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

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William Jefferson Clinton History Project

Carol Willis

Interviewed by Betsey Wright

February 21, 2012

Little Rock, Arkansas

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Objective

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

Transcript Methodology

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

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 18th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

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

Citation Information

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Betsey Wright interviewed Carol Willis on February 21, 2012, in Little Rock, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: This interview is being conducted by the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History in partnership with the Butler Center for Arkansas Studies. The interviewee is Carol Willis. 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. Carol, if you agree with this statement, please give your verbal consent now.

Carol Willis: I do.

KK: Thank you.

Betsey Wright: Okay, Carol, let's start at the beginning. When and where were you born?

CW: I was born in McGehee, Desha County, Bayou Mason, Arkansas.

BW: And whe—what—how many were in your family?

CW: Well, there are five other—I have five siblings and a mother and a father.

[00:00:56] BW: And what did your family do for do for income?

CW: Well, my father was a funeral director, a preacher, and a building contractor.

BW: Little bit of everything.

CW: Mm-hmm.

BW: And are all of your siblings still living?

CW: Yes, very much.

[00:01:12] BW: And what kinda childhood did you have?

CW: I think I had a good one. I think I had a excellent childhood, and I hope it reflects into what I am now.

BW: And you still have connections to McGehee.

CW: Yeah, I still have—I still run the family business, the funeral home.

BW: But you're not doing contracting.

CW: No, I'm not. [*BW laughs*] No, I'm not doing contracting. [*Laughter*]

[00:01:40] BW: And I don't—I wanna make sure to talk about your own family here in Little Rock. [*Airplane overhead*] Who are you married to and what . . .

CW: Well, I'm married to a young lady named Joyce Smith from

Marianna. I have one son, and I have two grandkids.

BW: So you maintain—you married Delta, and you're stayin' in the Delta.

CW: Yeah, well . . .

BW: In a lotta ways, yeah.

CW: Yeah.

[00:02:09] BW: When did you first get interested in government and politics?

CW: I've always been interested in government and politics, starting with the 1960 Democratic and Republican Convention. It was the first time that my father and my grandfather bought a black-and-white television, and I can remember the conventions being the only thing that would be on at three o'clock. You know, they varied the television productions, and I would watch the conventions. The Kennedy, whole Kennedy thing, the whole Kennedy/Nixon thing. And then my father bought us a set of *Standard* book encyclopedias. And in the summertime if you're in the country, there's nothin' much to do if you ain't gonna chop cotton, pick cotton, and we were in the construction business—or dig graves. You read. And my mother was a person that insisted that you read, and you had to come back in the afternoon if you read in the morning, and you had to tell her

somethin' about that you read in the *Standard* book encyclopedia.

[00:03:24] BW: And what kind of school did you go to?

CW: I went to a segregated Black school, Desha High School. I finished in 1966. And it was a school where you had great teachers. You know, we—you didn't have the books, you didn't have—well, obviously they didn't have computers. You didn't have all of that. But you had teachers that kept you engaged. Not only did they keep you engaged, they expected you to be exceptional. And we had a system that was a competition system between the high schools where there were county contests. There were county debates, there were county contests where you took exams, and they were standardized exams. And the schools competed with one another to see who would—what schools would be the best. I was also introduced in my seventh-grade year to a magazine called *READ Magazine* by my seventh-grade teacher. [00:04:32] The seventh-grade teacher also took us to Heber Springs. John Kennedy came to Heber Springs to dedicate a dam. Now the high school would not let us have the bus. But this teacher—there was a little school, a little Black school, in Dermott called Morris Booker Memorial College. We got on this little bus. Must've been

twenty of us, right. And we got to go to Heber Springs to s—John Kennedy was the first president—you know, Bill Clinton tells the story about how he met John Kennedy. We first saw John Kennedy in Heber Springs. And we were just a little speck of little black folks. And I've tried my—for the life of me looking through the photographs of that event tryin' to find us. I never have. But we were there. But we were there because of *READ Magazine* and this—and the foresightness of this seventh-grade teacher. Her name was Williams. Clotile Williams. And there was another teacher named Evangeline K. Brown who was a hard teacher. I mean, a tough teacher. But she understood that her students had a lot to give, and she insisted that you gave her your best. And in later years, we all came to the conclusion that these were the best two teachers that we ever had.

[00:06:03] BW: That's a great story. And then after you finished high school, what did you do for education?

CW: I went to Philander Smith College, then I went to the University of Arkansas law school. I went to Southern University law school.

BW: Okay. What did you study when you were at Philander Smith?

CW: Political science.

BW: And then what made you decide to go to law school?

CW: Well, I didn't wanna be a lawyer. I wanted to be a politician. And I understood even back then that in order for me to be a politician that most of the players in Arkansas were gonna be at the University of Arkansas law school. See I—initially I was admitted and went to a summer class at Howard University in DC, but the dean of the law school called me and asked me that I'd like to come back to Fayetteville. And I said—I jumped at that opportunity because I wasn't accepted at Fayetteville the first time around. I don't think I even applied. [00:07:01] But anyway, I met President Clinton there. Governor Beebe was in a class ahead of me. The mayor of North Little Rock, Patrick Henry Hays, and the list goes on and on. This is where I met the Arkansas players in politics today. My first campaign was, strangely enough, David Pryor's campaign for the fourth congressional district. That was the first political campaign that I ever participated in with Pryor and I believe it was Richard Arnold.

[00:07:38] BW: And what did you do in that campaign?

CW: Well, my daddy—back then the way to get the black vote out was you had to have a good, strong interaction with black leadership. The black preachers at that time were the leaders of the black community. And all these guys, all politicians, always

came by my daddy or my grand—started with my grandfather. Then they'd come see my daddy. My grandfather let 'em go see my daddy [*laughs*], and that's the way it worked. And I just start interacting with these guys, Pryor, all—Merle Peterson, who was a senator. He was one of the first guys that I worked for at a political campaign, and he became a friend of ours over the years as well as a friend of President Clinton over the years. So that's how we got involved in politics on a practical level. And that is also how we began to understand that politics is about people, and it's about doing good for people and about helpin' people who cannot help themselves. [00:08:46] You know, early on in my life, I just thought people that were downtrodden were people—were black people. And right next to me, you know—President Clinton likes to tell the story about how his grandfather helped black folks when he had a store. I used to tell him the story. I said, "I can tell that story, too, 'cause my grandfather and my uncles and my grandmothers and them, we used to feed plenty of downtrodden white folks that lived down the road from us." All of my neighbors early on were poor white folks. So I always had that kind of interaction with people. And I always had an appreciation for diversity among people. And strangely enough, a lot of those people that were poor and

downtrodden? Now they rich. [*Laughs*] And upright. [*Laughter*]

[00:09:37] BW: Ah, well, some things have a happy ending. Okay, so you met Bill Clinton when he was teaching at the law school. Were you in one of his classes?

CW: I was in the class—I was what they call auditing the class. And this guy was runnin' for congress. So a friend of ou—mine is a guy named George Van Hook, who's a judge down at El Dorado now. We decided we gonna go down to the campaign headquarters and volunteer. So when we got there, we said, "Look, we wanna volunteer." Some guy—and I wish I could remember his name. I can't remember. He came out with a water hose, and said, "Look, what you guys can do is water the rocks." And we were outside waterin' the rocks. Bill and Hillary Clinton drove up. It was a house—I mean, I can't remember the name of the street, but it was a house, and the rocks were grey, and it was dusty. And I said, "Man, I [*laughs*] don't think we gonna water these rocks. Let's go in here and see if we can't get involved in this process in a different way." So we went in. Clinton was holdin' court, as he usually does. [00:10:54] But I noticed that in that process that the person—Clinton was doin' the chalk—was doin' the talkin', but the person in charge was

Hillary. And I figured that out early on, that this would be the person that drives this campaign, because she had some guy, I don't remember who he was, some guy over in the corner sayin', "Look here, this is what we need to do." But eventually I went to Clinton and said, "Look, I wanna help you in this campaign, but I ain't gonna water rocks." I said, "In this district, ain't a whole lotta black folks, but they're all down in Fort Smith." And on the weekend, we'd go down to Fort Smith, talk to people back and forth to—at Fort Smith. So that's kinda how we started with Clinton. And then later on helped him in the attorney general's race. [00:11:46] And an interesting story about that is that in 1976, he was runnin' for attorney general, and I was runnin' for Desha County judge. And he was in Dumas. And somebody that was with him called, and I went to Dumas. And we were havin' this conversation about the election, et cetera, et cetera. I said, "Now, Bill," I said, "I will be able to get you a lot more votes for you than I will for myself from the black community." And he said, "I don't understand that." I said, "People are afraid to vote in this community, in this county. They're gonna be afraid to vote for a black candidate because they are afraid of reprisals." So I reminded him of that later in life somewhere. And you know, you—as all of us know, Clinton does a box-by-

box analysis, and he came back, and he said, "You know, you were right." And he did better in the black boxes than I did.

