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

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William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Phil Price

Interviewed by Betsey Wright

March 30, 2012

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Objective

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Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. We attempt to transcribe verbatim all words that are spoken, including false starts and repetitions.

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 18th 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.
- 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 Phil Price on March 30, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Mitchell Crisp: Verbal approval for Clinton Phase 2 interviews: 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 Phil Price, 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. Phil Price, if you agree with this statement, please give your verbal consent now.

Phil Price: Yes.

MC: Thank you. Thanks.

Bruce Perry: Thank you. Anytime you want.

Betsey Wright: Phil, I wanna start with your beginnings, and tell me where you were born and who your parents were

and what your family and childhood were like.

PP: Well, I grew up in Dumas, Arkansas, in southeast Arkansas. When I was growing up, Dumas was a town of about six—five, six thousand people. My dad was a small-business owner. We had a feed-and-seed store in town. And he was pretty apolitical. In fact, there was an interesting sidelight, I guess, to that is one time he ran for city council, but he refused to campaign. And I was probably about eight or nine. I don't remember exactly. And I knew at that young age that that was not the way you get elected to political office. And I guess it kinda frustrated me as a child. My mom worked a variety of jobs. She worked at the elementary school and at the library. My—I have a brother and a sister, and I'm the youngest of three.

[00:02:06] BW: What were your parents' names?

PP: I—Charles and Eva.

BW: Charles and Eva . . .

PP: Price.

BW: Price.

PP: Mh-hmm.

BW: And what were your brothers' names?

PP: Clay and Mary Ruth.

BW: And where are they?

PP: Actually, they're both here in Little Rock now. Sure are. They're—they are both retired.

[00:02:28] BW: Well, where did you go to school?

PP: I—course, went to high school in Dumas, and then I went to Hendrix College in Conway and—kind of a family tradition. My sister had gone there, and my brother went there. And I toyed with the idea of going other places, but I ended up there. It's a great school, and get a very good education.

BW: There are people who would die to go to Hendrix, and you said, "I ended up there." [*Laughter*] Most people it's their first choice.

PP: Yeah.

[00:03:07] BW: And what did you study when you were there?

PP: History and political science. When I started college, I got, I think, some pretty good advice from an advisor there that—look at a lot of other courses. Look at things that you have not studied before. You know, philosophy, humanities, other science, and some different areas, some different subject areas and disciplines and so forth, and find what you like. Well, I knew I liked history and political science. And I came right back to that because quickly I found out that that was really where my passion was. That was so much fun to learn.

[00:03:57] BW: And so what did you do after you graduated from college?

PP: After I finished college, I went to work for Southwestern Bell in Tulsa. And I was an accounting office supervisor. And it was quite an interesting time. I learned a whole lot, and I really enjoyed the opportunity to do that. I worked for about a year and a half there but again realized that, you know, this accounting is fine, and this corporate world is fun, but I think there's some more things to do that are more in line with what my interests are. And so then I went to graduate school at the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville, and I got a master's in public administration. After that I—after I finished that I—in a couple of years, I came back to—or came to Little Rock and went to work in state government and enjoyed that and then worked . . .

[00:05:03] BW: Where in state government did you work?

PP: With the old Department of Local Services. Again, I enjoyed working in local government.

BW: And what year was that?

PP: Oh me. That was about [19]76, [19]77. In that time frame. [00:05:20] And after that I went to work for the Association of Counties and enjoyed that greatly until . . .

BW: And what did you do there?

PP: I was an assistant to the director and did a variety of things. We put on educational seminars. I applied for grants for the association. And we put together—and when—in fact, I had put together some procedures manuals for different offices in county government, which was, again, a lot of fun and kinda some brown—groundbreaking things that had not been done before.

BW: Yeah, I think it's important to talk that about that association because counties have a uniquely important part in Arkansas and its structure, and that association has a very unique role in ter—in a relationship with state government, so anything you can think of to expand on that association as a background is pretty important here.

[00:06:17] PP: Well, it was really fascinating at the time that I came in because it was such a kind of a buzz because Amendment 55 had just passed and limited home rule for county government, which was quite a bit different from the—I guess it could say the archaic version of what county government was about. There was a lot more of expansion of services. And just as—you know, people in this state and others living in rural areas, moving back out and into rural areas, they wanted city services. And so there's a big expansion demand of service from county

government. And it was fun to be a part of all of that changing and moving the former justice of the peace, the quorum court, to, really, to a legislative body for county government instead of a—I mean, here in Pulaski County, I think, at the time before Amendment 55 there were, like, 420, 430 justices of the peace. And so it was a highly unworkable group. And of course, they really never met together. But then changing that to, based on population, about fifteen JPs for Pulaski County. So it made it much more of a workable—actually a legislative body.

BW: That was an exciting restructuring of county government, then.

PP: Yes. Oh yeah, it was very exciting.

[00:07:54] BW: And how long were you at the Association of Arkansas Counties?

PP: I was there about seven years.

BW: And then what did you do?

PP: Well, then I got a phone call from Bob Nash or—and you, I think, and really surprised me, I guess, but as much pleasant surprise—about coming to work on the governor's staff for Bill Clinton. And that was in 1985.

[00:08:32] BW: Talk to me about when you first encountered Bill Clinton or became aware of him.

PP: Well actually, I had first met Bill Clinton back when I was in

graduate school in Fayetteville through some friends, some mutual friends, and so forth. But I did not really know him very well other than just to say, "This is a—this is somebody you need to watch. This man is gonna do some things." And certainly he did. And he was someone to watch. He was very close to county government. At that time, there were about seventy-four Democratic county judges from the seventy-five counties. So there was much closeness with Governor Clinton and his administration. So it was a lot of people that were very supportive of him that we worked with, certainly that I worked with, every day.

[00:09:42] BW: And so when did you start working in the governor's office? What month in 1985?

PP: It was November of [19]85.

BW: And this was after we had just had a major economic development session in the legislature. And as I recall, we brought you in to help oversee the implementation of those new programs.

PP: Right. Right.

BW: So now I want you to talk about what you did there.

PP: What I did in the governor's office?

BW: Mh-hmm.

PP: A variety of things. And it was so much fun and so—it was a learning situation every day. I mean, certainly, I had never done anything with international trade or anything like that. Never had that opportunity. But virtually every week we would have visitors—either trade issues and so forth that would come up, and either the governor would be doing an event, or he would want some information on this and that. [00:10:54] I did a lot of inf—a lot of background on all of these programs that were implemented in [19]85 or, I guess, initiated in [19]85. And looking at the implementation of them and trying to find out how they were working. What was working, what wasn't, are we using these things? What—you know, again, how do we tweak them and that kind of thing? So that was most of my job. [00:11:25] I did a lot of traveling with Governor Clinton at the time.

BW: Talk about some of those trips.

PP: Oh, they were great. They were so much fun. So much fun.

BW: In what way?

