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

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William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Cliff Hoofman

Interviewed by Betsey Wright

February 24, 2012

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Objective

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- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing;
  - and standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

Citation Information

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Betsey Wright interviewed Cliff Hoofman on February 24, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: This interview is being conducted by the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History in partnership with the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies. The interviewee is [*camera clicks*]—well, I've forgotten his name.

Unknown: Cliff.

KK: Cliff!

Betsey Wright: Cliff Hoofman.

KK: I forgot your first name before I even got to it. Cliff Hoofman. And the interviewer is Betsey Wright. The interview will be transcribed and returned to the interviewee and interviewer for their review before being published. The interview, transcripts, and related materials will be deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas, Fayetteville, and at the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies, Little Rock. Mr. Hoofman, if you agree with this statement, please give your verbal consent to us now.

Cliff Hoofman: Well, you have my permission.

KK: Okay, great.

Trey Marley: Give Kris a second to get out, and, Betsey, we'll be ready.

BW: Okay.

CH: I'm assuming that if I need to wipe my nose, we'll do that . . .

BW: You bet.

CH: . . . and it'll be okay.

BW: And we, furthermore, we can stop any time you want to. You can help yourself to water any time you want it. Other than that, it's just a conversation.

CH: All right. Let's go.

TM: We're good. Any time.

[00:01:08] BW: All right. Well, as we sit here today, I am speaking to Judge Hoofman, who is a member of the Court of Appeals of the state of Arkansas. And that's the last time I'm gonna call you Judge Hoofman.

CH: That'd be appropriate.

BW: We're going to [*laughs*] . . .

CH: Over the years, you've called me a little bit of everything.

BW: [*Laughs*] I wanna start with your beginnings and where you were born and ha—and what kind of a childhood you had.

CH: Well, I was born in Judsonia. And but I was raised with my grandparents on my mother's side. And they were sharecroppers with a pair of mules and—had a wonderful childhood, though. My grandparents were wonderful people.

[00:01:56] BW: Did you have siblings?

CH: I had three brothers, but they lived part of the time with my grandparents, and the remainder of their lives was lived with my mother.

BW: Talk about your schooling.

CH: Well, I went through first through twelfth grade at Searcy High School or Searcy school system. I did go for a few months in the elementary school years in Judsonia. I don't remember what year that was, but I was back in Searcy schools that year.

BW: And then did you just go right straight on through into college?

[00:02:39] CH: Oh, no. No, no. When—I dropped outta high school in the eleventh grade and—for economic reasons. And but two wonderful people, Cecil Morgan and Luther Hardin—one was the agri teacher and the other involved in an economic program—came and found a job for me at C. R. Anthony's and encouraged me to come back to high school and participate in a DE deal program, which allowed me to go to school half a day and work half a day. Best thing that ever happened to me. And so I

intended to stay with Anthonys when I came back from my military experience, and I did for a couple of years but realized that without an education, I was going to be very limited. And so I worked on a pipeline in eleven states and a pea cannery in Rochelle, Illinois, and a Red Ball Motor Freight trucklines and any other way that I could to go to college. And then I worked—with my experience at C. R. Anthony's, I worked for JCPenney Company in Conway as I attended UCA, which was then ASTC and became SCA and ultimately, after I graduated, UCA.

[00:04:13] BW: And what did you study at UCA?

CH: I was intending to be an engineer. And I majored there in mathematics and history which—as it developed I, later in my college career, met Judge Milas Hale. And after my acquaintance and visiting with him for a summer, I knew that I wanted to be a lawyer. And so as it turns out, my education in math and history were both very helpful to me in law school.

[00:04:56] BW: And where did you go to law school?

CH: I went to University of Arkansas at Little Rock. Though I took my last course at Fayetteville. I commuted from Little Rock to Fayetteville and stayed three nights a week in a hotel up there and took one course to graduate so that I would graduate in time to take the summer bar. I took my final exam in

Fayetteville on Thursday, found out that I passed on Saturday, and started the bar exam on Monday.

[00:05:30] BW: And where and when did you meet this love of your life that you're married to?

CH: Well, Debbie and I, you know, Debbie was a part of North Little Rock, as I was involved in North Little Rock. So we knew each other for a long time. But we married, I think probably—we married in 2000. And we'd known each other for a long time, but both of us had experienced a divorce, and subsequently we, as people do, furthered a relationship that was only an acquaintance before.

[00:06:20] BW: And you have a daughter.

CH: Yes. I have one child from my first marriage, Ragan Denise, and she's married, has two boys, lives in Tupelo, Mississippi.

BW: And your two boys are how old? The two—her two boys are how old?

CH: Twelve and nine. Excuse me, twelve—strike that. They are eleven and nine.

BW: And that would be important to them.

CH: That's a very important to them.

[00:06:48] BW: [*Laughs*] When did you first become aware of a guy named Bill Clinton?

CH: Paul Revere and I were very much involved in college politics. He was president of student body down at A&M in Monticello as I was at U—at AS—at SCA at that time. And the two of us were invited, as I believe many college student body presidents are each year, to the presidential prayer breakfast. And Paul and I drove up there. He was acquainted with Mack McLarty. I think they had met at Boys State. And when we got to Washington, Paul took me to Mack's room to introduce me to Mack. And while we were there, in walked this tall, young fella, who was Bill Clinton. He was preparing to go to England for—on his Rhodes Scholarship. But the four of us sat there and visited for more than two hours about all of our thoughts for tomorrow. And I never saw him again after that until 1974. And of course, our lives had a lot of involvement after that, but he was so intelligent, and I remember—course, he ran for Congress in [19]74, and he was in the process of running at the time. Course, I saw him on television regularly and knew who he was. [00:08:37] But I remember it was in 1968 that we met. He hadn't—he had not seen me since then. That summer I remember seeing him in First National Bank. And I walked up to him, and I told him. I said, "You won't remember me but"—and he immediately interrupted. He said, "Oh, yes, I do. You're Cliff

Hoofman. I met you in Mack McLarty's room when you and Paul Revere came up there in 1968." And I was very much impressed with that. And after that we had many, many years of wonderful involvements, successes, and disappointments.

[00:09:23] BW: And when did you first run for office yourself?

CH: [Nineteen] seventy-four.

BW: So you were on the campaign hustings when you ran into him.

CH: No, I had already completed the Democratic primary. Well, I guess I was. I did have a Republican opponent at that time as well. Generally speaking, in North Little Rock at that time, if you won the Democratic primary, the Republican—general election wasn't generally of much consequence. Course, in my mind it was because that was my first experience. And but . . .

BW: And did you deal with him when he became attorney general?

CH: Yes, I handled—he had a man on his staff that had been a law partner of mine when I first started practicing, John Fincher. And because of mine and John's relationship, we—I—everything that attorney general had that he wanted in the legislature, I may not have sponsored it by any means, but I at least was contacted by John Fincher and was a part of it.

[00:10:42] BW: And then he became governor. And what was he like as governor, and you were in the house of representatives?

CH: He was at—how was he as a governor? He was arrogant—in the first term, he was arrogant and aloof and not well thought of by the legislature. And he surrounded himself with people who were arrogant and aloof. And though he—his ideas for government were real, I thought. And I worked with him in that first term and was glad to be friends with the Governor's Office.