[00:12:47] BW: Okay. I wanna go back to the watering rocks. Is that literally what the guy said? He didn't say "We need to wash the litter off" or something?

CW: Hm-mm.

BW: He just wanted the dust off the rocks?

CW: He gave us a water hose and said, "You guys wet the parkin' lot down."

BW: What do you think he had in mind? Was this a white man?

CW: Yeah, this was a whi—I think what he had in mind was that these are two black guys, and we gotta do something with 'em. And I wish I [*laughs*] could remember who he was because I'd like to find him now. I think that they were not expectin' us to show up, and they had to do something with us. And I learned from that, too, now. I learned a valuable lesson from that, that in a campaign, doesn't matter what you do. You do what you have to do if it makes a difference. Now I didn't—I took offense to it then, but now I tell young guys or young women, now, to be a part of the process, you do what you have to do, that you can go from waterin' rocks—and every time that I think about watering rocks. Every time that I used to walk into the White

House, I'd think about the time that I watered rocks. [00:13:58] Or better yet, when I used to walk into the Capitol. Every morning when I used to walk into the state Capitol, I used to look up at that dome. And I'd look up at that dome, and I said, "This is the place where Orval Faubus used to keep us out of." I don't ever wanna forget that because—that we are here now that we have arrived because we're still waterin' rocks to a large degree. But you do—in a campaign anybody that's anyb—ever been involved in a campaign, there are times when you go get the sandwiches, there are times when you drive the lady to whatever they need to do, you do whatever it is that you do to get the votes, to turn people around, and to get—engage them. Because it's a process of engagement. Everybody has to feel that they are needed, you know. Some guys feel like they're needed to water rocks. You know, we were just too arrogant to think—you know, we're smart guys, we think we too smart and too arrogant to do that. But I've seen top-of-the-line people go get coffee for people that [*laughs*] they didn't even wanna go get coffee for. But—and I learned all of that from the waterin' rocks process.

[00:15:09] BW: All right. Let's go back to law school. What was law school like?

CW: It was tough. It was—when you go to law school, you think you're a pretty smart guy. If you get in, you think you're a pretty smart guy. But when we got—when I got there, in my class there were three of us. And I think there were three others there when we got there. So we thought that we were pretty smart guys. But the first semester, my first semester, I got three Ds and two Fs. And I'm sayin', "Nope. This can't be right." [*Laughs*] You know, you just—you can't convince me that I'm that dumb. Plus, we all understood that you got to study, you got to do this. And we were back and forth, and we were back and forth. And we saw guys that were drinkin' beer all night that were Joe Blow's son or Jack Smith's son, and we were bustin' our rear ends, and we were gettin' killed. So you had to make a decision then whether you gonna let these guys beat you down or whether you gonna raise up, you know. [00:16:18] The—one of the—somebody asked me—say, "Why do you support a guy like Mike Beebe, for instance?" Well, Mike Beebe—one day in the hall of the law library, I was comin' down the stairs, and Mike Beebe was goin'—Beebe was goin' up the stairs. And he said, "How you doin', Carol Willis?" Now, you say that's somethin' simple. But the way were treated, we didn't even know these guys knew that we were there, let alone know

our name. So for a guy to reach out like that, it was something different. And then when you get a guy like Bill Clinton who engages with you, you know, and tell you—and the smart guy. We didn't know a whole lot about him then, but he would engage you, right, and he would—he didn't mind bein' seen with you. He didn't mind givin' instructions or givin' advice. So it was a natural thing. And he usurped in the black community. There was another guy named Jim Guy Tucker. Jim Guy Tucker was young, vivacious, good guy. He was the guy that most black folks were rallyin' around. But within a period of a year and a half, Clinton took him out [*laughs*] with black folk because he started with us. And then the rumors started gettin' around that this guy is a—is gonna be a comer. He's gonna be a good politician. Not only that, but we can deal with him. We can talk to him. We can say anything to him. He got thick skin. He got a scraggly beard. He got some screwed-up-lookin' hair, but we can deal with him. [*BW laughs*] But we look the same [*laughs*], you see what I'm sayin'? But we could deal with him. [00:18:09] So I think we would just kinda like—it was kinda like a magnet that I think that we were all kinda drawn to each other. You know, Clinton has always been an extremely lucky politician. He's been good. He's been good, no question about

it. He's been smart, he's been good, but he's always been lucky because in his second campaign in the—for governor, if you look at the kind of staff that he pulled together, the diverse kind of staff that he had—you had women. You had a crusty old Faucrat named Maurice Smith, who I love with a passion. And you would've thought that a guy like me and Maurice Smith would never get along. But Maurice Smith came to me one day, and he said in that drawl—he said, "Politics is about power." And he said, "The only way we're gonna get what you want, Willis, and what I want—we're gonna have to work together 'cause the only way that we're gonna get the power that we need—we gotta get this boy elected." And he said, "If you sit by my desk and listen to me on the way that I work some deals and the way that I go at it, then you will learn a lot." Now at that time people saw any black person with a beard and afro as a militant, right? But Maurice Smith became one of my favorite people. And I don't—you know, he was just that kind of a guy. [00:19:36] And then you look at the women, the chief of staff, the feminist women, and then you look at Hillary, and then you blend all this together. Even if you look at—say you got me and Bob Nash and Rodney Slater. We all black. But we different in totally different ways. We come from som—me and Slater come from

the same part of the state, but our attitude and our approaches were different because he's young. Nash came from the southern part of the state. His skill set was different from what my skill set was. But we worked together as a team. We didn't necessarily always agree. And you look at, I mean, you look at the academic people that we had, and you look at what Clinton requires of you. [00:20:23] You know, I can remember this book, *Laboratories of Democracy* by E. J. Dionne. We had to read because we knew Clinton read. So nobody's gonna get on the airplane or get in the car, and there's a discussion goin' on, and we gonna be the dummies. So you got to read this stuff about the *Laboratories of Democracy*. Now, when you look back at it, you knew Clinton was preparing himself to be bigger than the governor of Arkansas because he brought all of these people in, and we got a chance to meet a lot of these people. Now, it was a tight ship. It was a tight ship, but it was a team of people. I can't ever remember anybody that had a direct conflict or personality clash with somebody else. You know, we might've disagreed with some things. The teacher testing thing, for example. I think three of us got together and said, "Look, we don't like this 'cause this is gonna be discriminatin' against black folks. So we got to figure out a way" . . .

[00:21:30] BW: When you say the three of us . . .