PP: Well, little—the little anecdotes that happened. There were always the times where we would be flying somewhere for him to make a speech and the weather would not cooperate. And he would encourage me to get up in the front seat with the pilot

and help him find a way through the clouds to land the plane. You know, because he was so anxious to get to where the speech was or where he needed to be. There were situations where we landed on—well, it wasn't uncommon at all for grass runways and things like that. [*Laughs*] But it was interesting. One night when the pilot, after we had already landed, you know, he asked the governor—said, "Governor, now when are we gonna be leaving here?" "Well, it'll be you know, eleven, twelve o'clock." I don't know exactly, but something like that. And he said, "Okay, well, we're gonna have to get the state trooper to go down at the end of the runway and turn his lights on where I can see." Because there was no lighting on this runway. So there was a lot of exciting times. [*Laughter*]

BW: That's an excitement you could've lived without. [*Laughter*]

PP: Some of it I could have, yes. [*BW coughs*]

[00:13:11] BW: What kinds of things did he talk about when you were traveling with him?

PP: Well, he was so enthusiastic all of the time, and it just—it amazed me. It frankly amazed me. He was so enthusiastic not only about Arkansas but about his job and about trying to get people in that local community, specifically, or to that event that we were going to charged up about making a difference, making

a change, making things better for the people in the community. And that's what he talked about all of the time. And you know, the—course, the tie-in between education and economic development and the importance of that, and how they could just kinda glo—certainly they'd go hand in glove. [00:14:14] One of the things that—certainly, part of my job, too, was talking with companies that—company officials that were wanting to expand or relocate or things like that, and that was always at the very top of their list. I mean, certainly, they want to take advantage of the tax incentives and so forth that we had and other states have available. But one of the most important things that they always came back to is "What's my workforce gonna look like because I hear"—you know, the company officials would say wonderful things. They'd say, "I talked to Company X, who has a operation fifty miles away," and they would brag about our workforce and about how loyal they were and how reliable they were, and they would show up ready for work and be excited about having a job and making a living there and giving a full day's work for their pay. So but you know, the—having people with the skills to get trained and retrained and retrained again as, again, processes change and as the products change that the company's making. So that was—I

mean, we talked about all of that all the time. But it was so funny because he would—Governor Clinton was so funny because he would start out very tactfully with the—some of the local officials and local leaders and say, "Okay, I think you need to do more of this and this and this." And then if he didn't get the response that he expected, he would ramp that up. He would start pushing it a little bit harder. And say, "Listen. I mean, you can't compete without doing this kind—these things. I'm not making this stuff up."

[00:16:14] BW: And he—how would you s—how successful do you think he was in convincing them?

PP: Oh, I think he was very—I think it wa—he was a great resource, I think, for them. Because a lot of those community leaders, especially smaller communities, didn't have other influences. They perhaps weren't as well read and didn't understand that all these dynamics were going on in the world and in the economy around the world. And so he would push them and—I mean, certainly in a good-natured way, but just impress upon them the importance of doing these things. And it's about your community and the livelihood here that you have, the jobs that you have in this county or this community.

[00:17:17] BW: Let's talk about some of the programs that had been

put in place or were being put into place that you got to work with. And one of the ones I wanna talk about is the Science and Technology Authority. Talk a bit about what the dream and goal was and where it seems to have come.

PP: Well, I, certainly, I think the science and technology—and just as the governor just pushed it, again, promoted it quite a bit. It was so important because when you have—especially, like, basic and applied research programs that they have. And that is so important for companies and the development of jobs in the future right on—you know, in the years ahead because there are not nearly enough companies. There's not nearly enough support for that kind of work and that kind of development. We—another thing we had is some business incubators. And we had a variety of startup companies. And they were located in several—there was one in Fayetteville, one at UALR. They were located around universities, again, for the science and technology angle of that and the impetus of that. [00:18:46] So it was—I think it was very important that we have that because you had to have a mix of programs. You couldn't just, you know, I guess to use the old, trite phrase, put all your eggs in one basket. You had to do a variety of things all at the same time as far as supporting variety of programs and things that

could develop jobs whether it was in science and technology or through—it was—through workforce development programs, training and retraining of workers, and so forth.

[00:19:25] BW: The—at the time that the Science and Technology Authority was set up, there was very little actual research university concept in the state. And now there is. There i—it has really worked. The dream was there. And I think it is one of the ongoing legacies of the work that you all did to get put in place and s—you had to get the authority expanded just about every single legislative session because it became clear that this aspect wasn't being covered, and that one wasn't being covered, et cetera.

PP: Right. Right. And again, I guess to underscore Governor Clinton's diligence with that whole effort, he told me a story early on, I guess, and I have used it several times in my various jobs that I have held over the time—over the years—is that he would always say, "We are in these jobs for only a short period of time, so we have to do everything we can all of the time to make a difference and to get things done." And that really made a big impression upon me because not only did he say it but he lived it, and you saw it every day.

[00:21:04] BW: Well, I remember that he—it seemed like every time

you all came back, you had a whole list of new things that had to be done in response to either constituents or new ideas that you'd come up to explore or research about. And I wondered if you all thought that the staff was growing at the same size [*laughter*] that the ideas were.

[00:21:28] PP: Oh. Well, another thing that Governor Clinton was great at is, certainly, listening. And he talked, and he would seek out people's opinions on things. And whether they were just local officials—or really they were company officials when we're talking about economic development incentives. And after he made that offer a time or two, people came forward. They said, "Okay, he really means it. And here they are, boom, boom, boom, boom. [*Laughs*] Here are the suggestions." And he was great about responding, trying to get a—well, just a kind of a transaction going between—you know, you have the governor and state government, and you have companies. And he kinda looked at 'em, I think, as by demonstrated his last two or three years in office as governor—is that emphasis on the quality management program. And you know, constantly rethinking these processes that we're doing—you know, that the company is doing. And how can we improve them? How can we improve that? And you know, the governor, of course, took that

back to state government, and we made some, I think, some very good, needed changes around state government.

[00:23:01] BW: Talk about the quality management program, what it was all about.

PP: Well, it's—it was kind of a—like I said, it's kind of a transaction in that the taxpayer pays their taxes, they expect good service. If they don't get good service, they wanna know why, you know. They wanna know why. Why I can't get this done? It—kinda like a business, I guess, from that standpoint, although I think that phrase is probably overworked [*laughs*] about running government like a business. It's not so much that, it's being responsive to things that are working and also things that are not working. How can we—well, one of the things I think of that we made some starts on—we didn't necessarily finish it all, but anyway, we made some good starts and some changes on is the whole license tag issue and the renewal of that. But again, that is an intergovernmental process with county government as well. And you've got an issue there with—you know, the consumer doesn't see the difference. It's just government. You know, they don't care whether it's county or state, it's—they, you know, they just see it as government. So I think trying to sort through that, share information where it had not been shared at

all, I think that helped greatly. Ee—you know, make some improvements in that process and then—that since then there have been more improvements as well. And of course, the internet and everything—it's much, much easier to do that process now.

[00:25:01] BW: Yeah, it was a way to make government more citizen- and user-friendly in many ways before we used that kind of jargon. In fact, you came in when we were still trying to get computers throughout state government, and we were trying to get the staff to use email. [*Laughs*] It was a struggle. It was a struggle. We—some of our cabinet heads never did. We'd have to call their secretaries to say, "Tell him to check his email."

