few years down the road but who've now gone on and had great stories and great success because he went to DC. And so I think it did create—in certain areas, especially with term limits, you start running out of people to run who are—people who, you know, are involved and engaged and those kind of things who would be that person who

would obviously fill that gap and run when you've got term limits kicking in and those kind of things. So I think there were several dynamics, you know, really at play. [00:40:05] The other thing I'll say about the legislature at the time was still very conservative. I mean, I was probably just as if not more conservative than some Republicans. And so that was a dynamic as well in terms of Republicans gaining seats because most of the Democrats were just as conservative. Especially on social issues and maybe some other issues. So it wasn't—you know, what're you gonna run against 'em on kind of deal. And so it was still that local election, that local person, that person they trusted that understood their values, espoused those values just as they did, and that allowed, I think, the Democrats to continue to stay in power as one of the last states in the South to eventually trend towards Republicans.

[00:40:58] JD: Certainly. And you speak on that. So this next topic which is, you know, the idea that Arkansas is able to continue to be a Democratic stronghold well into the early 2000s despite the fact their neighbors to the north, south, east, west, everywhere, had turned. And seemingly it occurred for those other states during these sort of mid-term, sort of national politics climate elections where, whether it be the popularity of a President

Reagan to the popularity of the Republican Party brand, the sort of Gingrich era being sort of reformulated in [19]94 onward, Arkansas remains sort of this tried-and-true Democratic stronghold. Maybe in part because of the "Big Three" and maybe in part because of the localized or retail politics that does, I think, make the state unique at that time.

SB: Oh, certainly.

JB: In particular.

[00:41:53] SB: And I think it had a lot to do with Clinton, Pryor, and Bumpers, as well as that local county official, you know—county officials weren't partisan, in a sense, they just happened to all be Democrats, you know. And so you still had all that at that local level. And it took the Republicans a while to kinda start gaining some footholds in areas where they knew they could start making some inroads. Saline County's a good example. You know, when I was growin' up, it was all about the plant. You know, it was Reynolds and Alcoa and the steel workers. And even in my first—probably my first or second term, steel workers still had a huge footprint in Saline County in terms of those guys who had—and ladies who'd worked at the plant and were part of that union. As they started waning off and dying off, that became less and less of an influence in Saline County, and so Republicans were

starting to be able to make inroads because of that influence was starting to go away. And so you know, I think it depended on the cycle. I mean, you know, we went through 9/11, but everybody worked together and those kinds of things. So it wasn't really until the late 2000s.

[00:43:10] JD: So Shane, we've talked about how when there was a dominant Democratic presence for decades that the partisan politics, the partisan sort of play in the General Assembly really was minimized, and the focus was more on these sort of bread-and-butter sort of issues that . . .

SB: Right.

JB: . . . could draw across party lines if need be, such as school funding and this sort of thing. When did you notice that start to change? When did you notice national politics—and I guess the reason why I ask—Democrats in Arkansas had done an exceptional job in separating themselves from their national brand. And when did that start to—when did that dam start to break?

SB: You know, that's a good question. My first real recollection was after the passage of Obamacare. 'Cause I was still in the Senate at the time, and really, I mean, that session had focused on the lottery. The lottery had just passed, and most of our session that

session was focused on that. And it was my last term. I was having to decide, you know, what options I had going forward. And then the passage of Obamacare really is where you start to see it. I didn't have another place to go except to run for lieutenant governor at the time. You know, my—like I said earlier, if I could've stayed in the General Assembly my entire life, I would've been fine with that because I loved that arena. And that's really the main reason I ran for lieutenant governor was, number one, was to give the governor some comfort knowin' that he could leave the state, you know, and then I wasn't gonna screw it up, hopefully. [00:44:59] And but number two was still to be around that legislative process. That was really my only reason for running. It wasn't something I'd ever dreamed of or envisioned, you know, in my career. But because of term limits, I was about to term out of the House and the Senate. Didn't have anywhere else to go. And so I remember announcing. And it still, you know—I think—I can't remember exactly when Obamacare passed, but it was not long after the primary when it really became an issue. And everywhere you went, it was the issue. It didn't—and so that was the first time I ever remember politics really becoming, for Arkansas, nationalized. And it was mainly over the mandate that

