

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

University of Arkansas
1 East Center
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-6829

William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Bobby Roberts
Interviewed by Betsey Wright
March 29, 2012
Little Rock, Arkansas

Objective

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

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

Transcript Methodology

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

See the Citation Guide at <https://pryorcenter.uark.edu/about.php>.

**Betsey Wright interviewed Bobby Roberts on March 29, 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 Bobby Roberts, 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. Roberts, if you agree with this statement, please give us your verbal consent now.

Bobby Roberts: I do.

KK: Thank you. Have a good interview.

Betsey Wright: Sounds like we're gettin' married, doesn't it?

BR: That got me married and got me in the navy, so
[laughter] . . .

Bruce Perry: Any time you want to.

BW: Okay. Okay, start with your beginnings. Where were you born, and who were your parents, and what kind of childhood did you have?

BR: Sure. I was born in Memphis, Tennessee, in 1944, although I lived in—my parents lived in Helena. That was the closest big hospital I could go to so I—my—actually was born and raised in Helena. I was an only child. My parents were—my father got out of the eighth grade. My mother finished the tenth grade. They were lower-middle-class workin' family who had sometimes succeeded financially, and sometimes we didn't. But I grew up in comfortable circumstances and had pretty much what I wanted. My father, unfortunately, did believe in the work ethic, and so at about thirteen or fourteen, he had things for me to do. So I worked in the service station, I drove trucks for him, I hauled gasoline, I, you know—whatever he wanted me to do, I did. Reluctantly, sometimes, but I did it.

[00:01:39] BW: And did you go to school in Helena?

BR: I did. I graduated from Central in 1962. Out of a class of 106, I was about 103, I suspect. If—it's in the old days when they [*laughs*] graduated in rank order, so I was way down the list. The chances of me gettin' out of college at that point, I suspect, looked pretty remote.

BW: But you did go to college.

[00:01:58] BR: I went to several colleges. I was in and out of college for a while and was majoring in business and didn't like it. And this was in Vietnam. I was about to—like everybody I was lookin' at the draft, and I woke up one day and said, "I'm outta here. I'm—I'll quit school." I joined the navy, was in the reserves for a while, and then came back and was a much better student after that experience.

[00:02:22] BW: And where did you graduate?

BR: I got my undergraduate degree from the University of Central Arkansas. And then I got a master's degree in history from the University of Arkansas. I went over to the University of Oklahoma and got a master's degree in library science and then came back, circled back, to Fayetteville and finished a Ph.D. in American history in 1978.

BW: A well-educated person.

BR: Well, I don't know about that. Indifferently educated, perhaps.

[Laughter]

[00:02:50] BW: And where did you first hear of or encounter Bill Clinton?

BR: Well, my first encounter with him was sort of a strange deal. I had—actually didn't support him when he ran for attorney

general. I voted for his opponent in the Democratic primary. And the person who was the chair of the history department was on the Democratic Committee in Washington County, and he said, "You know, why don't you come out and meet Bill Clinton?" I said, "I don't—I—you know, I've got things to do. I don't really—you know, what's the point of that?" And he said, "Well, it's out at the Smokehouse. You'll get a free meal." So I thought, "Okay, I'll go out," and literally went down and got in line and met him, and when I left I had a stack of postcards and my promise to him that I would write my friends to support him. And that's really how—the first time I met him. I had no political interest in him or political interest at all. So it was to get a free ham sandwich, I guess, is how I got tied up with him.

[00:03:44] BW: And that—he was campaigning then for . . .

BR: He was campaigning for governor then.

BW: So that was for his first term.

BR: That first term as governor, right.

[00:03:53] BW: And so you worked as a volunteer in that campaign?

BR: I didn't do a lot. I sent out the postcards and, you know, talked to a few friends of mine and made a few phone calls. I didn't do a whole lot in that campaign.

[00:04:04] BW: And then when he was elected, what kind of

relationship did you develop?

BR: Well, in that first term, I was just finishing up graduate school and was looking at—by coincidence, at a job down at UALR. And my wife, my first wife, was a librarian and a friend of Diane Blair. And so we were coming to Little Rock. And Diane sort of had a favor with Bill, and Joan wanted to be in the office, and so actually my connection to Bill is more through Joan than anyone. She ended up running a—they had a little—kind of a little planning office there. Glenn Whaley was in it. The old Washington office dealt with 'em. And it was to—if you needed to know something on the staff, you know, about grants or how something worked, they were sort of a library within that staff. And so that was sort of my entrée into that first administration. [00:04:59] I didn't do a lot in it until—well, I was appointed to the preservation commission, which was great. That was a great kind of experience in the state government. And at the very end of that campaign when it was kind of clear that Frank White was gonna—if not win it, it was gonna be a close race—I did get a little involved in the—in just the tail end of it, but not very much. Did a little opposition research and a few small things like that. And of course, we lost, so, teach you depend on me for your campaign advice. [*Laughter*]

[00:05:33] BW: And then in the interim, Joan was important in terms of . . .

BR: Right.

BW: . . . the monitoring of the Frank White record and . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . compiling of the Clinton record.

BR: Yeah. Yeah, I'll never forget that night down at the headquarters when it was clear we'd lost that election. Everybody was kinda waiting for the eastern Arkansas vote to come in, and when it didn't come in strong enough or—it was clear we were gonna lose. And so the next day, I mean, basically my wife is out of a job. I mean, she's gonna be out of a job in a few months, so suddenly, you know, we're a one-income family that just bought a house. [00:06:06] And so the first big shock was just where do you go from here? And there were a couple of people off of that staff, and frankly, I don't remember everyone, but Kay Kelly was involved in it and Joan, who set up a little consulting group, and they did various work. One of the things that they did was to do work for the Democratic Party, and they were doing opposition work on Frank White. And so in a way Joan became one of the most knowledgeable people about White just simply because she was

looking at the clips every day. And they had a strange new thing called an Apple computer. The first computer I ever saw was in that campaign. And they were, you know, they were basically trackin' what Frank White was doin'. [00:06:44] And I was—at that point, I thought, "Boy, I sure would like to see him get reelected again 'cause I'd like to see Joan go back to work, you know." So we—I mean, I had a—I was interested in him by that time and thought he was a, you know, a person we needed to support. But some of it was selfish in a—frankly.

[00:07:02] BW: And then when he ran again in 1982, you became more involved in the campaign.

BR: I got more involved in that, actually, through my friend Betsey Wright, I think. We—I was doin' a little bit of work, and I got—after the—I guess after the first Democratic primary, we had the runoff with Joe Purcell. You asked me to go out in western—you'll probably remember this—asked me to go out in western Arkansas. There were five or six counties that we didn't have a kind of a regional coordinator. And I went out there. I left with a trunkload of signs and a list of names and some contacts, and was gone for two weeks. Did not know what I was doin'. But it was an interesting, again, interesting sort of introduction to grassroots politics. I think we lost every county in the runoff but

one, so it was not exactly a successful foray in there. But it was interesting, and after that I was bitten with the political bug and determined to do something more with Bill Clinton. [00:08:00] Then I ended up—in the race against Frank White, I was a travel aide. So I traveled a lot with him, went all over the state, and you know, met a lot of people, and really learned a lot about kinda retail politics in Arkansas and how you do it and just how remarkable he really was at that type of politics.

[00:08:20] BW: What was he like to travel with?

BR: Well, he was like the Energizer Bunny. He—everybody talks about how hard he works, and that's true, literally. I could go out four or five days with him, and after then I was—I would call Joan or you or someone and say, "It"—you know, "I need to come back. Get Bruce or Dave Criner or somebody to go out with him because I'm outta energy." I—he has a lot of energy, but I thought he drew a lot of energy from the people around him, where the travel aides don't get all that attention and that ego building, you know, so after a while it—you're—you think, "Just get me away from here because I need to rest." But you know, he has great energy in those situations. He likes to talk to people. He just relates very well to people.

[00:09:09] BW: So what kinds of things did you have to do as a

travel aide?

BR: Well, try to keep him on time was one of the big chores, which nobody ever succeeded at that. But mainly to be there to try to make sure that—my point—I tried to make sure he didn't get tied up in a crowd 'cause he would start talking to somebody, and people would just—they'd just ask you anything. And at some point you have to get him away from that kind of thing to move him along, you know, so I would try to move him along. People would give me notes saying, you know, "My cousin needs to find out about, you know, somebody in the brig," or who knows what it would be. I'd get those and stuff 'em in my pocket. Occasionally get campaign checks from people. And you know, basically served as somebody just to kinda combination valet and political assistant, you know. And we would go off, since this was before cell phones, you know, we would go off with a roll of dimes and instructions to call you when we could. [00:10:01] So we were, you know, try—it's a moving target, as you know, and things are changing all the time, and we're trying to respond to that and make sure that if something has been said by somebody, Frank White or others, we get that information, we ask Bill about it, we get back to you to try to make sure we were consistent in what we were saying

and that we weren't being blindsided or leaving some issue out there that, you know, we weren't talking about. So it was a pretty busy way to live your life.

[00:10:29] BW: And when you were out overnight, did the campaign put you up in luxury accommodations?

BR: Ah, we usually stayed in somebody's house most of the time. And if we didn't, we stayed in the equivalent of the cheap 6 motel. I mean, we never spent much money when I was travelin' with him. Most of the time, we stayed in somebody's house, but not always.

BW: It was pretty much a requirement.

BR: Yeah.

BW: And it boggles the mind.

[00:10:52] BR: Yeah. When I started out traveling with him before we had much money, if we weren't going very far, we would go out in my old Oldsmobile. I'd drive and he—we had no security. It's just be the two of us. So it was—it's hard for people to imagine, I think, how small that operation was at one time. And of course, as he organized more, we got more money, it got to be a bigger campaign, then we had security, and we had planes to fly on, and so forth, and it got much more complex. And in some ways it was more fun when it was just a smaller group.

[00:11:24] BW: Well, what would happen when you were driving from one place to the other with just the two of you in the car?

BR: Well, we would, you know—sometimes we would talk. A lot of times, he was tired. And you know, he liked to ride in the front seat, which he would do. You know, he might read a bit. We usually had a—if we were going out, say, to Perry County, we would have a file that had been compiled by the office that told us everything we'd done there, who all our contacts were, money that had gone in there from the state, and kind of generally what was going on. You know, we would go through those. We would talk some but not a whole lot. We had some conversations but not a lot.

[00:12:00] BW: Was he carrying books around?

BR: Sure. He always had something to read. He always had a crossword puzzle with him. And I've seen two great crossword puzzle workers, and that was my mother—well, three: my wife, my mother, and Bill Clinton. They're amazing how quickly they could fly through 'em. And then he would go to sleep. And I don't blame him [*laughs*] 'cause it's a, you know, it's a tough road, I think.