CW: Nash, Slater, and myself. We said, "Look. We gotta figure out a way how to tell the governor that we disagree with this thing, but we don't wanna be confrontational about it, but we just gotta come up with a way." So we sat down, and we thought about it. I said, "Well, this is one way we can easily do this. Why don't we get"—there was a professor up at St. Louis, Washington University, had did a test called the black intelligent quotient examination or something. They called it the BITCH test for short. I said, "Why don't we pass this test around to the white staff and see if they can pass [*BW laughs*] this test? Right. And then we can make the argument to the staff and let the staff make the argument to Clinton." And we did that. But now the only downfall was about it, half of the Black folks couldn't pass it either. [*Laughter*] So but it was an urban test. It was more of an urban test than it was a rural test. But we thought about it. We made our point to Clinton. And he said, "I think the teacher test is the way to go. I need y'all to help me on it." All right. We said, "Okay. If that's your decision, then we gotta go make this thing work." And that was our attitude toward everything. [00:22:45] We always had an opportunity to make our point. You can make your point. If you make your point and you lose

the argument, that's fine. But if you don't get an opportunity to make your point—but after you made your point and the decision is made, then it's up to us as staff people to carry out the decision, the wishes of the people at the top. And we do it the best way that we possibly can. I think all of—and the way that we sold it to black folks was that, look, we all know that the way for us to excel and exceed is to look at education as the bootstraps that have always raised all of us up. And if we are not as good or twice as good or three times as good as somebody else, we ain't in the ballgame. So you got to—it ain't about a question of fair. It ain't never about a question of being fair. It's a question about whether we can raise my grandson or my great-grandson, whether we can put them in a position so they can—you can take them to the next level. If we can get them to the next level, then everything that we had to take and everything my grandfather had to take and my great-grandfather had to take, then it's worth it because we're makin' proce—progress. [00:24:04] Bill Clinton was a progressive person. Now was he a liberal person? No. Was he a conservative person? No. Was he in the middle of the road guy? Most of the time, he was. Now what—the argument we always used to make with black folks was that black folks are

more conservative than you ever [*BW laughs*] dream they are. You know, I [*laughs*], you know, when I look back at myself, you know, I look back, and you weigh what you think about *x*, *y*, and *z*—we have a tendency to be more conservative than we think that we are because we come from a conservative background. Religious background, slave-history background, your family background, all of that plays a major role into—as to who you are. So you take the best of what you have to offer, and you use that to try and give that to—you give Bill Clinton or whatever the decision maker is the benefit of your experiences. If you can give the benefit of your experiences, then he will understand. [00:25:17] Now in that whole process, I can remember a time that we went to a little place called Lake Village in southeast Arkansas. We also went to a place in Magnolia in southeast Arkansas. I was the staff. The security guy was a guy named Ralph Parker. Both of us was black. We went to dedicate a rice—a fish farm or something. All the play—all the power brokers were over in the corner. And they whisperin', and they murmurin'. [*BW laughs*] And we tryin' to figure out what's the deal? Well, one of 'em eventually came to governor and say, "Well, governor, we're goin' to the country club. And we don't know if these guys can go in." Clinton just turned around and

said, "My security, my staff can't go with me, I can't go. Right?" He did that twice. He did that in Magnolia. He did that in Lake Village. Now how did that make us feel? Made us feel like we're about somebody. Now they resent it. Went to the country club. We went to the country club. At the country club, most of the help was black. In the kitchen, we saw them millin' around. They're scared. And so I backed in, and I said, "What's y'all's problem?" They said, "Y'all gonna get us in trouble." I said, "What do you mean you're gonna get us in—they—we gonna get y'all in trouble." He said, "Black folks in this country club?" Now what do you learn from that? There were plenty of times on the political trail, especially in the national political trail. [00:26:55] There was a guy named Bruce Lindsey that was always around, and he was a smart guy. And I used to think I was a smart guy. There were certain situations where it wasn't kosher for me to be, you know. I didn't get offended. There were situations where I'm interacting with black folks and Bruce Lindsey would disappear, and I would disappear when I didn't need to be there. We got a bigger goal here. [*Laughs*] We need all these folks. We need everybody that's out here. But I think that we were all—we learned enough in Arkansas as that laboratory that we can be—ain't got nothin' to do with masculinity. Ain't got nothin'

to do with Black Power. Ain't got nothin' to do with none of that. It's about gettin' done what needs to be done. Don't make no difference for Willis to go down to Lake Village and raise a whole bunch of hell when these people in this kitchen gonna suffer for it. So I could disappear. I mean, if I'd've known that's what the deal was, wouldn't have been no problem for me. If they were gonna have to suffer the consequences of what we did just because we got on our three-piece suits and we're governor's security and governor's staff and we full of ourself, you know, that doesn't work, you know.

[00:28:13] BW: But how would it have been retaliated again them?

CW: Well, in any of ways, you know. For instance, the guy that runs the hardware store or the guy that runs the grocery store. Black folks had their little credit bills there. "Your credit bill is due." Or your child might go to jail and old farmer come and get him outta jail. He go to jail on Friday night. He come and get him. He gonna make sure he get him on Monday morning. He might let him stay in jail, let you know that "I'm still in charge." That's the way that's . . .

BW: It's retaliation.

CW: That's the way that system works. Now we understood that. We all understood that. Lot of guys—and I don't think Clinton

even understood it at the time. I think what he was sayin' was that "This is a noble gesture. This is a grandiose thing. It's the right thing to do." And it was the right thing to do. But what does it benefit, who does it benefit at this particular moment? Doesn't benefit the people workin' in the kitchen. Didn't benefit Joe Blow who mows the yard out there who might be replaced by somebody else because we showed up at the country club.

[00:29:25] BW: Now, there were places in—during that campaign, I discovered that there were places that the country club was where events, political events, were held. And that became a problem.

CW: Yeah.

BW: And what did we do about it?

CW: Well, Clinton always told us we can go. [*Laughs*] I mean, he didn't—there has not been one instance where Bill Clinton ever said to us, "You can't go." Now sometimes even if we went we sometimes stay outside. Sometimes you be a little bit discreet and stay in the car or do whatever if it was gonna create a problem. But nobody told us that we couldn't go.

BW: But we did change that at the sa . . .

CW: Oh, you changed, yeah.

BW: In Helena, I remember, it had—things had always been

segregated campaign events, and they'd been at the country club, and we moved them to the airport hangar.

[00:30:28] CW: You did that a lot of places. And not only did you do that, but I think even a bigger stroke was that, you know, we had a campaign system of county coordinators. There were some counties—and this is a classic example of how things had worked. Some counties you could have dual coordinators. You could have a black coordinator and a white coordinator. Some counties you couldn't do that. But where you—where it was feasible to do that, we did that. And I think that broke a lot of barriers. Now it didn't go—it didn't float well with a lot of the people that were in charge in the given areas. Now some of 'em went along with it because who's gonna take on the governor? You know, some of 'em did it for that reason. Some did it for the right reason. Some used it as an opportunity to say, "We can break down some of these barriers," right. It was a combination. And you had to be careful as to who you did it with because you didn't wanna get into a situation that was confrontational or was gonna be negative for everybody. But I think that we broke that barrier—we broke those barriers down. And I think you had counties where guys worked together hand in hand. They've always worked together hand in hand. But

white guy was always in charge, you know. That was always—you were gonna always know that white guy was in charge of doin' one, two, and three. Black guy was in charge of doin' three, four, and five. But once it got to be an equal thing, if you're a progressive person, black or white, then it worked.

[00:32:00] BW: Okay. I want us to talk more about the campaign in a minute, but I wanna go back and find out what you did to stop having Ds and Fs in law school. [*Laughter*] What did you do to pull outta that hole?

CW: Well, one I did—one thing I did. We studied a little bit more. But then we confronted the administration on the racism that was there. We took some examinations that we got some Ds on, three of us. We took the same exams, got the exams back, sent the same exams to Ole Miss, University of Mississippi, and say, "What would this professor grade these at?" All right. Came back Bs, all right. Now what that said to us was we wasn't dumb. We were black. We were black. Now, question is whether we're gonna stay here and fight this battle at the University of Arkansas or whether we gonna move on. Now we had—we wrote—we did this newspaper, and I been lookin' for it for the rest of my life. I can't find it nowhere. We wrote this newspaper where we ripped the University of Arkansas law

school. Ripped it everything—put everything out there. It was called the *BAD Times*. [*BW laughs*] The dean called us in. Dean said—I think it was me and three more.

[00:33:31] BW: How many black students were there in the law school class?

CW: I think it was six. I think it was three in my class, and it was three above me. But the three—it might've been two above me at that time because Jimmy Wilson was gone. Dean called us in and—on my wall, right now, I don't have any degrees. I don't put no degrees on my wall. But I got a transcript. Dean called us in. He said, "We got a new rule. And that now, if you get a D+ or C-, you get an extra point." Right. We were always on academic probation. Black students were always on academic probation. One grade was a—minus a C. He said, "We'll give you all an option here." He said, "I—with a stroke of this pen, I can change your grade point from a"—whatever it was, a point to 1.99—"and give you a 2.0, which is a C." He said, "But if I do this, y'all got one option. You got to leave my law school 'cause you ain't never gonna get out of this law school." Said, "You never gonna graduate from this law school." We went and kicked it around. Three of us say, "Well, that's a pretty good ultimatum." I said, "Look, I'm going [*laughs*] to Baton Rouge.

