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

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William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Richard Weiss

Interviewed by Betsey Wright

March 30, 2012

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Objective

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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.

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

Citation Information

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Betsey Wright interviewed Richard Weiss on March 30, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: Okay, 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 Richard Weiss, 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. Weiss, if you agree with this statement, please give us your verbal consent.

Richard Weiss: Yes, I do.

KK: Thank you. Have a good interview.

Bruce Perry: Bunch of noise in the kitchen.

RW: I can't control that.

BP: Nah. [*Laughter*] None of us may be able to here.

RW: Can't control it.

Betsey Wright: A little punch drunk at this point.

RW: I'll bet they are. Y'all have done twenty of these already.

BW: Just about.

RW: Yeah.

BW: But over a two-month period.

RW: Okay.

[00:00:56] BW: I'm hoping that we can do another batch in Fayetteville in April. I've just got—somehow or nother gotta find a way to get Joan Roberts to do it.

RW: Oh, yes.

BW: You know, she and Sam are the only two people who were there from the first staff . . .

RW: Yeah. Yeah.

BW: . . . and then the comeback staff and—to bridge that. And Sam can't do it so . . .

RW: No, don't think Sam can do it.

BP: Whenever y'all ready.

BW: Oh, you're ready? Okay.

BP: I'm sorry, yeah, I am. We were just—I thought you were going.

BW: They've calmed the back room down? Okay.

BP: They've slapped them all around. [*RW laughs*]

RW: Okay.

[00:01:26] BW: Great. I want to start by making clear that your current position is director of the Department of Finance Administration for the state of Arkansas, and that's important on the front end . . .

RW: Sure.

BW: . . . because of several references to others in that department when we get to talk. [00:01:47] But I wanna start—you have one of the most incredible life stories of anybody I have ever known, and I want you to talk about where you were born, who your parents were, and what kind of childhood you had.

RW: Oh my, Betsey.

BW: Yes! [*RW laughs*]

RW: I was born in colonial Africa in the Belgian Congo right towards the end of the Second World War, when that was, indeed, darkest Africa. There was virtually no communications with anything. Transportation was tenuous at best. My parents were extraordinarily poor, as most missionaries were, particularly the ones that were supported with individual churches rather than whole denominations. But we lived out there for the—my folks were out there for forty years. I was out there essentially until I finished high school. And it was so different that it's really been hard—it's really hard to talk about because I think that people

are never gonna get it. [00:02:56] I just did an interview like this with my grandson over the phone. You know, he was asking from this day and age, looking in encyclopedias and Googling and all that kind of stuff. Yeah, they don't look at encyclopedias [*laughs*] anymore. But you know, asking about things that happened in 1960 when the Congo got its independence and wanted me to react a whole lot of things, and I said, "Gage." I said, "I lived at one end of the country several thousand miles from the capitol. We had no electricity. We had no communications, really. We didn't have a clue what was goin' on. And the poor Africans had even less of a clue [*laughs*] what was going on." But we were way out in the bush for our home life. Now the way that school was organized, it was a mission—it was our mission's boarding school. We would go to school for three months, come home for a month, three, and home one, like that, year round. And so when I was six years old, my mom [*laughs*] sent me off.

[00:03:56] BW: Where did you go off to for three months?

RW: It was up in the mountains of the Belgian Congo, which was like a day's journey but for—missionaries and no money and very little gas or anything like that—you essentially did not see anybody other than your schoolmates for three months. In

re . . .

BW: What kind of a school was it?

RW: It was a missionary boarding school.

BW: And how many students were in it?

RW: There were fifty of us in grades one through ten in that first school. And it—very, very small, obviously. There were five people in [*laughs*] my class. And as there were most classes. And it was a pretty neat situation, really, because we were all just expats. I mean, we were pretty homeless folks. And you learned to be independent very rapidly. You know, when you're six years old and you're on your own pretty much, you have to do that. [00:04:50] And so going to school was fun because we had other kids to play with. We'd go home, and there were no other kids, no other American kids, at all. We really never cozied up with any of the Belgian or Greek colonial or merchant folks. But parents would make a big effort to go on safaris and see their out churches and do all that kind of stuff. And of course, we always hunted. We had to hunt just to eat. It was—there were no—there was no electricity, there was no refrigeration, there was really nothing to go—place to go buy groceries [*laughs*] or anything like that, so it was a combination of killing your own game and what you could raise or what the

Africans could raise, and all of it was very tropical, very hot land stuff. So.

[00:05:38] BW: What kind of game did you eat?

RW: We had a lot of buffalo, Cape buffalo. A lot of very small—well, they named a car after it, the impalas, which are about a deer-size antelope. And then several other sizes up of those that would kind of equate to American elk.

[00:06:00] BW: And . . .

RW: And guinea fowl for our chickens, poultry. And warthogs for our pork. [*Laughs*] 'Cause you couldn't raise warthog—you couldn't raise any pork for sure.

[00:06:13] BW: What was your—or what were your parents' names?

RW: My dad was Norman William Weiss. My mom was Naomi Gilbert Vandewater, both from New York state. They met by, I guess, by fate at—Moody Bible Institute was where my parents went to school. And in the—in 1939 just as the war was really breaking out, they crossed the Atlantic with my oldest brother as a six-month-old child, and they went to a place where—I mean, my mom literally was carried in a *tipoi*, it was called. It's a sedan chair. You know, two Africans in front, two in the back. And my dad, I guess, walked beside her or whatever. They went up to their mission station, which was a long ways away, not knowing

any languages. It's just ama—it's an amazing story. [*Laughs*] You know.

BW: It is an amazing story. Now how many siblings to you have?

RW: Two older brothers who . . .

BW: And what are their names?

RW: David and Bruce. They both live in the northern Illinois area at this point.

[00:07:23] BW: And did you learn any other language?

RW: Oh, yes. I actually spoke Pazandi, which was our tribal language, simultaneously with or probably even before English because my folks were doing their church work or their school—you know, teaching school or doing that type of thing, and so they had Africans looking out for us, babysitting us or whatever you want to call it. And so you know, I spoke both of those languages simultaneously. And then I learned the trade language, which in the Congo was Lingala, and then later Swahili, which was the trade language in East Africa. And then French.

[00:08:02] BW: What kind of house did you have?

RW: The house that my daddy built. He learned how—you know, with his Bible-school background, he learned how to—[*laughs*] just through that, you know, I don't know how he did it, but he

learned how to make bricks. He learned how to make tile. I mean, make 'em from the clay, kiln them, fire 'em to where they could stand up, and actually built our house. The store—some of the store-bought things was the concrete for the floors and screen for the windows. We didn't have any glass windows 'cause we were in a very hot climate. But he built the house, then he built several more on the mission station. There were two other single ladies who lived on the mission station, which was pretty common with missionary folks back in those days. And you know, he—so he became a builder, a contractor, a car mechanic, a dentist. He would—had rudimentary [*laughs*] dental tools, and he'd work on you. And gave birth to lots of babies and did all kinds of things in the world that the [*laughs*] son of a dairyman from New York and a Bible-school student—was pretty astonishing.

[00:09:16] BW: When you were home for a month at a time, what kinds of things did you do as a kid?

RW: We [*laughs*]—I was the baby of the family, so we would play various games, you know, badminton or whatever, and my brothers would beat me and then humiliate me, so that was a routine thing we did. We did go out hunting. We did go to various out schools that my parents had, and so it made, like,

little safaris, and then just kinda hung around.

[00:09:47] BW: And when did you leave there? How old were you?

RW: I was eighteen years old. In 1960 was when the rebellion took place. I was a refugee and had to flee into Uganda with my—my folks were already there. And our mission had a boarding school for tenth and eleve—that had tenth and eleventh grade—or eleventh and twelfth grade, and so I finished up my high school there and then came . . .

BW: In Uganda.

RW: In Kenya, actually.

BW: Oh, in Kenya.

RW: Yeah, it was in Kenya. [00:10:18] They were in Uganda, then I went to Kenya where the boarding school was. And one of the neat things about that was going to school there from the Congo. We'd get on the old steam engines like the Orient Express kind of things, you know, with the private compartments and the heavy china and the, you know, linen napkins, you know, and here we were dirt-poor, rag-tag little [*laughs*] missionary kids, you know, doin' all that stuff, but it was pretty cool.

[00:10:47] BW: Well, when did you leave Africa and why?

RW: Left Africa in 1962 when I finished high school. There was no

future for me in Africa, obviously. I was never really prepared to come to the States, I didn't feel like and . . .

BW: Had you been to the States at all?

RW: Yeah, we had come to the States, like, every five years. And it was—I was always a stranger in a strange land. I had nothing in common with anybody. I felt like I was just a total, you know, somebody who had zoomed in from outer space. [*Laughs*] [*Crash*] And it was very hard. And when I came to the States, it took a good eight years before I ever really felt like I was a part of this country and part of these people. That was a tough transition.

[00:11:35] BW: I bet it was. Where did you come initially and when?

RW: I went to school in Texas.

BW: Where?

RW: Well, at a little place called La Tourneau Tech, which was a big name on the mission fields. Nobody in this world has even heard of it [*laughs*], I don't think. And I ran into a guy who was the English teacher, and he was a coach, and he kinda took me under his wing and said, "You know, you need to go to Baylor or"—he was from Baylor. He said, "You need to go someplace where you can get a little better education and all that." [00:12:06] And honestly, and I think it served me well, I didn't

really have any idea what I wanted to do. I was in a huge culture shock, and I thought, "Well, the best thing for me to do is get a liberal education, expand my mind, learn as much about everything as I can." And so I became a liberal education major. I got a degree in English and history. And again, I think it served me well because most of my life, particularly these days, is just spent talking [*laughs*] and getting in front of people and dealing with—dealing—explaining things, explaining how things work and all that kind of stuff. So I think that was—that served me pretty well considering, you know, what I had goin' at the time.

[00:12:52] BW: So you got a degree from Baylor University.

RW: Yes.

BW: And then what?