[00:12:23] BW: And then he won that campaign.

BR: He did.

BW: And you really began to be involved at that point.

BR: By that time I was really bitten by the political bug. I was working for UALR, and so I wanted to do something, but I didn't know what. And that opportunity came up to be a legislative aide, which was—you know, I didn't know enough about what a legislative aide did to be one, but it sounded like an interesting thing to do. And I can remember walking up to the Capitol—you remember our office was just right down a block or block and a half from—the old campaign office—from the Capitol. I remember walking up to the Capitol. They sent me up there to see Senator Howell or somebody, and I thought, "What have I gotten myself into? What is this gonna be like?" And so I was nervous about it and scared in a way, but you know, it's exciting to sort of be on the inside of a new administration, so I had mixed feelings about it.

[00:13:24] BW: So what did you find out a legislative aide did?

BR: [*Laughs*] Well, I'm not sure what we did. We—you know, most of what we did—I felt like what we needed to do was to try to find out—to gather intelligence for the governor and the staff, to try to find out what people were thinking. Where were we in trouble? What were we doin' right? What were the issues out there? And the—I think to s—for the aide to not be able to

commit to anything and to be able to stand between the member of the general assembly and the governor and to be patient. I certainly learned that, you know, you need to be patient. You need to take your time. You need to remember that just because somebody disagrees with you this time doesn't mean the next time they might agree with you, and to be patient, and to listen to people, and you know, and try not to make policy on behalf of the governor, although sometimes that's hard to avoid.

[00:14:19] BW: So what was a day in the life of a legislative aide like?

BR: It started early, and it went on till all hours of the night. A typical day when we were workin'—during the session, we would meet I guess seven, seven fifteen in the morning. We would—again, you have to keep in mind there were almost no computer systems. They were just coming in use. We would literally go up the day before—let's say on Monday the session's over with. We would literally go up, get the agendas for the committees for the next day off the board, take 'em to the Xerox machine, make copies, take 'em back up there, and then the next morning, we would look on those committees and see if we had any bills up, what was gonna be on the committee, what was gonna be the nature of it. And we would sit down with the legislative aides,

the department heads, the DF&A folks, the kinda policy staff, and we would literally go over everything that was in committee and as many bills that had been introduced as we could, and we would go around, basically go around the room, and say, "What is this? What's it doin'? Are we for it? Are we against it? What's our position on it?" And then we would rank the bills. We had a ranking system because you would have—oh gosh, I don't know, Betsey. If you threw out the appropriation bills when I was there you probably had twelve or fifteen hundred issue bills that were in. Eighty percent of 'em didn't matter. They were technical corrections. They were minor deals, and you could sort of ignore those. But you had, you know, 10 or 15 percent that were our bills, the things we wanted to get passed or friends of ours wanted to get passed, that we wanted to give priority to. And then you had, you know, 10 percent of 'em that were just either bad or horrible. [00:16:02] And so a part of it was a sort of sorting out process to figure out which ones we wanted to work on. But I was—in terms of Bill Clinton, I was always impressed, one, that he was in the meeting every day, and that he was engaged in the conversation in the level that he was. So I learned a lot about what we were doing and what the issues were just from the exchange that went on. When you

hear a Sam Bratton talk about a budget issue, you know, or Carol Rasco talk about some Human Services issue—I al—you know, as a liaison, as we used to say, we just need to know whether we're for it or against it. We don't really need to understand it, but you need to understand a little bit of it. And so those morning meetings were invaluable to give me enough information to not just com—seem like a complete fool when I was talking to somebody. [00:16:55] So we do the meetings. We would try to get through when the committee started. Usually about ten o'clock. Budget Committee started early, and those guys would leave and go down there. Then we were assigned to a committee. I covered Revenue and Tax for years, for example. And we would go to the committee and find out—listen to the committee hearings, see if we could get our bills out, find out if we were in trouble. And when those were over with, we would usually go back and talk to the governor and say, "Well, here's what happened. We got this bill out. You know, we think you need to talk to Mr. Miller or Representative Jones or whoever it was 'cause we've got a problem here." And so we would begin that process of what do we need to do to get our stuff movin'? What do we need to do to stop another bill? What amendments have been put on 'em, and all those issues. We'd,

you know, take a bite to eat. I usually ate at the blind stand. I ate more [BW laughs] Beanee . . .

BW: What was the blind stand?

BR: . . . Beanee Weenees than—well, it was a little corner up there that had snacks in it that you could eat and that—you know, it had cold sandwiches and Beanee Weenees and tamales that were heated up in little cans and Cokes and coffee. That's what most of us lived off of.

BW: And it was called the blind stand because it . . .

BR: It was . . .

BW: . . . was run by a blind services . . .

BR: Right. Right.

BW: . . . group.

BR: It was run by blind services. And it was a great place to go. I'm not sure it was a very healthy at the time. [Laughter] But that was not a big concern for anybody. [00:18:16] But we would, you know—then after that the sessions would start, the actual sessions. And at that point, we would have—probably have some bills up that we wanted to get through, and we would start polling the legislator. So we'd go if you—I covered the senate some, the house some, but I would—you know, if it were the senate bill, we might go down and one—there'd be two of us in

the senate, three in the house. And we would go down and, you know, try to talk to the senators and see if we had eighteen votes to get it outta committee or eighteen votes—or get it out of—get it passed or eighteen votes to get it out or stop it or whatever we wanted to do and kinda try to see where we were, you know.

[00:18:52] BW: But you were able to go onto the floor of the s . . .

BR: At that time we could. They—I don't think you can now, but they would allow—in the senate, they would allow one person on the floor, and in the house they would allow two. So we could actually go in. And that was very helpful because you, you know, you need access to 'em. We need to be able to talk to 'em, you know. And then when it was over with and at the end of the day, we'd usually meet again and say, "Well, here's what happened. We didn't get this out. This got hung up. You know, Representative Lloyd George is opposed to us. Can you talk to him?" And Bill would get a list of people that he needed to talk to. And we would say, "You know, if you get a chance, talk to these people." And then the next morning, to carry it through, he might come in the meeting, say, "Well, I talked to so-and-so, Wayne Dowd or something, and here's why he's opposed to this. We can put this amendment on the bill. He'll be fine with it." Or

"I didn't get a chance to talk to, you know, Representative Smith. Can you get him down here so I can visit with him?"

And so we would try to follow up on all that, make sure that we had run our traps on everything. So that was sort of the, you know, the day-to-day operation of it.

[00:19:56] BW: And if you didn't get a representative he needed to talk to to the governor's office, he then went to them.

BR: He did. He did, which I always discouraged him from doing. I never thought that was a smart thing to do because I think—he's the only person that could commit to something. I couldn't commit to anything, you know. But once he's there, he can make a commitment. It may be a commitment you really don't wanna make. He may not wanna make it. It may be it—you—when you make that decision, you've now alienated four other people. So those needed to be done in consultation, and if you let him out of his lair, so to speak, you run the risk of *[laughs]* bad things happening. So I was—I didn't like it for him to do that but he—I think he liked to do it. I think he liked the exchange and the give and take of it. He's the only governor I think we've ever had that liked sessions. I don't think most governors in their right mind would like a legislative session because you—there's too much at risk in it. But he seemed to

enjoy it because I think he was, in some ways, a horse trader.

BW: I think he wanted to be a legislative liaison.

BR: I—you may be [*laughs*] . . .

BW: I don't think he wanted to . . .

BR: . . . right.

BW: . . . be the governor.

BR: You may be right.

BW: He wanted to be out where the action was on the front line.

BR: Right. I think you may be right. I think it was irresistible for him to go down there. And he could—he's a very persuasive person. There's no question he, you know, he could turn some votes for you. But it's better to turn 'em in his office as far as I was concerned.

[00:21:19] BW: Well, and when you brought someone into the office, we tried to make sure that you were in the meeting or someone else was there so that you could . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . interpret what it had.

BR: I don't think, as a rule . . .

BW: What had happened.

BR . . . I don't think a governor, in those situations, should meet privately with legislators. I think you need somebody there to

hear the discussion. It just makes a difference, I think, in what's going on.

[00:21:45] BW: Can you remember any particular episodes that occurred during that first session that you worked?

BR: Oh, I don't—you know, all these sessions have run together. I mean, I . . .

BW: Well . . .

BR: . . . I worked, like, eleven . . .

BW: . . . okay, let's just talk about a session . . .

BR: . . . of 'em, and they sort of go together. I guess in the bigger sense what—a lot of what we were dealing with, it seems to me, just over a eight- or ten-year period, was a situation where Ronald Reagan had been elected president, the economy was in trouble, federal programs were not bein' funded, and a lot of that was fallin' back on the state. And so we were caught up in this situation of havin' to pass taxes, sometimes small taxes, just to keep things goin'. And so there was a lot of stress and strains goin'. I—and that first session, I particularly remember the beer tax, when we decided to raise the tax on beer. Well, again, this is before email, so you have to keep in mind what we were doin'. Well, one of the tactics that was used was the beer boys just put out postcards in all the liquor stores, all the

taverns, all the beer joints, and God, suddenly we were just flooded with thousands and then tens of thousands of postcards, you know, saying, "Please don't raise the taxes on my beer," you know, "Signed, Jim Ed." And they were big stacks of 'em that would come in, so many of 'em that we used to use 'em for seats. *[BW laughs]* I mean, they were all over the place, you know. So it's a odd sort of existence.

[00:23:10] BW: Well, as I recall, we ray—that tax increase was for teacher salary increase.

BR: I think it was. And it was a small amount of money. And it was a, you know, so-called sin tax. But everybody, you know, everybody down there has a vested interest in either getting the tax or paying the tax or not paying the tax, and so there's a special interest involved in all of it. You know, some of 'em for good reasons, some of 'em for bad reasons. But there's—no matter what you do, if you're doin' anything, no matter what you do, there's gonna be somebody that doesn't want it done, and there's gonna be somebody that really does. And so there's a lot of, you know, a lot of push and pull that's goin' on.

[00:23:50] BW: Well, there wasn't far—when that session was over, we didn't let you go far.