PP: Right. [*Laughter*]

BW: That an important message from the governor has come over. [00:25:35] Talk a bit about the Arkansas Capital Corporation and what its function and role was and is.

PP: Well, the Capital Corporation was kind of a—certainly a sleepy organization and was really small. But I mean, the whole idea was—I mean, Arkansas certainly is a small state. We have less than 1 percent of the population of the country. We are, in a lot of ways, a capital-poor state in the sense that we don't have development capital for some of these entrepreneurs and others

who want to do some things differently, who have some ideas and wanna change things. And the whole concept of the Capital Corporation is to—I mean, that we change the board, increase the tax credit that companies got for making contributions to that, and then in turn take a slightly more risky venture. Not risk capital or anything that—out there like that, but take a few more chances. It's not a banking—or it's slightly different than a banking operation. Okay, it—and in the sense that they could take a few more chances in their loans, and they wouldn't have the examiners coming in looking over their shoulder and saying, "Oh, no, you can't do that anymore because this and this is not up to speed." So that was what that Capital Corporation was certainly all about.

[00:27:24] BW: And at the same time, we moved to get the retirement systems to keep their money, or a good portion of their money, invested in Arkansas so that there was more available.

PP: Right. Yeah.

BW: Talk about the Development Finance Authority 'cause it's a very unique agency even today.

PP: Yes, and a lot of the things that, again, that ADFA, Development Finance Authority, had done is to, again, take a position, take an

ownership, a partial ownership in the company to—and again they can take a few more risks than a bank. And they could in turn loan some money for an expansion, mostly, is what they did, for expansion. 'Cause we expanded a lot of companies and, you know, if—depending on what the market was and what the company was doing, how their products were selling or not, we could, you know, we could take a few chances, again, as state government to extend the terms for this company to—especially in some of these areas of the state where—I mean, the development in our state, and really every state, it's not uniform, although things were working very well for our state as a whole through the Clinton administration through the years. [00:29:12] In fact we led the nation in percent of job growth in [19]91 and [199]2, I think. But just the, you know, the growth was so unequal. And again, that was—that is another wonderful initiative that Governor Clinton trumpeted with a Rural Development program. And it was a program—again, he did in the last couple of years, [19]90, [19]91, [19]92, in his administration just because, you know, you look at the development, and it was not equal. And so what we had tried to do is—and again, this is not—this is difficult stuff for any politician to do because there's not gonna be quick fixes. And

you're risking your personal capital. And I really, you know, admire him for doing that. I mean, that was very risky on his part. But what we did, again, is we met with those local leaders, came up with plans for them to make some changes and some mu—developments in their counties and to try to implement some of those things. And at the risk of alienating some of those areas of the state that were doing well. So it was a—it was not a—I mean, overall, it was certainly the right thing to do, and again, I can't say enough good things about him for doing that, taking the risk to do something like that.

[00:30:59] BW: Can you think of any examples of things that occurred in rural development?

PP: I'm sorry. Rural—in . . .

BW: Examples in the Rural Development Programs that went on.

PP: Well, not specifically right now, I can't think of any. But there were a few successes. We did have some few.

[00:31:22] BW: Well, the Development Finance Authority was a self-funded agency, and I'm not sure why. How did that—how did it fund itself?

PP: Well, they did that on the—based on the bond issues that they would work with the—well, wi—for a company. And they had a portion or less than a percent or whatever that they could make

out of doing—out of issuing these. And as long as the payments were being made, then that was a time—now later, that—the federal legislation on that changed, and it became more difficult to do that, became more restrictive. But early on the agency did have much more flexibility, and they did make some money, and they did put some money in reserve, and they were able to do some things that—again, take some risks that we hadn't taken before.

BW: It grew out of a Housing Finance Agency.

PP: Right.

BW: And they kept that component and expanded to broader economic development and, I think, some higher-education capital funds and some agricultural programs, too. [00:32:43] Can you talk about minority business programs that were done under Clinton?

PP: Well, I mean, he wanted to do, again, everything he could to, certainly, help minority business. And a minority business is usually small business. And how we can—we made some changes in the law where we could do some things through state purchasing and so forth. We made some changes there where we would try to get some extra incentive to do some of that in some of the purchases that the state made. What we—but

certainly we set aside a few resources and tried to direct them to minority-owned businesses and so forth.

BW: And that got the Highway Department to really . . .

PP: Right.

BW: . . . buy in on that also.

PP: Right.

[00:33:48] BW: For contractors. What is an enterprise zone?

PP: Well, it is basically an area that has a higher unemployment, has lower development, and is not—doesn't have a lot of jobs, has some low or moderate income people. And if we were able to put, you know, job expansion, job opportunities, in those areas, then they were able—the company was able to get some tax advantages by doing that. And so we started that in very specific areas, but then we expanded it to broader areas as well. And toward the end a lot of things were in enterprise zones.

BW: It became a major tool.

PP: Yeah.

BW: Was an important tool. [00:34:48] Talk about the export programs, the foreign trade.

PP: We—actually, could we pass on that one? [*Laughs*]

BW: Yeah, we sure can.

PP: I'm sorry.

BW: No, that's okay.

PP: I'm kinda flat-footed on that one.

[00:35:12] BW: Agricultural initiatives?

PP: That one as well.

BW: Okay.

PP: If we could.

[00:35:22] BW: Small businesses we did some revolving loan funds, and we did some ag co-ops and farmer, beginning farmer, programs, things like that.

PP: Right. And so vegetable farmers as well. Trying to expand, get people to at least diversify and get out of so much the row crop and get into the vegetables because what we could do with that is then—then we could get a processing facility, a food processing facility, in there if we had enough people who were growing vegetables and so forth. So that, again, that was kind of a—that's certainly a win-win there.

[00:36:08] BW: It's still—it's spotty about how well it stayed in places in Arkansas, isn't it? Or are there places growing vegetables . . .

PP: Well . . .

BW: . . . to some extent now?

PP: . . . it's—it is spotty. It is spotty. And things change over time,

and markets change, and buying habits change.

[00:36:35] BW: Workforce training was huge.

PP: Yes.

BW: During all of Bill Clinton's administration in Arkansas. And I know he did some major, major expansion of programs at the vo-tech as well as with adult literacy. Can you talk about what some of those were?

PP: Some of the things that I think were the most important that he did and—in—again, I think it's in response to those comments that he got from business people saying that, you know, "I gotta have a workforce in here day one, and I have to be making product and I"—so what we set up—'scuse me—is a pool of workers. We would say, "Okay, in this county or in this community, this company wants to expand, or they want to hire fifty people, okay. But they want to, you know, train here, for a month ahead of time, about a hundred people. And they're gonna pick the fifty people or seventy people or however many out of that that will go to work for them here in a month." So you have a chop—you know, certainly you have a chance to do that. But again making some incentives for the worker to excel. That, hey, if I do—if I learn this job well, then, you know, in a month or a couple of weeks or whatever, I'm—I can have a job.

[00:38:14] BW: And who designed the training?

PP: Well, the company did. Because we worked real closely with the company because—we set up the conditions, and a lot of times we would go into their factories and provide—they would provide, certainly, the material to do that. And what we would do is set up and make that product for them and give that person a chance to learn how to make that product.