BW: So you weren't surprised when he was, then, defeated after his first two years as governor.

[00:11:37] CH: Well, no. I—the truth is, I had my first frog-leg fund-raiser for him at . . .

BW: You did have these fund-raisers that had weird entreés.

CH: Well, it's true, and I think that may be part of why people came. Some may have come because of the candidate, but at any rate, I remember that one time, Governor Clinton told Senator Beebe—this was just about the time that Clinton ran for president—that I had raised him more money over the years than all the other legislators with whom he had served put together with these frog-leg fund—well, the first one was in [19]80. And I remember after it was over, and I took the money to him. I told him at that time that I wouldn't be surprised if he didn't get beat, that I was most disappointed, that at my house we had 120-something people, and he sat in

the house talking about the problems that Jimmy Carter had and the reason that Jimmy Carter was gonna have a difficult time being reelected. He never told anyone thank you for being here. He never even told me and my wife thank you for doing this for me. He was as though he expected folks to do that for him. And sure enough, he got defeated. And I think that arrogance was more the reason for his defeat than what was said to be the reason was his support of the car tags increase for highway funding. I never thought that that was a real part of his defeat because I had an opponent that same year, 1980, who was a very capable opponent, Chip Welch, who is presently running for circuit judge and probably will be elected. He was knowledgeable, intelligent, and he attacked me over the car tags. And it was a big part of our campaign. I got nearly 70 percent of the vote. And so I could not believe that the car tags was the significant part of Clinton's defeat in that year.

[00:14:08] BW: And what did you think when he decided to run again?

CH: You . . .

BW: In 1982?

CH: Well, course in 1982 is when I ran for the senate. And I was not surprised for he, as we say, he was on the hustings quite often,

and he had, I think—not, I'm sure, because anything I said, but he knew that he needed to humble himself. And he was more himself being humble than he was ever being arrogant. And that role fitted him perfectly. And he was, I think, very comfortable in knowing that to accomplish anything for the betterment of mankind, he needed to be a part of that. And he was.

[00:15:11] BW: Well, and he was, then, reelected to be governor, and you became, as a freshman senator, his most key ally and floor leader in the senate.

CH: Well, I did—I was honored to be appointed by him to the legislative council and to be his floor leader. And with the programs that we worked toward in those years—course, I was honored to be a freshman and to be in that role, but I would have been honored to be part of that program my last term after twenty-eight years in the legislature.

BW: Yeah.

CH: We did some wonderful things, I thought.

[00:15:57] BW: Well, I want you to talk about that. Particularly the education legislation that got passed because most folks in history think of him as having done stuff in education, but they don't begin to know the depth of either the program or what had to happen to get it done. And I wish you'd talk a little bit about

that session from beginning to end.

[00:16:26] CH: Well, I think that Governor Clinton called that session unprepared. He knew what he wanted to do. He knew. But he—his staff—no one was really prepared. They had concentrated mostly on the big stuff. We had to raise some money. We couldn't accomplish any of the things that needed to be done if we didn't raise money. And he had polled, I think, the public and knew that any effort to raise any revenue would fail and was not supported by the public until you put into it accountability, which became known as teacher testing. When you put teacher testing or accountability of the teachers into the mix, the support for raising some revenue went up in the 60 percent range. So going in, we went in with the concept of teacher testing. And so the big discussions were teacher testing that was really opposed by AEA, that had a real grip on the legislature, and raising revenue. When we got into that session, we—the legislators were just sort of like swingin' from the rafters. They—no one thought we was gonna accomplish anything. [00:17:54] And I remember talking with Governor Clinton about, "Let's quit talking about the big ticket stuff. Let's give 'em something to think about, some of our education bills, some of the little ones. And that will cause them to at least have

to debate the issue, not just laugh at the whole concept of the special session that had its faults." And we did that. And we started introducing some bills, and people began to take issue with or support. And the session just sort of like blowing smoke on a beehive. Things just sort of settled down, and we started toward accomplishing some things. [00:18:40] And I remember teacher testing was the big issue. And more so than the money bills, ultimately. And I think teacher testing was really misunderstood. The first place, teacher testing was not, as stated and restated by the opponents, as a measure of determining who was qualified to be a teacher. It was designed to show those that were not qualified to be a teacher. And no one thought for a minute that the test that was designed was intended to say that if you could pass this test, you're qualified to be a teacher. But surely if you couldn't pass that test, you don't have any business being a teacher. And somehow AEA got their membership to be offended by the whole concept. And it got pretty well distorted, and ultimately it was passed. And ultimately, we raised some revenue, and it was the revenue that was necessary to improve education. I don't think that there was ever any significant contribution to academia in Arkansas through teacher testing outside of the purpose it served in giving

us support for some revenue that did, in fact, support academia and improve education in the state.

[00:20:20] BW: Well, one of the interesting experiences for a lot of people was that the rural school people joined forces with the AEA in opposing so much of what was going on in the atmosphere about big change. And a lot of the—it was a fascinating coalition because they hadn't always seen eye to eye.

CH: Well, that's true, and I—and of course, the—every discussion ultimately a point—when you talk about improving education, you ultimately had to realize that you had to make available educational opportunity for children to get an education. And the small, rural schools knew that as that focus was given to that one aspect, they with a small pop—student population could never offer the adequate core curriculum for an adequate education. And they knew that ultimately what—when you talk about improving education, you were going to have to abolish some of the small schools. And though that wasn't part of the front-end discussion back in those days, they knew that's what the improvements to education were gonna lead to, so they really didn't want to say it, but they didn't want any improvements to education 'cause they knew—that is the administrations and the local folks didn't want to lose their local

schools.

[00:22:04] BW: Well, and the education package was adding a lot of requirements of teaching a lot more math and science and geography, adding guidance counselors, and those are expensive items, and the tiny schools couldn't do it.

CH: They couldn't do it, and they knew that those improvements to education, which is curriculum—that there's no way the money was gonna be available, even with the revenue that we raised, to foster what they wanted to keep, and that was their small school, even though if they honestly recognized that they were sacrificing the future of their local children to maintain their local school. And that's been a battle that really commenced in the Clinton years that we carried on through and have battled and, quite frankly, though we have accomplished significant—we've overcome significant hurdles in the state, we still have a lot of schools out there that simply cannot provide an adequate curriculum with adequate instructional help for the young people of those areas.

[00:23:27] BW: Yeah, it is disheartening to realize how incrementally this has to be done because of the institutions that communities value at the expense of the futures of their children and of the state. Well, it's fairly well known that we raised the sales tax.

But one of the Herculean tasks that you undertook were on the two other taxes that we were proposing and didn't succeed on, and I wish you would talk a little bit about that effort and why they failed.

CH: Well, there's a—the truth is when you talk about corporate taxes, you've got a whole lot more money to oppose the tax than the little fellow out here paying sales tax. He doesn't get as well organized as the chamber of commerce, and we had a few business enterprises that supported our efforts because they knew the long run—range impact would improve everything in the state. But generally speaking corporate Arkansas didn't support the corporate taxes. And you know, that's—I've found that . . .