BR: I was on leave from UALR and probably would've headed back

there, but the governor asked me if I would become the liaison of Public Safety, which was primarily dealing with the prisons. And I thought, "I don't even know where the prisons are." And I wanted to stay, but I thought, "You know, I'm gettin' ready to step into something I really don't know anything about." And I actually went out to see a friend of mine, Bob Sarver, who'd been commissioner of correction. Was on the—I was out—he was on faculty with me out at UALR, and I went out to talk to Bob about it. He said, "Well," he said, "you know," he said, "I don't know what to tell you." He said, "If you're doing your job," he said, "the governor's not gonna like you and the general assembly's not gonna like you. You know, nobody's gonna like you. But it'll be an interesting experience." And he was pretty much on the mark on that. It was an interesting experience. And it's not a place where the governor's gonna win any friends by havin' a great prison system. It's sorta the dark side of government that I ended up with. [00:24:54] But it was a great experience for me. It's so different—it just a different world from anything I'd been around. But had it not been for Bob Sarver, I don't know that I would've don—I had a great deal of respect for Bob. He had tried and failed to reform that prison. And really was involved in the—in getting the cases filed, the

Holt/Sarver cases, that eventually had that system declared unconstitutional, so that took a lot of courage to do that. And so I had a great deal of respect for Bob. So that—I ended up doin' that for two long years.

[00:25:27] BW: But it was much more than the prisons.

BR: It was. It was . . .

BW: You . . .

BR: I was dealin' with it. It was—you know, anything that had to do with law enforcement. Keep in mind I'm a—I have a Ph.D. in history, not in law enforcement, so it was a completely different place for me.

BW: Well, let's talk about the liaison work you did with state police issues.

BR: State police—I'll—I never will forget. I walked out to the state police and—how—what kind of—how bad of language can we use in this film? I won't use too—I walked—I went out to a thing at the state police, and one of the big majors looked at me, and he said, "You know," he said, "I'm gonna tell you something." He said, "You know, all you are is a fly on our ass." He said, "You're a—you and the governor are comin' through here. We been here before you got here, and we're gonna be here after you left. And I just hope you stay out of our damn way." And I

thought, "That's pretty good advice," [*laughter*] you know. And we had had trouble, as you know, with law enforcement in the first administration, and we'd had trouble with the state police and some of the sheriffs. And part of my job was not only to deal with the state police issues but to try to repair some of that damage. And the state police, I thought—the more I dealt with 'em—Colonel Goodwin was there. The more I realized they really were a first-class agency. And Buren Jackson's who said that to me, and Buren was right. If we just let 'em do their job, they would do a good job. [00:26:54] And I never felt like, with the state police, that I had to really worry that they were gonna tell me one thing and do something else. And Tommy Goodwin kept everybody informed. Everybody liked him. And they were really a pleasure to work with. So much so that I—you know, if I got a letter about the state police, a problem with 'em, I felt perfectly comfortable with talkin' with any of them and felt like I was being told the truth. And that's a—you know, you need that kind of relationship with 'em.

[00:27:24] BW: Well, you also discovered that there were things—there were support systems that they needed that state government wasn't giving them.

BR: They did. That . . .

BW: And you became an advocate.

BR: I did and that—they needed a high-band radio system. We had an antiquated radio system. And that needed to be upgraded.

BW: Can . . .

BR: And it was done under Clinton. And . . .

BW: Why did we need it?

BR: Well, you couldn't—there were parts of the state where you couldn't communicate with anybody. You simply could not—particularly in the southern part of the states, there were areas where our radio system just wouldn't work. So you had these really dangerous situations where our state police couldn't communicate with each other and couldn't communicate with local police. And if you recall in [19]80—gosh, I guess starting in [19]83 and [19]84, we had a lot of problems with the survivalists and the militias, not just in Arkansas, but all over the place. But they were here. The Covenant, the Sword and the Arm of the Lord are up in Northwest Arkansas. We had several troopers that were killed, one by a survivalist down at—I think down around Texarkana if I remember correctly. [00:28:27] We had a number of police officers that were killed. And so it was a—there were some really dangerous situations out there. And those troopers are, you know—there're not many of 'em.

You're puttin' 'em in harm's way. And we really needed that sys—we needed to upgrade the cars. That was done. You know, it—we added troopers. I really think the state police was a much better agency when we left office than when we started—we—because we spent more money on it. And you can't run the government without money.

[00:28:57] BW: Were—did you ever touch base with the marijuana eradication programs?

BR: I did a little bit, yeah. There was federal money to do that. And at that time Arkansas was a huge producer of marijuana, and so we had federal dollars to deal with that. We had helicopter and systems you could use to—infrared systems you could use to pick up fields and so forth. That was a big initiative.

[00:29:26] BW: You mentioned the Covenant, the [*BR laughs*] Sword and the Arm of the Lord. That was a real, major episode.

BR: It really was.

BW: Describe what happened with that.

BR: Well, they were a survivalist group up in Northwest Arkansas. And th—when I started dealin' with 'em, there was a—Asa Hutchinson headed up a—I can't remember the exact title, but it was a law-enforcement group that met all the time, and I used to go as the governor's representative to those groups. And the

see . . .

BW: Was that when he was federal prosecutor?

BR: He was federal prosecutor. And we would meet and talk about the CSA. And there were—you're dealin' with six or seven different agencies. There're all kinda different views about 'em, but most people—the state police, the sheriffs, most people, thought, "Yeah, they're a bad influence, but they're—and their rhetoric is terrible, but they're really not breaking state law." Or at least—you know, there might be a judgement against them, and there'd be a warrant somebody would want served. And one would wonder just how far you wanna go with a group that's armed to the teeth to deal with some of those relatively minor issues. Who really wanted 'em was Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms, the ATF, because their real sin was firearm violations, so those were the ones that really after 'em. [00:30:45] But you know, we watched some of their films, and they're chilling when you watch what they were doing. They were basically training for Armageddon. They were training for when America was gonna fall apart. They believed that this—there was this great conspiracy, which sounds laughable to people, but you know, they believe this—there was this great Jewish conspiracy and the Bavarian Illuminati, and the council of the Elders of Zion,

all these groups were—they'd taken over the banks, and they were conspiring to take over the world. They didn't like blacks, but they thought they were really dupes of the Jewish community. They believed—if they didn't like somebody like Rockefeller, you know, they—in their literature, they would say, you know, "Winthrop Rockefeller, you know, alias John Schicklgruber or Julius Lowenstein" or something, you know. And those—you think those folks don't exist, but I had a lot of dealin's with 'em. I met with 'em a couple of times. And . . .

[00:31:49] BR: Why were you meeting with 'em?

BR: Well, there was a lot of bad—they had a lot of bad press, as you might expect, and some of these troopers had been—this one in southwest Arkansas had been killed by a survivalist who was on his way to Texas or somewhere. Well, they got drawn into that, and so they actually called up the governor's office and said, "We'd like to meet with the governor because we wanna talk about firearms." And at that time before we changed all of our laws, Arkansas had a pretty strict firearm law. It basically said you could carry a weapon on a journey, but there was no concealed permit laws and all that stuff. And they wanted to talk about that. And so I—somebody, you or somebody, said, "Well, why don't you go talk to 'em?" I thought, "Well, I'm not

gonna go up in that compound [*laughs*] and talk to 'em." So we met down at Harrison and visited with 'em. Once or twice we met with 'em. And you know, they're scary people. I mean, they're not somebody I . . .

BW: But the governor didn't go with you in those . . .

BR: It—no.

BW: . . . meetings.

BR: No.

BW: We . . .

BR: No, no. I took a state trooper with me and Mike Gaines. I made Mike go. [*Laughs*] So you know, we went up and talked to 'em, and it was basically these, you know, these sort of constitutional arguments about the right to carry weapons and all this business. And they're trying to, you know—"What happens if I have this piece in the car and I get stopped, you know, what can I do?" And you know, there's this—there's a wing of 'em that didn't believe you could regulate their—they had a constitutional right to drive, so you couldn't force 'em to have a driver's license. I mean, some of the stuff is so off the wall you don't know how to respond to 'em. You know, you really don't know what to say to 'em.

[00:33:26] BW: So what finally was the crisis point that shut 'em

down? What happened with that?

BR: Well, I was off the staff when that finally happened. But what happened—there was a—I'm gonna have this a bit garbled, but essentially what happened, there was a trooper killed in Missouri. And the fugitives, the two—I think there were two people involved in that. They had reason to believe that they had gone to that compound in Arkansas. And so at that point, ATF, the FBI decided to take 'em down. I think the reason it didn't happen before was because the only people that wanted to confront 'em was ATF. Everybody else, including the FBI, thought, "Okay, they're not nice guys, but it's really not worth what we're gonna get into." After that, after that trooper was killed, I'm assuming that the pressure just became such that they felt like they had to do something about it. And it was a huge operation. I remember when it went on, but it was a big operation. And it was, unlike the business in Waco, it was a successful operation, too. Nobody was hurt in that as I recall, which you really—and there were innocent people in that group up there. So it was a scary group.

[00:34:41] BW: What other state police issues can you think of that were going on then?

BR: Gosh, I—you know, Betsey, it's been so long ago I—the big one

was the high-band radio, the cars for the state police, the one that we just desc—the Covenant issue. The—and the nagging problem, political problem, that went on with 'em that I just finally threw up my hands and said this just the way it is, is the conflicts between the sheriffs and the troop captains. I mean you have this—you know, I don't know how many troops we had. Twelve or thirteen, I think, or—so you got these troop captains out there who consider themselves the chief law enforcement officers, and you've got the sheriff over there who, in the constitution, is the chief law enforcement officer, and they don't always agree with each other. And I—you know, I hadn't been there a week until I started gettin' calls from the sheriff wantin', you know, Captain So-and-so transferred or the captain wantin' us to do something about the sheriff's activities, you know. [00:35:36] And I'd go up and talk with 'em and I—after a while, I thought, "There's no solution to this problem. This is—this was here before I started," as Buren [Jackson] said, "and it's gonna be here after [*laughs*] I leave." But it was a—and oftentimes, you know, the captain would—and some of 'em had been there fifteen or twenty years in those places. They were in the community. You know, they would step down and run against the sheriff, and then you'd have the state police captain

runnin' against the sheriff in some county. It was a political issue that you didn't wanna get in the middle of. But we had a lot of great sheriffs, I thought, in the state, and a lot of good troop captains. I think the world of those guys that I dealt with. And we had a lot of good sheriffs that supported us. Our problem, I think, was more with state police—some of the captains and some of the people down the ranks that we had trouble with, and with municipal police, which we were never, I don't think, as close to as we were with the sheriffs. [00:36:31] And my simple reason of that is sheriffs were elected folk, and they have a different view about things than an appointed law enforcement officer. And I think there's just a more sympathetic view if you're an elected law enforcement officer dealing with the governor or somebody like that. You know, you have a better understanding of the possibilities and limitations you're dealing with.

[00:36:53] BW: Well, my recollection is that you very quickly developed extremely good rapport with most of the sheriffs in the state.

BR: I got along with 'em. I, you know, I liked 'em, and you know, I guess they felt like maybe I was one of 'em.

BW: One of their problems with state government was the crime lab

and the difficulty of getting prompt analysis of their evidence.