you had to have insurance or you were gonna pay a tax penalty. And that was kind of the last straw, as I saw it. And I remember standing out at spaghetti suppers and fish fries and everywhere was, you know, "What are you gonna do about this? What are you gonna do about that mandate?" And that was where I really sensed the first time people could not separate the two. You know, that—and I remember my opponent, good friend of mine. We were friends. Happened to be opponents. And he talked about suing and doin' this to Obamacare, and I'm like, "You're runnin' for the wrong office. That's Congress. You know, if you're gonna fix Obamacare or fix the mandate, you gotta run for Congress." Well, they were smart because people weren't drawing those distinctions. [00:46:35] That—those days of the distinction of "That's a federal issue, that's a state issue that we can't deal with" started to get really blurry. And it—so I had a sense that summer that it was gonna be an uphill battle tryin' to overcome—and to the Republican's credit, they were smart in terms of how they rolled that out. Obviously Medicare was an issue that they were—that Obamacare was gonna do away with your Medicare, so obviously the seniors and everyone else—it really became—and then you remember the death panels and all those kind of issues, but what really stuck was the mandate. And

that was the thing that you could—you could try to explain the reason you had to have the mandate and the tax penalty to be able to pay for doing the other things, but the mandate was still there. And unless Congress was gonna go and fix that mandate, I knew Democrats everywhere were gonna be in trouble, and that's what happened. It was just an insurmountable issue to overcome unless, in Governor Beebe's case—he was runnin' for re-election. Unless you had significant name ID, as he did, you were gonna be in a battle. He had, obviously, he had established record, he had name ID runnin' for re-election for a second term. Here I was a senator from Saline and part of Pulaski County.

[00:48:02] And one thing that you always learned and I always told other colleagues is legislators think they have name ID. They don't. And you learn sometimes that lesson the hard way. So I knew, then, that we were in for a battle and likely wasn't gonna be able to overcome it. 'Cause you could feel it. It was one of those things you could sense. I could always tell, when I was runnin' in a legislative race, I could tell, you know, the issues that were resonating with people and if you were reachin' them and they were—they felt comfortable with you. I could feel the same thing happening out there, and that's really my first vivid memory of that change from the local side to things becoming

nationalized. And it's really been that way ever since.

[00:48:51] JD: Was it inevitable? So I guess the way I would phrase that is we think about eight years of President Clinton, of course, being an Arkansas favorite son, able to sort of hold back some of that sort of storyline that Democrats were too liberal, weren't relatable. When you've got a guy from Arkansas in the White House, that's a pretty good defense of that statement. Then you've got George W. Bush for eight years. Wildly popular in the state as far as general election terms.

SB: Right.

JD: But he's a Republican. So you don't have that same narrative of sort of liberals, progressives in DC infiltrating Arkansas.

JD: If McCain had won in [20]08 . . .

SB: Right.

JD: . . . do you think we would've had another four years of sort of that continued Democratic success in the state because there wasn't really a scare sort of element . . .

SB: Right.

JD: . . . from national politics?

[00:49:49] SB: Possible, I think. That's a really good question. I think it would be possible that it lingered on longer. But I think you're right. I think it was eventually going to happen, that they

were makin' those inroads locally and starting to make the inroads at that state legislative level. You were starting to have more and more. So yeah, I think it might have staved off, but I think it was eventually gonna happen, and partly because of the National Democratic Party. It got away from the issues of everyday Arkansans and went to more social issues that were out of step with the average, everyday Arkansan. And other issues as well, financial issues, monetary issues, that really started going away from—and it became hard to say, you know, I'm running as a Democrat because of the national party. It wasn't the state party, and it wasn't Arkansas and the Democrats that I was serving with. It was more national and the national party moving away from those traditional Arkansas values that people saw. And so I partly blame that as well. And that was just a part of a lot of moving parts that were all going on and different dynamics happening all at the same time, like you mentioned. And so I think eventually, it was gonna happen. I think the mandate in Obamacare accelerated it.

[00:51:30] JD: We've talked a lot about sort of pre-2010 General Assembly politics. And since leaving the state senate, you've still been actively involved in policy-making both in Arkansas Department of Higher Education as acting commissioner there,

acting director, and then more recently with the ASU system office overseeing a lot of the policy, advocacy piece and governmental-relations piece for the university and colleges under that umbrella. What do you think, post-2010, what are the biggest changes you've seen in the General Assembly other than just, I mean, straight, "Oh, well, there's more Republicans"? What do you think—below that surface, what are the biggest differences you see pre-2010 General Assembly/post-2010 General Assembly?