Now I don't know what y'all gonna do." Another guy went to Maryland. One guy went to Princeton. And one girl stayed there and got out, right. [00:35:03] But it was the idea that this guy said this, "You ain't gonna get outta this law school." It was as simple as that. So we left. Now what did that do for the University of Arkansas law school? It made it better because the students behind us didn't have it as bad. They had it bad 'cause the class behind my class was better, and the class behind that was even better. You start gettin', instead of two or three, you got four, and you got five, and you got six, and then the number continues to go up. By the time Slater got there, it might've been seven or eight. [00:35:47] But that's the price that you pay for breaking down barriers. Now were we disappointed in it? No, because I like to think that we laid the groundwork for a lot of good lawyers today, all right. But we laid the groundwork for it because we took a stand, and it was a tough stand. Now one advantage that I had that a lot of other students didn't have was that my daddy was paying my tuition himself. And when I called my daddy and I said, "Look, Preacher. I done gave this my best shot up here. No"—he said to me, "Willis," he said, "how do you feel about this?" I said, "Preacher, I gave this my best shot." I said, "I gave this my best shot, and I ain't gonna continue to

waste your money." He said, "Well, Willis, if you gave it your best shot, you do what you got to do." I said, "Well, Preacher, in about six hours, I'm comin' through McGehee goin' to Baton Rouge." And that's what I did. And that's where I finished law school at. And that's how it all happened. [00:36:59] But I tell people all the time, the best education I ever got across the board was at the University of Arkansas. It was a learning experience to me. It was an experience where you had to come back. Talkin' about the comeback kid? Black folk been the comeback kid all their life. Ain't nothin' new about that. It put us in the position where you know you're good, but you know you got a handicap. But you can't use racism as that crutch. You never heard me use ra—I never played a race card. Never. But it's a handi—it's always there. It's kinda like a handicap in golf or a handicap in anything else. It's always there. It's always in the back of your mind. But you overcome that. And so many people before me, you know, that—I mean, the little stuff that we went through, that wasn't nothin'. You know, that was—that—when you look back at it and look at what guys went through and women go through and women went through and the whole process—because the same thing was happenin' to the women in the law school. White women. The same thing was

happenin' to them. We didn't know. We didn't have—we didn't—we know we had some kinda kinship with 'em, you know. [00:38:17] There was another—that was an interesting thing with a white woman that was in law school. She was paired with me as my legal bibliography trial partner. My name was Carol Willis so they have a computer or whatever how they did it. They put me and her together. Man, her daddy found out that she was paired with a black dude. [*Laughs*] He went crazy. [*Laughs*] He went crazy. Right.

BW: And how did she feel about it?

CW: She was fine. To this day. She was always fine [*laughs*] with it, you know, because there was a kinship there. We were sufferin' the same thing. She happened to be white and female. Had to—happened to be black and male. But the discrimination process was there because—my guess is—I can remember there might have been five, six, maybe, women in the law school at the same time. I can remember five or six. [00:39:18] But that kinship was there. It was always there. And she resisted. She resisted, and she tried to stay, but you know, the family thing wasn't gonna let her stay. So I said, "Look, I ain't broke up about it. Get you another partner, and let's roll on. Simple as that."

[00:39:39] BW: Okay. When—did you have Hillary Clinton as a teacher at all?

CW: No. No, I didn't have her.

BW: Did you—had you encountered her other than on the [19]74 campaign?

CW: No. Hm-mm.

BW: That was your only connection with her.

CW: Mh-hmm.

[00:39:54] BW: So then you went to Southern and finished law school there.

CW: Right.

BW: And then what?

CW: Let's see. After Southern University, I came back to McGehee. I was gonna change the world in McGehee, right? And we started the activity of politics, of registerin' people to vote, of tryin' to get people to participate in the electoral process. Then came along the campaign of Jim Guy Tucker, Ray Thornton, David Pryor runnin' for the senate. Me, Olly Neal, Jimmy Wilson, few more of us over in the Delta, we put together a group called the Committee for the Education of the Black Electorate. All right, so we gonna bring these white boys to us, all right. Every one of 'em came to Helena. We interviewed 'em. We talked to 'em.

And we decided we gonna make a decision as to who we were going to endorse. [00:41:02] Well, turned out that everybody had a different candidate. [*BW laughs*] You know, everybody said, "Well, we like Jim Guy." Then we start tak—lookin' at the political analyzation of 'em. "Well, who can we"—[*laughs*] right. You had Ray Thornton had his group of folks from down in Pine Bluff. So I think we decided we'd go with Jim Guy. Well, Jim Guy lost. But we learned a valuable lesson from that. [00:41:33] Then the next thing we know, here come this guy named Bill Clinton, right? Said, "Well, I know this guy." These other guy—Olly and Jimmy and them, they didn't know him. Said, "I know this guy. This guy's gonna be a—this guy's gonna be all right." [00:41:47] Now in Arkansas at that time, white community, local white community, saw us as a bunch of crazies. You know, we radical. We're militant. And I don't know how we got to be militant, you know. I mean, I just can't never—comin' from where I come from and the family I came out of, you gonna be militant? [*Laughs*] That don't work. You can be strong, and you can be tough, but you can't be crazy. So we worked it, and we started gettin' involved in the political process at the local level. We started gettin' people elected to the school boards. We started gettin' people elected in JPs. And

we just started. We started a systematic way of gettin' people involved in campaigns. And then from the Delta—started in McGehee and Helena, but from the Delta we expanded. And finally we got to Little Rock. [00:42:41] Now at that time, there was a distinct difference between black folks in Little Rock and people in the Delta. They saw us as these crazies comin' from the Delta, all right, invadin' the solemn turf of Little Rock. So we had to figure out a way how we could bring the Little Rock crowd and the pine—because see, you had Little Rock, Pine Bluff, and the Delta. There was three separate entities. Pine Bluff was the intellectual hub or whatever. You know, people thought different there than they did in Little Rock. Little Rock guys were a little bit more economically sound. We didn't have nothin'. We just a bunch of guys from the Delta who went back to the Delta. All of us came from the Delta, went back for the Delta. And you know, Olly Neal was the leadin' the marches and the boycotts, and Jimmy was suing everybody, and we were raisin' the roof, right. So we just figured out, "Well, we got to find a way to get more politically involved in this process." [00:43:48] Up pops Bill Clinton. Here comes this young, dynamic guy who we can talk to who wants to be attorney general, right. So let's get on this horse. And we decided this is the horse that we're gonna ride

either into glory or either into the sunset. [*Laughter*] That's the way it started. So we worked that. We got—Clinton was elected, and we kept the agitatin' goin'. And then Clinton got elected governor. Then the second campaign—I got involved in the second campaign.

[00:44:26] BW: Now had you been involved in the first campaign for governor?

CW: Yeah. But we were field boys then. We were just out there—I mean, I guess a guy named B. J. McCoy and some guy named—black guy that was a newspaper guy. I can't remember his name. I remember his face. But they were the cogs then. We were just out in the field doin' a little work out there. So but the second campaign when Clinton figured out he made a mistake, I think he broadened his horizons, and he brought a whole cadre of different people in. Then I think he also understood that, all things considered, that if he was gonna win, he could win on the strength of the black vote. That if the white vote split down the middle, where then lies the difference between winnin' and losing? It's with the black folks. You get the black folks, you win. I think that's what happened. I think Clinton reached out to black folks, and the staff reached out to black folks, and the strategist figured out that this is what it takes for us to win. So

consequently, I think you got me, Slater, Nash [*laughs*], and all the rest of 'em. And rest of it is gubernatorial history.

[00:45:45] BW: Well, let's go back over some of that history now. One of the things that always struck me is that it seemed like you knew everybody everywhere. Where did you—how did you know all of those people across the state?

CW: Because we got in the cars, and we were at—I don't care what it was, if it was two folks, if it was one folks, if it was a birthday party, if it was a weddin', if it was a funeral, if it was a church event—sometimes I'd be comin' from Blytheville on my way to Texarkana, Slater'd be comin' from Texarkana goin' to Blytheville. And we crisscrossed the state, and we knew every little nook and cranny. We knew who the players were, and we courted these people.