BR: Right. Right.

BW: And . . .

BR: It was a problem.

[00:37:23] BW: And you had to work with the crime lab . . .

BR: We did.

BW: . . . a lot, too.

BR: Tried to do something with that. And you know, that, to me—I think back on the crime lab and those days and how little money we had. I mean, part of the problem was money. You can't operate those agencies on a dime. And the crime lab is driven by the body of crime support that they need for what's goin' on in the state. And it was too small, it didn't have the money, and it didn't have the leadership to do what needed to be done. And it's driven, you know, it's driven by—they couldn't control their business, I guess is what I'm trying to say, 'cause the business was comin' to them, and we just didn't have enough people there. [00:38:05] Fahmy Malak is a good example. I know Fahmy is—was a controversial character, and you know . . .

BW: He was the . . .

BR: He was the medical examiner. The only one we had. And he made some mistakes, there's no doubt about that. But Fahmy

was probably doin' five times as many autopsies as any other medical examiner would be doin' in any other state. And we just didn't put enough resources in it to—and we began to take care of that. And the crime lab got better. And you know, you don't hear much about it today. And I think that probably goes back to Bill Clinton slowly putting resources in it. [00:38:44] I think Bill understood that you, you know, you gotta spend money on those basic services, or they won't work right. And it's a downward spiral. They don't work right, and so people get mad, and so therefore they don't wanna spend money on 'em, so they don't work right. And it, you know, it runs itself into a hole. And I think the governor understood you can't let that happen. And so we were able to reverse some of that.

[00:39:11] BW: One of the things that Clinton began working on when he was attorney general that he then continued into his first term and forever after was victim's rights and victim's assistance. And do you remember any of the particular programs or legislation, Mothers Against Drunk Driving, any of those kinds of issues?

BR: I remember 'em all very well. [*Laughter*] I—you know, that's a hard issue to deal with. There were times where, frankly, I wanted to pinch his head off about bein' too likely to bend in

particularly to the victim's groups because—their stories were tragic. I heard some of the worst stories of things that happened to people or their family that were just awful events. But I objected to the idea that we might make state policy around those things and that you begin to make the criminal law so onerous and so rigid that you take all the flexibility out of 'em. So I was not a big proponent of what we did all the time with those groups. MADD I've come around on. I didn't like MADD very well, but I've come around on—the drunk driving issue was a far bigger issue than I really understood. I didn't deal with it directly. Mike Gaines dealt with that most of the time. But you know, I didn't like them very well either.

[00:40:36] And I think part of it was I felt like it was—they were just single-minded, pushy folks, and you know, it just didn't seem to me to be that big a deal. But MADD was. And the victims need—we need to do better with victims. We always do need to be sensitive to 'em. But you had to be careful—and I was lookin' at the prisons. And I was lookin' at a system that was overcrowded and that—once the system gets overcrowded and you can't make good decisions about who needs to go and who needs to stay, then I think you put the larger community at risk. And so you need to be careful about who you put in prison,

how long you keep 'em, and you really need to give everybody that's in prison some sense of hope that either they can be paroled, they can be commuted, they can be pardoned, that they have some way out as a matter of practical public policy and of just a matter of basic humanity. You need to be able to do that. And I felt like the victims were—oftentimes got too far over on the other edge of that. And I, you know, I . . .

[00:41:36] BW: They would've executed everybody at the courthouse if they'd been able to.

BR: They would have. And—except if it had been their own son. And so—and I think, you know, I think the governor went—sometimes went too far in placating those folks.

BW: Well, we were also working a lot with drug laws.

BR: We were. And we were in a time when the approach to the crime issue was, "If you just get tougher, if you just get tougher and meaner that somehow it'll lower the crime rate." So for that to work, you have to assume that if you sentence me for a long period of time, it's gonna deter somebody down the street from committing a crime. My experience was that that's not the mental process that criminals are engaged in. That's not how they think. They don't know what the consequences are of their acts, or if they know, they don't care.

[00:42:29] BW: Or they think that they'll get away with it.

BR: Right. Or they're just caught up in something, you know, and they don't have any way to get out of it.

BW: And particularly if they are substance abusers.

BR: Yeah.

BW: They don't have rational minds at that point.

BR: Yeah, of course they don't. And you know, we've created this crazy system, to me, where we have these tough drug laws. You drive the price of drugs up, you make 'em a glamorous activity for people, you get somebody addicted to something, and then you make the drug so expensive that they go break in my house to get the money to feed their habit. It's never made a lot of sense to me to think you're gonna cure the problem that way. I don't think you can. [00:43:13] And so you know, you look at our prisons now. They're loaded up with people who, you know, who are there for drug charges, either directly or because they committed a burglary or a robbery or a rape or a murder that was involved in the fact that they were drug addicts, you know. It's—we need to rethink all of it and try to, you know, try to make this work better.

BW: It's stopping the drug use, not stopping the criminals who commit the crimes.

BR: I think so. Or admitting that, you know, some of these drugs we'd be better off just to legalize 'em and let the price go down on 'em, you know, let 'em be like alcohol. What could be a worse drug than alcohol?

BW: Well, that's a very politically . . .

BR: You know, and we regulate it . . .

BW: . . . plausible position.

BR: Well [*laughs*], yeah. It's never gonna happen in this country but I—you know, we regulate alcohol, which is a far more deadly drug. But we've somehow turned—created this drug war that makes things worse. Look at what's going in Mexico now. It's just insane.

[00:44:06] BW: Well, I wanna talk about the prisons. And then I wanna come back to legislative sessions . . .

BR: Okay.

BW: . . . because you worked all of them even when you weren't on the staff.

BR: I think I did.

BW: So what—you've ma—you've alluded to some of the problems with the prison, with the crowding and the need to see that inmates needed some kind of hope on the other side.

BR: Yeah.

[00:44:33] BW: What did you encounter in dealing with prisons?

BR: Oh gosh, I don't even know where to begin. It—first of all is the fact of overcrowding. So that's one thing that's goin' on. The second thing, I think, that was goin' on with our system—you have to remember that our system had been declared unconstitutional back under Rockefeller. And it needed to be declared unconstitutional. So it had been with a special monitor for years and years, special mastery, and it had finally, by the time I became involved with 'em in Frank White's—actually in Frank White's term, they got out of federal court, and they were turned back over to the state. So we were in a transition of trying to figure out how do you go—they got in trouble because the political system failed utterly. And so the courts stepped in and took 'em over and said, "You can't run an unconstitutional prison. We're gonna run 'em for you till you can take 'em over." So we were the takeover team. Basically, we had to pick 'em up, keep 'em constitutional, keep 'em goin', and do it in a political context, which is hard to do 'cause nobody gives a damn about inmates. [00:45:43] I mean, I used to tell the governor—I said, "You know, we could run the best prison in the world, and you wouldn't get eight votes for it." I mean, people don't care about that system. And so there's not any—there's

really no sort of political—it's one of the few things where there's no political lobbying group for 'em except the very small number of people that make money off of 'em, and a lot of those were in Pine Bluff. And so it's a different—there's no constituency for 'em except that constituency. So we were tryin' to keep it constitutional. At the same time—I think they let it out—they turned it back over to us, to the state, just because they thought they'd done all they could do. We still had poor medical services in it, we still had poor facilities, none of—I think the women's unit may have been accredited, but the rest of 'em weren't.

[00:46:32] So we were sorta tryin' to get this thing to become, for lack of a better term, a professional agency. And I think it was probably the last of the agencies in Arkansas to sort of get away from the old-boy network. Not that any of 'em ever get completely away from it, but it was more bound to the old ways than anything we had. And course, Knox Nelson was a powerful senator in Pine Bluff. He controlled a lot of what went on in the prison. He was not someone—because of his position in the senate, it was hard for the governor to buck Knox Nelson because he was chairman of the Rules Committee. The Rules Committee decided who—folks—what senator bill got on the agenda, whether it got voted on at all, and if Senator Nelson

didn't want something to happen, he could shut the governor down. [*Laughs*] I mean, so he—it was a difficult situation to be in. And the board, when I came in, was not a board that we had appointed, so we didn't have a lot of friends on the board. And Art Lockhart was a good, close friend of Knox's. They were all good friends, and it was a difficult—it was a cliquish kind of place. It was difficult to break into it. And there's no outside constituency that says, "Gosh, what we want is a better prison system."

[00:47:52] BW: Art Lockhart was the director.

BR: He was the director of the program.

BW: And how did he get to be the director?

BR: You know, that was, again, before my time. He was appointed by Frank White. He was brought in with what was called the Texas crowd, who came in, oh, under Dale Bumpers, really, to try to clean the prison up. And they actually did some good work. I don't dispute that. And then Art was appointed by Frank White. And so he was never our appointee. Vernon Housewright was who Bill had put in there and Vernon—I think Vernon had some good ideas from what I s—I didn't deal with him, but from what I know about him. But he just couldn't stand—he couldn't work in that old-boy network that was runnin'

the prison system.

[00:48:34] BW: Well, Lockhart and Nelson had a business partnership, and Nelson was making money off of the prisons.

BR: I think that's true, and . . .

BW: As a senator.

BR: And I think that's true, and I think there were people in Pine Bluff that were making money off the prison system. We like to do business locally and so—and I don't know, you know, if it was a corrupt bargain or whether it was just "These are my friends, and I'm gonna do business with 'em. I'm gonna do what I can to help all my buddies." And it was at least that. Maybe more. I don't know, but it was at least that much.

[00:49:10] BW: Well, at some point, outside of the governor's office, you were appointed by Governor Clinton to the prison board.

BR: Right. I . . .

BW: When did that occur?

BR: Oh, I went off—I left Bill's—I stayed on the staff for two years and went back to UALR. I felt like it was time for me to get back to my academics. I'd had all the fun I could stand down there. So I went back. And I think, Betsey, probably maybe a year or a year and a half after that—and frankly, my view of the prison and my—the way I saw my role on the board was a lot different

than a liaison. As a liaison, what I felt my first responsibility for was not to have the thing blow up in our face, and the way it was gonna blow up was overcrowding. And so I always wanted to say, you know, "Let's keep liberal good-time laws so we can reduce sentences. Let's don't over sentence people. Let's keep indeterminate sentencing. Let's talk to the parole board so they understand the pressures we're under. Let's get as many people as we reasonably can out of there." [00:50:16] So that was—when I was advising the governor, you know, my view was let's just don't have an explosion, and let's keep the population under control. We're the people, I believe, that started payin' for the jail backup. And that was to take the pressure, the political pressure, off of the governor's office. Now it's turned into a nightmare. I mean, we're payin' out millions of dollars, but we actually—you know, we started doin' that. So you know, when I got on the board, I had a different view of it, and that really was we need to make this system as humane as you can make a basically inhumane thing, you know. We need to be fair and evenhanded as best we can.