BW: It was on-the-job training.

PP: Right.

[00:38:47] BW: It was a marvelous tool that really worked in terms of expanding existing businesses as well as new ones?

PP: Right.

BW: It attracted new businesses to the state also?

PP: It did. It did. But certainly it—what it did is those people with already—who already had—those companies who already had facilities in the state, if they could expand it by fifty jobs here, put a new product line or two in here, and they had a good workforce and—and again, they would tell us—and I heard this from, I guess—myself I've heard this several times, and I know the governor heard it many more times than that is—because of the working relationships that all the different agencies had—I mean, companies were amazed at how we got things done in

this state. And again, it goes right back to Governor Clinton and the, you know, the example he set for everybody, the encouragement he gave to all these agencies to be responsive to what these companies want. They would be amazed. And they would say, "We don't get this attention in, certainly not in California or in Texas or in other places, but we don't, you know—I mean, I talk to other companies, and we don't get it." They would also say that the workers show up—I mean, that there's much more eagerness to work. They will show up except in deer season. [*Laughter*] They will show up ready to work. And give you a full day's work. And that's not what I get in some of our other plants located around the country.

[00:40:53] BW: You worked with quite a number of agencies, and different ones more than others. But talk about—I mean, when you talked about making a whole bunch of agencies come together to make something happen, what were some of the ones that you worked with?

PP: Well, the ones I worked with were primely—primarily in economic development. And that includes a whole bunch. That was our Industrial Development Commission, our Development Finance Authority, Science and Technology Authority, our bank department, our employment security department, our

workforce training or the old voc-ed agency, certainly the Capital Corporation and the—what was, at the time, called the Pollution and Ecology Commission. I mean, a variety of things. They were amazed that, you know, that, again, that we could get things done so quickly. If they had a problem with an water permit or an air permit or something—and it could be just as simple as somebody talking past each other, not really communicating very well. Someone down in the organization talking to one of the science people within the company, and they not understanding one another. So it—several times it would get elevated up to the manager, and the manager would call or perhaps would see the governor somewhere or call the governor's office and say, "Hey, we're—we got a problem. We wanna, you know, we wanna add these fifty jobs and—or these hundred jobs and we can't do this till we get this resolved, till this, you know, this water or air problem here because we have to get our—we have to stay within our permits and so forth." And it could be something very simple. [00:43:06] But certainly we would—and the governor certainly empower us to figure out an answer toward this. I mean, how can we resolve this issue? And most all the time it was not anything major, it was mostly just people not communicating very well.

BW: So your role on the governor's staff was as an ombudsman, a facilitator, a translator, and a coalition building of all of the agencies around a particular problem.

PP: Right. Right.

[00:43:42] BW: Did you do public speaking on behalf of the governor?

PP: A little. A little. But not a, I mean, not a whole lot. I made a few chambers of commerce or, you know, some for the Lions Clubs and some of those kind of things. But I didn't—I did not do a whole lot of it. I frankly was not that interested in doing a whole lot of it. But I did those things that I needed to do.

[00:44:10] BW: What—something else that—in the workplace training. We had a special emphasis on dislocated workers . . .

PP: Right.

BW: . . . and then toward the end of his time in Arkansas, there was a youth apprenticeship program started. Can you talk about those?

PP: I can talk a little bit more about the dislocated worker program because—first, let me kinda set the—you know, during the—I started in [19]85. During the [19]80s or the early [19]80s, in [19]83, we had double-digit unemployment in the state. And we had lots of problems. We had—the companies, garment

companies, rubber companies, a lot of different types of companies were closing right and left and going overseas. So it wasn't just happening in Arkansas. So it was happening everywhere around the country, especially in the South, because they'd kinda moved from the Midwest to the South another ten or fifteen years ago, and now they were moving overseas because, again, they were in search of cheaper labor. So that was one of the, really, impetuses of the governor and the reason, certainly, economic developments were so important. [00:45:39] And the reason that we would do a lot of things to do virtually everything we could for—to get a company to expand or certainly to locate in, you know, in the state because we had some—I mean, they were just difficult times, and people were hurting everywhere. And we were constantly doing some things with the dislocated workers program because there was that need to retrain. You know, because companies—no matter what you do, technology is changing. Labor markets are changing around the world. Everything's, you know—at that time, certainly, was going global. And you know, just—things change. It doesn't stay the same. It's not like, you know, you're gonna be in this job for thirty years like your dad was or your grandad was or whatever. A lot of things—it—things are

just so much more dynamic. And certainly Governor Clinton understood that in his design of all these programs. I think that was extremely important in how we approached economic development as a state. [00:46:55] But what we did with the dislocated workers program is that we would—those people who were being laid off—is we would meet with them. We would go over the whole range of state benefits that they could have, whether it was unemployment compensation and other things, even getting into insurance and also things like, you know, food stamps and welfare or whatever, if they needed that to get them by, to get them—and also we'd go over training opportunities, and that was perhaps the most important thing because everybody trained to get retooled and go back to work. But we had to sus—try to sustain those workers for that period of time before those—before they could get trained and retrained.

[00:48:00] BW: Are there any notable industries that got saved or that got brought in or any wonderful success stories that you can share with us?

PP: I think one of the biggest success stories, and there's several, is the Nucor-Yamato plant in Blytheville because that was such a game changer in the region, and it was such—I mean we had a workforce in that area with a little over a high school education.

But with that—with the location of that Nucor-Yamato, that steel mill, that mini steel mill, there and then the subsequent other expansions and new companies that came in around it supplying it—I mean, it was dramatic that people with twelve to fourteen years of education at that time could make $60,000 a year. Now granted, it was not the prettiest, you know, the most comfortable kind of surroundings and so forth that they were in. There was a lot of smoke and heat and that kind of stuff that they had to put up with. It was difficult work. But there was an opportunity if those people want to stay in that community and that area, in that area of the state perhaps where they grew up, where they could hunt and fish, and they could make—I mean, they could make that kind of money in that community. It went very far. It went very far. And . . .

BW: It was a very good salaries.

PP: Yes.

BW: Very good income . . .

PP: Very good salary.

BW: . . . for those workers. [00:50:13] Talk about economic development in the Delta, the economic status of the Delta.

PP: Wow. That's a—that is certainly a—at best it's a mixed bag. There were some areas or some pockets, like in, certainly, in

Blytheville and Jonesboro and some areas that were doing well. In the town that I grew up with—grew up in, Dumas, did better than most. Wasn't great, but it did better than most. It was able to keep some light industry there for several years and was kind of held up as somewhat of a—kind of a regional example of how things can happen. [00:51:12] But you know, the focus was on leadership. That—I mean, the people, the community leaders, they would come in—and again, kinda getting back to what I said earlier about what Governor Clinton understood and knew and was responsive to companies. If they had people locally and—which Dumas did and certainly Jonesboro did and the people in Blytheville as well—of working together as a community and that's difficult to do sometimes in the Delta, but certainly in those areas they have done a very good job of that. They were able to do—I mean, the company was responsive. They could see what was—you know, that, "Hey, if I've got a problem, well, I can call—you know, locally, I can call this leader or that leader or this bank or whatever, and they will be responsive to this need. They will understand that, hey, this is important for my livelihood, and not only my livelihood but for the livelihood of the hundred, two hundred people that are employed in this community."