[00:24:58] BW: But how did you as a freshman senator manage to get the senate to pass it? It was the house that wouldn't pass it. But you got the corporate income tax passed through the senate.

CH: Well, I suspect I could—I know the presentations and the arguments that I made and that I carried people down to Governor Clinton's office, and he shared the positives that we were hoping to gain with all of this. I really think that the reason the senate—not everyone. But there were enough votes

in the senate that voted for the tax with the honest belief it'd be killed in the house. It would've been a wonderful thing if such had not occurred, in my opinion. But I really believe that there were a number of the members in the senate that ultimately voted for the tax that did so with the earnest belief that the house would not pass it. And so therefore they could have it both ways.

[00:26:15] BW: What was Clinton like working with the legislature after he came back in and during that session?

CH: Oh, he—there was—he understood that the process was give and take. And it was, you know—he understood that sometimes you traded apples for oranges. And he did all those things, which has been going on since time began if you study history. You—to accomplish a purpose that you think is worthwhile, you may have to give up on something totally unrelated, and he learned all of that. And it was—you know, we did, for example—I don't remember the issue that we were trying to accomplish, nor do I remember the year, but I do remember that Max Howell wanted to consolidate Human Services. And I think that that has been a negative for the state of Arkansas. It's too big to manage today. I think Clinton thought that then, but he didn't think the problem was as big as what we were trying to accomplish. I remember

Max Howell saying, "You know, you could probably"—and I don't remember that we had—it was one of our sessions, and I don't remember exactly. But I was getting nowhere over there. And Max Howell told me that, "You know, if you could—if you'd cause the governor to see the need to consolidate some of these Human Services issues, then you could probably get some of this legislation unlodged." [00:27:59] I was not even aware, at the time, honestly, what was involved in the consolidation efforts that Senator Howell was attempting. But I do remember this. I went to talk with Governor Clinton about that, and either as we were talking about it or shortly thereafter, he told me—the bill had a number, whatever it was. He said, "I'll sign it." I told—went back up there and told Senator Howell and Senator Nelson and Senator Wilson. They were the three that were running the senate back in those days—that the governor would agree to the consolidations that were proposed at that time. And everything's just sort of like the dam broke, and we began to move all of the items that the governor wanted to move over that. And my realization since then has been, at least in my opinion, that we put too much under one umbrella in that consolidation, and Human Services has areas that are inadequately providing services today that they—at—where the

state should be providing.

[00:29:19] BW: But his other legislation that he cared the most about was logjammed until . . .

CH: Yeah.

BW: . . . that got opened up.

CH: And I—that—and that's the—I only bring that up to point out that he learned that though—I think that was in our economic efforts, trying to find additional capital for the state. You know, we provided for the utilization, I think, of 5 percent of the biggest pots of money in the state of Arkansas were the retirement systems. And we allowed for a utilization of up to 5 percent of the retirement systems for real estate investments in the state. And if you think about a poor state like Arkansas, you have—I think all of 'em together probably at that time amounted to about $2 to $4 billion. So you're talking about $50 to $100 million that was made available, and in a poor state like Arkansas, Clinton could see of the tremendous economic impact the availability of that kind of capital could have. And it did. [00:30:39] I remember that—I believe it was those bills where we created ADFA and, at the same time, expanded the or allowed the investment of retirement funds into real estate in the state of Arkansas. And I believe it was those bills that were

locked up without any discussion hardly at all on the floor until—and Senator Howell had, apparently, no interest in those issues but knew that Clinton did, so he held . . .

BW: Held it hostage.

CH: . . . them till he could get the issues that he had an interest in.

[00:31:19] BW: Yes, that was the 1985 session when the whole push was economic development, and some extraordinary legislation came through, and an extraordinary number of the governor's bills got passed with your leadership on the floor of the senate.

CH: Well, that—I don't know what contribution I had . . .

BW: Oh! [*Laughs*]

CH: . . . made, but I know that there were a lot of those economic development issues that I only understood in concept. But we were able—I was able to persuade the senate leadership into allowing Governor Clinton's experts to come on to the floor in a meeting of the community as a whole to explain the finite ideas. And I had the confidence, or Governor Clinton had caused me to be confident, that it was the thing that we needed to do. And looking back I'm confident that he was right.

[00:32:26] BW: When he came back in in [19]83, did you think he had had his comeuppance and was not as aloof and arrogant any longer or did—was that still a problem with . . .

CH: Oh, no, I—he knew. He knew in that period of time, two years, he knew that Arkansas was not a place for someone to wear their Rhodes Scholar on their cuff and that—he knew that we're a rural state. And he learned all—he didn't just learn what to say. He learned that humility carried him a long way, and there was plenty of reason for him to come from his background and be where he was. And he needed to demonstrate that he knew that.

[00:33:35] BW: One of the rules he set forth was "any time a legislator wants to see me, that legislator come in—comes in and sees me."

CH: Yep.

BW: And I got the idea that it was—he was—it was a lesson he had learned.

CH: It was commonplace in his first term for people to talk about how they went down to see the governor and couldn't get in. It was commonplace for me to spend a great deal of my time carrying people from the senate down to the governor's office to talk about whatever they wanted to talk about. And that open-door policy that he had was the kind of policy that I think previous governors of—had had and the kind of relationship that members of the legislature before term limits were familiar with.

And he had more of an open-door policy after 1980—his comeback in [19]82 than I think any governor before or since has had.

[00:34:56] BW: One of the things that I noticed about him early on was if the legislature was in session, he could not stand to stay in his office. He wanted to be where the legislators were and talking. How did that—was that your perspective?

CH: Well, it was my perspective. And you may not remember, but it was always my assignment by you to get him through the Capitol because of his willingness and eagerness to talk with everybody along the way about anything. And we would have meetings with members in various places in the capitol around the senate, and we would start over there in time for him to be there on time, but along the way other members of the legislature would stop him in the hall, and he would talk about whatever. And it was my assignment by you to get him over there. So I remember many times I would be criticized by individuals that were talking to him when I would simply get him by the arm and take him and remind him out loud that he has an appointment at such and such time, and we're already late. And I would say that loud enough for whoever he was talking to to know why I was pulling him off. After it was over, the next time

I saw that individual I—it was inexcusable, and I'd get criticized for it. [*BW laughs*]

[00:36:23] BW: There was a time during the education session when Mrs. Clinton came and spoke to a joint session, as I recall. What was the reaction to her, and had ye—and what had your relationship been with her during all of this education reform?

CH: I don't—I never had until—I'd have to digress here just a little bit. When Chelsea was just a—in a cradle, I had a client and a friend in North Little Rock who had a restaurant, House of China. And he invited the Clintons and the Hoofmans one night to a dinner there. And I remember this is when I saw his ability to be just one of the folks. We met there at the restaurant out on MacArthur next to Camp Robinson out there. And he—they had Chelsea in a little basket, and we had dinner in a walled booth. And that was the first time that I really became acquainted with Hillary. And after that, I mean, she was, you know—early on, she was somewhat distant, and she knew more than we did. And so consequently we were intimidated with talking about issues with her. And then I came to learn that she, too, was a very human individual and had a lot to contribute. [00:37:59] I don't think that the legislature was prepared at that time for their first lady to be instructive toward them, be advisory toward

them, about what they ought to do, although there were—you know, everybody was courteous, and she was right on what she had to say. But I just don't think at that time that Arkansas legislature was familiar with that kind of teamwork outside of the Governor's Mansion.