[00:51:09] BW: Talk to me about the beginning of the boot camp 'cause you were on the prison board then.

BR: Yeah, I was on the board then. I was not then and am not now

a boot camp fan. I—they may work for some people, but they always look like a quick solution to a basic problem that we had and—you know, I don't know. I never—I know Bill liked 'em. They were very popular. I was not a big fan of 'em.

BW: Well, they were put forth as an alternative to incarceration.

BR: They were a quick way to speed people out of the system, but you could do that anyway.

BW: Without going through that.

[00:51:47] BR: Yeah. What I didn't like was when the—when we changed the good-time laws and made it more difficult for inmates to earn good time. When I was dealin' with 'em, both as a matter of practicality for overcrowding—any time we could come up with a way to stretch the good-time law out when I worked for the governor, we would do it. Sometimes he—I don't even think he knew we were doin' it, but we would try to run those good-time laws out and make 'em more liberal because—I mean, what you'd like to see in the prison system, to me, is there are people that never need to get out of prison. I mean, there are people down there that need to stay there forever. And there are some people that, once they've learned their lesson or served their time, they need to go. But what it takes to get me straight and what it takes to get you straight are

gonna be different. So you need an indeterminate sentencing system so you can—I don't care if you wanna sentence somebody to thirty years. But be able to let 'em out in two if they don't need to be there any longer. And so good time allows sort of a—to me it's sort of a capitalistic system, you know. You give good time to inmates, and the ones that do better and they earn good time—they get that by how well they work. They get it by goin' to take classes. They get it in lots of different ways. Yo—and it gives 'em self confidence. It takes the people who wanna do better up the notch to get out. And so I think you're gonna let out better inmates by usin' that kinda system rather than some screwball system that says you gotta serve 80 percent of your time. Doesn't matter whether you're a Class IV, which is a bad inmate, or a Class I. It makes no sense to do that, and it does not make the public any safer. And so I, you know, I think if you can put those systems in places—in place and use 'em, you're gonna be better off.

[00:53:39] BW: So what happened to the good-time programs?

BR: Well, it basically got gutted after Bill left office. We did away with a lot of it. Which I really think is terribly unfortunate that that happened. And they're slowly, I think, beginning to put 'em back in because they serve a useful purpose.

BW: Well, they're incentives.

BR: Right.

BW: To—incentives to the inmates to . . .

BR: I think we oughta pay inmates. And that was—you brought that up down the general assembly, you'd think I'd, you know, said we oughta slit your child's throat. But again, all of us are used to makin' money, and that's how we get by. And you know, pay 'em—just pay 'em a little bit, but pay 'em something. They'd have money when they got out, which they need, and they would begin to tie that to rewards, good work, good performance, to rewards, and that's really what you want 'em to do. And you always have to remember, I think, you're dealing with human beings. And some of 'em are gonna fail. A lot of 'em are gonna come back. A lot of 'em you're gonna let out are gonna go back to their wicked ways. But all of 'em won't. And you can't lock everybody up for the crimes they commit. You just—you can't do it.

[00:54:46] BW: Talk about the farm program at the prison.

BR: Well, when I was there, we were farmin' about 20,000 acres of land. Most of it row crops, but we had gardens and cattle operations and—had a cattle operation, actually, in Bentonville with four inmates livin' up there with a truck just drivin' around

town. It was a *[laughs]* great place to be. You know, the farm produced a lot of money for the department. I'm a big believer in the work ethic in prisons, that the worst prisons I've been in, seen, are places where inmates are just sittin' in the cells. So you know, I think havin' something for 'em to do is a good thing. I don't know that farm labor is the best thing to do, but I think you need something to keep 'em busy. It's in their interest to be busy, and it's in our interest. And the farm, particularly the crop part of the farm that raised truck crops and vegetables for the inmates, I think, was a good thing. [00:55:46] And one of the things that we did was to upgrade that whole system, to build blast freezers where we could freeze food, where we could keep food under better conditions, and raise our own food. We saved an enormous amount of money for the state by doin' that. And I think the inmates were pretty well fed. I ate down there with 'em. It was a lot of brown food, but it, you know, it was better than a lot of places were getting so—and I think the farm's okay, but you have to be ka—it's hard to manage it. You have to be careful with it. You don't wanna abuse inmates. You don't wanna overwork 'em. But I, you know, I—havin' 'em work is a good thing. And I don't know how you deal with seven or eight thousand inmates who don't have any job skills without some

way to employ, basically, manual labor, which is what they were.

[00:56:34] BW: Well, seeing the hoe squads in the fields is feeling like you're going back into another century, though.

BR: It is.

BW: Because hoe squading is not a way farming is done.

BR: Right. It is. It's a keep-busy deal. And I think the more industry you can put in, the better off you are. And again, Governor Clinton did a lot of industry and a lot of it—they make furniture down there. They repair busses. They used to be in the printing business. I'm not sure if they still do that. But they—the more of that you can put in and the more you can train inmates—one of the things that we did that saved a huge amount of money and, I think, really trained a lot of inmates for skilled jobs was construction. I mean, we were buildin' stuff all the time. And so we would use inmates alongside free-world people to become carpenters and bricklayers and masons and all of that. [00:57:27] And I—the maximum-security unit—one of those wings down there was built by inmate labor, and I swear you can't tell it from free world. I mean, it's to the same standards. So if you can do things like that, that's better than putting people on a hoe squad. I absolutely agree. But I don't think you've got enough jobs to take care of everyone, and you

gotta keep 'em busy.

[00:57:50] BW: But also, if you're on a hoe squad where you get to eat the product, that is some reward.

BR: I think it is.

BW: And now the inmates don't get to eat anything that they grow.

BR: Yeah. I do—I have not dealt with 'em in years, so I don't know what they're . . .

BW: They sell everything.

BR: . . . what they're doin' now. And that's . . .

BW: They sell everything.

BR: . . . that's too bad because, you know, I really think that was a good system. And I thought—you know, I do think they were well fed. [00:58:14] The—probably the greatest weakness we had was in medical care, and that turned out to be a huge monster to deal with.

BW: Well, and there was scandal.

BR: There was scandal in it, there was a blood scandal, there was a whole lot of things that went on with that. And the basic—the root of the problem was the state was never gonna—we couldn't hire private physicians and nurses to come in there because the state wasn't gonna pay that much money, so you ended up havin' to contract it out. And it's hard to provide that services to

inmates. I mean, I've—saw this in the navy when everybody'd fall out for sick bay 'cause you were there anyway, you might as well go to sick bay. Well, two-thirds of us weren't sick. I mean, you kinda got the same problem in the prisons. And so it's a difficult thing to provide those services. I think you're better off to contract it privately but the super—we were the first ones to do that, and we didn't do—we, being the Board of Corrections, didn't do a good job of supervising that. And we finally, as you know, did cancel a contract with one of the providers. And that was a local company. It was a Pine Bluff company.

[00:59:22] BW: Talk about the drug treatment program in prison.

Substance abuse.

BR: Yeah. I thought Max Mobley that ran those programs tried hard. Tried hard to do somethin' with 'em. We didn't put enough money in 'em as we should have. We—obviously drugs are a big problem in the prison. He did a good job with it. They were A.A. type programs, inmates-helping-inmate programs—it's essential that those things be done. I think the—what I—the difficulty, I think, in prison is figurin' out when—if you're an individual in prison is what makes you wanna do better. What makes you wanna not come back. And I'm not a religious person, but I think that's a spiritual decision of some type. For whatever

reason, the guy—he's like, "This is not the life I wanna live. I need help to get better." And then at that point you need those good rehab programs like drug programs and GEDs and training and so forth so you can get 'em prepared to go back out in the community 'cause it's gonna be tough. [01:00:29] I don't think there's anything that the state can do to make somebody decide they wanna reform. That's a personal decision. And I'm not sure those drug programs—if they—when they were mandated, which is what the state likes to do, worked that well.

BW: Well, they're mandated now, but the problem is that they're not available to inmates until they're ready to be released. When anybody . . .

BR: I'm sure that's true.

BW: . . . who knows about substance abuse treatment . . .

BR: Yeah, you need to start on it early.

BW: It has to be . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . a long term obli . . .

BR: Right. And it's gotta go on . . .

Bruce Perry: Need to change tapes.

BW: Okay.

BR: And it's gotta go on outside the prison. You've gotta—if you

get—you know, you can't just do what we used to do, just give inmates thirty bucks and turn 'em loose. You know, you've gotta have a real program in place. You've gotta get 'em in drug rehab programs and halfway houses. And we didn't do a good job with it. But we were just tryin' to get 'em out the door.

BW: Okay. We have stop now.

[Recording stopped]

[01:01:21] BW: I—couple of other items regarding the prison that I wanna talk to before we move on. And one was the issue of emoluments. What were emoluments, and what became the issue about it?

BR: Well, emoluments were food that was grown on a prison and given to the employees, the higher-level employees, as a perk. And it goes back—it made sense at one time, and that's when employees were underpaid, they didn't make a lot of money, they grew a lot of food, and they just took what they wanted. And it ju—and it—so in the [19]30s or [19]40s it probably made a lot of sense. But by the [19]80s it's something that I felt like, and you did, too, needed to be dropped for a couple of reasons. I think it was just symbolic of the old plantation mentality that ran it, and I didn't like it, and I think you would agree with me. Don't wanna [*laughs*] drag you into this but—it was only given to

the people who were runnin' the system. The poor guard who may have needed it didn't get any of it, you know. And so their argument was, well, it's sort of a—you know, just makes you wanna work your way up so you can finally get to the free food.

[01:02:34] And it just seemed to me the kind of thing that, one, just symbolically it didn't make a lot of sense, and two, practically, why open yourself up to that whole issue of givin' these, basically, state supplies away to people who can afford to buy things? So I mean, that was the basic issue with 'em. And you know, we decided to get rid of 'em, which turned out to be a huge war, as you know. And I think they're still givin' 'em out, although we stopped 'em for a while. But it was a—oh, it was a horrible issue.

[01:03:10] BW: Yeah. It was—it—the members of the legislature who had a vested interest in the prison system were furious . . .

BR: They were furious.

BW: . . . with the governor's office . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . and you . . .

BR: The two of us.

BW: . . . but you were . . .

BR: [*Laughs*] Yeah, I was on the board at the time. Yeah, it—I think

it was—and I sometimes think back on it and think it was maybe the symbolism as much as anything, you know. There was a group of legislators down there that saw the pri—they were very proud of 'em in an old-timey, old-fashion sort of way. You know, they remembered when they were self-sufficient, and they had this strange sort of connection to 'em that didn't have to do with law enforcement, didn't have to do with punishment, it had to do with what they were as an institution. I think they found 'em interesting. I found 'em interesting. I—they are interesting places. And so it was—I think it was all balled up in a lot of different things, but it certainly became a lightning rod for a lot of discontent with me and with you, I think.