[00:52:38] BW: It's tough. I think it's one of the—I mean, the Delta is still one of the poorest parts of this country.

PP: Yes.

BW: And it's been—it was an agricultural economy, and a stable alternate economy didn't set in for the whole area, and yet it's right on the Mississippi River with great transport. I guess the status of the Delta is one of my greatest regrets of what we didn't get more done about, and I don't know what we could've done 'cause it certainly was important to Bill Clinton.

[00:53:14] PP: One of the things that I know Governor Clinton did—in fact I was in several of those conversations and heard him talkin' to leaders in various Delta areas. Specifically, I think of the Helena area and that Delta Cultural Center. And he almost single-handedly encouraged them to do that and promoted them to do that. They seemed to be reluctant to do it but once he—I think, again, this took a few years. But again, celebrating the things, celebrating the cultures in the area and, again, building on that because that is also another aspect of economic development.

[00:54:14] BW: The racial divide in the Delta and particularly in that county was very severe.

PP: Yeah.

BW: And he was pulling black and white leaders together with all the power he could, and the Delta Cultural Center, he felt, was going to be a real bridge across that divide. And I mean, it is a jewel. He's—it's one of his great accom—one of the things he's most proud of having gotten put into place. Well, it seems to be thriving.

PP: It is.

BW: Not much else is, but [*laughs*] it is.

PP: Well, it is. It is. And you're exactly right. It is an example of the races working together.

BW: It was tough. It was tough to—and it—there's still a lot of plantation mentality lingering even to this day among black leaders as well as white leaders in the Delta. It's just tough. [00:55:22] Talk to me about preparation for legislative sessions and what you had to do in those to prepare.

PP: Well, that—they were fun. They were exciting. They were hectic. [*Laughs*] Sometimes disjointed. And one of the . . .

BW: When you say sometimes, they were always disjointed. [*Laughter*]

PP: Well, [*laughs*] we were running around in circles a lot, and but that's kinda the nature of it. It was a lot of fun. It was getting the ideas in front of the governor, the various ideas, and you

know, he would challenge us and say, "Okay. I—what can I do? What can I do to, again, make a real difference in people's lives?" You know, "Give me"—you know, "Give me some ideas." And again, that's another constant theme and that he displayed to us all the time.

[00:56:49] BW: During a session—well, during a session, it was a circus, and it was [*laughter*] very hectic. Talk to me about what a day was like for you during a legislative session as an economic development policy person on the governor's staff.

PP: Okay, well, we would have meetings early in the morning. Start around seven. And we would have all the agendas for the day for all the committee meetings. And we had—we would meet in the governor's conference room. And we would go around. We would go through the agendas, basically, and we would—well, we actually had already graded bills, so we knew bills. We had given 'em A, B, C, D, or F. And course, the governor's bills were As, and the bills the governor liked were Bs. Most bills were Cs, actually. Most bills were Cs. The ones that he did not like were Ds and usually the ones that were unconstitutional or really far out there were certainly the Fs. And we would go through the agendas every morning from, oh, about seven to eight thirty or—because meetings would usually start around nine, eight

thirty or nine. And you know, okay, Cs we would usually let go unless there was an unusual amendment that was coming into it. We would want to support, certainly, his legislation, make sure that we're there to support, speak for, these bills, those As and some of those Bs, if we need to. [00:58:59] Some of those Ds and Fs we would work on getting either—depending on how f—what he—you know, if he wanted to come out front and speak against it, that's fine, but if he wanted to—we'd want to work on getting someone else up there to speak against it. We would certainly talk against it and may not, you know, publicly speak against it. But again, that would be—and then going to the committee meetings.

[00:59:28] BW: Now, you had certain committees that you were supposed to cover, didn't you?

PP: Right. Right. And really depending on the—depending on what was on the agenda that day. Agriculture and Economic Development I would be at most all the time. Public Health, Welfare, and Labor—I was at that committee quite a bit. Occasionally I'd be at the Insurance and Commerce Committee. But yeah, it varied which ones we would be there. Depending on what, again, what was on the agenda for that day.

BW: Well . . .

BP: Change tape.

BW: Okay.

[Recording stopped]

[01:00:07] BW: When you first joined the governor's staff, you worked as a team with Bob Nash, who had been the economic development policy advisor before you got there, and then we expanded the staff to both of you, and then there came a time when he left and went to become the director of the Development Finance Authority. So talk about how your job changed when Bob Nash moved over to ADFA and whether we gave you any additional team help at that point.

PP: Oh, okay. Yes. It did change. And I mean, I was enjoying it anyway, but it became more enjoyable and more hectic, too, at the same time. And I did get some help with Tracy Steele came on staff. And his—it's been kind of interesting because over the years his relationship and mine have changed because he was elected to the legislature, and course, and I now work for the legislature, so that's interesting. [01:01:20] But it was—yes, it did change, and it did improve and expand. I was called on to do more, to d—certainly to do more things, to be more places with the governor, which was always fun. He was such a—he had such a youthful exuberance about him that he would keep

you anxious and excited about what he was gonna say next and what was gonna happen next. He was just so much fun to be around.

[01:02:04] BW: Well, when you were talking about traveling with him before, most of it was talking about that community that was coming up that you were gonna be talking to—that's not fun. What did he—what else did he talk about that was more fun? What kinds of things besides work did he talk about?

PP: Oh, well, we—I mean, we talked about—let me see. What were the—they were the music videos that were going at the time. Again, that's back in the mid-[19]80s or late [19]80s. And w—I mean, we talked about—he's a musician, and I like to think I'm a musician. So we would talk about music a lot. We would talk about, I mean, sports and all kinds of different things that were going on at the time. So . . .

BW: Now, he played the saxophone player—saxophone, and you played drums. Did you all ever play together?

PP: No. We didn't. No.

BW: Oh, well we have to make that happen. [*PP laughs*] That's a good goal. [*Laughter*] If we can find some drums.

PP: Yeah, that would—oh, I have got a set of drums. So. [*Laughs*]

[01:03:21] BW: Well, I want you to—he also—with some staff people

he talked about the latest book he was reading, and he was always reading books.

PP: Yes.

BW: A lot.

PP: Oh yes. All the time. And he did it a remarkable way of working that into his speeches, whether it was, you know, to the chamber of commerce or to some school group or wherever he was. He would always work that in. One of the—some of things that I remember about being on the road with him were that we would always stay at the end. He would speak twenty minutes or sometimes longer. And then at the end, he would be at the front and shake hands with everybody who wanted to come by and shake hands. And then he would go to the—we would always go to the kitchen, and we would shake hands with everybody who prepared the dinner or the lunch or whatever the event was. And we would stop, if it were in a hotel, we would stop at their registration desk or, you know, at the concierge or wherever we were, you know, and we would stop and say hi to everybody that was there. And then we would move on, but I mean, there wasn't a hand left unshaken anywhere.