BW: But how did you know who the players were?

CW: We did—oh, we just did that over a period of time, just started going county by county. In the black community there's always a player. There's always somebody that is the lead person in the community. Usually it's the preacher. But in most to—most time you got a player. You got a preacher, and then you got a layman player somewhere. You learn who these guys are. Then you ask them, what do you need? What do you want? And let

me tell you, politics has never been about the big things that you do. We got more benefit out of givin' people Arkansas Travelers and certificates of recognitions and showin' up with that little letter. The governor at a funeral—I mean, that's a big deal. "Hillary and I are sad to know that your loved one passed." That was the way it always started. Turned the place out. But we were there, you see what I'm saying? We were a extension of the governor. The governor cared. The governor's staff cared. [00:47:33] Then you get into the part about where Clinton did directors and people who could make decisions, who could make money decisions, or Mahlon Martin, who could run DF&A. And people said, "Well, you know, these boys can—these boys might be able to get somethin' done. They ain't just blowin' smoke out here." We catered to 'em. We catered to people. We catered to every little simple need no matter how crazy we thought it was. I mean, Governor never knew about it, but you know, whatever it took for us to keep Bill Clinton and Bill Clinton out front and his programs out front because the programs were—if you're goin' to the next level—we always thought the next level would be senator first. If you're goin' to the next level, you've got to have a base in which to run on. You got to be able to say Mahlon Martin ran DF&A. "I appointed a black to every major board and

commission in this state." By the way, that ain't happened since. [*Laughs*] That has not happened since Bill Clinton that a black person was on every major board and commission. Not only was there a black person on it, but it was the right kind of black person. It was the person that could stand by themself. You know, you didn't need seven people on a board. You had to find a person that could stand by them self and make the case. [00:49:00] So in that process of appointin' people—and there's a photograph somewhere at the Mansion where all the appointees were together in front of the stairs. And you look at that, and you say, "Man, this is an impressive deal, here, when you got the director of Human Services, and you got the director of developmental finance, and you got the director of DF&A, and you got this director, and you got that director, and then you got these guys over here on the governor's staff." Now one of the things that—if you look at Clinton's staff per se, wasn't a whole lot of black folks, but it looked like it was a whole lot of black folks 'cause we were everywhere. Not only were we everywhere but we could come to chief of staff. We could come to the governor, and we could—they listened to us. So it wasn't a question about numbers 'cause there'd been plenty of governors that had a bunch of folks on staff, you know. But when you look

back at the history of Bill Clinton, you're gonna have a history of people who could make decisions on their own, stand with those decisions on their own, and make the right decisions. Didn't make no bad decisions. You can't find—I mean, there might be some somewhere, I'm sure, where some guys made some bad decisions. But it ain't many. I mean, you expect that, but it ain't many. But we were out there, and we had a common goal. The common goal was that this place is gonna be better if this guy is governor as opposed to somebody else.

[00:50:39] BW: In that [19]82 campaign after he had been out for two years, was there any problem convincing leaders in the black community that he should be reelected again?

CW: Yeah, it was initially because they didn't think he could win. And they also didn't—the first governor's office didn't have the kind of outreach that the second governor's office had. So people didn't know who the players were. I mean, if you asked me now, "Name me seven people from the first governor's staff," I couldn't do it, and I been around. [*Laughs*] You see what I'm sayin'? But if you asked me to name—you ask people across the state, "Name me ten people from Clinton's second staff," they can go down the list one by one because we learned that lesson, you know. Guys were—I don't know. I don't wanna say

arrogant 'cause they—you know, to be a politician period, you're arrogant, so I think all of us got a little bit of arrogance about us. But I think these guys were just out of touch with a state like Arkansas. They had the eastern liberal mentality. They thought they were smarter than everybody else. And they didn't understand the little guy down there in east Arkansas on a tractor or pushing the plow probably smarter than you are with your Ph.D. So you gotta learn how to reach that guy. And you got to figure out what makes him tick, and you got to come—you gotta do it in a way. Whether you gotta go down there, and sit with him, and chew tobacco, drink some moonshine, eat some barbecue, do whatever it is he's doin'. And in that process, when you're talking with these guys, you learn what—not only what they are about, but generally when you're talkin' to a person, you know what the whole surrounding area thinks. And if you know how the whole surrounding area thinks, you know how to approach everybody in that area. You don't go in there and make them—you don't make them stupid mistakes, right.

[00:52:47] BW: So the concern was not so much about car tags as it was about whether he could be reelected.

CW: Oh, no, not—car tags was the deal that the press put on Clinton, and I think it was a white deal more than anything else. That

ain't what black folks were about. Car tags that—black folks were concerned about teacher testin'. Now that was a big deal. But car tags? No. I don't think car tags was it.

BW: So the issue—you just had to convince people that he could be elected again.

CW: I think you had to say this, that Bill Clinton could be elected, and if Bill Clinton is elected, Carol Willis, Rodney Slater, Bob Nash gonna be in there pitchin' for you. You know us. You can call us. You know where I live. We gonna be in there throwing curve balls for you, so you can get to us, hold us accountable, right. You ain't got to hold Bill Clinton accountable, but hold us accountable. That means it's our responsibility to make things happen for you.

[00:53:49] BW: After that campaign and—we moved into the governor's office. About how much of that time were you in the Little Rock office as opposed to being out on the road?

CW: Well, I only came to the Little Rock office when my chief of staff told me to come home. [*Laughter*] But we . . .

BW: You were on the road all the time.

CW: . . . we did the road work. Slater did road work. Nash never did much road work. But we did the road work.

BW: But you—that's—was it any different from the campaign?

CW: No.

BW: You just kept goin' like you were . . .

CW: Just kept goin'.

BW: . . . field organizers . . .

CW: We . . .

BW: . . . in the campaign and . . .

[00:54:27] CW: We ran what was called the permanent campaign. It was called the permanent campaign. And if you look at the history of the permanent campaign and you go back to look at—I found out doin' the presidential campaigns that some of these states had adopted what we'd been doing. You know, and I was—I guess I should be flattered, but I'm listenin' to these guys. "We do this." I said, "Really?" I said, "Where y'all learn about that?" They'd say, "Well, them guys down there in Arkansas, old Clinton and his guys, they talk about"—when we'd go in these meetings, we talk about what you did, the permanent campaign. So the guys in South Carolina are doin' it right now. They do the same thing. Republicans are doin' it now. They doin' the same thing that we were doing in [19]82 to ay—to [19]90. The same thing. That's how you keep winnin'. You stay in contact with your people. And the only way you stay in cont—and you know. The other—another thing that drove it

was you had to run every two years, so you couldn't shut down and then start back up and—you gonna shut down for a month then start back up in two months. So it's just easier to keep it goin'.

[00:55:37] BW: Was it—I'm—describe what a given day was like when you were on the governor's staff.

CW: Well, we'd have a staff meetin' I think once a week. We'd come in. We'd check in with everybody and say, "Look, I called the educational liaison," or "I called the prison liaison," I'd say, "Look, I'm going down to"—I'd say to Bobby Roberts, "I'm goin' down to Pine Bluff, and I'm gonna—I know the prison issues are down there." Or I said to Don Ernst, I'd say to Root that, you know, "We're going to talk to some people, we're gonna run into some teachers. Give me your card. If I need to—I can't ans—first of all, I can't answer all these technical questions. But if I wanna get somebody on the phone, I want you to talk to 'em." So we'd tell liaisons where we going. All right. And then we'd break down when we came back. Then the liaisons would follow up on what—on intel that we picked up. And that was an ongoin' part of that process. And it conti—and it worked well. That—it worked well because not only did they get to know us, but teachers got to know who the educational liaison was. And the