RW: And then I was still very religious. That was four years later. I told you it took eight years for me to ever get acculturated. That was in the mid- to late-[19]60s. I got a—you develop groups of friends, and I had this group of guys I got to be friends with. And one of them on graduation came to—went to Fayetteville to go to graduate school in drama or something. And just raved about how beautiful the Ozarks were, how cheap the land was and how—what a wonderful place it was to live.

And this was in the [19]60s in the time of people moving back to the country and all that stuff. Well, this group of friends and I did that. We bought some land up outside of Devil's Den State Park in the valley there. And you know, just immediately fell apart when the guys realized that, you know, when you got there you just really have to do a whole lot of hard work and, you know, and you don't just sit around smoking dope or whatever, which I didn't do. [00:14:04] But to me, that was the closest thing back to Africa that there was. I could work with my hands. I knew how to make things. I knew how to do things. I knew how to build roads, you know, and all that stuff 'cause that's what we had to do in Africa to survive. And so I was pretty happy with the whole situation. But everybody else pretty well dropped out, and it kinda became a bad issue. So in the meanwhile, I had to drive through Devil's Den State Park to get up to this property. [00:14:34] Well, the folks there were just beginning the—under Bumpers they had just gotten some money and were starting to really make improvements on the parks. And so they saw this guy with a strong back and awillingness to work, and they said, "Well, let's—he'd make a good worker up here." And so they came and asked me to do that. And for a dollar forty-seven an hour. But they sweetened

it by saying, "Well, you can live in one of the cabins, and you'll—we'll give your wife a job for a dollar an hour." And so [*laughs*] anyhow, that was where I started with state government.

[00:15:08] BW: Now when did you get married?

RW: I had gotten married in, gosh, [19]67 or [19]68, I guess. Right before we moved to Arkansas. Well, a year before. And . . .

BW: And your wife's name?

RW: Her name was Cathryn.

BW: Cathryn.

RW: No longer my wife. That was my wife at the time. And we had a son named Charles who is actually here and has just produced me a grandson.

BW: Oh. And what is your grandson's name?

RW: Grandson's name is Beaux, *B-E-A-U-X*, Fisher Weiss. And he's—it's pretty exciting.

BW: [*Laughs*] Yeah, indeed.

RW: We have four grandkids now but—and he's the baby. He's the youngest of all of 'em.

[00:15:52] BW: So you have—you got this job at . . .

RW: At Devil's Den.

BW: . . . Devil's Den. And how long did you do that?

RW: Well, the parks director at the time was a guy that Win

Rockefeller had brought in name—by the name of Buddy Searles, who was a real gung-ho, young, trained guy all about parks outta Texas and was really building—trying to build the park system that had just fallen into bad disrepair. And anyway, he would come around, and I would see other folks from the Little Rock office, and he finally says, "You know, that guy has maybe a little bit more to offer than just fixing sewer lines and such at Devil's Den," so he asked me to go to Village Creek State Park and buy the land there. The legislature had just passed, you know, had passed the enabling legislation and an appropriation bill to go over there and buy land from seventy different owners in the Forrest City and Wynne area. [00:16:58] And that's when I [*laughs*] finally got accultured, I think, to this country because I went over there, and it was a really big deal to the local residents there. And so they all were asking me to get on the rubber-chicken circuit to all the little clubs and everything in the Wynne and Forrest City and all of those areas. And so I was kinda forced into just being in front of people and talking and talking about this park that we were gonna build. And I could get excited about that 'cause it was a pretty neat project. Still is. [00:17:32] And anyway, I was there for two years and bought all the land without having to condemn a

single bit of it, but the threat of condemnation was always there. And then the same guy, Buddy Searles, asked me to come to Little Rock and take care of the business affairs of the park system for him. [*Laughs*] So I, you know, I said, "Well, sure, you know, I could do that. And—or I could try that." I mean, it was all, you know, I mean all of this stuff was a brave new world for me. [*Laughs*] I still felt, and I still do at times, felt like a kid from Africa [*laughter*], you know. But my gosh, I don't know about this stuff. But anyhow, that's how I got to Little Rock and I . . .

[00:18:12] BW: And you worked for the Parks Department until when?

RW: I worked there until 1984. And Walmsley . . .

BW: Janis Walmsley.

RW: Janis. Resigned that . . .

BW: Janis Sneed Walmsley.

RW: Yeah, Janis Sneed—just takes me a while to remember some of these names. [*Laughs*] She had just resigned or left or whatever. And they—Mahlon had advertised for another head of the budget office. Well, I was—I had pretty long since kind of mastered what I was doing at parks. I was do—I was the head of administration over there. And my current wife, Jan, was

reading the paper Saturday morning. She said, "Well, look at that. Walmsley has left. Why don't you apply for that?" And I said, "I—you know, I will." So I did, and very fortunately, interviewed with Joe Stewart and Mahlon. And they went to you, I'm sure, and said, "Here's the guy [*laughs*] we wanna hire," and somehow or other you let me get hired.

[00:19:17] BW: Oh.

RW: So that was in [19]84.

BW: And Bill Clinton had come—in his comeback term . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . for almost a year when you came on, I think.

RW: Yeah.

BW: I don't think it was quite a year.

RW: I don't think it had been, either.

BW: 'Cause it was—I can't remember exactly in [19]84, whether it was early or late, but . . .

RW: It w . . .

BW: . . . it wasn't late [19]84.

RW: No, it was March that I went over to Budget.

[00:19:43] BW: When did you first encounter Bill Clinton?

RW: In bu—after I went to work at the Budget Office. It was my first, really, my first meeting with him, and I was terrified. I mean, I

was a kid from Africa, remember? [*Laughs*] I'd never dealt with governors and people like that. I didn't really know what to do, how to do it. I went over there with Mahlon and Joe Stewart and, you know, Mahlon, of course, was so gracious. Such a wonderful man. And you know, so he kinda was my buffer, I think, at first, just going over there and just kind of starting to get in the drill of things. And you know, he, Bill Clinton, had so many things going. It was just sparks flyin' out of him all the time in my opin—you know, the way I saw it. And it was just, you know, he was just constantly challenging, pushing the envelope on what we do with all kinds of things. More than any governor, he utilized special sessions. Let's get people in here, let's get this—force this issue, force that issue, what have you. And in these special sessions, there was always money involved, so I always dealt with him in those things.

[00:20:59] BW: Do you remember that first meeting how it went with him?

RW: No, I do not. I really don't.

BW: I just—I wanna clarify. Mahlon Martin was director of Finance Administration . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . and Joe Stewart was . . .

RW: Was the deputy.

BW: . . . deputy director and had been a . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . long-time employee . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . over there.

RW: Yeah, he was . . .

BW: Mahlon had been appointed by

RW: By . . .

BW: . . . Governor Clinton when he . . .

RW: . . . by Governor Clinton.

BW: . . . came back in in [19]83.

RW: Exactly.

[00:21:24] BW: Talk to me about what Governor Clinton was like in preparing budgets with agencies.

RW: He had, I think, before I got the budget, he had really established a whole framework, he and the folks that worked with him, on how to use the budget office and DFA, to prepare documents, to structure the whole agency program thing where he could then come and sit down and go through agency programs and say, you know, "This is the one I wanna do. That's not the one I wanna do or—and how can we do it

differently?" and what have you. He was incredibly—I mean, he just incredibly detailed—knew the details of just down to about every little tiny agency. And he was very hands on, particularly those first couple of years. So Sam would come over, and Sam did a wonderful job tutoring me in all these things. And it was just super structured. I remember finishing up those thing—when Clinton didn't personally attend. I would sit there and drone for hours in the evening on a little whatever you call that anymore, Betsey. We don't use those things anymore. But having the notes typed up later. [00:22:55] And but what struck me about him was just the amount of detail he knew and how daunting it was to me to sit there and tell him what we were doing and why we were doing it, figuring he was fifteen steps ahead of me the whole time. I felt [*laughs*] very out of my water a lot, very out of my depth a lot of times with that.

[00:23:18] BW: Well . . .

RW: A Dictaphone. That was the name of the instrument I was talk—thinking about, talking on, a Dictaphone. All hours of the night.

BW: Oh goodness.

RW: Yes.

BW: Yes, indeed.

RW: See why—you can see why I've forgotten that.

BW: Well, and it—course you got there when we were trying to switch everybody onto computers and onto email . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . and voice mail and all of these—it was . . .

RW: Oh, the very . . .

BW: . . . primitive days . . .

RW: . . . beginning.

BW: . . . technology.

RW: The very beginning of the whole technological thing. [00:23:43] And my best memory [*laughs*] of all of that, Betsey, involves you. Pledger and I both decided we were gonna go on vacation after the session. We were both just totally worn out. I have no idea what session it was. But it had to have been after he came over as director. And we both went off without any way for you to contact us. [*Laughter*] "You will never go without cell phones again anywhere!" [*Laughter*] "You'll never be apart from that." I remember that very vividly. Yeah, that got us all to cell phones.

BW: Yes, indeed. [*RW laughs*] [00:24:17] And but I can assure you that the only reason I was upset about it was because it was someone else over my head upset . . .

RW: I don't—oh . . .

BW: . . . because I couldn't find you.

RW: . . . I understand that.

[00:24:26] BW: Well, and when you said Pledger, we're talking about Jim Pledger, and we'll talk about him some more.

RW: Yeah.

BW: And he succeeded Mahlon as director of Department of Finance Administration.

RW: In [19]89 Mahlon retired and Joe Stuart retired. And I remember the governor calling me, or president, calling me into the office and saying, you know, "This is what I want to do with you. I wish I could do more." I mean, he was super gracious and super nice, and I was just amazed by it, but he said, "I want you to be a deputy director over there, and I'm puttin' Jim in as the revenue commi"—or he was the revenue commissioner. "I'm puttin' him as the director." And that was, you know, those two guys, Mahlon and Jim, were some of the best mentors a person could ever ask for. And you and Sam were some of the best trainers a person could ask for along with the governor. You know, I learned so much about so many things through those years.