[01:04:49] BW: Now you describe it as shaking hands. The way you all came back in with piles of little notes and pieces of paper [*PP*

laughs] there had to have been more interaction going on about with those people than just shaking hands.

PP: Well, sure there was. There was. And they could—they felt like then they had his ear after he had already spoken. And then they could kinda vent [*laughs*], I guess, at him about different things and so . . .

BW: Or ask for help or . . .

PP: Or ask, yeah, whatever.

BW: So yeah, you all would come back just laden down with all these little pieces of paper and notes that had to be followed up on.

PP: Right.

[01:05:30] BW: So when did you find time to respond to correspondence?

PP: It was difficult. It was difficult to do.

BW: It was nigh unto impossible . . .

PP: Yeah.

BW: . . . I know.

PP: Yeah. It was hard to do.

BW: We just didn't have enough staff.

PP: [*Laughs*] That too, yeah.

BW: And we never—we just didn't increase the staff in all of those years. We just kept—every now and then we would borrow from

some other agency but—ah. It was horrible. [01:06:01] The—then—did you stay in the governor's—on the governor's staff until he was elected president?

PP: Yes. I did. I did. I . . .

BW: And what was it like while that process was going on?

PP: It was quite crazy. It was quite crazy and we—I would get calls—I remember several that I would get calls at night or on the weekend, and some of them were from him on the road. [*Laughs*] And, "What did we do about this? You know, this situation, I'm gettin' asked about this and that. And what did we end up doing?" And you know, just clarifications of things that we did or didn't do and what happened, and were we gonna do something else on that or, you know, those kind of things. 'Cause he was getting—in fact these are, like, union questions that he would get when he was out of state. [01:07:08] We—well, one of my favorite, though, I guess, is in the [19]92 election—was a phone call I got one night right after, I think—yes, President Bush was on Larry King or something. And he had made an accusation that Bill Clinton as governor had said something to a foreign leader and—or somehow communicated something that—I don't—was not appropriate or something. I don't really recall all the specifics. But what I [*laughs*] do

remember is getting a phone call about that. And within an hour, less than an hour, I had a copy of the letter that had been sent to that leader showing that no, look, this was what was transmitted. It was not that. It was not that accusation that was being made. And anyway, that was fun to have turned that around real quickly.

[01:08:27] BW: Well, it seemed like we were constantly asking those—I'm speaking as someone who was on the [19]92 campaign staff—that we were constantly asking people on the governor's staff to get this history together, that history together—what they're saying that we didn't do this, and what are the facts behind that situation, or they throw out this statistic. And yet you were also [*laughs*] supposed to still be doing the government operations . . .

PP: Right.

BW: . . . as well as the Clinton record that was being challenged, it seemed like, at every nook and cranny across the country. And you had an acting governor in many cases on many days because Bill Clinton was traveling around the state. [01:09:17] What was it like to also then be responding to Jim Guy Tucker as the acting governor, lieutenant governor, during that campaign, too?

PP: It was certainly difficult, yeah. It was—because you had two bosses. So and that's difficult in any situation. That's di—and their personalities are different, and the way they approach issues is different. So it was—I guess it tried all of our diplomacy. It did that.

BW: And it had to have been difficult for him, too, for Jim Guy Tucker, too.

PP: Oh, yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

[01:09:55] BW: It was awkward. It was just really awkward. It was—it had always been awkward—like I remember Winston Bryant, when he was lieutenant governor, was very frustrated because he didn't feel like we were finding substantive assignments for him to do. And I can't imagine what it would've been like to be a lieutenant governor when the governor was out campaigning all across the country and not in the state so much. It must have been tough . . .

PP: Oh, I . . .

BW: . . . for all of you.

PP: Yeah. Yeah. One thing—talk a—you bring up Winston Bryant. One thing we did do for Lieutenant Governor Bryant is with that Rural Development program. He was the chair, and he went to all those meetings that we had around the state in all those

different counties. And I know 'cause I would introduce him everywhere we were in all the small towns. And we would—we'd have some good, you know, good turnout of community leaders and so forth. And it would be—I got a chance, I guess, got an opportunity to work with him closely.

BW: It was, I think, our—it was a good match for him because we pulled together a group from all of the agencies that touched on rural development with a commission that he chaired and directed forward for that. So yeah, that was a good one. Oh. [01:11:32] And then—b—what a—you were on the staff when Bill Clinton thought about running for president in 1988. And then were you surprised when he didn't?

PP: Yes.

BW: And why was that?

PP: [*Laughs*] Well, I don't know, I just was surprised he did not because you always got the sense from, certainly, from working with him—not that he would talk about it. I don't mean that at all. But just the way he approached his job, and just the view that he—he saw issues, he saw programs, he saw policy, he saw public policy so much broader and intertwined than, certainly, most any governor that I have worked with and have seen.

BW: Well, not only did he not run in [19]88, he gave that nominating

speech for Dukakis that was pretty much a disaster. And what did it feel like as a staff person watching that?

PP: Oh, it was a sinking feeling. [*Laughs*] You know, it was—oh, you just—you wanted to tell everybody to be quiet and let him speak, you know. But they evidently, from what I understood at the time, they weren't prepared for—I mean, they were expecting a two- or three-minute rah-rah speech, and here's the nominee, here's Michael Dukakis. And that's not what Governor Clinton had gotten from gover—then Governor Dukakis at the time. [01:13:28] But I do remember now—and now that you bring that up, I do remember the time that—when he got the phone call from Governor Dukakis or his people saying that "I want you to give the nominating speech," he was so excited. We were out on—we were on the road, and he got the phone call, and he just—it was just—it—again, that's part of that youthful exuberance that—about him that is so infectious. It is—it—he just makes everything enjoyable, everything better.

[01:14:16] BW: The—well, he pulled it out of the fire with the Johnny Carson appearance, which I guess all of us were glued to . . .

PP: Oh, yes.

BW: . . . the TV sets . . .

PP: Yeah.

BW: . . . and he was brilliant. He was masterful. And that was another one of his near-death experiences. I think he felt the—after that that—by—that he probably wouldn't have a chance to run for president again. And of course, amazingly enough, four years later he was the nominee of the party. And I guess—I mean, talk about how you felt when that happened, when he became elected president in November of 1992.

[01:15:03] PP: Well, it's extremely, you know, proud, certainly, of him and perhaps that I had a small part in helping that. But he was just—I mean, he was just so masterful. I mean, you saw it—that [19]92 campaign was, again, unusual. I took time off from the governor's staff and helped campaign because I couldn't miss that opportunity. That was just too—talk about once in a lifetime, that was it.

BW: Did you do any of the Arkansas Traveler?

PP: Yes.

BW: And where did you go?

PP: Yes. Well, I went to New Hampshire and went . . .

BW: And took your heavy coat.

PP: Huh? Yes. [*Laughs*] Yes. And I remember one scene that was just too funny. I mean, I was there. I was, you know, in my button-down shirt and my very conventional clothes. And I was

at a polling precinct, you know, on Election Day in New Hampshire and encouraging, you know, holding the Clinton sign, encouraging voters to vote. And there was a fellow that was standing beside me that—a young man, several years younger, maybe twenty, eighteen, twenty, had green hair. And he was holding a sign for one of the other [*laughs*] candidates. And so I couldn't help but think, "Wow, this is" [*laughter*] . . .