[00:52:25] SB: It's an interesting question. Now when I was director at ADHE, obviously most of my time was focused on higher-ed issues. It was kinda nice being an independent in a sense, in that I worked for both sides as an agency director as well as the governor, and so I had a lot more—you know, was able to kind of pull away, you know, from the politics side of it and just observe. But I thought—I think you saw continually the part of national politics coming into play start to grow. And has continued to grow, certainly through those years, President Trump years, and even into today—more of a national issue and not focused as much on state issues of education or economic development. And that was kinda the theme back in the day was education, economic development. And a lot of the issue seems to be now

about federal overreach. You know, the feds not being able to come in and dictate our lives and freedom and those kinds of things. Obamacare was a huge part of that first beginning of the 2010s. And I don't think—you know, he and I have never had the conversation. Certainly I don't think Governor Beebe planned—and I've noticed this with every governor if you think back to the last three that I've served under. Governor Huckabee in his last term had Lake View. Governor Beebe had Medicaid expansion. Governor Hutchinson has had a pandemic. I don't think either of them intended their last four-year term to be something defined by other than them. You know, they had their own ideas of what they wanted to do in their last term, but something else happened, an outside force happened, that kind of changed the trajectory of that last term for them. And so for the early 2000s was certainly about Medicaid expansion and how that process was gonna work and tryin' to pull enough to get three-fourths of vote of both houses to try and pass the private option where you actually had Democrats and Republicans still working together, that dynamic. You know, the Republicans eventually took over the House and the Senate, but you still had that sense of working with the governor's office and relationship between the two in a bipartisan fashion that put together the

private option. And so it was a nationalized issue, still, and the campaigns were still nationalized. But the actual operation of the General Assembly—and that's one thing I'm still proud of to this day. The General Assembly, yes, are those outside issues, those outside, big-ticket, federal issues or social issues. But at the end of the day in every session I've ever been involved in, the work of the people eventually got done. Budget got passed, the is—the big issues that needed to get solved got solved in some bipartisan way. [00:55:29] But you've had—you know, after that, now you've gone into this pandemic era, and you've got a lot of discussion about executive powers and legislative powers, and everybody's certainly been frustrated and pent up over the last, you know, year, and those kind of things. And so it's been an interesting decade, to say the least, of—everything was driven by Medicaid expansion, and that kinda dictated a lot of the other side issues. In the last few years or the last year or so, it seems like it's almost hard to remember pre-pandemic what the issues really were. Medicaid expansion was still one of 'em. It's been an issue every session. Not as much the last few. It was kinda one of those once you got past a certain threshold, once you started puttin' in the work requirements and other requirements, then, you know, that issue in and of itself kinda waned as not

bein' the big issue, but it's almost hard to remember now what the really big issue other than Medicaid expansion was pre-pandemic. [00:56:33] And so it's been an interesting dynamic to kind of sit back and watch in a different light. Not being involved in it every day, not being a member, a voting member, and facing—the other dynamic that's changed it I think the most is social media. My last term—my first term was the second session we had emails. We had this big, old laptop. That thing was huge. It was heavy. We had to send it overseas, you know, if something went wrong with it. So email was a new dynamic when I first came in. Social media had just come about in my last session. So it was kinda interesting to be a part of both significant changes to our culture and life and everything kind of at the beginning and the end of my tenure. So social media, I think, is one of the biggest changes, and I think one that historians will look on decades from now as having had probably one of the most profound impacts on politics at a state and national level. Because you could really sense—people had much more opportunity to become engaged where they had not before. Email—you actually had to sit there and type that thing out, you know, and send it to a member. Once you started havin' Twitter and Facebook and all those kinds of things, you could post

something to really drive a discussion or appoint an issue or get engaged in a particular battle of a bill that had never really happened before. So in a lot of sense it gave people a voice that may have never had a voice. But it also changed the dynamic of how the process of legislating and policy and politics and all of that has really changed. So I would probably say in those—in that span, probably the greatest change has been—I would say would be social media and its influence on politics and policy.