[00:25:31] BW: Well, I'm going to want to talk about those guys some more . . .

RW: Yeah, I'm sorry, I'm jumpin'.

BW: . . . in a minute. No, it's fine.

RW: I'm jumpin' ahead here.

[00:25:39] BW: Talk about what Clinton was like working the legislative session and working the budget through the legislative session. And I want you, in talking about it, to refer to who were some of the powerhouses over budget du—in both the senate and the house during that time.

RW: Well, one of the things, obviously, I did was—and I've always done has been a go-between between a whole lot of legislators and the administration, particularly the governor. But I remember very shortly after I first came in as the head of budget, I was summoned over to a little—used to have been the safe [*laughs*] and was now the lieutenant governor's office. And Max Howell and Knox Nelson and Joe Yates and Nick . . .

BW: Nick Wilson.

RW: . . . Nick Wilson and probably John Miller were all in there. And you know, again, I was green in the upper reaches of how things go and all that stuff, and I was by myself. I didn't have Mahlon to shield me or Joe Stuart to shield me. They just—they wanted me over there. And they started grilling me on all of the tax issues that the governor might be bringing up and the revenue

things and where he was wanting to put money and all that kind of stuff. That was a—that was kind of a baptism by fire into all that, into the whole mess that I then came into because I just—just for your posterity or [*laughs*] whatever, you know, as the head or—in DFA, particularly the top-level jobs there. You were really the person that's kind of there with legislative leaders and the governor. You know, you're the—that's the mix of people that really end up makin' the decisions, and of course, our part was to make sure it's all correctly done procedurally and on paper and every other place. But I got very much into that. We had a—some time later—I'm just wandering now . . .

BW: No, it's good.

RW: Correct me if you want.

BW: Oh, it's great.

[00:27:57] RW: Some time at the end of that first session, I think, we had, Sam and I—and of course Sam was working with the governor, and I was in a lot of those meetings, too. But we had written the administration's Revenue Stabilization Law.

BW: I want you to explain what that is.

RW: Okay.

BW: But you can finish the story first.

RW: Let me finish the story. And it—we got out, and the governor

had a meeting of leadership out at the Mansion. And I'd been working with Sam on all this kind of stuff, and I expected Sam just to carry it and explain it. Sam turned around and said, "Well, Weiss, why don't you explain [*laughs*] Stabilization Law, what we're doin', to 'em." And that, you know, was a real shocker, but again that was something that gave me that push to really get out in front of things. [00:28:48] But that was first—kind of first remembrances of just the big issues that I all of a sudden kinda got thrown into. With the governor, I was constantly, as the session progressed—I mean we had meetings every—seven o'clock every morning, as you remem—I'm sure [*laughs*] you remember well. And then I had lots of one-on-ones with him at the end of the day on stuff that happened in budget or—particularly when we got to the point of signing bills and going through bills and all that kind of stuff. So it got to be very intensive working with him. To this day, I'm still amazed and daunted by—in dealing with him because, you know, the guy is so far ahead of anybody else in the universe, I think, in so many areas. Stabilization law—you wanna talk about that?

BW: He never stopped thinking of things to have you do, too.

RW: Oh, no.

BW: I think—I remember him saying, "Break this down by every

district. Break this down by every county."

RW: Yeah.

BW: "Run it through as if it were this way" . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . "and then let's compare it to how it would be if we compromised and went that way." I mean, he constantly was . . .

RW: Constantly.

BW: . . . wanting you to do thi . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: And you'd always did it. But I knew you weren't going home for much sleep every night, too.

RW: I didn't get much sleep. That—I mean, that was—that was an incredible learning experience. Absolutely incredible. I can't imagine, you know, I can't imagine my successor or anybody [*laughs*] else coming in and—without that kind of a background being able to organize your thoughts that way and to come up with those kinds of things. But Clinton was just—he wa—daunting is just as good a word as I have for it. He always challenged you. Always challenged you to do more, to come up with more.

[00:30:38] BW: And he never stopped thinking . . .

RW: Oh, no.

BW: . . . of more things to do.

RW: Oh, no.

BW: Was one thing that amazed all of us. It was like—[*RW sighs*] and no more staff. [*Laughs*] We're . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: And no more hours in . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . each day, and we're going to take this on, too.

RW: Yeah.

[00:30:54] BW: Okay, you mentioned Nick Wilson, Knox Nelson, Max Howell, and John Miller.

RW: And one other name. Senator Bell.

BW: Senator Clarence Bell.

RW: Clarence Bell.

BW: And . . .

RW: He was always in those things, you know. He headed up education more, but he was part of that whole structure.

BW: Well, and because education was so important to Clinton, they needed to make sure . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . they had that partnership with him also. But those were the

giants.

RW: They were.

BW: They were there for—by seniority, by position . . .

RW: Oh yeah and . . .

BW: . . . and in a way that nobody will ever see again.

[00:31:37] RW: Oh, no. It's just—you know, it is amazing. I forget—when I first started in budget doing all this stuff, I forget how many members were on the Budget Committee. I think it was, like, eleven or thirteen, maybe, max. May have been nine. And we met up in a little room off the house chambers, 305, I think. And I mean, it was just a little tiny room. And you made lots of decisions, went through lots of bills, passed stuff out. You know, now they have a committee of ninety, and they can't [*laughs*] hardly get anything done at this point, you know, it's a—just the change, the shift in how all of this is done is so amazing.

BW: Well, and term limits are the . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . major reason all of that has happened, that there will never be those power giants again.

RW: Well, there are—will never be statesmen again is what I'm afraid of.

BW: Yes, indeed.

RW: I mean, there were statesmen, and people didn't recognize that. These people did a whole lot besides just be concerned about their district. And it was just—it was a totally different set of dynamics.

[00:32:49] BW: When I think about the school funding formula [*RW laughs*], I almost gag . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . because I never knew what anybody was talking about when they were talking about it. And the truth of the matter is there weren't many legislators . . .

RW: No.

BW: . . . who did, either.

RW: No.

BW: Who were the handful who—of people who really knew what school funding formula meant?

RW: Ed Thicksten and Jodie Mahony were very, very much burrowed up into it. And created a whole lot of the wormholes themselves [*laughs*], I think. Clarence Bell, of course, as the senate man. But I never really dealt with Clarence on the intricacies of that. That was always a Jodie and Thicksten and Nick got real involved in things when they concerned areas of his interest.

BW: And John Miller.

RW: And John Miller, of course. Yeah.

BW: That's—those—that's the handful of people who . . .

RW: That's—yeah.

BW: . . . totally knew it . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . in and out.

RW: And Bill Clinton.

BW: And Bill Clinton did.

RW: And Sam Bratton.

BW: And—yep. It was amazing.

RW: I mean—oh, yeah.

BW: And of course, you know it now but . . .

RW: Well, see, it's totally different now. I couldn't go back to that old formula to save my soul [*laughs*], I don't think. Hope I never do. They have . . .

BW: It was . . .

RW: They have this whole new system of adequacy now, which is very much simplified compared to what it was back then.

[00:34:12] BW: Okay, well let's talk about Revenue Stabilization Act.

RW: Okay.

BW: I think it's really important for history for you to define what that

was and what the process was and what the process was supposed to be.

RW: Well, the act itself gets all of general revenues, and you do just general revenues because that's the place where you have—where you can move money from one place to another without fail. I mean, there are no constraints on it. You know, all of the cash funds that are raised by college, universities, well, that's their money, or like parks or tour—special revenues like the gas taxes is the Highway Department's money. General revenues, though, are the things that had to be stabilized in the sense that you had to have categories that that money went into. It was the funding system for all of state government. And what was devised in the late [19]40s was a method of making of priorities of spending that and having a definite starting point and a definite ending point for each fiscal year. [00:35:21] And what it does is in the interim—I mean, it's kinda hard to talk about, but in the interim when there's no legislature there, the administration, the chief fiscal officer of the state, and the governor can decide just by watchin' cash flow every day what level to set the spending authority at, and then that falls within the stabilization formula of how much each entity gets, their proportional share of that amount. And if the revenues go up,

then the forecast can be adjusted accordingly. And you go—if you finance a higher level of the stabilization fund, if the economy goes to the dogs, you cut back. And it's all done proportionally on that schedule, that revenue stabilization schedule, that the legislature and the governor have set down and devised with that small group of people, essentially. And it's got to be a small group of people because it's so complicated.

[00:36:23] BW: And is it still done that way?

RW: Yes.

BW: And how does the—in so many ways, the real decisions about what government was gonna be able to do were made in the Revenue Stabilization Act.

RW: Yeah.

BW: So that if your program made it into the high priority, it was gonna get done.

RW: It was gonna get funded.

BW: If it was in a C priority, it probably was not . . .

RW: Absolutely.

BW: . . . ever gonna get done.

RW: Absolutely, and there was a lot of—back in the day, there were a lot of letting legislators pass an appropriation bill, actually get their name on it and pass it, and all of that. And everybody

knew, well, that's never gonna get a penny, you know, but they can go home and say, "Well, look what I did," and all that stuff. [*Laughs*] It's a—in—on many levels or many ways, it's a wonderful system. It has been what has kept this state one of the ones that has not gone belly up in the la—this last recession. We have, through a lot of hard work and a lot of working things around, we've managed to make a go of it. But it's—it has done the state so well that you can't say enough for it.

[00:37:40] BW: Well, let's go back to talking about the way Bill Clinton worked in getting legislation passed or stopped.

RW: He worked a whole lot of times out of anybody's sight, I think. There was lots of calls at midnight [*laughs*] from the Mansion to the legislators, and he'd come and tell us about it the next day, "Well, I talked to So-and-so, and he's agreed that he's gonna carry this or work it this way." He was wonderful about the way he brought—we always call it the war room—this was before the campaign war room, but this was the seven o'clock meetings—the way he brought staff into knowing the political things he was doing and how they were affecting programs and kind of the marching orders each day for everybody. He shared that with us. He was very hands on in that process. I don't wanna get in the position of comparing governors to [*laughs*] governors,

particularly, but he was more hands on by far in getting the whole staff together and getting them out, working those programs or working the legislature every morning and reading all the bills. Every governor has methods of doing that. I think Bill was much more hands on than anybody in doing that.