BW: It's a great contrast to have . . .

PP: Yeah, this is a lot different.

BW: . . . this green-haired kid [*laughter*] campaigning for the other guy. [01:17:00] Well, New Hampshire primary was a rollicking political thing anyway. The—'cause that's when the whole Gennifer Flowers and draft, and . . .

PP: Oh.

BW: . . . people who didn't know Bill Clinton kept saying he was through. Even people on his staff were packing their bags, on the campaign staff, 'cause they hadn't known him like we knew him. It was—he didn't go easily, so.

PP: No.

BW: And then he won. And then he won.

PP: Yeah, it was just exciting beyond belief. I can still—and frankly I think that's one of the reasons that my kids—because they lived

through that. They were twelve and six or twelve and seven or so, about that age, and so that made a big impression upon them, and they both worked in government and in politics. So.

[01:18:00] BW: Well, I wanna talk about them more, but I wanna do that later. And I mean, I want—I'm not through talking about economic development, but while we're talking about the Clinton election—he—when he was ready to resign the governor's office and work on the transition to the White House, he came and met with you all. And do you remember that meeting and what he said and what it was like?

PP: I member the meeting, and it was—you know, we were all very sad, you know, very sad. We understood, of course. We understood, you know, why he felt like he needed to do it and certainly to make preparations for being—becoming president. And you know, it was just—it was a real sad event. And it was difficult for him, too. I do re . . .

BW: 'Cause it was the end of a family bond.

PP: Yes. It really was. And that was—you know, I—it's kind of odd, I guess, in some ways, in my career that I have—that I even went to work for a politician because I've always had kind of a little skeptical nature of a lot of politicians. But I—after I got—I mean, after I was on staff and got to know Governor Clinton for

a short period of time, it's like it went away [*snaps*] that fast. I mean, it was just—it was amazing. He was just an amazing, ama—or is an amazing person and an amazing politician.

[01:19:49] BW: Well, we've all had an extraordinary experience to get to work with him. And you had a big part in getting him elected to the presidency. Talk about interactions you had with him while he was in the White House.

PP: Well, he always wanted to see you when you were in town. And there were several occasions that I was in there for a meeting or whatever, and that was, you know, that was always fun. He would always, course, give you a big hug when he saw you. And I remember I was there for a meeting right after the [19]94 election, which was not a good election. That's when the Democrats lost Congress, as you know. And it was really difficult for him, but he was so happy to see a friendly face. And . . .

BW: That—it was like every time he saw someone that he had known well in Arkansas, it was like seeing a family member. It was for him.

PP: Oh, and . . .

BW: It kept him buoyed.

PP: And it brightened up, I mean, his face just brightened up. You

could just see it. And Hillary's too, as well. They both just brightened up.

[01:21:17] BW: So how long did you stay in the governor's office after he was elected president?

PP: About six months. I helped Governor Tucker get through the next legislative session and . . .

BW: And then what?

PP: After that, I—well, I had told Governor Tucker that, you know, "It's been fun, but I've been here a long time. I'm really ready to do something else. And I'd like to do something with some of the economic development agencies that I've been working with because I think that I can bring some value to you and to the state by doing that." So I was appointed assistant bank commissioner for a year. And enjoyed that. It was a different—it—different. But also at the time I could tell that—I mean, banking is interesting and fun, but after you've worked with Bill Clinton and in the governor's office, it's not—unless you're doin', you know, I guess, some—I—really unusual kind of lending or whatever, it's pretty sedate stuff.

BW: [*Laughter*] It takes a lot of decompression.

[01:22:36] PP: Yeah. So but then there came an opportunity that—after that that I went to work at the Employment Security

Department and . . .

BW: You didn't just go to work at it.

PP: I was—yeah. I was the interim director, and then I became the director for Governor Tucker for about three years. And for a few months under Governor Huckabee. And it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed that very much because, again, what I was able to do is to—I guess using, certainly, Bill Clinton as one of the models of communication and how he communicated with people and his staff and his cabinet—I learned a lot of valuable lessons. [01:23:28] One of the more important ones is you don't only listen to the people that are your direct reports, people that report to you directly. I mean, sure, they're gonna tell you one thing, and they're gonna—and generally it's gonna be right. Generally it's gonna be the, you know, the best thing. But you need to have some other lines of communication open. And just to test you and test them and make sure that you're asking the right questions because asking the right questions, as Bill Clinton always did and always asked many, many, many questions, it was—it's so important at getting down to whatever the issue is, whatever the rub is and trying to solve problems.

[01:24:31] BW: Well, it sounds like you learned a lot from working with Clinton about ways to do things on your own later.

PP: Mh-hmm.

[01:24:40] BW: And then when you left Employment Security Division, where did you go?

PP: I went to work—well, really, for the legislature, for the Bureau of Legislative Research.

BW: And that's where you are now.

PP: That's where I am today.

BW: And what kinds of tasks do you work on there?

PP: Well, I've done a variety of things. I've been the administrator of the committee staff, and I've done that for about ten years. And trying to make sure that this chairman is pleased with the staffing that he or she is getting and on various committees. And now I'm working with the Public Health committee. And that's fun bec—especially with all the discussion that—with health care these—this day and time. And it's always interesting. [01:25:39] And the advent of term limits is—has changed, I think, greatly, the—well, the relationship between the branches of government. So I think that has changed. It—unfortunately, I think it has kind of lessened the legislative branch as far as one of being a coequal branch of government. But it—certainly one positive thing is—that I can see out of term limits is no matter what the idea or no matter what this bill is

that a member has and however, you know, vetted a bill it is or not, it's gonna come up. It's gonna be put on the agenda, and eventually it will come up for discussion. And so from that standpoint, I guess it's more democratic with a small *D* because previously with chairs who had been in place for ten, twenty years or more, they would just not do that. You know, if they didn't like a bill, it wouldn't come up. They just wouldn't do it. So in that standpoint I think it is a little bit more democratic, but it's so hard to see the bureaucrats and the lobbyists with new members, new legislators, and how they can move 'em around and get 'em—they'll change position, and then they'll talk to a bureaucrat or a lobbyist, then they'll be on the other side, and then they'll be back. And you know, it—they move around a whole lot. And tha—I don't think that's necessarily good for the system at all.

[01:27:45] BW: Well, it has discouraged the development of statesman.

PP: Yes.

BW: And stateswomen. Because—like, three terms in the house of representatives, maximum six years, is about enough time to truly understand how government works. And then you're in a position to give some great leadership. And they're gone. At

that point, they're gone. So I do—it hasn't served us well. And it has increased the strength of the bureaucracy, the strength of the lobby. I don't care what the advocates for term limits said it was doing to lessen those. It's—they were wrong. It's too bad. But we have them, and that's what we're do—struggling to do the best with we can.

PP: Right. Right.