prison guys got to know who—first of all, who they could trust [*laughs*], right, in the prison thing 'cause it was a trust deal, and they wasn't gonna do too much talkin' to somebody they didn't know. And you know, we always had to duck the press guys to some degree because they were always constantly trying to figure out what we were doin', whether we were legal, whether we were bugged or whatnot, that whole nine yards. So it was always—and let me tell you, then every other politician in the state—I used to look up, and I'd see—every place I'd go, I'd look behind me and there's a car. Bill McCuen followin' me everywhere I go. Everywhere I'm goin', he goin'. I'd look up to whoever runnin' for treasurer or whoever else—they're followin' me everywhere I go, right. They endin' up in the same places that I did. Now that helped because we developed a good relationship with some of them as well. [00:57:44] And in the case of McCuen, he had a lot of jobs. He had a lot of summer jobs. I could go to somebody in wherever and say, "Look, I can get you a job in the state Capitol. Not with the governor's office, but I can get McCuen to give you one 'cause he got the jobs." "McCuen would give us a job?" We had—at one time we had ten, twelve folks up there with a job that Bill Clinton got credit for even though McCuen gave 'em the job. So it was kind of a—

it was a trade-off that we helped them, they'd help us. Attorney general folks, you know, same way. You know, and we looked—and the other thing was that we always looked for good young people. You constantly had to look for that next young star 'cause we gonna get old. So you gotta find these young folks who wanna participate in the process. Plus, you know, Clinton was about young people, too. So you gotta bring these young people in. You gotta groom them because Willis, Nash, and Slater are gonna be old men. Sooner or later, we're gonna be wore out, so you gotta bring some young blood in to keep this thing goin'. And I think we did a fairly good job of doin' that. And I think that's gonna play out well in the next five, six years.

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

BW: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[00:59:05] BW: You were talking about the kinds of things that you did every day when you were on the governor's staff. Did you have days off?

CW: Nah. [*Laughs*] Never.

BW: I always had the idea that you worked seven days a week.

CW: Yeah.

BW: Because starting on Saturday nights, you were going to

churches.

CW: Right. That's the deal and you—we usually—we made a bunch of speeches. We made a bunch of church speeches, we made a bunch of speeches to civic clubs. So the weekend was really the time that you could get a whole bunch of people together. Especially in the black community, you know. You just—Wednesday night was a good night. That's prayer meetin' night. You find a bunch of people there. Then the various clubs and organizations would meet on Friday nights. And sometimes we'd be on—say we went to Blytheville. Then we'd stay and come back down to West Memphis if we—we kinda coordinated the schedule. We kinda knew what was happenin' every week and every month. We had a schedule down. Slater and I had a schedule down. We pretty much knew everything that was happening. And we divided it up.

[01:00:14] BW: Well, had you pretty much identified your source of information in every community by the point of the campaign bein' over?

CW: Oh yeah. We—the campaign gave us an opportunity to identify everybody. We just pulled it together—once we got in the governor's office, we just put it in a form that was easy for us to divide up and know who was goin' where and doin' what.

[01:00:42] BW: Okay, some people said that the way that you all divided it up was that Slater went to the churches, and Willis went to the juke joints. Was there any truth to that?

CW: Yeah. I mean, but I [*BW laughs*] did both. [*Laughter*] Well, now you have to understand, Slater was not a juke joint man. [*Laughs*]

BW: Right.

CW: He was a smoother. He was a smooth kinda guy, right. And I think I was smooth, I just—I grew up in a little place, in this town called McGehee, and it was lined—on a Saturday night, a Friday and Saturday night, there would be seven to ten thousand people in the streets in McGehee at juke joints. So juke joints were a place where people gathered. I mean, we were lookin' for places where people gathered. Plus you could go in there, and you buy a couple old boys a beer, and they'd tell everybody in town you bought 'em a beer. And they knew that you gonna come back. And they knew what we were doin', you know. They kinda looked forward to us. So I made the juke joint round. And I didn't drink. I mean, I don't—I still don't drink. But you know, that is where—we went to where people were. Didn't make no different what—where it was. We went to where they were. I felt more comfortable doin' it than Slater did. Now

he did—we all did juke joints. I mean, Clinton did juke joints. We went to places down in Washington, Arkansas. [01:02:05] I never forget one night we were at a place down in Washington, Arkansas, and the governor was there makin' a speech. Sheriff was there. And we kept hearing this noise in the back room. And you could hear these guys say, "Bar nine. Seven come eleven." [*BW laughs*] Say, "What the hell is this, right?" We go back there, there's a crap game [*laughs*] goin' on. The sheriff's there. All the pillars of the community are there. The governor there. And we said, "Governor, we may need to get you out of here." He said, "Hey, that's just the way it is in southwest Arkansas." And he went to a few—he went to quite a few juke joints, you know. We tried to get him into places where he was safe. I mean, the state police was gonna make sure all that was happenin'. But I think he liked goin' to juke joints. I think he liked interactin' with the kind of people—and they were good people. People were—I mean, you—half the church folks were in the juke joint on Saturday night. You see 'em in church on Sunday morning. [*Laughs*] But a lot of them would be in the juke joint. So it was just another avenue that we used that a lot of politicians didn't know, didn't understand, and wouldn't even try.

[01:03:17] BW: What—it—for people who don't know the term juke joints, what are they?

CW: Well, the term juke joints comes from—there used to be a musical box called a jukebox, right. So if you look at the—you know, black folks have a way of takin' and addin' their own vernacular to it, so jukebox turned into a juke joint. Where—that's where people dancin'. You're fryin' chicken, you're dancin', you're drinkin' beer, you're havin' a good time. You got people that have worked primarily on farms the whole weekend. The only avenue they have for any kind of entertainment, cheap entertainment, is to go to a juke joint, get you a hamburger, drink you a beer, dance a little bit, and that's it. Get—juke joints would usually stay open. Some would stay open till three o'clock. Some would stay open till one o'clock just depending upon who was running the juke joint. But it was a eatin' place. It was a combination of everything in the community. And like I said, McGehee had twenty-five, thirty of 'em. In McGehee on a Saturday night, there'd be seven thousand people from all—everywhere. And all of the blues singers, the Bobby "Blue" Blands and the B.B. Kings and the Little Miltons and all these guys, used to ride the Chitlin Circuit from Helena down to Greenwood, Mississippi, to McGehee and all along the Delta. You

didn't have many in Little Rock. You had a few. But the Delta was where most of the juke joints were 'cause that's where most of the black folks were. It was a cheap—it was a form of cheap entertainment.

[01:04:56] BW: And did you get reimbursed for buying a couple of beers?

CW: No, I don't think so. [*Laughter*] I don't think so. [*Laughs*] I don't think I'd even ask. [*Laughter*]

[01:05:10] BW: Did at—talk about being on the road with Bill Clinton.

CW: Well, it was a different kind of experience in that he was a guy in motion. Constant—he was constant motion. And not only was he constant motion, but he absorbed everything. He didn't miss anything. The smallest little detail over here, he'd pick it up. And he'd say, "Well, I saw So-and-so that's sittin' over there, and she didn't smile at me." Now the downside of being on the road with Bill Clinton is that when you go to a church and you gotta put your money in church, he ain't never got no money. [*BW laughs*] So you know, everybody kinda ducked [*laughs*], and there was a—and we used to tell him and said, "Look, don't put no more money into the church. You watch the preacher. If the preacher puts in a five, we put in a five. Don't go there and put in fifty or a hundred just to be frontin'. Watch the preacher.

Preacher put in a ten. Most of the time he gonna cuff it on the wrist, put in a ten. That's what we gonna do." Now he's lookin' around, and we got pretty smart at it. [01:06:22] I'll never forget up in Blytheville one day, I got old Lavester McDonald to go with us. And I said, "Mac, you got the governor today, we gonna stay out—we gonna sit out here in the foyer." Old Clinton was sittin' up in there, and he was rockin' and rollin', he was singing, and he was havin' a good time. Collection plate came around. Preacher put in about twenty-five, thirty. Mac come and looked around. I said, "Mac, you gotta give him twenty-five, thirty." He said, "What?" I said, "Yeah, you gotta give him twenty-five, thirty." And we went to the next stop. Mac had to do that, and we went down to Osceola to the next stop. Mac had to do that. He ended up givin' up about $150 that day 'cause Clinton had no money. [*Laughs*]

BW: [*Laughs*] Sound . . .

CW: So we [*laughs*] put it on him that day, right. But Clinton never had any money. He loved to eat. He loved to enter—he loved to—now when he did have some money or he had a credit card—somewhere—once or twice he got a credit card from somewhere. When he had his credit card, he liked to pay. He'd always, "I got this, boys." I say, "You—it's about time." [*Laughter*] You know.