[00:38:36] BW: After the education session, he began being recognized for being an education leader and became more active in national—the National Governors Association, Southern Governors, Education Commission of the States. And was that just detracting from what he was trying to get done in Arkansas and what the legislature wanted him to do?

CH: I don't think Arkansas legislators or Arkansas generally was very familiar with the idea of their governor traveling across the nation to share his ideas about anything. That's not something that governors from Arkansas have historically done. And I—it was later that I think people began to see the impact he was having outside of the state of Arkansas.

[00:39:48] BW: Talk to me about the—there was a bill he vetoed that you had been very active on getting passed. And that was a moment in strange history of Arkansas, and I wish you would talk about that bill.

CH: Well, you're talking about highway funds.

BW: Yes.

CH: And I think I have told you before that—we mentioned earlier in our discussion the highway funding that took place in [19]79 that was the car tag bill. But we had, in the [19]80s after I was a member of the senate, we had a highway program bill that raised taxes on fuels. And in that bill I was the governor's floor leader. Now there were, in the state of Arkansas, a lot of discussions that, you know, Governor Clinton vetoed that bill. But there were people who were of the opinion that he really wanted the legislature to override his veto so he could have it both ways. One, he vetoed the tax increase. Two, he funded highways. And I think the reason for that was that earlier in that session, his floor leader in the house was Bobby Hogue. Bobby Hogue had a conflict with one bill that Governor Clinton supported. I think Bobby Hogue voted against it, and it was so offensive to Clinton that he fired Bobby Hogue as his floor leader and removed him as his representative on legislative council, which is—you know, that was a very significant thing. I don't think I'd seen that happen in all of my time before or since. [00:41:38] Now move forward a few weeks, and we have—in the state of Arkansas, when the governor vetoes something, we have way more times that it won't be overridden than that it is.

People respect the fact that the governor is the administrator of the state, so when the governor vetoes something, it's a lot less often for one to vote to override the veto than it was for 'em to vote for the bill. Well, in my case, I was always a big supporter of highways. Henry Gray was as close to me as a friend as was Bill Clinton. And . . .

[00:42:20] BW: Henry Gray was the director of the Highway Department.

CH: Yeah, he was the longtime—King Henry he was known by many, you know, because of the influence he had in the state. He was the longtime director of the Highway Department. And when the—we passed that highway program. The governor vetoed it. It came to the senate, and the senate overrode the governor's veto, as did the house. I voted to override the governor. Now, that is a big step. Never was there a word spoken to me by the governor nor said publicly about me, his floor leader, voting to override his veto, after a dispute over some other bill by Bobby Hogue caused Bobby to be terminated in the relationship that he shared with the governor. So because of that a lot of people thought that Governor Clinton really wanted the legislature to override his veto. He never said that to me. He never said that to me, and I never discussed it, for quite frankly, I didn't want

the issue to come up where I thought that he may be reminded and we could have conflict that we never had as a result of it.

[00:43:38] BW: I think you have heard correctly that he knew that the votes were there, at least in the senate, to override the veto, and he had advisors on the staff, like Maurice Smith, who cared a whole lot about that bill being passed, who was giving him vote counts. And that was someone on the staff who cared passionately, too. When—why did you stop being—what happened when you stopped being his representative on the legislative council?

CH: Well, I quit over the fact that I was of the opinion—it never was made public, but you were there when we were discussing the—a pardon of a person whose family lived in North Little Rock. And he told me that he would do that. And then as—for whatever reasons in his arena, he chose not to, and I was so disappointed that I resigned as his floor leader to the legislative council. But this is the first time that I have ever publicly said that. But since you're sitting there and you were there at the time when that discussion took place, that's the reason.

[00:45:05] BW: And very soon thereafter you became the chairman of the legislative council.

CH: That's true. Well, it was—it was—you know, at my age today, it

would be considered very soon thereafter, but it was a few years later, yes.

BW: Not too many years later. I don't think it was years later, I think it was months later.

CH: I think it was probably several years later.

BW: Was it?

CH: I mean, I became, on my own right, a member of the legislative council shortly thereafter.

BW: That's right.

CH: And then it was a couple of three or four years later before I became chairman.

BW: I was thinking you became chairman in [19]86.

CH: I think it was more into the [19]90s.

BW: In [19]88 and [19]90.

CH: It was—mm-hmm.

[00:45:53] BW: Okay. Did you, as a legislator—well, I wanna talk about the session that led to the ethics legislation that the governor wanted passed in the legislature. And it was an very unpleasant time from our perspective. What was going on in the legislature about why the governor wanted this ethics legislation passed, and why then it was so unsuccessful in getting the legislature to act on it?

CH: Well, the practices within the state of Arkansas needed some limitations imposed on them. But I think it was such a way of life that the legislature was so accustomed to having their friends take 'em to lu—to dinner that—and I don't think the legislators even considered that their friends were lobbyists who wanted something out of them. It was just that their friends wanted to take 'em to dinner or to lunch, and Clinton wanted to interfere with those relationships. And the fact—that is, the foundation for the objections was really the reasons why it ought've [*laughs*] done in the first place 'cause it was just accepted as a way of life in Arkansas that the third branch, that is the lobbyists, have an impact in state government. And I . . .

[00:47:55] BW: But the legislation wasn't saying stop it, it was saying disclose it.

CH Well, I understand, which led to stoppage, you know. I mean that ultimately, the legislature felt that—and it was, course, the lobbyists were right there—the lobbyists were telling the legislature just how the sky was gonna fall on them if they passed it. And the lobbyists were the ones that were really the moving factor in the legislature's position. And then there were some legislators who—same ones who I think caused the people to adopt term limits were the same kind of legislator who didn't

want disclosure at all, for they didn't want disclosed how much they were receiving from outside interests. And those few spoiled the whole pot.

[00:49:04] BW: Well, the governor had made it clear that if they didn't pass it, he would take it to the people as an initiated act. And what ultimately went to the people was tougher than what he was asking the legislature to adopt. Do you think the legislature just didn't believe it?

CH: Well, I don't think—I don't know what I think about that back then. I don't know—everybody had their own thought. I don't really know what a majority of them thought. And their thoughts were, I think, that they were just opposed to the concept of changing what has always been the case here. I think the lobbyists were the motivators of their thought processes, and the lobbyists thought that they could beat it if it got to the ballot. I think that—so that's not what—so the lobbyists convinced the legislature to defeat the bill. Bills. And I think they did so with the bel—with their belief, the lobbyists' belief, that it wouldn't get to the ballot, and if it did, they had spent enough money to defeat it. Consequently, the legislature, that is, enough of them, followed the directives or suggestions or wishes of the lobbyists, and therefore the session failed.