BW: And part of that was because he always had such an enormous agenda of things he wanted to get done himself.

RW: Incredible. Yeah, incredible agenda. [00:39:08] I member one time, Betsey, he—[*laughs*] these are things that stick in a bureaucrat's mind 'cause that—he wanted to do something, and the law, fiscal laws, just wouldn't allow doing it the way he wanted to do it. And he got up in the middle of this war meeting [*laughs*] at seven o'clock in the morning and just announced to the whole group there, "Well, dammit, I wanted to do so-and-so and so-and-so, and Weiss won't let me." [*Laughter*] Oh, and I thought, woo—oh—[*laughter*] it just scared me to death. And you know, and everybody kinda glowered at you. And I'm sure nobody else would remember that at all but it—man, it sure stung on me. [*Laughs*] "I wanna do so-and-so, but Weiss won't let me."

BW: Yeah, "Weiss won't let me break the law."

RW: Yeah. [*Laughter*] Exactly.

BW: And that was your job.

RW: Exactly.

BW: Well, we did view you as a member of the staff . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . I remember, almost from the beginning. It was . . .

RW: You did, yes.

BW: You just had an office elsewhere, but you had to be in our office just as much as there. And not just in legislative sessions. [00:40:10] Well, I always felt like Bill Clinton, during legislative sessions, really wanted to be a legislative liaison . . .

RW: Yes, he did.

BW: . . . instead of the governor because we couldn't keep him in the office.

RW: Well, I know. He loved to wander to committees. He loved to wander through chambers when they were in session. But he was—I mean, he was just constantly working stuff, you know.

BW: And he knew—he could talk every little detail . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . of the impact on their county and what was goin' on.

RW: Exactly.

BW: And he knew more than most of the legislators . . .

RW: Egg—oh, more than all of 'em . . .

BW: . . . about the dollar impact . . .

RW: I think [*laughs*] more than all of 'em about that. It—he was just—he was daunting, he was uncanny, he had such a huge capacity for detail and never forgot a damn thing, I don't think. [*Laughs*]

[00:40:57] BW: That's right. Well, we made an awful lot of various tax efforts . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . in various sessions, and I really want you to talk about any—what do you remember from any of those in particular? For instance . . .

RW: Okay.

BW: . . . do you remember when we really made an attempt to remove the exemptions on a whole bunch of things like services, beauty and barbershop and legal services, advertising. Do you remember that session?

RW: No, I really—and I—see, I didn't—when I was in the budget office—that's before I became deputy or before I became director, I didn't get on the tax side very much at all. I was in quite a few tax meetings, though, later on where he would personally come down there and watch and even, sometimes, go to the table and testify. [00:42:00] Yeah, which is—I don't

think anybody's done that since.

BW: Is that right?

RW: Yeah, maybe Beebe might have once or twice. And that puts them way out there. It puts them way out there for them to do that. But I know he did it. I remember him doin' it.

BW: Well, I know that when we were trying to raise taxes, we always had you preparing all kinds of . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . contingency—what the budgets would look like, where this would be . . .

RW: Wha—oh yeah.

BW: . . . impact and everything. So you were constantly . . .

RW: Constantly all the inputs and tha—the a—there was a—yeah, that's a huge—that's a—yeah, that's a huge amount of detail.

[00:42:42] BW: So do you remember the special session we did on ethics legislation?

RW: Yes. [*Laughs*] I do.

BW: Talk to me about what you remember on it.

RW: Oh, I remember Webb being real involved with it and . . .

BW: Webb Hubbell.

RW: Yeah. And by that time, I had developed lots of relationships with lots of legislators. I mean, just—you just—does that way.

BW: Do you member why we did that?

RW: Betsey, I—no, I don't. I did at the time. I know exactly why we did that, but I—but . . .

BW: I think it was because we found that the most powerful of the lobbyists and the most powerful of the senators were joining together . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . even to stop . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . legislation . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . that had nothing to do with their . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . own area.

RW: Yes.

BW: And that . . .

[00:43:32] RW: Huge unholy alliance.

BW: It—they were just stopping everything . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . for no good reason on their own interest. And we decided it was time for there to be some disclosure of their interests.

RW: Yeah.

BW: So—both from the legislators and the lobbyists.

RW: You have . . .

BW: That's my recollection.

RW: You have brought it back, and that's my recollection, too. I—[*laughs*] you've refreshed it. Yeah, there was lots of hard feelings amongst all the legislators who [*laughs*] enjoyed the beneficence of the lobbyist. But lots of hard feelings, lot of . . .

BW: Well, and . . .

RW: [Unclear words]

BW: . . . the aftermath of that especially becu—I was always amazed that they bel—first of all, they seemed it—maybe they didn't believe that we would take it to the people if they didn't . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . pass the ethics reform . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . act or that they weren't willing to go ahead and pass something that was less than what it was clear we would have to take to the people if they didn't. I never could understand why they didn't pass it. What was your reading on it?

[00:44:44] RW: Betsey, I—my reading is—on that and many other things is people develop a in-the-building mentality that is—has no real bearing on reality outside of the building. And they were

so powerful within that building. They had had their way with so many governors and just ran over them when they wanted to that they could do it. They could do it. They had the—they had lost perspective. I mean, those names who we've talked about, those guys had been there forever, and they were gods inside that building. And any new governor come along, well, they could just kinda jerk 'em around, pretty much.

BW: And a few of those were also deriving income from some of those lobbyists . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . and industries that they were supposedly legislating. I mean, there were some very obvious conflicts of interest going on.

RW: Yeah, more than a few, too. More than a few. [00:45:49] Gosh, that was just different times, wasn't it?

BW: Well, it—and it's important that people understand . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . that we didn't just by accident get to where are now.

RW: No, I—no, I'm so glad that you brought that up.

BW: It was tough. And I think . . .

RW: Bruce, how's my tie?

BW: . . . the rough feelings after we did succeed in getting it passed

by the people really almost killed us the next . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . legislative session . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . 'cause they were still so angry.

RW: Yes. Very much so.

BW: And wanting to stop everything. And then by 1990, Clinton began having unbelievably . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . successful sessions again . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . with the legislature.

RW: Absolutely.

BW: They got over it.

RW: They did, and you probably know far better than I what all happened in the interim.

[00:46:46] BW: Well, I want . . .

RW: I don't . . .

BW: I mean, obviously you had, at that point—I think that was in—we took it—we put it on the ballot for the fall of [19]88, that election. And you really had developed relationships with legislators . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . at that point, and so you were around . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . and hearing their debate. [00:47:06] And I think Nick Wilson bottled it up in the senate . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . pretty much. Do you member trying to talk to any of them about the votes?

RW: No, they just . . .

BW: It was after that.

RW: They just dumped on me wantin', you know, wantin' me to pass that up. They dumped on me all their [*laughs*] frustrations and anger about it all. Yeah, that was pretty amazing times. I can see why I've repressed that. [*Laughs*]

BW: Well.

RW: But yeah, that made a—such a huge difference.

[00:47:42] BW: I want you to talk a minute about each of mayl—meal—Mahlon Martin and Jim Pledger and describing them 'cause they've both died now . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . and we can't talk to them, and they were both extraordinary men, and I want you to talk about each of them . . .

RW: Okay.

BW: . . . 'cause you got to work with 'em.

RW: Yeah, I did. And it's kinda hard to talk about 'em still to this day. I was very close to both of 'em. Both of 'em just treated me like I was gold, you know. They were so good to me, so gracious to me. Mahlon, you know, just kind of, you know—getting to that level in government just was a big change for me, obviously, moving up through the ranks like I did. And you know, he did so much just kind of in guiding me on so many things of—in dealing with the governor, dealing with the legislature. You know, nothing—just making little, you know—we kinda need to tilt things this way or talk about it this way or do this, you know, and it's very hard to even talk about. But it—he was such a smooth, kind, cheerful personality. [00:49:14] One of the things I—right off the bat I recognize—you know, Mahlon would walk anywhere in any of our buildings over the legislature, and he always had a smile on his face and a happy word for everybody. And I thought, you know, I mean, that's bringin' it back to—I mean, he treats people like that, and they're gonna treat him the same way. And that was a, I guess, real eye opener for me just in the way he dealt with other people besides—I mean, 'cause he—Mahlon wasn't a state government

budget expert, you know. I mean, he knew a lot about finance of various levels, but budget stuff he—once he saw that I knew what I was doing, he pretty much let me do that and just kind of nudged around the edges. But he was such a great teacher on that. [00:50:04] And then Jim came along. Jim to—Pledger took Mahlon's place.

BW: And Jim had been the revenue commissioner . . .

RW: He had been the revenue . . .

BW: . . . within the department.

RW: After he had [*laughs*] left Yell County Treasurer's Office, which is something else. In my first recol—memories of Jim were the war-room meetings, again, when he was revenue commissioner. And he had set in there . . .

BW: Well we had had him come do—work a couple of sessions . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . before then . . .

RW: Well, be—even before then, yeah. And I think—that was some of the sessions, I guess, when I first got there before he had ever came. [00:50:37] Anyway, he sat there every morning with a cigar and a Coke, straight lining Coke. God, that [*laughs*]—what a man. Anybody that can deal with those things at six thirty and seven o'clock in the morning, you know. He

didn't always have—he didn't have it lit, he just had a cigar he was chewing on and that Coke. And it was—Jim was, you know, he came across s—initially like, you know, here's this guy from Yell County down here and kinda rough around the edges and a country boy and all that kind of stuff. That guy was the best politician and the best person at just understanding at the elemental of level politics on how to get along with people and how to do things. And that's what I learned from Jim more than anything was just dealing with folks. And this was a lot—after I'd made a whole lot of—you know, gotten very close with a lot of legislators, and then Jim coming along really, really helped that—so much on that. And he and I got to be just such a great team. [00:51:46] In fact, one of the pictures I have in there is of Jim and Geneva and Jan and I.