[01:28:44] BW: A lot of things have changed in terms of the makeup of the legislature. We used to have two or three Republicans, and now the Republicans have a near majority in both houses. And we used—I always said that when they said it's a one-party state, "Yeah, but the divisions between rural and city" . . .

PP: Right.

BW: . . . "and conservative and liberal are just as real as divisions between political parties so it doesn't matter." But now you have divisions of political parties as well as rural and city, and it's tough. It's a really tough—and divisions are very deep these days in most places. I know it will equal out, and I hope it—it will even out, and it will settle down, and I hope it happens in my lifetime. [*Laughs*] I just don't know.

[01:29:42] PP: Well, another thing about term limits, too, is I think it has given, really, the executive more authority just by . . .

BW: Default.

PP: Yeah, just by default. And I don't think that's good for the system. I mean, they, certainly, they were set up as coequal branches of government, and they're—somehow they're not quite there.

BW: No, it's not working that way. And the adversarial role will be very destructive for a while, too. If—once the Republicans get the majority in some of those bodies, too. So it'll be amazing to watch. What have we not covered that you remember that's important to share?

PP: Hmm. We've gone through most of my notes. Most all my notes that I . . .

BW: Go ahead and look at your notes.

[01:30:48] PP: Another thing that Governor Clinton used to always do when we would be developing legislation and kind of airing out ideas and thoughts and so forth and prospective policies is that, you know, we would always say, "Okay. What's the up side, and what's the down side?" And it was always interesting because if there wasn't enough discussion about the down side, then he would jump into it and say, "Well, listen. It's this and this and this." And in other words, he loved to talk public policy, really more than anybody I had ever—certainly I have ever met

and been around. I mean, I like to talk it a lot, a whole lot. But he is well beyond me in his willingness and desire to talk about—to talk public policy.

BW: Well, and I remember when you would write memos to him laying out a situation, and he would send it back saying, "Okay, who's not gonna like that?" And he'd want you to . . .

PP: Right.

BW: . . . look at it from the other side.

PP: Right.

BW: He didn't want any surprises, and he wanted you to think through the whole deal. He wanted you to take it on. Take it on. Yeah. What else?

[01:32:15] PP: One of the things that I found out, again, very quickly, about working with Governor Clinton is that—and again, I have a—I have kind of a—or at least before I came to work for him, I had kind of a distrust or kind of a basic distrust of politicians. I wasn't—I was a little leery, I guess. I—just a little anxious about doing that. I mean, it became very obvious very quickly that, personally, he didn't care anything about money at all. And it was like, what's money? I mean, you know, that didn't matter. We would be in—we'd be in discussions with company officials, people with lots of money, lots of influence,

and you know, they would be saying, you know, they would be telling the governor, these are, you know, these are our concerns or whatever and thank you for helping us on this and this and this and so forth. And there would be that time, "Now, Governor, what can we do for you?" And he would, you know, without fail, he would always say, "You em—keep employing our people. You—you know, in our state. You know, we want you to stay here as long as you can and be successful. And if you're successful, we're successful." So you know, it was always the high road. Always.

[01:33:57] BW: It was always an opportunity if he were the kind of person who . . .

PP: Right.

BW: . . . wanted to to take something for himself.

PP: Right.

BW: But he didn't do it.

PP: No. And never even got close to it.

[01:34:09] BW: Talk to me some more about your family. Tell me about your—the name and what your wife does, about your children, and how old they are, and where they are, and what they've done.

PP: Okay. Belinda is my wife. And Belinda and I—gosh, have been

married thirty-four years comin' up in June. And we have two kids. Belinda is a minister. She had a kind of a midcareer change. In her forties she decided to go to seminary, and she's a Methodist minister in Vilonia, Arkansas, and she is finishing up six years. Probably be there another year. And so that has changed our lives in the sense that we're goin' back and forth. We're on the road a lot and—but it's given me a great opportunity to kind of, I guess, bring up one of those hidden talents that I have as far as playing drums. So I play drums in the church praise band. So that's been fun. It gave me an excuse to buy a set of drums so that—so anyway.

BW: Wonderful story.

PP: Yeah. [*Laughter*] It's—anyway, she's doing great. She has—she's gettin' better every year. She gets better at it. I get a chance to hear the sermons about three times. She preaches twice, but then I get to read 'em on Saturday night before [*laughs*]—beforehand. So from that standpoint it's—I mean, you know, it—that's great. That's—and she enjoys it. They really like her. They really do like her. [01:36:06] Our kids—Matt is thirty-one, and he is getting married. He's engaged. He's getting married this fall. And Matt is—Matt has worked in government. He worked on Capitol Hill a while. He . . .

BW: In Capitol Hill of Little Rock or DC?

PP: Both. He worked for—what was really strange is he went to work for Governor Beebe, and he was in the same office, in Room 238 in the governor's office, where I was. I mean the office configured differently in the sense that they've got smaller—you know, more petitions and that kind of thing. But the same place where I was several years before. So but now he's kind of tested that, kind of gone through that a few different capacities, and he's—at heart, his really true nature is he's an entrepreneur. And he has started several businesses. And he's got a couple goin' right now. And he's making it. He's enjoying it, and it's more internet marketing in that area. And he—I mean, he loves it, and I have people he meets come to me all the time, and they say about how much they enjoy workin' with him and what a good job he's doin', so that's always great for any parent to hear that. [01:37:54] My daughter, Elizabeth, has a—also worked on Capitol Hill in Washington for several years. And she worked for the Democratic National Committee for a couple of years. She's worked in various campaigns. I had—you know, her dad has tried to give her some fatherly advice on occasion, and she's not listened to it very well. But you know, I keep telling her—I mean, sure, elections are fun,

and I'm sure working for the Democratic Party was fun, but that doesn't—that's not how you sustain a livelihood. You can't go from campaign to campaign. And . . .

BW: You don't develop a retirement fund [*laughter*] that way.

PP: No, you don't. So anyway, that's some—she is twenty-six now. She's moved back here. She's here in Little Rock, and she is working for a political consulting company. And just enjoys it very well.

BW: Well, I know you love having both of them here.

PP: Oh, yeah. It's great. It is great.

[01:39:08] BW: That's good. And how much longer are you gonna work?

PP: Well, I don't know. All these payin—still paying for these kids' educations, and my wife's graduate school. Second master's degree, so we've—I've gotta pay off some college loans. So hopefully another—well, I don't know. I'll be sixty later this year, so I've got a few more years to work.

BW: You've got another ten years in you in the workforce.

PP: Yeah.

BW: Easily.

PP: Yeah.

BW: Well, I know we took some years off of your life, but I am so

glad that you came to join Bill Clinton's staff because you were a wonderful addition, and you contributed a great deal to this state. And I'm grateful to you.

PP: Well, thank you. Thank you. And I just—I can't say enough good things about it. It is by far the best place, the best job, I have had in my career, and I've had a lot of 'em. [*Laughs*] But it's by far the best and the most fun. I mean, it was just—you never knew what was gonna happen every day. And but you felt that you were doing—as we always say, the people's business. You're doing the people's business, and you're working with a great group of people and, in this case, working for Governor Clinton was just wonderful.

BW: Was—thank you.

PP: Thank you.

[End of interview 01:40:39]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]