But when he had his credit card—he got a credit card from somewhere. And he stopped—we stopped down at the Pizza Hut in Pine Bluff and all this kind of stuff. [01:07:38] But ridin' with him in the car—he did a lot of readin'. He'd read for a while, then he'd start a conversation for a while. Then he'd ask wheth—what did we do right? What did we do wrong? We had a—the most interesting car ride I ever had with him was that we went to a little place called England, Arkansas. And that was a race, a major race thing goin' on over there. So we convinced him, "Look, can't nobody solve this problem but you. And these white folks and these black folks at each other, and we don't need no racial incident." So I'm with him. Ralph was with him. And Dick Morris was in the car. So him and Dick Morris got into this whatever. "Well, now"—you know how Dick talked. "Well, now, Bill." Clinton hollered, "Stop the car, Ralph! Stop the car. Get out, Dick." [*Laughs*] He said, "Gotta get out." I said, "No, he didn't." 'Cause I'm—me and Ralph's in there. We don't know what to do. [*Laughs*] Ralph pulls over. Finally Clinton cools off, and he said, "Let's go. Let's go." Went on down to England, did what we had to do, came on back to Little Rock, all right.

[01:08:56] BW: So what did he do about the problem in England?

CW: We went to the Black church. Black folks were meetin' at the

Black church. We went over to the white church—believe it was a white church or a white school. I can't remember. Talked to the white folks. Talked to the Black folks. Got on the phone, said, "Look, you folks need to talk to each other." 'Cause what it was—it—I can't remember exactly what it was, but it was somethin' simple. It was not a big deal. These folks were at each other's throat about somethin'. I mean, and maybe it'll come back to me. But anyway, that—what solved the problem was the governor in the big, blue Lincoln showed up to solve the problem. And he had a colored boy as his aide, and had another colored boy that was six three drivin' the Lincoln with a .357 Magnum on his shoulder. And people were convinced . . .

[01:09:51] BW: Because he was the state trooper.

CW: Yeah, it was Ralph Parker. It was the idea that he got in his car—and everybody was there. For him to come down to England, Arkansas—population might've been three thousand at that time, right. To get in the big blue car—the governor of the state of Arkansas come down there to try and solve this problem. That was volumes. The word in the community was just riveted through the community. So I went back down there the next day, you know, after—to find out what the fallout was, and you had folks talkin' to each other, right. And whatever it

was—I can't remember, you know, what it was. Whatever it was, they worked it out. But they worked it out because Clinton got in the car. I mean, I guess it was instinct. He got in the car. We went from one place to the other folks, other place, and the problem was solved, and it went away. And I doubt if—the newspaper picked up some of it, I don't know, but it wasn't much. But it coulda been a bad racial situation, and it coulda been bad for the state of Arkansas. It could've been bad for the image of the state of Arkansas, but he nipped it in the bud. And that was—there were a number of other incidents of little stuff like that that happened, that he'd get on the phone. One up in Blytheville and a few other places—that—you nipped it in the bud. But he could nip it in the bud for the simple reason he had his troops out there findin' out what was goin' on.

[01:11:22] BW: People used to tell me—make some comment about the advance team. Well, we didn't have advance teams in the sense . . .

CW: No.

BW: . . . that I understood they were. I finally caught on they were talking about you.

CW: Yeah.

BW: Because you went ahead and got the lay of the land.

CW: Right. Mh-hmm. Well, the way that worked was that—the word used to be if you see Carol Willis, Bill Clinton ain't far behind. That's the way it was. So we did. We always—you always had somebody that was angry or teed off about something. And we had the kinda relationship with most people that they would call us and tell us. And if we knew if the governor was comin' into an area, we'd get back down there and try to find out what it was. And I always, almost always—I mean just—I don't know why I did it, but that's before we even knew what advance was. I always would go hour, maybe sometimes two hours, before he'd get there. [01:12:25] So that happened in a little place called Prescott. And I have to tell you this story 'cause it—I—it's funny now. Clinton and Hillary came down there to make a speech in a little town called Prescott, right. Clinton made his speech. I made a speech to introduce Hillary or Clinton, one of 'em. Anyway, I introduced them. Clinton comes back. He said, "Okay. We got this other stop to go." And he said, "Carol Willis." He had—you remember Roxie, right? Roxie—what was Roxie's name? He had—Roxie came down there with him. He said, "Carol Willis," he said, "Roxie gonna ride back to Little Rock with you." I said, "No. I'm sorry." He said, "What's wrong with you?" I said, "Man, I ain't lettin' no white woman ride back to

Little Rock with me in no car. You crazy?" I said, "We will get lynched out here." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "Mean?" I said, "We still in Arkansas." He said, "That attitude is still out here?" I said, "Governor, that attitude is two streets over from here." He—it never dawned on him that that deal was still out there. He said, "Well, what're we gonna do with Roxie?" I said, "I don't know what you're gonna [*laughs*] do with Roxie, but she ain't goin' back to Little Rock with me." [01:13:42] But a lot of that was because where I grew up. And where I grew up in mississ—in Arkansas, it was thirty miles from where Emmett Till was thrown off the Mississippi bridge. My grandmother used to tell me, "If we go to town and you see a white woman comin' up the street," she said, "I want you to hold your head down, and if you raise it up, I'm gonna knock it off because I don't want you to suffer the same fate as Emmet Till." Now this was 1982 or [19]83, but that kind of thing was still prevalent in Arkansas in [19]82, [19]83, [19]84, and [19]85. You had to be conscious of it at all times because you don't want the governor gettin' caught in the middle of some deals like that. It had nothin' to do with Roxie, though. We're friends to this day. Love her with a passion, but I said, "Roxie, you can't ride back to me to Little Rock. I just ain't gonna do that." And but once that

happened—I was thinkin' about this, too. I said, "We done come a long ways, but we still got a long ways to go here any time that that kinda deal still happens." And it, you know, it still happens now. It ain't like it's gone away. But that's one thing that I suppose I kinda regretted a little bit because I think I'd grown past that point, but my first reaction was, "I ain't gonna do this. [*Laughs*] I am not going to do this." And for a long time—and a lot of people knew that. I would not dance with white women on a floor. I wouldn't do it. And it had nothin' to do with the individual. It had to do with the tenor of the times. [01:15:44] But my point is that Bill Clinton broke those kind of barriers down by goin' to places that you would think a governor wouldn't go and bringin' the kind of people with him that you would think he wouldn't bring. So a lot of those barriers were broke down for the simple reason that he was governor. If he didn't do anything else, if he didn't do anything else for Arkansas, the atmosphere changed. The atmosphere changed. Now why'd it change? It changed, for one, because who gonna take on the governor? You know, I don't care who you are and what your thoughts are, you really don't wanna take on the governor. And you basically know what his thoughts and patterns are. So you kinda scot—you start givin' your thoughts

and patterns a second thought, right. And you start the—same thing about the thing down at Lake Village and the same thing at Magnolia. The pattern started to change. The same thing with the county coordinators. The pattern started to change. Black folks became acceptable, and they became acceptable 'cause the governor said, "This—what you're talkin' about here is wrong, and it shouldn't be accepted." So the atmosphere of Arkansas at that time changed. And it changed because of the personality and the attitude of the governor. If he don't do nothin' else for the state of Arkansas during that period, that happened. And it changed. And the benefit of it was that it changed all of our attitudes.

[01:17:25] BW: There were white people on the governor's staff who said—several of them said this in different ways. Until we worked on the staff with Nash and Willis and Slater, we had never worked with blacks as colleagues. So did you feel—did you have a similar experience?

CW: Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. Go up—let me tell you. I had—I mean, let me give you this experience. Let me break it down to you this way. When I was in DC once, this black woman accused us of being chauvinists. Male chauvinist pigs. I said, "Girlfriend, evidently you never met my mama, you never met my sister.