BW: Oh, that's wonderful.

RW: Yeah.

[00:51:56] BW: I want—Sam Bratton is still al—is still living, but because of strokes is not able to do an oral history interview, even though his mind is still . . .

RW: His . . .

BW: . . . as brilliant . . .

RW: He has got to be . . .

BW: . . . as ever.

RW: He's got to be so frustrated.

BW: Talk about Sam because he can't describe himself for us, so I want you to describe him.

RW: Well, Sam couldn't—wouldn't ever describe himself the same way I'd describe him anyway [*laughs*] but . . .

BW: That's right.

RW: Sam was incredibly brilliant. He would come as close to Bill Clinton as anybody I know just of the sheer brilliance, of the sheer retention and mastery of detail. Every morning in the war council things. He would've stayed up after we all left and whatever. And he read every bill that was introduced. And he'd sit there, and he'd talk about stuff and go through the fine points, and he and the governor would talk back and forth about things 'cause they both were the same way. And I mean, all of the nuances of detail, they both knew. And I'm sure that Bill Clinton relied on him hugely for that very thing because they kinda fit into each other and complimented each other so much. But Sam had an incredible mind, an incredible mastery of detail, and it just breaks my heart to think of him now trapped in the fantastic mind and not being able to articulate.

[00:53:28] BW: Well, you wouldn't—it seemed like at the end of

every day and certainly once bills began being passed and there were decisions about whether to sign them or veto them or . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . send them back or whatever, you were in on a number of those sessions . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . going through stacks of bills . . .

RW: Sure.

BW: . . . with Governor Clinton and Sam Bratton. And Sam, both as legal counsel and knowing what was going on . . .

RW: Right.

BW: . . . in budget, plus being an education expert . . .

RW: Right.

BW: . . . at all levels—so describe those meetings and how they worked.

RW: [*Laughs*] Well . . .

[00:54:00] BW: The volume was enormous.

RW: The volume was enormous. And what I tried to do was just stay out of the way a whole lot of the times because—I mean, Sam and the governor just were all over that. And he—and that was long before I put my finger and saying, you know, the politics was in—it was such and such a way or your politics were or any

of that kind of stuff. [00:54:25] Those guys were all over that and knew that. I would sit in there and supply details on budget, what had happened from the time we had made our first recommendations, what stuff legislators had put in there, what stuff we'd have to line-item veto. And have—and the reasons for that. So we—I was kind of just wrapping stuff up on the finance end, making sure the appropriation bills were all things that we all agreed to and pointing out where we didn't.

[00:54:54] BW: Now, I would think just watching the two of them—they almost could speak in code and know what the rest of the sentence was.

RW: You understand why I said I just stayed outta the way most of the time.

[00:55:04] BW: Do you remember when he unvetoed a bill . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . one time?

RW: Oh, I remember Sam called me up at midnight. "You won't believe [*laughs*] what he did! I talked, and I had him veto that." And the troopers called Sam, I guess, and said, well, they took him back down, and he [*laughs*] put a wire under the secretary of state's office door and pulled the bill out so he could unveto it. That's my recollection.

BW: And didn't tell Sam until . . .

RW: And . . .

BW: . . . after it was done.

RW: No. No, the trooper's the ones, I think, told Sam. I think that's the way I hear it 'cause he called me up just frothing.

BW: Well, and the governor was too afraid to tell Sam, so he asked the troopers to tell him they had done it. [*Laughs*] It was . . .

RW: That's right. Yeah. [*Laughter*] I can see that. [*BW laughs*] I can see it.

BW: It was—it is a moment of frozen horror that I will never get past. It was . . .

RW: Oh, I'll bet. I'll bet. I mean . . .

BW: None of us could believe it had happened.

RW: Sam and I had gotten to be very, very close through all that. I mean, we spent lots and lots of hours together. We thought on the same wavelength on a whole lot of things. And Sam was an incredible tutor on all things political as well. And to the point that he'd call me up at midnight [*laughs*] saying, you know, "That son of a bitch just did that." [*Laughter*] Yeah. [*Laughs*]

[00:56:25] BW: When—during legislative sessions, did you go to any of the after-hours activities?

RW: I did some, but I never could keep up with a lot of those guys. I

mean, the Bill Clarks and the Chris Burrows and Sam and, gosh, who else did we have? There was several other people that . . .

BW: Bobby Roberts but . . .

RW: Bobby Roberts.

BW: . . . he didn't do much of that . . .

RW: No.

BW: . . . nighttime stuff. Pledger did.

RW: More recent . . .

BW: Even when he was still . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: Even when he was director . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . of finance administration, he was . . .

RW: Yeah, he did.

BW: . . . still . . .

[00:56:57] RW: He did. He kept a lot of those relationships up. I got to where just less and less and less. I mean, now I never go to anything hardly.

BW: Well they don't have as many nighttime events anymore, do they?

RW: Well, they—yeah, they do.

BW: They do?

RW: They still have a lot. They still have—you're always gonna have lobbyists wanting to do stuff. But you know, I just . . .

[00:57:18] BW: Well, they had such ominous names, these places. Choo Choo Room.

RW: Yeah.

BW: Flaming Arrow. Poultry house. Chicken House, I mean . . .

RW: Yeah. It wa—I . . .

BW: Oh, the Electric Racetrack.

RW: Yeah. That was one of the biggies. And it was just all the different folks that were . . .

BW: It was—well that's—they're named for the lobbies that ran them . . .

RW: Exactly.

BW: . . . pretty much.

RW: Exactly.

BW: Yeah.

RW: Choo Choo Room was the railroad folks. Electric Racetrack [*laughs*] was the combination of racetracks and . . .

BW: AP&L.

RW: . . . AP&L. Sure. Sure. They'd have a country caucus where they'd have, oh, a bunch of legislators that represent the rural parts of the state, which of course is a lot of 'em.

BW: Really?

RW: Yeah. [00:58:00] But they still have a whole lot of those—you know, nursing homes still have big input, as you can imagine. A lot of the medical-related ones have big impact. And then it's—all the schools have their programs, too. So yeah, it's all—that kind of stuff all goes on now, but you know, I've just—each governor has folks that go to those.

[00:58:24] BW: You know, people used to say, well, Arkansas's just a one-party state, and I would say, "Yes, when it—you're talking about political parties." 'Cause we didn't have many Republican elected officials.

RW: Right.

BW: And I said, "But the parties in Arkansas are Little Rock and rural."

RW: Right.

BW: "They are conservative and liberal." And now you really do have on top of that . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . Democrat and Republican.

RW: Yeah.

BW: So it must be—is it different?

RW: Oh, it's tremendously different.

BW: Seems like it . . .

RW: And . . .

BW: . . . would be so much more difficult.

RW: And yeah, it's tremendously different because now you're actually, this last little session we had, you actually had, you know, parties really asserting themselves as "This is our plan and this is our plan."

[00:59:12] BW: There finally became enough . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . Republican legislators to be a bloc.

RW: And then you . . .

BW: And to keep each other together.

RW: That's right. And then just driven by everything going on in this country now, that's kinda whipped their flames into where they have to try and act like that even more. Much the detriment, I'm afraid, I think . . .

BW: I think so, too.

RW: . . . of our civil [*laughs*] discourse.

[00:59:38] BW: What was your relationship with the governor's staff, both with the liaisons during the legislative session and then . . .

BP: You know what, let's hold that question.

BW: Okay.

BP: I got about four minutes, and that's probably gonna be . . .

BW: Okay.

BP: . . . a bit more time.

BW: Okay.

RW: Okay.

BP: Remember that question, and . . .

RW: Okay.

BP: . . . we'll take a quick break. You need to . . .

BW: Change tape.

[Tape stopped]

[00:59:58] BW: Talk about ways that you worked with members of the governor's staff other than Sam Bratton.

RW: Well, it's like I do with everybody. I mean, you—each one of 'em, you figure out where they're comin' from, what they're doing, and what's of interest and—along with business you're doing. And of course, each one of them, all your program folks—I'm going blank, Betsey. Who dealt with all the human services? Oh, Rasco . . .

BW: Oh, Carol Rasco.

RW: Rasco. Yeah, lord, I dealt with Rasco a lot with the human services stuff, of course. And Rasco had a great wit, really funny, and we could get off on just Ray Scott or whoever

personalities we were dealing with [*laughs*] along with conducting business, but that's—that was pretty much the way I did with everybody. I just would try to talk on a personal level with them, and you formed relationships there, you know.

[01:01:01] BW: Well, we had the biggest budget issues with those that were working on education . . .

RW: Sure.

BW: . . . and health . . .

RW: Sure.

BW: . . . and human services, it seemed.

RW: Sure. Cabe, you know, Cabe was another one we dealt with. Of course . . .

BW: Gloria Cabe.

RW: Yeah. Gloria Cabe and—I'm sorry. We're doin' this not for your or my memory. I remember workin' with Joan Roberts a lot on stuff because she was always trying to figure out, okay, how's the news—how's this working for the [*laughs*] news of the day or what have you, so she always needed to have information and that.

[01:01:32] BW: And then Mike Gauldin after—who . . .

RW: Oh.

BW: . . . succeeded Joan?

RW: Mike Gauldin, yeah. Absolutely.

BW: A golden boy.

RW: He really was. I got to see him in DC when I was up there . . .

BW: Oh, did you?

RW: . . . one time. Yeah. Yeah.

[01:01:44] BW: How did you interact with the legislative liaisons during sessions?

RW: It was—it would just—again, that was situational. I got to be friends with all of 'em. We got to be good acquaintances and, you know, if they—most of 'em just—they rarely liaisoned with budget, joint budget committee or anything like that. That was pretty much my job.

BW: You were our legislative liaison . . .

RW: Yeah, I think . . .

BW: . . . on budget stuff.

RW: . . . I was.

BW: Yes.