[01:04:16] BW: With—I viewed it as a closed society.

BR: That's a good description of it.

BW: And that the legislators had—who had inroads into that closed society didn't want anybody else meddling with their closed society.

BR: I think that's . . .

BW: And . . .

BR: I think that's a lot of it. And I think it also really was in transition. It was becoming a place that was more professional, as it is now. For all of its problems, you know, most of those

units are accredited by the American Correctional Association.

It's made great headway, and it was movin' in that direction, but there was always a countervailing force that didn't want it to do that, the Knox Nelsons of the world and others who simply, for whatever reason, didn't want it to change. And I think that emolument just, you know . . .

[01:05:02] BW: Well, they felt like those issues were administrative issues, not governor's office . . .

BR: Right.

BW: They didn't think that the governor should have anything to do with the prisons at all.

BR: And it was an odd deal because, you know, it reported to a separate board. And as you know, so much of the governor—it's a very weak office in Arkansas, the governor, because everything you'd like to control you don't control. And the prison was one of 'em. And you know, it was a bad time, it really was. I got a great tape of me bein' in front of the legislative council with Knox Nelson just chewin' me to pieces about the emoluments. It's a wonderful little snippet. I've got—I'll bring it to you sometime. It's a great little piece.

[01:05:41] BW: Well, and I know that he threatened the governor that if the governor didn't fire me that he would never get

anything else [*BR laughs*] out of the senate.

BR: He was a powerful man.

BW: And . . .

BR: And he controlled a lot of what went on down there.

BW: To Bill Clinton's credit, he did back me up, though I do think he resented that I had created such a hubbub over it.

BR: It's not the kind of fight Bill liked to make.

BW: Well . . .

BR: To say the least.

BW: It was a bigger fight than I realized it was gonna be 'cause it only made common sense . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . to me.

BR: Well, it's good you had me along to talk into doin' it. [*Laughs*]

[01:06:11] BW: Absolutely. Well, another issue that you were present both in the governor's office, legislative sessions, and on the prison board was an evolution of pardons and paroles board. And talk about how that all came to be, what it was like and then what it . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . became.

BR: I guess one of the scariest moments I ever had was the first

time I went to watch the parole board operate and realized that, you know, we're makin' decisions about who's gonna stay in prison and who's gonna get out, we're lookin' at way too many inmates, we have a board that are well-meaning citizens but really don't have the background to kinda make those decisions, and it was a willy-nilly sort of operation that I found disturbing, you know. [01:07:08] And yet we were dependent on the good will of the parole board because that overcrowding was threatening to overwhelm us. So there was a part of me that wanted to say, "Gosh, let's get 'em to—let's see if we can talk 'em into lettin' four hundred people out," you know. And yet you knew that they didn't have—they were spendin' three minutes with 'em or five minutes with 'em. It wasn't enough time to really see the workups on 'em. No one could do that once or twice or four or five times a month and really do justice to those inmates or to make good decisions. That's what we were lookin' at. And so I was a proponent, and several of us were for years, of a full-time parole board. That you really need something that's meeting all the time, that they have time to look at the inmates, bring 'em up, talk to 'em, look at the records, you know, re—and I—you know, really have professional people doin' it. We still haven't gotten to that stage. We still don't wa—we

still tr—relying on well-meaning laypersons to make decisions that you really need professional training, I think, to make it work right. But it's better than it was.

[01:08:13] BW: Well, and it's still a political system with a political appointees and . . .

BR: It is. Yeah. And I would really like to see it become something completely separated from that and, you know, you have some professional people on it because it's—you know, I've let two people out that went out and killed people. And you live with that every day. You don't ever forget about that. And that's gonna happen. You have to realize that's gonna happen. But you, you know—if you can make a detached, professional decision, you can minimize that, realizing that when you're dealing with thousands of people, bad things are gonna happen.

[01:08:53] BW: There were times in dealing with legislators when they had a constituent with a special interest in a person who they wanted to get a pardon or parole for, and those became really thorny times.

BR: They were tough times, and there were programs created like Act 814. When the parole board basically denied an inmates release, that program was set up to give the board of correction authority to release inmates. We actually could release inmates

and did release 'em from time to time. And that was simply a law passed to get around the parole board, which is not how you want the system to operate, to say the least. And you were right—you said earlier we don't spend enough time on the—on—when an inmate's going out, we don't spend enough time deciding who that should be and how we're gonna care for 'em till we can integrate 'em back into the free world. We don't spend nearly enough money on that. [01:09:54] But again, I hearken back and harp on it—it's 'cause we're overcrowded. You have to deal with that day in and day out, you know. And that was—for two years that was my life with the prisons was how do we make sure we don't have five hundred or six hundred inmates backed up in the jail. And whatever it took to get 'em out, you know, we would try to do it. And if that meant goin' down and winin' and dinin' the parole board and basically beggin' 'em to let as many people out as you can—that's not how the system oughta work. Shouldn't work that way.

[01:10:23] BW: Well, I just felt like the whole thing was a powder keg, the criminal justice [*BR laughs*] system.

BR: Yeah.

BW: There was a powder keg in the county jails, there was a powder keg at the pris—at each prison, there was a powder keg at the

board of pardons and paroles, that the whole thing . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . was explosive, constantly.

BR: It was. I—you know, if we didn't have a problem for a couple of months, I was happy. I mean because it—you really did—you really were on the edge, I think, of chaos all the time with it.

[01:10:49] BW: I wanna go back to an issue, unless you can think of other prison stories to talk about.

BR: I can think of a lot of 'em, but that's probably enough.

BW: I wanna go back to state police for a minute. Which was when Tommy Goodwin came to you about Roger cole—Roger Clinton. Can you describe that whole situation?

BR: Yeah. I can give you my memory of it, although it conflicts with other stories that I've heard. But here's what I remember. I had a basement office with no windows in a little closet down in the bottom of the Capitol. And Tom—the door's always open, and Tommy came in and shut the door and said, "I have something to tell you." And basically, it was that Roger Clinton had been caught with drugs, and they wanted to use him, basically, to flip him to try to get up to the next level of where they came from. And he—you know, Tommy came to me both to tell me that and to say, "What do I do now?" And at that

point, I thought, "Well, you, you know—this is all—this is way over my pay grade. So you sta—you kinda sit tight, and lemme go talk to Betsey," and I think I talked to Joan. [01:11:59] And the—at the next stage was, let's get Hillary, and I'll—so Joan and I—you may have been with us. I don't know. But as I remember Joan and I got in the car. Hillary was eating somewhere up in the Heights or Kavanaugh.

BW: Afterthought.

BR: Aft—she was at the Afterthought. Yeah. And we drove up and got her and said, "We n—we all need to go out to the Mansion because there's something that you need to be there that we need to talk about." And so we went out to the Mansion. I was briefly in the meeting, and then I left. And so what happened with you and Joan and Bill and Hillary, I'm not aware of. But what I was told after that by the governor was that, "Tell Tommy to handle Roger as if he would any other informant. Don't do anything different than what you would do with anyone. And the only thing I ask that before the arrest is made on Roger that you give me a heads up so I can tell my mother." And I conveyed that to Tommy, and that's how Tommy operated with me, you know, he kept me informed about what was going on. But as far as I know, there was never any undue pressure put on Tommy

Goodwin to do other th—anything other than to deal with Roger like they would anyone else. And I've always had a great deal of respect for Bill for that because I thought [*car horns*] that had to be a horrendously difficult thing to do. And as far as I know, that's what was done.

[01:13:32] BW: That's my recollection. And it went on and on . . .

BR: And on.

BW: . . . and on.

BR: It did.

BW: And every now and then, we had to ask you to go talk to Colonel Goodwin to find out . . .

BR: Yeah, we—just to kinda keep . . .

BW: Is this still going on?

BR: . . . me informed. Yeah.

BW: Is there something happening? Because it was killing Bill at night and every time he would see his mother not to be able to say—or when . . .

BR: It's a . . .

BW: . . . he would see Roger.

BR: It's a horrible situation to be in. I can't imagine him doin' that. But he carried forth with it, and it was—obviously, it was the right thing to do. But I thought it took a lot of moral courage to

do that. I don't think I could've done it. And it was a terrible time.

[01:14:13] BW: One thing on my prison list—to go back to the prison now. The Braille program was one I always . . .

BR: It's a good program.

BW: . . . liked a lot.

BR: The—yeah, the Braille . . .

BW: So how did that come to be?

BR: Well, that actually came from Peggy Tucker. She's the one that started it. And I don't remember all the details of it, but she was the one that just insisted that the prison do it. And Peggy, course, dealt mostly with casework. But she was the kind of person when she got the bit in her teeth, you—you know, she came down there and started on me about it. I, you know, I got other things to worry about other than a Braille program, but she just wouldn't let it go, you know. And they started it, I think, at Wrightsville, if I remember correctly. And it was a great program. It was a—it was the kind of program you like the prison to do. They were doing something, really, that was hard to get done, and it was to translate books into Braille. And it was something that the inmates took pride in. I mean, they—it was a good thing all around. Didn't employ a lot of inmates, but

it did a lot of good. And you know, Peggy deserves the credit for that 'cause I certainly—I had other things to worry about. But as you know, Peggy wouldn't, literally, wouldn't leave you alone once she started in on something.

[01:15:22] BW: Well, and thankfully so because a lot of good stories came out of Peggy's tenacity.

BR: [*Laughs*] Yeah, that's true.

BW: And as—at one point after—there—so many inmates had been—had done the Braille . . .

BR: Had been trained. Yeah.

BW: . . . the Brailing—we never had a recidivist. That—they were gone. They left the prison system . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . they left crime, they had a self confidence around . . .

BR: Yeah. Yeah.

BW: . . . a new skill, so.

BR: I think what's missed in a lot of people in prison is self esteem, is what do you do to show them that they have worth, you know. And you can't do it. You have to get them to do it. I mean, it has to be their decision. And if you can do that—I was pleased to see 'em start this program with the dogs in the prison. I think that'll be a good thing.

BW: A very good thing.

BR: Yeah.

BW: Yes.

BR: Yeah. And so I think you can attack a lot of problems down there in small ways. And Peggy taught me that from the, you know, from the Braille issue. It doesn't have to be a big-brain project to make it work. It can be lots of small things that'll make the place better.

[01:16:27] BW: Okay, let's go to legislative sessions. And I wanna start with—as long as we're talking about self-serving legislation, [BR laughs] let's talk about the truck tarps.