[00:50:52] BW: And we did take it to the people, and in a way that made it almost impossible for anybody to publicly oppose it, including the lobbyists. The people passed it easily. I mean, it was not easy to do this because gathering that many signatures, and that was before you paid people to go out and collect signatures. It was very hard work. And when we came back after that and tried—it seemed to me that the legislative session after that was the hardest one that the governor ever had, that there was an anger at him by legislators for going around them and going to the people. Do you remember that?

CH: I do, and I don't think that the anger was with the legislators. I think the anger came from the lobbyists. It was—I, as I said, I don't think the majority of the legislature opposed the ethics efforts. But in each case, each legislator would have a friend who was a lobbyist that could cause that relationship to be big enough to get that one vote against this bill. And so we were unable to get any of it passed because each legislator had at least one friend who I think was assigned the responsibility of that legislator, no matter what. And so it was the lobbyists, then, who were so bitter, that found fault with each of the measures no matter what they were in the next session.

[00:52:35] BW: Yeah. It was tough.

CH: But I don't believe that was . . .

BW: But it was . . .

CH: I don't believe that was a rancor . . .

BW: My . . .

CH: . . . of the legislators the next . . .

BW: My sense was that it was very few legislative leaders who opposed it from the beginning, but they were able to trade favors and call in chits with their colleagues as well as with the lobbyist pressure that was going on to stop our success in passing it. I was just astonished because it was so watered down, it didn't seem like much of a lobbyist—a lobbying regulation form at all, and we did strengthen it when we took it to the people, so.

[00:53:18] CH: Well, and it was, you know, it was gonna be the foot in the door thought on the part of the lobbyists. And their statement was that if you pass this, I won't even be able to buy you a cup of coffee. That was the thing that went through the Capitol. That you won't even be able to have a cup of coffee with your friends. Your friends, not lobbyists, but your friends can't buy you a cup of coffee. And probably some of the, back in those days, leaders, as you refer to them, in the legislature, had as much at stake as did the lobbyists back in those days. And

you know, they intended to defeat the foot in the door.

[00:54:16] BW: Setting that session aside, I wanna talk about—there was this thing during legislative sessions where governors hired staff to be liaisons to the house and to the senate. And as a floor leader and then subsequently not a floor leader but a leader in the senate, what were those guys for? What did they do? How did you feel about them?

CH: Well, they . . .

BW: They were his lobbyists.

CH: They played a role. I don't think I ever—even though I resigned as Governor Clinton's floor leader, we never disassociated ourselves over the disappointment I had over that one issue. And I always had access to the governor's office. But to the other legislators, those liaisons were the opportunity and method of communication that members could have with the governor. I mean, you could tell—just take Milas Hale. He oftentimes served as a legi—a liaison for the senate. A member—you know, while we were debating issues and couldn't leave the senate, you could go tell Milas Hale that, you know, you keep talking to me about *x* bill over here. If you could tell the governor that I'm very interested in *y* bill over here and that what I want is not of great consequence to him. And you could find that what

otherwise would keep the two people from ever finding common ground—that liaison could go—he could get into the governor's office to talk about lots of—he'd mention that one issue, and oftentimes find resolves. And so those liaisons served a great purpose. And even today, you know, as both working with my seatmate Mike Beebe when he was attorney general and as governor, I served as his liaison to the senate. And there is a real contribution made by those individuals.

[00:56:38] BW: There's a story when you were representing the governor on the legislative council and you were getting a bill, you were arguing for one of his bills that he had just made a compromise arrangement on in the house, and one of the liaisons came to tell you while you were talking that he had just agreed to change the bill you were talking about. Do you remember this?

CH: I do not. There were—specifically. I mean, those kinds of things happened regularly. And . . .

BW: Well, the legend about Cliff Hoofman was—"And, ladies and gentleman, I have now told you all the good things about the bill. I am now going to tell you the bad things [*laughs*] about the bill."

CH: I think—I've heard that story told so many times. And it—you

know, they—I was honored in a lot of ways to—in the senate to be called the governor because we had such a good rapport. And, "The little governor is here. Let's ask the little governor." And I was such a supporter of Bill Clinton that, you know—in my own dealings, I probably would never have done anything like that, but I was such a supporter of Bill Clinton and his vision for what the government ought to be to people, which was a kind of vision that the state of Arkansas hadn't seen before in a lot of respects, that it would have been the kind of thing I would have done. I would have professed all of the good things about this bill, and if someone told me something different, I could have just immediately shifted over and said, "Now that I've told you what's [*laughs*] good about it, let me tell you what's wrong with it."

BW: It was frustrating to deal with the way he operated a lot of times. You and I both had many opportunities to feel frustrated on it. Well, I wanna go back to talking about these . . .

TM: 'Scuse me, Betsey, we need to change tapes.

BW: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:58:57] BW: I wanna talk more about these campaign fund-raisers you would do for Governor Clinton which [*laughs*]—

they really did produce an unbelievable amount of money. But you had the strangest, most exotic cuisine and menu I had ever encountered. How did you get started serving such food?

CH: Well, originally, I had always frog hunted. And that sort of blossomed when I was in college at Conway, my last year I was president of student body. The treasurer for the student body was James Neal Anderson whose family owned Anderson Minnow Farms. Well, as it turns out, their biggest predator is frogs. And so I really hunted frogs on the minn—Anderson Minnow Farms, and as a result of my relationship with Neal after I got outta college, I represented the Malone family that had the white moors, and the **Hill** family that had the catfish. And the Evans family that also had both minnows and catfish. And so consequently I had thousands and thousands of acres to hunt frogs on. [01:00:24] And so I started off—Clinton was the one that saw the bonsai in a fund-raiser because in my freshman year in the house of representatives, I invited some of the leadership that had befriended me to my house, and we had frog legs. The next year, word got out about that, so we did it again next session. That would've been in [19]85. Not eight—[19]75, [19]77. And so it expanded a lot. And I invited a lot of the folks from North Little Rock, and it just got to be a big affair at my

house. Well, Clinton was the one that saw—in [19]79 he came just as a guest. And as a matter of fact, I think in [19]79, the Junior League of North Little Rock had a fund-raiser that they always have, and different businesses—they give things to be auctioned off. And in that year I gave a frog-leg dinner for twenty people at my house. And it sold for $2,700. Well, since it sold for so much, I decided to make it a little more attractive. So I asked the secretary of state, Jimmie Lou Fisher, Steve Clark, who was attorney general, I think, at that time, and the governor, and Henry Gray all to come and be servers in the serving line for these people who had paid so much for this dinner. [01:02:10] Clinton saw that, I think, I'd expanded it to a lot of legislative leaders to come as well and really made it a, you know, special function for those people. Clinton, in [19]80, then, he asked me—I mentioned earlier the frog-leg dinner that we had. That was the first one. He said, "Why don't you do that as a fund-raiser?" I'd never done that before. And so, you know, a thing was born, so to speak. And so it grew from that hundred and twenty in my backyard to, you know—we expanded it later to Burns Park party house where we did four, five hundred people. And I remember my daughter—her—she'd love—we would—I had friends in Louisiana, and we'd go down

there and capture alligators. And we would fry the alligator tail and serve it as an hors d'oeuvre. And my daughter knew, and we all knew, that a lot of people, including Betsey Wright, would never eat alligator. But my daughter, she would put it in a little box and carry it around and call it lemonfish and—you want an hors d'oeuvre? Lemonfish. And we were all so delighted when Betsey Wright, she tried the lemonfish and liked it. And of course, she wouldn't believe it that night when we told her it was alligator. Later on, when I convinced you that it was alligator, you—it was unforgiveable. [*Laughs*]

BW: Well, it wasn't so unforgiveable. The thing that I never really understood was was it legal to kill alligator and eat it?