RW: I think I was. Because you know, I dealt with 'em, and of course I dealt with the governor and Sam on all of that stuff. But they were dealing with programmatic type things in other areas. They would ask questions a lot of times on what budget was doing that might affect some certain thing. But . . .

BW: You were their reference librarian.

RW: Yeah. [*BW laughs*] For everybody.

BW: They came to you for everything they needed to know about the budget.

RW: Then—but that's kinda just because that's what you're dealing with, and it's very arcane and complex to folks that aren't used to dealing with that kind of stuff. And for whatever weird, bizarre reason in my makeup, that stuff all kind of all worked for my head [*laughs*] so . . .

[01:02:59] BW: Are there any other legislative sessions or special sessions that particularly stick out with stories or developments? They all ran together, didn't they?

RW: They all run together.

BW: We had so many.

RW: There were so many that they just—it was like just a continuous stream of stuff that we were doing. And . . .

BW: And then if we weren't in a session, we were in a campaign.

RW: Yeah.

BW: Up until the [19]86.

RW: Fortunately, that's where I got to rest a little bit. You didn't. [*Laughs*] But yeah. That was—he was just so energetic. Had so much to do.

BW: And never stopped thinking of more to do.

RW: And never stopped thinking of more to do.

BW: Even when people thought he was burning out . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . he was still thinking up new things to do.

RW: Yeah.

BW: He read to—he read . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . constantly.

RW: Yes.

BW: And he knew all of these ideas.

[01:03:51] RW: One of the things that I—I'll tell you something that I always enjoyed was his word for the day. Do you member that? He would . . .

BW: That's right.

RW: And so many times he'd had a new word, and we would [*laughs*] all talk about it, you know, within the context he had, and I had a word for him one time that he didn't know, and it just tickled the hell outta me. Excuse me. Tickled the . . .

BW: No, that's okay.

RW: . . . fool outta me. Was that—I said, "Governor, you know, you have been cozened by these people more than anybody I know."

Cozen means flattery, you're brought around to their way of thinking by flattery and whatever. 'Cause there was always legislator buttering him up on something, and I said, "You are so cozened," and all that. And he loved it. He didn't—'cause that was not a word that was familiar to him at the time.

BW: How do you spell cozen?

RW: *C-O-Z-E-N* I think is the spelling of it.

BW: That's a great word.

RW: It's an old English—remember I was an English [*laughs*] major so . . .

[01:04:48] BW: What did you—when we weren't in a legislative session, what did you do?

RW: Well, I had an office to run. [*Laughs*] Obviously you did that. You trained analysts. You—you're constantly—and course, my different jobs are kinda running together now, but I mean, we're constantly looking at revenues just on a daily basis. You're constantly figuring out what's going on, what needs to be trimmed, who needs to be told to quit spending money or what have you. So I mean, there's just a lot of minutiae you're dealing with.

BW: You had to monitor almost every . . .

RW: Oh.

BW: . . . agency of state government.

RW: Oh, you do. Yeah. Including those we didn't have any control over. You know, you had to figure out all those little institutions I—are ?bankrupt?, so. [*Laughs*]

[01:05:41] BW: And what happened when we were—had a revenue shortfall and really had to cut.

RW: We had to cut the budget and . . .

BW: What were those sessions like?

RW: They were not nice. They were not pretty. I remember the years that—the couple of years that we had to—and—y—it's not a person's fault. It's the economy rises and falls independently, and it's very hard—there's not really any good tools, still to this day there's not great tools saying when you're going into a recession or when you're coming out of it. Well, we had a couple of really tough years, down years. [01:06:19] And I remember one time going over with Mahlon and Jeff and breaking the news that we were gonna have to cut the budget once again, and the numbers just weren't looking good. And the governor was angry and just kind of lashed out at everybody. And of course, he did that to me later [*laughs*] on, but that was, I think, maybe the first time that I saw him really do that. And I just remember us were walking back over across the street to the DFA building

that—I mean, we were all just beat dogs at that time, and Mahlon was so upset. And again, he was so gracious, but it was . . .

BW: You were upset about the cut—about the shortfall, upset about the cuts, and then upset about . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . Governor being angry.

RW: Yeah.

BW: But he got over it quickly, didn't he?

RW: Oh yeah, he—oh yeah, it was amazing. I mean, he would throw [*laughs*] the biggest fit, and then he would just [*claps*] "Okay. We're gonna move on," you know.

[01:07:22] BW: So how much wiggle room was there in what got cut and how you announced it, and did you have assignments of who to call and . . .

RW: Ze—yeah, that—well, there was zero wiggle room because the budget stabilization schedule dictated how much it was gonna be cut. Then you had to go and work with each agency and figure out, okay, are we going to cut salaries, are we gonna cut maintenance and operation, you gonna cut travel, what are you gonna do? And then get it in the system so the system could kinda control all that. Again, a lot of manipulation or hands-on

working with each agency at their—on the budget thing.

[01:08:03] BW: Did you ever get assignments of legislators to call and explain what the latest forecast was and therefore we were gonna have to cut this or that pet project?

RW: I don't remember any. I remember . . .

BW: I know we made calls . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . but I don't know who made them.

RW: Yeah.

BW: I don't remember that.

RW: And it might've been Mahlon, or it might've been Jim. It wa—and I mean, in later years, of course, I'm the one that calls 'em, but back in those years, I'm not sure who would've done it. Sam may've done some of it. And maybe a bunch of it we just made an announcement and hit the paper and everybody kinda figure it out.

BW: Well, and there were things like the Department of Higher Education had to make the calls to the . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . individual colleges and universities, et cetera but . . .

RW: Yeah.

[01:08:53] BW: Then the governor did have some discretionary funds

that I'm not sure the current governor still has quite the same set up. And he would release monies for things, and he could choose what they were being . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . released for. Talk about that process . . .

RW: Well . . .

BW: . . . and then how it has changed.

RW: . . . that was—he actually had an emergence—a half-million-dollar emergency fund which was really totally at his discretion. And he could and would release those frequently. All the governors up until Mike Beebe have done that. Beebe [*laughs*] hasn't released anything, hardly, which is just amazing. 'Cause he saw the other side of it, I guess, from being in the senate for so many years. But Clinton would—I mean, he'd make full use of that, and then we'd come into a session or special session or whatever and replenish it and run with it again. But that was really the pot of discretionary money. [01:09:52] And back in his time, in Clinton's time, we always wrote a stabilization law that was almost open-ended 'cause he wanted to capture any money that came in. If the economy improved, he wanted to be able to capture that and send it through the stabilization process to the public schools. That was his—that was a passion for him

to try to get better financing. And so as a result, for many, many years, we really had very little general-improvements funds, or one-time money left over.

[01:10:22] BW: What is a general improvements fund?

RW: General improvements fund became very notorious in later years, but it was money left over at the close of a year 'cause with a stabilization law, you close out one year, you start the next year from zero, okay. So you're not—if you have a big year, you just don't build that into a base, an overall base, and then that's when a recession hits. All a sudden, you go belly up. So the strength of a stabilization law is really to keep that from happening. But under President Clinton or Governor Clinton—he had—and we didn't have nearly the money flying in those days, either. But he would write education components out in categories that likely would never be funded, but if the economy got real strong, money would continue flowing there, so there was never really a surplus built up, you know, when you shut the books at the end of the year. So that's what they—since his time all the succeeding governors have had a much closer, tighter budget in terms of not wanting money to keep flowing to the schools. And you have developed, then, a pretty good surplus at the end of the year. And that becomes the general

improvement fund.

[01:11:41] BW: Well, there was—also there was—I remember talking about the deaf school has got to have a new roof.

RW: Right.

BW: And we've just got to move that up on the priorities. Or if we don't get Representative So-and-so . . .

RW: Right.

BW: . . . the money for the new building at his state—of his fairground—now what was that money from?

RW: That was that construction money, the one-time money left over, but it was very, very limited is what I'm saying. It was very limited just because of the way we developed the stabilization, whether good or bad. I mean, there were a lot of problems in later years after the Clinton years over that whole thing of the general improvement fund and leftover monies and stuff. [01:12:30] But anyhow. Back then we—he had that, and he had discretion. He would, you know, he might've had $40 million to spend and had $130 million worth of options to spend it. And so that's where you had that negotiation with members or cabinet heads or what have you over the needs that he could address with that.

[01:12:57] BW: Were you ever impacted by racing passes?

RW: Yes. [*Laughs*] Yes. Oh, yes. Yeah. We—there were times when they were all in my office, as [*laughs*] a matter of fact. After—well, most of that was after Bill Clinton's administration. We had an administration with a man who had just come out of the ministry, and he didn't [*laughs*] wanna have his hands anywhere on 'em, and so they ended up coming to me or us 'cause under the law we're also kinda head of the racing organization. Yeah.

[01:13:40] BW: Racing commission is under the DF&A?

RW: Oh yeah, it's a pa . . .

BW: Is it still?

RW: Yeah, it's still a part of DF&A. And we actually made the distribution, Pledger and I did. And it drove us both crazy. We were real glad when the legislature moved to get that—take that—let the Hot Springs delegation do it, essentially, is where it goes now. Thank God.

BW: It was with—it was . . .

RW: It was a nightmare.

BW: The worst nightmare of . . .

RW: Yeah.

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

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . as far as I was concerned.

[01:14:07] RW: You got—I mean, 'cause you guys had to—you handled them all.

BW: I didn't want them. [*RW laughs*] We got, like, 10,000, which was n—about 350,000 less than what the requests from the general public were, and then you—in legislative sessions, which we had all the time . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . you had to have all these extras 'cause legislators would say, "I'm not . . .

RW: It was . . .

BW: . . . "gonna vote until you find me fifty more passes."

RW: It was the most liberating thing in my day to get rid of all that mess.

[01:14:38] BW: Well, I'm [*RW laughs*] making . . .

RW: I'd forgotten about that.

BW: I make you talk about it because thank God it's history, but . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . it's important for people to know. Legislators were willing to trade votes for . . .