BR: [Laughs] Well, sometimes the—sometimes liaisons had their own agenda down there that we didn't bother the governor with, and one of those that I got involved in was—you know, gravel trucks are goin' down the road, rocks fall off of 'em, break somebody's window, they get mad, they go talk to the member of the general assembly, they put in a bill to limit that. And I was in the gravel business. My father re . . .

BW: They were requiring tar . . .

BR: Yeah, to put tarps . . .

BW: They wanted to require . . .

BR: They were gonna require tarps to be put on the trucks. And I

was in the gravel business, and I'm thinkin', "This is a bad idea, you know. This is—one, it's not gonna work, and secondly, it's just a bad idea for all of us." And ironically, the person that used to carry it a lot of time was Mike Wilson, who is now my brother-in-law. And you know, I would—I'd get on the phone. I'd call up the Pittsburgh Plate Glass Company and tell 'em what was goin' on. I'd call up the county judge. And they'd come down there and just kill it. They'd just kill it for me, you know. I'd never get near the thing. I—and it would be done in. And I suspect I was not the only one that had *[laughs]* special interests that went on in the session. But as long as I was there they never got it passed out there, I would say. It's never been.

[01:17:47] BW: *[Laughs]* Well, what—it—you made it an untouchable issue for us because, I think, because you worked every single session.

BR: I did, yeah.

BW: And you did your own little legislative lobbying on the side.

BR: Well, that happened. There were things we didn't wanna bother the governor with, you know. *[BW laughs]* His busy schedule.

[Laughter]

[01:18:08] BW: Okay, let's talk about that special session on education in . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . 1983.

BR: Yeah.

BW: And what memories do you have from that session?

BR: I remember thinking it was never gonna end is what I remember about it. It was a—you know, lookin' back on it, of course, it was the sort of keystone, I think, of Bill Clinton's tenure as governor. It was—it grew out, as you know, of a court case that had declared our school formula unconstitutional. And so we were faced with a decision of—if you're gonna equalize funding and not raise taxes, and you were gonna take money away from the fast-growing schools and put 'em in the slow-growin' schools. And that politically was not gonna be possible. So you're gonna have to raise taxes. [01:18:53] And I thought they did a masterful job, Bill and Hillary, of selling that basic idea of education is a good thing. We need to spend money on it. And the devil's in the details but we—I think we had a basic understanding in the state when we started that session that we were gonna improve public education in Arkansas. And I think Hillary had a lot to do with that, and Bill, and the hard work that went into it. But of course, the devil always is gonna be in the details, and that's who's gonna get the money and who's gonna

pay for it?

BW: People loved the higher standards and the lower class sizes . . .

BR: Right.

BW: . . . smaller class sizes, and I think the people were pretty much in favor of the taxes by the time . . .

BR: I think . . .

BW: . . . the legislature convened.

BR: I think they were.

BW: It was easy to get the sale tax—well, it was sort of . . .

BR: It wasn't easy, but . . .

BW: The sales tax passed.

BR: It was . . .

BW: And I'll never understand the opposition to the other taxes that we attempted and failed.

[01:19:52] BR: Yeah, we tried an income tax and several other small taxes that I remember.

BW: The severance.

BR: A severance tax. Of course they're 75 percent voters, both of 'em, so they're—it's just the mechanics don't allow you to do much with it. You know, I think—we thought the session would last two weeks, and I think it went six weeks. We were not as prepared as we should've been when we went into it. We rarely

were as prepared as we needed to be. And so we sorta got bogged down in it. We got bogged down on the formula and who was gonna get the money. I can remember the printout. They—somebody'd come up with a new formula, and they'd do the printouts. And the first thing the rep or the senator does is look at their school districts. If they benefit from it, they're for it. If they don't benefit, they're against it, you know. So it's all about money and who's gonna get it. And so a lot of it becomes bogged down in that formula and how you're gonna get that done. And the sales tax is not gonna pass until the formula—you've got enough people to accept that formula. And so I think that's what jams it up, and . . .

BW: That . . .

BR: . . . we really weren't prepared. [01:21:01] I think we made the mistake—we—you know, one of the things we had trouble doin'—if you think about it, we had five legislative liaisons. And in a regular session, we'd have 1,500 bills introduced. To try to keep up with all of 'em is enormous. And if you put a bill in too early that's controversial, then you give the other time—the si—the other side time to look at it and to organize the opposition to it. And we didn't do a good job of putting those bills in in the right order and putting 'em in where we could manage 'em. So

we didn't do a great job. And that—and the—I think we all bear some responsibility for that. [BW coughs] But it really came down to that formula issue. [01:21:41] And then it becomes the teacher testing, of course, the infamous teacher testing rears its ugly head in the middle of all of that. But you know, I don't recall that—maybe I'm wrong, but I don't recall that being a big issue at the beginning of the session. I don't recall it—it was in his kinda speech to the general assembly, but it was way down in the bottom of it. It didn't seem to me to be a big issue. It begins to rise up because you need a cover, or at least the members of the general assembly think they need a cover, to get under, and somebody's gotta be held responsible. And it ends up bein' the teachers, which is unfortunate in many ways. But it seems to me it became a sort of—a blanket for everyone to get under. And at that point, you know, it—then it takes on a mind and a sort of a method of its own.

[01:22:38] BW: One of the things that I found frustrating about the school-funding formula was that [*sound of object falling in background*] without the printouts to look at their individual districts, there were very few legislators and very few people who understand—who understood the overall . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . funding formula.

BR: Yeah.

BW: And who . . .

BR: Well, outside of Jodie Mahony and Ed Thicksten, I don't, you know, know very many people that did. I mean, it's a very difficult thing to understand. I never made the slightest attempt to understand it. It was just a very complicated document to deal with. And . . .

[01:23:14] BW: And who did you rely on for guidance about who was tellin' the truth and who wasn't?

BR: [*Laughs*] I didn't rely on anyone, really. I mean, you know, I—we had some people on our staff that—I thought Sam Bratton understood it, and I think Don Ernst had a hint about what it was doin'.

BW: Oh, he relied on Sam a lot, too.

BR: Yeah, and Sam really was the person that understood it. And I mean, my relationship with it was how do we get it passed? You know, what do we have to do to get it passed? And it really was a tough issue 'cause if you took money away from those big schools, you were gonna lose them in the formula. And but the small schools, the very small schools, had a great lobby. Those small school districts were very powerful. They were—they

feared consolidation. They—and they had been kept afloat by what were called phantom students. They just made up these numbers and they just—you know, you might have two hundred students twenty years ago, but now you've got a hundred, but they treat it as if you still have two hundred. And so they had these floaters that kept 'em alive. And when it looked like that was gonna disappear, they mounted a tremendous effort to stop it. And this, as you know, was then and still is a state that's gerrymandered around where the rural interests are very powerful in Arkansas. Even though the population's urban, the power's not. And these were obviously rural schools, and they had power out of all proportion to their numbers. They were very difficult to deal with.

[01:24:45] BW: One of the ironic things that occurred during that session was that the Arkansas Education Association, which was adamantly opposed to the teacher-testing provision, which was also a misnomer because it was going to apply to any certified personnel . . .

BR: Right.

BW: . . . superintendents and principals . . .

BR: Right.

BW: . . . not just teachers—allied in opposition to a lot of stuff with

those tiny school districts that were usually . . .

BR: Right.

BW: . . . not . . .

BR: Not on their side.

BW: . . . not in coalition with 'em.

BR: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.

BW: [*Coughs*] Some interesting bedfellows.

BR: Well, there were some interesting—yeah, interesting coalitions in that thing. [01:25:25] But it—you know, and it got worked out as nearly as I could tell. It was a—just an artificial creation of these isolated school districts. I mean, they just—I was in a meeting, in fact, with Bill Clinton. I think Mike Beebe was there. He had, at that time, he had a—I think it was St. Charles or somewhere. He had one of those districts that was in trouble. And they just sort of, as nearly as I could tell, they sort of created these isolated school districts. They said, "Well, if you're, you know, so many miles away from this, and you're so many—you know, you only got so many students and blah, blah, blah and—oh gosh, here are thirty-five students that—stu— school districts that fit that model. We're gonna give them a little extra money. And that'll get us our votes." And that was just a—and I thought, "What a marvelous idea. An isolated

school district. Who ever heard of it?" I don't know where it came from.

BW: Well, John Miller was a part of all of those . . .

BR: I . . .

BW: . . . negotiations . . .

BR: I can imagine . . .

BW: . . . too.

BR: . . . he was involved in that, yeah.

BW: Yeah.

BR: So, you know . . .

BW: He understood the formula.

BR: . . . that's sorta gave everybody a way to go. But it was a tough session. There was a lot ridin' on it.

[01:26:28] BW: And then you tried to go back to UALR.

BR: I did. I just couldn't stay away. I came back, I think, for—I may have missed one session, but I can't—I think I came back for almost every session after that. I worked the last session when Bill was governor, the last special session that we had.

BW: In [19]92?

BR: It was, yeah. Right.

BW: It was the same year he became president.

BR: Yeah.

[01:26:49] BW: And a lot got through that session. Well, I wanna talk about these ethics session and what you remember from that session where . . .

BR: You know, I . . .

BW: . . . we tried to get the legislature—why did we . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . decide to put this bill . . .

BR: I really don't—I don't remember a lot about it, I'll be honest with you. I don't—you know, I was there when it was goin' on, but I don't know that I could add much to what was happenin' in it.

BW: Except that we had a—we proposed a bill because we felt that the big lobby special interests were fighting us on the economic development proposals in the previous session.

BR: I think that's—I think that was the genesis of it, yeah.

BW: And that there was a lot of legislative pay—legislators who worked for an industry who were also, then, voting on matters of that industry.

BR: Right.

BW: And we felt that there had to be full disclosure. And so we put forth a bill that—there was a lot of wrangling.

BR: Yeah, I—you know, for some reason, it just—it's just lost on me what was going on when that was happening.

BW: When the governor said that—at some point when it—he said, "I will take it to the people and put it—get it on the ballot if it doesn't pass." And I don't think the legislature believed he would or could do that.

BR: Yeah. Yeah. I remember that very well. And I, you know, I guess, again it—there's this image of Clinton sometime that he could be rather timid and, you know, and not able to make up his mind, but you see him do things like that or the thing he did with Roger or several other things I can think of with NRA issues and so forth that, you know—he did have a lot of courage when it came right down to it.

[01:28:46] BW: On the NRA issues, those were—he v—he did—vetoed . . .

BR: He did.

BW: . . . two bills that they got passed by the legislature . . .

BR: He did.

BW: . . . to keep local cities from having . . .

BR: Preemption bills.

BW: . . . any say so over . . .