[01:04:02] CH: In Louisiana at that time—it is today. At that time, I'm not certain. My friends, who were Cajuns—and I have a friend that was a pharmacist down there, and he lived in Morgan City, so right there on the marsh. Those people, I'm confident, never paid any mind to the prohibition taking alligators. They—that was something that they—a delicacy for them, and they regularly took 'em all their life, and the fact that it may have been illegal for anyone else to have alligator, they did. And so when I would go down there, I would always bring back some.

BW: Was it legal to hunt frogs?

CH: It was legal to hunt frogs here. You couldn't sell frogs that you hunted. And the gi—and it was legal for me to take the frogs, and there was no illegality at all about that. Now, as it grew bigger than what I could put in my back yard, I began to buy the frogs. They were marketed to restaurants, you know, and they sold frog legs in restaurants. And I had to buy the frog legs that came from Asia and Vietnam and wherever to have enough to feed the folks. When you—I wasn't able to capture enough to feed four or five hundred people.

[01:05:29] BW: Well, I went to very few events. I was always keeping the home fires burning in the campaign headquarters. But I remember that it was important to me to go to this event because it was so different from anything else. And your daughter was precious when she was conning me into eating alligator. I do remember that vividly. She was . . .

CH: But see, it was lemonfish back then.

BW: Lemonfish. It was lemonfish. Yeah. [01:05:57] Did it ever occur to you that this man would run for president of the United States?

CH: No. It did, yes. It occurred to me—I believe it was [19]87 that he was inaugurated, if you would, as chairman of the National Governors Association. And I was asked to go—and there were

a number of us from Arkansas that were asked to go to Hilton Head to the Governors Conference where he was named chairman. And it was at that time—I mean, his travels around the country—I knew, as everybody knew, he was traveling here and there, and the paper would mention that he went here or there. I don't think that a lot of his travels were published. Not all of them were published in the local papers or the state papers. He went where he went, and that was where he went. But a lot of times there would be a report that he went here or there and spoke to this or that group. [01:07:10] I—none of that really impacted on me. I was not the kind of thing I'd be interested in doing. We hadn't had other governors that did sort of that sort of thing. But I think we in Arkansas thought that, well, he's the only Rhodes Scholar that we've ever had, and he naturally has acquaintances that he met in that experience and his out of state education—all of those things gave him acquaintances that our governors hadn't heretofore had. So the fact that he would have acquaintances here or there that might invite him to speak or be there was not unusual. It never impacted on me of what impact that was having until I went to the Governors Conference and saw that there were people from all over the nation that had a familiarity with him. And then,

course, I had a personal familiarity with Bill Clinton. [01:08:17] But I saw there that that was not unique to me. It was not even unique to people in Arkansas. He had a familiarity with a lot of people. And the same ease with which he moved in Arkansas, he moved with people from all over the country down there. And you know, he—I remember one evening we had a—Alabama, as a matter of fact, played a concert at that convention. But that was not as impacting on me as a function at some big lounge. They were hundreds of us that were at that convention at this lounge, and Governor Clinton came through, and you could just see there was people that I had met from all over that knew him when he came through. And I'm sure I was seeing other governors that I didn't know that they were governor from anything. But everybody knew my governor. [01:09:22] And it—and that same night that—talk about his ease with everybody, he managed—in a little while, he was on the stage and reached in his pocket and pulled out his mouthpiece and took the saxophone from the player in the band and played with 'em. And the people there from all over the country. You could see that somehow that resonated with 'em, and that they felt a rapport with him. He's just one of us, you know. And so from that—every time anything happened after

that that might have led toward him running for the president, I was not too shocked that he might do that because, I mean, what I saw once, I'm sure he saw every occasion he went outside of the state. [01:10:18] Now I—there's a picture that I want, and you probably have access to it. And that's a picture of October the third, 1991, I believe it was, when he announced at the Old State House. I was in the middle of that picture the day he announced. It—picture that appeared on the front page of the paper. It was in the *Gazette*. And I have lots of pictures, and that one was special, and I've misplaced that picture. And I've always wanted to get it. I've called the *Gazette*, and I've called the *Democrat*, and the *Democrat* say they don't have it any more and lah-di-dah-di-dah-di. But you probably have access to it, and I'd like to have that picture.

BW: We'll look for it, that's for sure.

CH: I came back from an elk hunt in Montana and still had my beard from several weeks out there, but I was right in the middle of that picture and proud to be there.

[01:11:23] BW: What was it like to be in—to be an elected official in Arkansas. The governor was running for president. And all of the sudden, all of these things were being said about him and about this state. It was rough. Did you think that this was just

gonna go nowhere or—how did it feel to be an Arkansan with that kind of attack machine going on?

CH: I don't know that it had any impact on me. You know, I mean, it was—it—see, I was very interested in how it was impacting on Bill Clinton. He was my friend. And the one thing that, you know, I didn't—I did not think early on that he would win. I don't think anybody from Arkansas thought anybody from Arkansas was gonna be elected president no matter what. [01:12:44] But as you know, because of our friendship if nothing else, but because he was from Arkansas, I watched it very carefully and participated as an Arkansas Traveler in four states. I hate that I didn't go to New Hampshire. But at any rate, I just didn't—I didn't think that he was gonna win when he first started. I knew he would have a great contribution if he did, but I didn't think that the—that he would win. And I don't think that I thought that he would win when I first even agreed to be an Arkansas Traveler. We saw—I believe we were in Iowa when the debate took place between him and Bush and which we all watched. And I think that was the time that I thought that he might win and that he showed himself to be so knowledgeable, that he was not a bumpkin from Arkansas, and that he could discuss issues of world concern even, in many

aspects, superior to the president of the United States. I was in Iowa when I thought that he might win.

[01:14:31] BW: And what were you doing when he did win? Where were you?

CH: Oh, I was at home watching the returns. And I member the thing about his winning that was—that I remember most was that little program they put together, *The Man From Hope*. And I really thought that we have all been forgotten. We are of no consequence anymore. And it was—that was the feeling that I had, that we're a thing of the past. And—because we were not any part of that little program, I didn't think. It was more to do about, as it should have been, I understand, but it was more about him, but we, those of us in Arkansas, really—there was no individuals in that presentation. I remember that was the thing—I think they did that thing a day or two after—I mean it—they published that thing just a short time after he won.

BW: The nomination.

CH: No, no—well, they published it after he won the presidency in November. And that was, you know, a lot to do with about the fact that even before the election, he knew he was gonna win. He was, of course, a master at polling. I think you taught him all of that.

[01:16:22] BW: Well, we learned together. He had some real bumps in the road before the day of his election . . .