[00:58:25] JD: Yeah. That's very interesting. So we—we're covering, in our discussion, really mid-[19]90s to post-2020. We're covering a large swath of time in both the late-twentieth century, early-twenty-first century. We start with Democrats having supermajorities in the House and Senate, majority historically, constitutional offices being in Democratic hands. At no point prior to relatively recently would we see more than half of the House delegation be Republican. Usually DC—Arkansas was represented in DC also with Democratic elected officials. We're now the complete opposite.

SB: Right. You've done a 180.

JD: A complete 180, and in relatively short order. I mean, all the way, really, to election morning 2010 to election day 2020, it is a complete 180 from constitutional offices, supermajorities in the

House and the Senate at the state level, all of our House delegation and both senators being Republicans. Knowing that is the reality of Arkansas politics today and also knowing that demographics in other Southern states are sort of percolating—some Democratic activism, a few key victories in particular Congressional elections, US Congressional elections—what do you see Arkansas's political future in the next ten, twenty years looking like?

[01:00:05] SB: I don't think we'll have the demographic shifts of a Texas or a Georgia or of some of the other Southern states so that you start to see a trend to a little more purple kind of a color. You do see it in certain parts of Arkansas. Benton County, Washington County, some of the maybe Northwest Arkansas counties because of Walmart suppliers and their influence and people that are comin' in. But I think Arkansas's gonna be a Republican state for the next many years. I don't see that changing. I always give a caveat to that: There could always be that person or that personality or that issue that—you know, if you have a scandal or an issue or something that kinda changes that, that Obamacare that kinda, you know, changes the mindset of Arkansans. I don't know what that would ever be. But outside of that, outside of an outside force or person, I don't see the

politics of Arkansas changing any time soon. I think it's gonna continue along the same trend that we've been for—been in and been goin' through. [01:01:13] And for us who've, you know, been around it, watch it, observe it, it is pretty fascinating to see the change that has occurred. And to be a part of that at this point in our life, you know, to kind of observe that and be around it and be a part of it has been pretty fascinating for me because I have friends on all sides. Always have. I've been more kind of independent in terms of my—you know, I've been more the policy than the politics person, but I observe it. You know, I chair the Political Animals Club. And so you—as—like you. And so you like seeing all the dynamics and watching how all of it comes together. So I don't see a significant change, maybe like some of the other states are starting to see. It's possible. Certainly all it takes is one or two or three big counties to start changing, and the dynamics of a statewide election can change. A Benton County, a Washington County, a Sebastian County, a Craighead County, if their demographics start changing and going in a different route, you know, if Pulaski County continues to stay heavily Democratic, you pit—you get that Benton-Washington-Craighead, you know, three or four counties, pretty soon you could win a statewide election as a Democrat. But I think that's

many years down the road, like I said, unless some outside something else happens. [01:02:37] But so it's gonna be an interesting dynamic to watch. I think the key is going to be can we, as a state, continue to focus on Arkansas and issues that we need to deal with for our people in a bipartisan way, in a way that, yes, you've got these national issues that are out there, but at the end of the day, we have a balanced budget. And I think that's one thing we tend to forget and that separates us from some other states, a lot of other states. At the end of the day, you've gotta balance our budget. June 30, it's gotta balance at zero. And that, as long as that is in place, I think Arkansas is in good hands because it forces, in some ways, people to come together because you've got—as long as that mindset is always there, we're always gonna have a balanced budget, then I think it forces everybody to the table. And that's my hope is that whenever there is that big issue, it was always my mantra, always the thing I firmly believed in—whatever problem we've gotta solve as a state, if you will put people who are willing to work together, who are willing to put in the time and the effort and the resources that it takes to solve that issue, then we'll continue to flourish as a state. We'll continue to grow, we'll continue to deal with issues that we've gotta deal with. If we go

away from that mindset is what concerns me.

[01:04:09] JD: Well, Shane, on behalf of the Pryor Center thank you so much for sitting down and speaking about . . .

SB: My honor.

JD: . . . your experience in politics, your time in office, your time working other capacities but still in politics and government in Arkansas, your historical knowledge, and also your assessment on the state of state politics in Arkansas as it's transitioned from blue to red.

SB: Yeah. JD: So thank you so much for your time.

SB: My pleasure. Enjoyed it.

[End of interview 01:04:51]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]