RW: Absolutely.

BW: . . . for legislative pa—for racing passes.

RW: Which had a face value of two dollars.

BW: Well . . .

RW: I mean . . .

BW: . . . I think it was one dollar at first.

RW: Or one dollar. But I mean . . .

BW: And then it went up to two dollars.

RW: It was a—it was such a huge ado over nothing, really, other than just the politics of saying, "Oh, you know, I got these."

BW: Well, all things being [*RW laughs*] equal, if we hadn't had the political pressures for them, we would've given them the closest proximity to the track, whether it was at Southland or at Oaklawn, because those were the people who . . .

RW: Right.

BW: . . . were gonna go every day, and so it would add up to . . .

RW: Right.

BW: . . . an admission fee after a while. But all things were not equal, and people . . .

RW: No.

BW: . . . who were only gonna go to the track once or twice had to have their pass.

RW: And they would have a pass that they'd be showing their grandchildren out there.

[01:15:40] BW: So did you ever ride in the car anywhere with Bill Clinton on a trip?

RW: No. Never did.

BW: You didn't get drug along in between . . .

RW: Thank goodness, no.

BW: But you had enough . . .

RW: I'd heard [*laughs*] . . .

BW: . . . meetings.

RW: I'd heard all the horror stories. [*Laughter*] No, I didn't get drug on any of those trips.

[01:16:00] BW: You mentioned—well, I wanna talk to you about—was there a time at which it occurred to you that this man might be president of the country or even run for it? And when was that?

RW: I'm not really sure. I mean, as you know, Jim was real involved in all of that type of stuff. And he'd come, and he and I talked about it all the time. And first we were all just all [*blows raspberry*], you know. "That ain't gonna happen. That ain't gonna happen," you know. And I remember I had a national budget officers meeting in San Diego or something. And so I got—and this was right when he f—right after he announced, and I got Pledger to give me a bag full of buttons to take out

there. And at the same time, Cuomo's running, and I forget who all was running, but a bunch of the budget folks who represented those states, you know, they were all out there, and I was the only one that had buttons for my governor that was running. [*Laughs*] And so I handed 'em out to everybody, and I mean, to this day there's a bunch of those people still that say, "Can't believe you had those and gave 'em to us and [*laughs*] all of that stuff." It was kinda neat. But as far as I—I mean, it's just kinda built slowly, I think, in my consciousness that, you know, that this might could happen.

[01:17:32] BW: Well, you know, he thought about running in—for the [19]88 election. And were you surprised when he didn't?

RW: Yes. Yeah, 'cause that's—I mean kinda everybody kind of had gotten built up for that.

BW: And the national press had . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . started coming in.

RW: Yeah. Yeah.

[01:17:50] BW: And then he gave this nominating speech of Dukakis at the . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . convention of 1988.

RW: And everybody said, "He's wiped. He's gone," you know. [*Laughs*] That was it. Stay—stay he was . . .

BW: Did you watch him on Johnny Carson . . .

RW: Yeah, I did.

BW: . . . after that?

RW: I did.

BW: It was amazing . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . wasn't it?

RW: Yeah. I couldn't believe he had the guts to get up there and do it, you know. I mean, he . . .

BW: Yeah, he . . .

RW: He was . . .

BW: He saved it.

RW: Yeah.

BW: He saved it because of that.

RW: He saved it right there.

BW: Yeah. [01:18:18] What was your observation of the 1992 campaign? Again, I know we kept you busy because we constantly had to have questions answered.

RW: Yeah.

BW: Because of the way . . .

RW: Lots of war . . .

BW: . . . the national press was asking.

RW: Lots of war-room stuff. Absolutely. We all were crankin' all kinds of numbers and spreadsheets and going down there a lot. An—I mean, it was all a learning experience. It was all intense. And it was very intense, I mean, 'cause there was—you know, not only did I need all this information, I needed it right now [*laughs*], you know. And . . .

BW: And state government . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . had to go on.

RW: And state government had to go on. That was a tumultuous time. That really was.

[01:19:03] BW: What kind of interactions did you have with him after he was elected, after election day 1992?

RW: I remember we had a meeting. It—cabinet meeting, kind of. And it may have been before the election or after the ele—I think the f—we had one during the course of the campaign when he came, and he just said, "You cannot believe how brutal it is out there." Said, "Someday [*laughs*] I'll tell y'all about it." And never did. I know he had a really some amazing things happen. And the whole thing was just kind of like, "Is this really

happening? Somebody I know?" You know. [*Laughs*]

[01:19:46] BW: Well, he met with the cabinet and . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . staff before he—as he was resigning from there.

RW: I've got a picture on my wall of that very occurrence. I didn't bring it down here, but I've got a picture of that that he—I guess he did for everybody that was in that picture.

[01:20:03] BW: Did you have any ongoing relationship with him after he got to the White House?

RW: Very little. I went up there one time. And Nancy got me in. And had a picture taken with Nancy and . . .

BW: Nancy Hernreich.

RW: Hernreich. And Mike Gauldin and Jana Pruitt and Bill Clinton and I in the Oval Office. That's another one on my wall that's pretty cool.

BW: Very cool.

[01:20:29] RW: But I've, you know, I've seen him. When he'd come through, I'd see him and talk to him. He was here during the last regular session, maybe. And I was down just kind of in the walkway when you first walk into the Capitol from the tunnel. And there was this crowd of all these people, and he looked out over there, and he saw me, and he waved, and said, "Well,

nobody can say you can't keep a job, Weiss." [*Laughs*] But I mean, we have talked and just in brief snippets here and there. He and I both have—were given the opportunity to speak at Jim Pledger's funeral.

BW: Hmm. He has lost so many of the people who were . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . so close to him during those years, and who served him so well. We've lost too many of them.

RW: Yes, we have.

[01:21:27] BW: Well, I mean, you were one of his fair-haired boys. He, God, he adored you. The—he was very proud of you. And thought that the selection of you was unbelievably prescient in a lot of ways about what was coming and . . .

RW: That's so amazing. See, I'm so glad you said that because let me tell you, it was the most daunting—is another—best word I know, again—to get thrown into that situation. And just coming from that background and then being with this man that's so incredibly brilliant and sparks flying everywhere and driving you to do this, drive you to do that, and it was just crazy.

BW: Well, you had a great deal to do with his becoming president of this country. There's no argument with that.

RW: Well, thank you for that for sure.

[01:22:15] BW: I wanna talk about your children.

RW: Yes.

BW: And where they are and who they are and your grandchildren.

RW: [*Laughs*] Okay. After my first wife and—with whom I had the son, Charles, Jan and I got together. And I actually hired her for the Parks director secretary. But anyway, we got together. She had two children who were even younger than mine. I had the one. And we raised our three children as our children. And never had any between us. [01:22:50] Middle child is named Shelley Leonard. She is the girl—she's the only girl. And she gave me my first two grandchildren. [*Laughs*]

[01:23:00] BW: And what are their names?

RW: Gage, is the first one I talked about, and then Jessie is the little girl. Sweetheart.

BW: And where are they?

RW: They live in Jacksonville, Florida. They livin' down there. She went to work for Alltel. They moved her down there, and then moved him down there, too. They both work for Altel. And they were paid nicely, and they have a nice house very close to the beach and no income tax, and they're gonna stay there [*laughs*], you know, they can—they both just shot up in the ranks of corporate world and have done very, very well for themselves.

[01:23:44] Then I have my oldest son, Charles, who lives here in Little Rock. He is a different—marches to a different drummer many times, but he and our youngest son both married the same year. And they both waited about five years, and then both gave us grandchildren in the same year, last year. So I've got a little granddaughter who lives outside of DC to—born to our son, Kevin, he and Vanessa. And she is a Dominican lady. Moved out there—'cause he graduated from uni—UT and . . .

BW: From UT?

RW: University of Texas, I'm sorry.

BW: No kidding?

RW: Yeah. [*Laughs*] Sorry. As an engineer, and was hired by then Halliburton Brown and Root. [01:24:38] And he has—since that company changed so dramatically, he was employed up until recently by just Brown and Root, and now he's kinda struck out with a new group, still as an engineer. He got to travel all around the world doing upgrades to US embassies, defensive structures, and that whole bit. And he was in it for a year in the [*laughs*] Dominican Republic. That's where he met his wife.

[01:25:07] BW: So how often do you get to see these grandkids?

RW: Not nearly often enough.

BW: They grow very fast.

RW: Yeah, they do. We have tried—for the last five years we—Jan and I camp now. That's one thing we do. We have a very nice fifth-wheel camper, and we drive all over the place camping. And we take a trip to Florida every year, and we drive through a lot of the state parks and go to the beaches and stuff, and then end up for a week in St. Augustine, which is just south of Jacksonville, and camp there in the Atlantic Ocean. And so we see 'em at—we can see 'em at least that one time a year, and generally Shelly will fly them home with her for something during the summertime.

BW: That's wonderful 'cause you're making memories for those grandkids . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . as long as you keep that up.

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: Camping and beach and . . .

RW: Well, they're makin' memories for us.

BW: . . . travel. Yeah. [01:26:06] What—I had thought of something I was gonna ask you. It went right out of my head. Well. Can you think of anything else to tell me about these years?

RW: Oh, I'm tryin' to think. One of the things—one of the crazy

things when—oh, my, probably my first or second session. Clinton decided he was going to present to the convening of the general assembly a book of all his programs. Well, he kept puttin' programs and makin' programs, and you know, the equipment in those days was just awful. You had to go and try to make copies and do stuff and then put together a book. And I remember up until the last minute I was getting new pages of new things we had to put in there. And I remember him going up to the general assembly, starting, and about thirty minutes later I'm over there with these huge boxes of books to try to [*laughs*] deliver 'em on time. And it was the best I could do, you know. Because he kept changing things and adding and all that kind of stuff.

BW: I think there was only one session where we really had it all ready . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . beforehand, and that was in 1989 . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . when Nate Coulter had come onboard . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . to prepare the session.