BR: They were preemption bills.

BW: . . . gun control . . .

BR: Yep.

BW: . . . in their towns. [01:29:04] Well, my recollection is that things were really strained with the legislature after we did get the initiative passed—on the ballot and passed by the people. And the next session was very difficult.

BR: It was an awful session, yeah.

BW: And yet we were better prepared for it than . . .

BR: We were.

BW: . . . we had ever been . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . before.

BR: Yeah. That must've been the eighty s . . .

BW: [Nineteen] eighty-nine session.

BR: [Nineteen] eighty-nine, yeah.

BW: And Nate had come in and . . .

BR: Nate came in and . . .

BW: . . . had worked on preparing the package.

BR: Yeah. And we were tryin' to impose a lot of new taxes. We were tryin' to tax barbers and beauticians. We were tryin' to tax lawyers for services. We took on every interest group that was down there. We tried to put a diesel fuel tax on fuel that was used on trains that were passing through Arkansas, which meant you took on Cotton Belt and UP, which meant you took on Joe

Bell and, oh, Charlie—I can't think. I'll think of his last name in a minute.

BW: Mitchell.

BR: Yeah, Charlie Mitchell, which was a ghastly fight. It was one of the worst sessions we ever had. And we . . .

[01:30:12] BW: It's not . . .

BR: . . . were well prepared for it.

BW: . . . that we were trying to impose taxes as much as that we were trying to remove the exemptions . . .

BR: Well, that's really what they were.

BW: . . . that they had.

BR: Yeah.

BW: And equalize . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . who got exemptions and . . .

BR: Who got 'em. Yeah.

BW: . . . who got taxed.

BR: Yeah. And we were seriously out of money. But that was a rough session. It really was. That was the one after about two weeks, I thought, "God, let's just go home 'cause we're not gonna get anywhere with this." And we kept trying. We never, you know, we never stopped. But, oh, I can remember—I don't

even remember which tax it was, but you know, John Miller was just a great person to support us and particularly on those tax issues, and he was chair of Revenue and Taxes. [01:30:47]

John Miller could give as good a spee—he and Bill Foster could give as good a speech as I think I ever heard. And I member John just givin' this rip-roarin' speech on one of those taxes and what a great deal it was and blah, blah, blah. I think we got thirty-seven votes. [*Laughs*] I looked at that. I thought, "Well, this is the end of this session. We might as well go home."

[01:31:04] BW: Well, we—the environment for the session was really tough because legislators were mad 'cause we had . . .

BR: Yeah, they were mad at us.

BW: . . . now imposed ethics laws . . .

BR: Right.

BW: . . . on them, and they were telling all kinds of erroneous, bad stories about what this was gonna mean in their lives, and then we were trying to remove exemptions . . .

BR: Yeah, it was . . .

BW: . . . from sales taxes.

BR: And you—so you were just hitting every special interest down there. And you know, I laugh when people say now, "Well, we're gonna take the federal tax code, and we're gonna get rid of all

the special perks and exemptions." I—you know, every exemption that's in the sales tax is there because there's a big, powerful, special-interest group that got it. And I would hear that peop—we heard it every session. "Oh, we'll—we don't need to raise taxes. We'll repeal all the exemptions." And I used to ask myself, "Well, you wanna introduce the bill to repeal the exemption on feed, seed, and fertilizers? Think—how far do you think that's gonna go?" I mean, those things are—that's very difficult to do. Very difficult to do.

BW: And we didn't succeed.

BR: No. We—well, you're fightin' everybody.

[01:32:10] BW: We did, however accomplish a good—a number of good things in that we expanded the authority of the Science and Technology . . .

BR: We did.

BW: . . . Authority, we expanded—we got the domestic violence law in place where law enforcement officials didn't have to witness a—an abuse. There were—we expanded some of the school programs.

BR: Yeah. We did a lot. And you know, I think after that [19]83 session that—everything gets focused on that, that education session, but there's a lot of good legislation that Bill worked on

and got passed after that. And a lot of it was economic development and things that we're benefitting from now that came out of those later sessions, changes at ADFA and other places.

BW: That've—that to this day are having . . .

BR: Yeah, right.

BW: . . . profound impacts.

BR: They still have an impact on us, yeah.

[01:32:56] BW: Well, so the [19]89 session, in my memory, was the toughest, the hardest . . .

BR: It was the toughest one.

BW: . . . and I mean, good stuff came out of it. But then two years later in 1990, or the [19]91 . . .

BR: Session, yeah.

BW: . . . session and—was a great session.

BR: It was a good session. It was. You know, of course, you're four ways—four years away from the ethics issue. Generally, I think, the economy was better by then. It's a lot easier to get things done if you're on a rising tide. [01:33:33] I think one of the things that, I think, really impressed me about Bill as a governor is he really governed—through most of the time he was there, we were in tough economic times, and the federal government

was rollin' power back to the states, and he really had to deal with some tough issues. By [19]91, that's beginning to, you know, beginning to change here in the state, and it's a little easier. People are not as scared. It's easier to get things done. It's just a different time. But those early—[19]83, [19]84, [19]85, [19]86, [19]87, all those years were really tough times in the state. And we were constantly—you know, the Revenue Stabilization Act was constantly not reachin' into even B and sometimes wouldn't even get out of the A categories in terms of money. So it's just tough when you don't have the funds to do anything with.

[01:34:24] BW: Well, and the [19]90—as a result of redistricting, the [19]90 elections changed some of the long-time leadership . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . and you had some newer leadership . . .

BR: Yeah.

BW: . . . that had . . .

BR: I believe Knox Nelson disappeared in that . . .

BW: . . . come up with Bill Clinton.

BR: . . . in that session. Right.

BW: In those days.

BR: It was a whole different thing, yeah.

BW: So you had new, younger faces on some of those committees . . .

BR: Yeah. That's true.

BW: . . . working on stuff.

BR: It was a different time.

[01:34:49] BW: What else?

BR: I don't know.

BW: Well, there's gotta be something else. What did you do after—when did you go off the prison board?

BR: I went off, oh, in 1993 or [199]4. They reorganized it, and I was kinda reorganized off of it, which was fine with me. I had been there for eight or nine years, and that was—that's enough for anybody to do that. I was ready to get out of the way and let Governor Tucker do what he wanted to do with it, which was not necessarily what I would've agreed to, so it was a good time to change.

[01:35:30] BW: What—talk to me about what you remember of Bill Clinton's decision-making process when he was thinking about running for president in 1988 and then decided not to.

BR: Gosh, we need to interview you about that, not me. I—you know, the thing I remember about that—I got a call from somebody when—and he was thinkin' about running the Super

Tuesday, oh, primary. We were all dis—a bunch of us were dispatched out to the states. I was sent to Louisiana. Spent, I don't know, a week or ten days down there. It was a great—I had more fun doin' that than anything I think I ever did. I had a list of names that the governor knew in Louisiana. I had a couple of books to read about the state of Louisiana and a road map. And off I went and just, you know, visited with people. And it was really a fun experience to get to do. [01:36:25] Came back and—you know, everything I heard in Louisiana was great. I thought Bill had a good shot at it. I guess about a week before he made the announcement that he wasn't gonna run, I had gotten a call from, I think, Peggy Tucker and said, you know, "They're askin' everybody to get ready to go on campaign and, you know, do whatever you need to do whether you—wherever you worked to make your arrangements to get off, take some time and begin to help," and so I was all ready to do that. And then a—you know, twenty-four hours or so before the thing, I got a call from Peggy and said, "Don't, you know, don't do anything. He, you know, he's not gonna do anything." And I said, "Aw, it's—I can't believe that." And so I was not on the inside and don't know what happened in the decisions, but up until that point it seemed to me that everything I'd heard from

everybody that went out and—you know, his chances in the South looked pretty good. So we were disappointed in that, obviously. But the trip down to New Orleans or down to Louisiana was wonderful. Wonderful adventure.

[01:37:25] BW: And then he—in the [19]90 campaign, he made this promise that he would fulfill his term, and do you remember there being any backlash then when he decided to run for president?

BR: Well, there were always the naysayers. There were always people that were—you know, Bill Clinton is a lightning rod. People—the people that don't like him will find out ways to not like him even more. And so I think that was—the people that already didn't like him said, "Oh, you know, that's just another big lie by Bill Clinton," and you know, all those things we had heard about him forever. But those of us who knew him and knew what talent he had, I think, were glad to see him do that. I—you know, he'd been governor a long time, and it's a job that wears on your personality and your psyche. It has to. He was great at it. He was a wonderful governor and did a lot of things for the state, but I really think his time was past. It was time for him to do somethin' else.

BW: Somethin' new.

BR: Somethin' new, and you know, he certainly had, obviously, as hindsight shows, he had the contacts and the stamina to make that run. And it's been a—it was a great thing for the state. A great thing for him, too.

[01:38:38] BW: Were you involved in the [19]92 campaign?

BR: Not a whole lot. I did a little bit, turned over some names of people that I knew and made some phone calls for him. And I went out on a couple of the Arkansas Travelers trips, which were great fun.

BW: Where did you go?

BR: I went to Chicago. Got to be in the St. Patrick's Day parade, which was a wonderful experience. And you know, I would have probably been more involved in it, but one of the things that was on the ballot in that same year was the amendment that changed the way public libraries were funded, and that was something Bill Clinton had supported. And so I was spending a lot of my time trying to get that amendment approved by the voters in Arkansas. And so it was just by happenstance I was really dealing with a local issue. But yeah, I, you know, kept abreast of it, but no. And I wished him well. I was glad to see him go to DC and, you know . . .

[01:39:31] BW: When did you leave UALR and go to the library?

BR: Nineteen eighty-nine. You know, somewhere, oh, around that time. And it's been a great place to be. And you know, the days with Bill Clinton were—I have more friends from that and more experiences from that. It's always stood me in good stead. I think I learned a lot from him and from you and came to respect people in the general assembly and what they do.

[01:40:01] BW: And did you have any interactions with him while he was president?

BR: A little bit. Couple of times—I went to the White House once or twice. I don't like long lines and people with weapons, so I didn't go up there a lot, but you know, if he was here in town, I went to events. And I had a few conversations, kinda policy conversations, with him about that [*motor revs*] business in Waco. They were tryin' to recall what we had done with the CSA. I was . . .

BW: Covenant, the Sword . . .

BR: Yeah. Yeah.

BW: . . . and the Arm of the Lord.

BR: Yeah. I was appointed to the National Commission on Libraries and Information Science, which was great fun. I enjoyed that. Bill did that. So we had a little contact.

BW: Oh. And the rest is history.

BR: I guess so. [*Laughs*]

BW: Thanks a lot.

BR: Sure. Glad to do it.

[01:40:48 End of interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]