CH: Oh, yeah.

BW: . . . for president, and I'll remind you of one that I would like to know how you thought about it. In 1988 he was giving the nomination speech for Michael Dukakis at the Democratic National Convention. And it was, to put it mildly, a disaster. And what did you think?

CH: Well, you may not have ever been mindful, but oftentimes at his inauguration addresses to the legislature, I would give him a cutoff sign, and I don't believe he ever—I remember him consciously not looking at me once he saw that I gave him a cutoff sign.

BW: 'Cause he was not through talkin'.

CH: He was not through talkin', and I think he was afraid that if he looked back at me, I was gonna do it again, and the media might pick it up that I was trying to tell him to cut it off. So he wouldn't look at me anymore. And I was familiar with him talking too much when he got the podium. You know, me, I'm the kind of guy one-on-one I'll wear you out. But give me the podium and I'm gonna be a man of very few words. In his case, give him the podium and he's just got a lot to say.

[01:18:10] BW: There—I mean, it's well known that he turned that around when he went onto the Carson program. Did you watch the *Carson Show* that night, and did you realize this man has just dug himself out of a hole again?

CH: Well, so many times I saw him do that. I don't think that—I don't know that I thought that at that time. I know that what he did at that convention after that election was over that—I mean, that year. I'm not sure that anybody even knew the name of the candidate the Democrats had that year, but everybody remembered Bill Clinton. And anytime—the thing that I observed was any time they showed him making any part of that speech, he was saying something of consequence. Any part of it. He just consequentially [*laughs*] spoke too much. But he—any time they were critical of him and they would—in the news—and they showed any part of that speech that he made, no matter what part you took, it was only the whole that was critical of Bill Clinton. As a whole he talked too long, but you take any segment of his comments that night, they were of significance, in my opinion. And as a result of the fact that he talked too long, everybody remembered the name of Bill Clinton.

BW: Well, and it was astonishing that four years later, he got the party's nomination. [01:19:53] Well, before that happened and

he decided to run again in 1990 for governor, and it was—a lot of people thought, "He's just not gonna see this through." And he promised that he would fulfill all four years of the governor's term. And then he didn't. And what was your reaction to that?

CH: Well. Life has twists and turns for all of us. And I'm not ever surprised—I don't know what will happen to me tomorrow, and I don't think anybody else knows what's gonna happen to them tomorrow, and deep down I don't think that, though there may—there was many people that were critical of him for not doing what he said he'd do with regard to serving out the whole term, he probably said that at the time realizin' there was no chance anybody from Arkansas was gonna be elected president. But you know, we—Ecclesiastes 9:11 has always been very meaningful to me. That scripture says, to paraphrase, it's not the swift that wins the race, nor the strong that wins the war. It's per time and chance we find our place. I would imagine that Bill Clinton meant what he said when he said, "I will serve it out." But I'm not offended, nor should anyone else be, if it appears that he can offer his leadership to the whole country that he would do that. I was never offended that he chose to run for president.

[01:21:48] BW: You just didn't believe he was gonna win.

CH: I didn't think he was gonna win.

BW: No. Most people didn't. It was an extraordinary [*unclear word*]. I noticed that—I know that a lot of the young folks that showed up to help him get elected president from all over the country in the New Hampshire primary when the Gennifer Flowers thing broke, when the draft letter broke, they started packing their bags to leave 'cause they thought it was all over. Most of us understood that that wasn't enough to get rid of this guy. He was gonna somehow or another crawl out of this hole, too.

[01:22:24] CH: Well you know, he, as I said earlier, he's so comfortable with himself, and in the face of adversity, he has—you know, if there is a light out there, he sees it. And I think that in New Hampshire he—I've never seen Bill Clinton full of despair but one time, and that was when he got defeated in 1980. And I don't think he had heard what anyone had forewarned him before that election. But the next day, he heard it all, and he addressed—that—he—that light at the end of that tunnel. He addressed it in every way that he could, and he's bright enough and, as I said, comfortable with himself enough to move to cover those errors.

[01:23:40] BW: Well, how did you come to be a member of the Court of Appeals in the state of Arkansas?

CH: Beebe appointed me.

BW: Governor Beebe appointed you. Governor Beebe had been your friend for a long time.

CH: Oh yeah. We took the bar exam together, and we met there and . . .

BW: And you worked in the attorney general's office with him after you left the senate.

CH: Yeah, we were seatmates for twenty years and very close.

BW: Well, he also had appointed you to the Highway Commission. And we're gonna get a Henry Gray memorial one of these days in this state because the man was a giant.

CH: Biggest disappointment that I've ever had in the media is the fact that on Henry Gray's demise, there was never a note in the newspaper other than a obituary. Not a article written about his demise and his accomplishments and contributions.

[01:24:44] BW: Enormous.

CH: Enormous contributions. He had—and he had—Bill Clinton was—and until Mike Beebe was the most influential governor that we'd had in my lifetime. But even Bill Clinton on issues couldn't overcome Henry Gray's influence in the state on some few issues. And . . .

BW: It wasn't just the power that Henry had, though. He had a

vision . . .

CH: He did.

BW: . . . for making the state better.

CH: Henry was probably the most humble guy that there ever was. You'd never talk with Henry Gray and think that he would have any influence on anyone.

BW: Well, you were his partner.

CH: But I take pride in the fact . . .

BW: And it . . .

CH: . . . I was also Bill Clinton's partner.

BW: Oh, you were. [01:25:47] I really did view you as a member of Clinton's staff, which it was an insult to most members of the legislature, but that's how much of the family you were in. And though . . .

CH: And I thought myself closer—I thought myself as much of Clinton's staff as the staff did. And that didn't, in my way, take away from my role in the senate. That was just another role that I had in life.

BW: Well, and you did have other interests in the senate, and you did have your own record that you developed. But I know that Bill Clinton couldn't have accomplished as much as he did accomplish as governor without your leadership on his behalf. It

was just astonishing.

CH: Well, per time and chance we all find our place. And I was just happy to be there, though I'm confident that someone else would have been in that stead had I not been there. Clinton—he's a powerful personality for those that, you know, can understand him.

[01:27:10] BW: When was the last time you saw him?

CH: Last time I saw him to visit with him was at the fund-raiser we had for Mike Beebe at the Alltel Arena. I had a frog-leg fund-raiser that the only place I could hold it was at Alltel Arena.

BW: These frogs of the world have got to be terrified of you.

CH: Well, one thing I always thought was every time Bill Clinton ever talked about these frog legs—now keep in mind, he's the guy that said I had raised him more money with those frog legs than all the other legislators with whom he had served. A very positive thought. Every time we ever had one of those fund-raisers, at some time, he would sit down and eat more than any three or four people. [*BW laughs*] But every time he spoke about it, he always called 'em insufferable frog legs. And I always wondered why he did that. Even the night—let's see what—well, I can think of a number of times, but anyway, he referred to them in a negative kind of way, yet they were a very

positive thing. [01:28:28] I saw him at Bill Gwatney's funeral. And he—we—across the street. He called out to me, and I waved back, but we didn't get a chance to visit. But that was the last time I saw him. I talked to Stephanie one time.