RW: This was probably the [19]87, [19]85 session, I'm not sure

which one. But it was just awful.

[01:27:24] BW: We were always late getting our bills . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . to the legislature.

RW: Oh.

BW: Except that one time.

RW: Except that one—you're right. [*Laughs*] And I had—the burden was on me [*laughs*] to try to carry all those stupid things up there. I mean, just pages, and it just kinda just got all mushed up together.

BW: But he had a fabulous session . . .

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: . . . in 1990 . . .

RW: Yes.

BW: . . . after I had left, and again in [19]92 . . .

RW: He . . .

BW: . . . with that special session.

RW: He had the most amazing sessions after that ethics session. I think you probably had something to do with it. You were instrumental with getting . . .

[01:27:55] BW: Well, now, I wasn't there in [19]90 and [19]92.

RW: . . . getting Jay Bradford elected.

BW: Oh, yes.

RW: I think that made—that changed a lot of dynamics. There were a lot . . .

BW: It was a watershed moment for . . .

RW: There were a lot of ripples.

BW: . . . Arkansas.

RW: There were a lot of ripples through that whole legislature after that. That's why I say it—that's why I said it that way. [01:28:15] And people started seeing things differently, I think.

BW: Well, disclosure wasn't so bad.

RW: Yeah.

BW: Sunshine wasn't so bad.

RW: Yeah.

BW: And then it kept expanding . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . to where things are much better now . . .

RW: Oh, it's a . . .

BW: . . . in terms of self serving and dealing and the revolving door and . . .

RW: Either that or it's [*laughs*] gotten submerged better.

BW: Another way to submerge it.

RW: Some of—[*laughs*] a little bit of both.

[01:28:41] BW: Well, I'm—I remember was at some national conference, and I didn't do much traveling. I hardly ever left the office. But I had gone to some conference, and it must've been something where legislators were because a senior senator was checking into the hotel or checking out of the hotel at the same time I did. And at his elbow was a major lobbyist. And the lobbyist handed him the cash to pay the bill because he then submitted the bill when he got back. So the state paid him, and the lobbyist paid for the room. And that's when I felt like we had to have . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . disclosure laws.

[01:29:26] RW: And I wish I could say that that's taken care of it all, but I—it's taken—it's changed . . .

BW: A lot of it.

RW: . . . the dynamics have shifted dramatically.

BW: Well, certainly when Senator Wilson went down the way he went down, there was a red flag about any kinds of . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . self dealing . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . behavior after that.

RW: Well, I mean, Nick wasn't by himself. Nick was . . .

BW: No.

RW: I mean, there was Senator Todd and several others who—Mike Bearden from Osceola. There were a whole bunch of . . .

BW: Steve Bell was pretty much . . .

RW: Steve Bell.

BW: . . . cleared, wasn't he?

RW: Pretty much, but that . . .

BW: I can't remember.

RW: . . . that was pretty much the end of his . . .

BW: Career.

RW: . . . career, yeah.

[01:30:05] BW: What was it like—I mean this is a little different, but when Governor Tucker, who I still feel very bad that—what he suffered . . .

RW: Oh.

BW: . . . because Bill Clinton was under investigation.

RW: No kidding.

BW: And I think if Bill Clinton hadn't been elected president, Jim Guy Tucker would never have had that kind of experience . . .

RW: Yeah.

BW: . . . but then he never would've been the governor.

RW: Yeah.

BW: What was it like making the transition from Jim Guy Tucker to Mike Huckabee.

RW: Well, first of all, let me just say that I had a tough transition with Jim Guy, Jim Guy Tucker, because he came in—you know, Clinton had this relationship with the legislature. Jim Guy had been lieutenant governor and presided over the senate. And he came in with a roar, and things are gonna be different with relationship with the legislature than Clinton's relationship. And he had 'em all—pretty much the old guard of the senate that was left, he had 'em all sittin' up straight and toein' the line. I mean, he really backed them off a bunch. [01:31:18] But he took s—quite a while to get okay with me. It started out wh—I mean, he was real suspicious. You know, that's a Clinton guy. That's—and I'm not sure how much I can trust him and what have—and I know he talked to a bunch of legislative staff members and everything about me. But before then, if you will recall, Clinton let he and Neal Turner come over and sit with us when we were promulgating the budget, and they were writin' all their notes and doin' all this kinda stuff. And Jim Guy would go to Joint Budge Committee and sit behind me, and a couple of times he started makin' some comments, and I just jumped [*laughs*] in

his face, said, "No, I'm sayin' such and such [*unclear words*]. There's a reason. So let it drop." I mean, we had a rough—kind of a rough go, but he got okay with it, you know. And then Jim left, went to the state fair. And . . .

BW: Jim Pledger.

RW: Jim Pledger. And then Jim Guy appointed me director. I'd asked for it not thinking I'd ever get it, but I thought, you know, why not. So I did. [01:32:24] The transition to Mike Huckabee was completely different. He—Huckabee called me over there when it became apparent that he was gonna be governor. And Joe Yates was in there with him. Joe Yates was the Republican senator who had been [*laughs*] about the sole Republican for a long time in the state senate. And Yates was over there. And Huckabee said—it was very smooth the way he did it. He said, "Richard," he said, "I want you to work for me." And he said, "I don't want you to just work for me, I want you to be a part of my team over here." He says, "I trust you. I think you're reliable, and I want you do to that." Now, that was very gracious and made me feel very good. So I had a very smooth transition with him. [01:33:21] And Huck—I mean, he knew zilch about state government, and so he relied very heavily on me, to the point that I, I mean, I got really worn out because I

was kind of the only person that the Democratic legislators would talk to. And I mean, they didn't talk to each other at all. And it was a rough couple years.

[01:33:44] BW: Well, they changed a lot of the rules because of Huckabee, too.

RW: Oh yeah.

BW: The Democratic legislators.

RW: Oh yeah. Oh yeah.

BW: What—can you remember any specifics? [*RW sighs*] They changed the discretionary money, to begin with.

RW: Yeah, they took a lot away from him, and that was a time in which Jim Guy had written real tight budgets so we had a pretty substan—subsid—sizable surplus. And they didn't want Huckabee controlling that. And so they ended up, you know, making some arbitrary division, and which changed all the time. But I was, you know, I was in the middle of all that stuff fighting for the executive branch. I mean, I've always viewed my job, my role, to—you know, I'm the guy that's supposed to be takin' care of the executive branch [*laughs*] not the legislative branch, you know, and making sure things go well. And that was really tough because all of these guys by that point I had deep relationships with, you know, I'd been with them and been

through tons of sessions and budget hearings and stabilizations and all that for quite some time at that point. And I mean, it was like there was just—there was a huge amount of pressure.

[01:35:04] BW: Have you been back to Africa?

RW: Never have. I left . . .

BW: You have any interest in it?

RW: I left that—I said this in the meantime when we were talking, but you know, I had to evacuate from Belgian Congo after the rebellion and ended up going to school in Kenya for the last two years that I was there with other kids from our mission, but most of whom I hadn't known for a long time. A lot of the kids that I had gone to school with in the Congo were killed in the rebellion, so I'd lost a lot of friends and my whole country. I mean, everything I knew was destroyed or pretty much gone. I was a child of colonial Africa. This was a whole new world that was very fragile and lots of fissures and cracks, and still is, unfortunately. There are still millions of people who have died over the last not too many years in the Eastern Congo.

BW: Horrors. Horrors happening still.

RW: Horrible things happening. You know this guy with the Lord's Republican Army went up through that whole area that I lived and the tribe that I lived. [01:36:16] And to my pride I saw in

the *New York Times* one time that when he got up in that area with my tribe, they were the first ones that really took up arms and fought against him, you know. I mean, when I'm sayin' taking up arms.

BW: Keep him from taking their children.

RW: Yeah. Taking up arms. I mean, this is machetes and spears and things like that. They didn't have guns and all that.

[01:36:36] BW: You ever hear those languages again?

RW: No. But it's funny . . .

BW: Do you ever use your French?

RW: No. Not really. But it's funny. Here's a funny story. [*Laughs*] My next-door neighbor is about ten years younger than I am, but he is—he's an Indian and his—in the East Africa, in British East Africa, the Indians were the merchant class. His parents owned a bunch of stores and then got wealthy and owned farmland and everything in Kampala, Uganda. So he lives right next door to me. And so we speak Swahili together [*laughs*] sometimes. You know, we both had forgotten. I mean, gosh, it's been fifty years since I left out there. But we both will talk and you know—"*Jamba bwana abari jako*." I mean . . .

[01:37:19] BW: What do you—other than camping, what do you do for relaxation and fun when you're not working?

RW: We do a lot of camping. Almost every weekend we go out. I hunt during hunting seasons. That's kind of—I'm getting where that's just not quite as easy on my body [*laughs*] anymore.

BW: What kind of hunting did you like to do?

RW: Oh, duck, deer, turkey. Do a . . .

BW: Turkey.

RW: Yeah.

BW: Tur—wild turkey hunting is dangerous stuff.

RW: It is dangerous stuff, and it's the most challenging of all hunting. But I've got three [*claps*] hunts lined up already for this spring so . . .

BW: In Arkansas?

RW: Yes. Yeah, I just hunt in the state. I don't spend a lot of money and go out of state to do [*laughs*] that kind of stuff.

BW: You don't seek the elk up north . . .

RW: No.

BW: . . . or the—yeah.

[01:38:03] RW: No, see, we, I mean, we were raised on wild meat. We—you know, that's all that there was. And I used to have a really difficult time just going to boarding school where they would—could get some processed b—or you know, get beef or get whatever and pork and that kind of thing. Just didn't taste

right.

BW: [*Laughs*] But you've adapted.

RW: Oh, I've adapted.

BW: And thank God you have. Thanks for coming to Arkansas and thanks for . . .

RW: Well . . .

BW: . . . the service that you've given.

RW: And thank you for the faith you put in me.

BW: You were—you are somethin' special, Richard Weiss. Great. Thanks for doing this.

[End of interview 01:38:39]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]