[01:28:53] BW: Stephanie Streett with the Clinton Foundation.

CH: And we talked about another engagement, and the timing didn't work out.

BW: Well, he's not in Arkansas much anymore. He is a man of the world now. And movin' on.

CH: Yeah, he is that, and moving on is true. I mean, he's not anywhere near givin' up.

BW: He's happy as a lark doin' what he's doin' now, traveling around the world. And very proud of his wife in the job she's doing as secretary of state.

CH: She's doing a great job.

BW: She is.

CH: And I—the last time I saw her—well, she was also at Gwatney's funeral, but the last time I had an occasion to visit with her, she was candidate, and we in North Little Rock had a big gathering.

BW: Did you eat frog legs?

CH: No, we didn't have—we didn't—I didn't get my frog legs to the national arena. [*BW laughs*] [01:30:00] One time when I was

in Washington, I was a guest of the president at the White House, and that—during that experience, I visited with the president and Mack McLarty there in the Oval Office, and we talked about the fact that we had all met just right down the street. And we talked at that time about a frog-leg fund-raiser for the reelection effort. We—it never came to fruition and I—we never at that time, I don't think, we had ever thinking about—the Alltel Arena wasn't completed [*laughter*] at that time but I—we did discuss it at that time. It was—we also discussed the fact that when we first met that I remember the discussion that Mack and the president and I had about—when we met we talked about what we—things that we all thought about doing when we were all, at that time, just students. And then just, you know, few years later, Mack was president of Arkla, Paul was Secretary of State, the president was, at that time, the governor, and I was in the senate. And all at the same time. And . . .

BW: It was quite a road.

CH: Quite a road that we reflected on all of that. And I have a picture that—what was the young lady's name that—office right outside the Oval Office?

[01:32:02] BW: Nancy Hernreich?

CH: Nancy took the picture of the three of us standing in the Oval

Office pointing toward the hotel in which we were when we all met and were all discussing that reality that developed when we were all students all having visions for contributing in our first meeting and how it played out.

BW: Well, I would like to get a copy of that photo. We will have to arrange that. That's very important to be a part of the Clinton State Government collection at the Butler Center.

CH: I'm . . .

BW: You'll have to dig it up.

CH: I'll have to dig that one up in exchange for you digging up . . .

BW: I will look for this photo. I sure will. That—thank you so much for doing this. I . . .

CH: Oh, I'm honored to be a part of it.

BW: Well, you are a part of Arkansas history and a critical part of Bill Clinton's history, so.

CH: Well, it was a fun road for me and an opportunity to be involved with things far beyond what my imagination may have carried me to when I was a child growing up.

BW: Great. Thank you.

[Tape stopped]

[01:33:23] BW: Well, I want you to tell Bill Clinton stories. What Bill Clinton stories do you remember?

CH: Oh, lots of Bill Clinton stories.

BW: Well, let's hear 'em.

CH: Well, one that I remember is that in the late [19]80s, Senator Gibson would invite—he had friends who owned a large island in the Mississippi River, and they had a hunting lodge out there. He would invite the entire legislature and the governor and others. And of course, I would take my coon hounds down there, and I would take one group out, and we would hunt for an hour or so, and I'd come back and take another group. And we did that on one of those occasions, and then I recall the second time it was—that was the focal for a lot of the people. There were, you know, fifteen or twenty that were interested in it first time. But then after that, the next time we did it, everybody wanted to go. And during that night when I came back, Governor Clinton was there playin' hearts. And he wanted to go. So he and I and two or three others took the dogs and turned 'em loose, and it wasn't very long till they treed. I remember I was surprised that—I mean, he didn't—he was not going to—there wasn't any media around, and most everybody'd gone to bed. He was going just to have the experience. [01:35:04] And I member he had on something that looked like anaconda or alligator skin, obviously a very expensive pair of cowboy boots.

And the dogs treed across this slough of water. And I offered to try to carry him across there. I had rubber boots. He—"Oh, no." He said, "I'll go." And he just traiped through the mud, and we got over there, and when I shined the light at the tree the dogs had treed upon, you could see the coon up there. And I asked him. I said, "You gonna shoot him?" He said, "Yeah, I'll shoot him." So he took the .22, and I held the light, and he shot him out. And no big deal. Coon came out, and I, you know, for us coon hunters if we have a young dog, you'd like to knock a coon out that's still got a little life in him so there'll be a little fight. That'll encourage the dog to hunt harder next time. I don't—you know, that—I think he was a little surprised at all the activity that took place once that coon hit the ground, but that was no big deal. [01:36:09] Someone informed John Robert Starr, and he did a critical thing as—he said that apparently, Clinton was now trying to win the Bubbas of the state over and wrote a critical editorial article about it. And I was very disappointed in that 'cause the truth was, Clinton didn't do that for anybody but himself just to have that experience. But . . .

BW: It's a—I had completely forgotten about the coon hunting that he did.

CH: He—and he never did have—he talked about sometimes going on

a frog hunt, but he never did that.

[01:36:52] BW: Did you ever play cards with him?

CH: Yes.

BW: What kind of a card player was he?

CH: Oh, he was way beyond my abilities. The—I set in—I was just learning how to play hearts. And I couldn't make it interesting for him. But I watched him play and those who—I had watched people play hearts when I was in the army, and I could understand the plays that others would make but wouldn't see that play if I were playing it myself until after the fact. And he was—he could play hearts.

BW: He took it so seriously.

CH: He did that.

BW: But then I guess he took everything he did so seriously.

CH: He did. I mean, there wasn't—I never saw much flippant exercises carried on by him. He—if it was worth doing, he approached it with an earnest attitude. And which, I mean, he wasn't like he wasn't any fun because he was too serious about it, it's just that—that's just the way he went about things.

BW: I mean, he would go to a movie. If you went to a movie, it was worth talking about afterwards, and most of us just go to a movie for the moment, so.

[01:38:25] CH: Well, and with the same kind of fever—fervor he approached his friends with the same attitude of—if he was trying to nurture a friendship, he did it with earnest. And which is the reason that he had so many people, I think, trying to help him.

BW: And it was real.

CH: It . . .

BW: It was genuine.

CH: It was . . .

BW: It wasn't—there wasn't . . .

CH: There was a lot of times people, you know, would—I remember the people on the Arkansas Travelers group, the common laughter we would have for ourselves was, "Just remember, he'd do it for us," and we'd all laugh 'cause we knew that he wouldn't. And the real reason for that was he—there were so many of us, and there wasn't but one of him. And but he was . . .

BW: Tell . . .

CH: . . . he was to every one of us that might find something critical about him, to every one of us, he was special in our own way. And though we might all find a fault in him that we all saw, we all knew, but our own relationship with him was so much bigger than that one fault that we'd laugh at ourselves for being a part

of that fault.

[01:40:02] BW: Do you have any other stories you'll share?

CH: Oh, I—we've covered a lot.

BW: We have.

CH: The—nah.

BW: There was—there were a lot of roads you rode with him. It was terrific. All right. Thanks.

TM: Good job. Thanks for picking that one up. That's good.

[End of interview 01:40:22]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]