[*BW laughs*] I said, "Let me tell you. I work with some of the—I work for some of the toughest women that I have ever known in my life, and I guarantee you won't none of them say that I'm a chauvinist." Now, what does that say? We'd never worked with white women. Never before. We didn't even know what to expect. You know, I mean, I didn't know what to expect. But once you got there and you start understandin' that to some degree women were in the same ballpark that we were in, so you had this natural kinship, so you develop kind of a friendship with a lot of 'em. And you could tell the ones that never had—and you could easily tell the ones that never had interaction with black folks before early on. But I think over a period of time—and we worked at it. Over a period of time, I could tell who had problems, and I don't—when I say problems, let me back that up. I don't say problems. Different attitudes toward black folks. Because again, they saw us one way, and then they found out we were another way. Same thing about them. [01:19:36] You know, you look at—you look and say—you know, you judge people by the way they wear their hair. You judge people by the way they wear their dress or their shoes or whatever. You make a decision based upon that. But I think what all of us learned was that you judge a person by their ability. And whether they

fair or not. Or whether you get a fair hearing or not, or whether they're willing to listen to your point of view without going off on you. And all of us had to come to that point because, again, you assembled a team that was, from what I could see, was the most diverse team of people that I have ever been around in my life, bar none. From the guys from the GYST house to the chief of staff to the Maurice Smiths of the world to the Bev Lindseys of the world to the—the one—the girl that was the press secretary, you know, Roberts.

[01:20:33] BW: Joan Roberts.

CW: Joan Roberts. All the, you know . . .

BW: Explain what GYST house was.

CW: GYST House was a drug rehab program. And this was—these were guys that were used to carry the mail and run errands and do a lot of little stuff around the governor's office. But I think what was most important for those guys was that they were needed. They were around successful people. And they felt a need to get their game together because they—you could hear 'em brag. You could hear 'em braggin' to the boys out on the street. "I work up in the governor's office." Which mean—I mean, you could see 'em—a different kind of shine on their shoes. A different—a guy come say, "Mr. Willis, how you tie that

knot on that tie? I like the way that knot tied. Show me how to tie a Winslow or a half-Winslow, or what's the JFK? Tell me where I can get that tie you got. What kinda shoes have you got? That suit and thats kind of stuff." So that was another example of Clinton's staff. And the staff just—they were part of us. You know, they were just—they were family. They were part of us. And I think—and I run across a few of 'em every once in a while now. Doin' pretty good. They're doin' good because they had an opportunity to turn it around.

[01:22:04] BW: You talk about being on the road constantly. Did that change at all during legislative sessions?

CW: Well, the legi—yeah, it did. We had what you call legislative liaisons. And legislative liaisons was assigned to different kinds of issues, and I think some were assigned to different kinds of legislators. Now, we didn't have official legislative liaison status, but we were always there movin' in. I learned—right now I do legislative liaison work for Beebe. I learned that on Clinton's staff. Now back then—now you learned something 'bout Clinton, too. If you listen in the meetings, the legislative meetings, or you listen to Clinton, Clinton would say, "[*Sighs*] What's Jodie Mahony think about this?" Okay. "What's Mike Beebe think about this? What does Nick Wilson or Max Howell or Ben think

about this?" Right. So you say, "What's the big deal, here?" Well, these are the guys that he saw had mental prowess. Not only did they have mental prowess, but they understood the game. These were the guys that he was gonna have to convince to get his program done. He'd like to have mental sparring matches with 'em because at least he saw 'em as—I don't think he saw 'em as his equal, but they were pretty close. And he liked to mentally spar with these guys. So we'd say, "I'm going out here, and I'm gonna lay around the senate to see what old Max Howell talkin' about or to see what old Nick Wilson and what old Beebe got to say about this thing." 'Cause we were gatherin' intel. We gathered information. And you feed it to the liaison in passin', governor heard, boom, boom, boom, boom, that this bill is gonna bite the dust if you don't come down here and talk to *x* senator or *y* house representative by their self. [01:24:26] Now on the downside of it, there wasn't but three or four black legislators, right, so we didn't have—you didn't have the kind of outreach—you didn't need the kind of outreach to them as you did to some of the other guys 'cause it wasn't but two or three of votes, right. But we kept 'em in play. We kept Dr. Townsend, we kept Henry Wilkins and them in play. We always made them feel as though they were legislators. Don't make any difference

you wasn't speaker of the house, you wasn't the pro temps of the senate, you're still a player here because in legislative work—and what I tell the young folks now is, one vote can always make the difference for you. And we got into a whole bunch of situations where whether it was Nap Murphy tryin' to sneak out the back door, or whoever, when we needed one vote or two votes here, and we knew how to work it to get the votes that we needed for this. But it was all driven by the fact that Clinton would say "What's Max got to say about it? What's Ben Allen got to say about it? What are these guys sayin' about it?" [01:25:40] And I think we all learned—we learned the negotiation process. We learned the cut-the-deal process. We learned the compromise process, and as all of us know, Clinton is a great compromiser. He figured he could compromise anybody out of anything, right. So I think all of us picked that up. You know, I think—[*laughs*] I think all of us think that we can cut a deal and not get into a fight and, for the better good, get things done.

BW: I think that's a good stopping place.

[Tape stopped]

[01:26:15] BW: Okay, we—we're talking about some of the legislative efforts that the governor took. I would like to get you

to focus now on some of the times when you were asked to go get public support for some of the legislative programs, and we'll just start with that [19]83 special session on education. You've already talked about the problems you had and how those got resolved and reconciled at least. [01:26:45] Did you then hit the road and line people up in the blue ribbon campaign?

CW: We did, but the first thing we did was to try to get Dr. Townsend and Henry Wilkins on board and Dr. Jerry Jewell and Irma Hunter Brown. And it was particularly difficult with Irma Hunter Brown 'cause she was a former school teacher. And her misgivings about the teacher test was kinda similar to what ours was initially. So it was difficult to try and convince her that there was not a diabolical plot to eliminate black teachers. Once we got past that hurdle—and it took a—let me tell you, if you know Irma Hunter Brown, she is a tough woman, and she cuts a tough deal. And it was hard to talk to her because back then even if women were tough, we, bein' gentlemen of the South—it was difficult to twist her arm or really get in her face, as they say today. And we were tryin' to figure out how we'd—how we could bring her around. So we finally figured out the person that could do that for us was Henry Wilkins. [01:28:00] Now on the other side of that argument, the outside forces that was involved

in that was—there was a lawyer here named John Walker, who was a friend of Irma Hunter Brown, and he was also a friend of Ben McGee. I believe Ben McGee probably was in the legislature too at that time, but I can't remember. So we said, "I don't know how we're gonna get around John Walker 'cause he has a very tough personality." And he represented school districts and all of the desegregation cases, and we knew it was gonna be a tough road to get around him because he and Irma were generational colleagues, and they were gonna hang together. [01:28:44] But we used Henry Wilkins to kinda bridge that gap, and I think we used Dr. Townsend, who was Mr. Integrity, and if we could get Dr. Townsend to say it was all right, it's kinda difficult to go against Mr. Integrity if he—if we could convince him that's the way it was. And back then you couldn't go onto the floor of the legislature, but as luck would have it, Dr. Townsend's desk was right near the door on the left side of the legislature. So it [*BW laughs*] was always me or Slater were stickin' our head in the door constantly talkin' to Dr. Townsend. Irma's seat was all the way on the other side, if I can remember. I believe her seat was all over on the—and he was kinda like brokerin' between all of us. It's hard say no to Dr. Townsend. It's to—it was even difficult for Irma to say no to Dr. Townsend.

So once we got him in play, we felt good about it. [01:29:45] Now what that did for us was that also a lot of the black legislators at that time were graduates of UAPB. In fact I think probably, if I can remember, almost all of 'em, if it was six or seven. I can't remember the exact number. But most of 'em were graduates of UAPB. So they all had this notion that the black teachers were gonna be affected by this in a negative way. But I think the sellin' point was, to us, that—was that Dr. Townsend and most of the legislators that were in favor of that with us—we could go out to Joe Q. Public in McGehee or in Dermott or in Lake View or wherever, and we could say, "These people believe in this, right?" And then you say—we use our own credibility. Say, "Now you know, we've been around you long enough." We used our credibility. Then we use Clinton's credibility that he built up over the years. Said, "Look, we don't—if we didn't think this thing was good, we would not be out here pushin' it." So we started pushin' it through the community meetings. We'd go to some educational meetings. [01:31:05] But mostly, you started with the older black teachers. And if the older black teachers bought into it, you were fine. Now the people that were most skeptical of it were the younger black teachers. Older black teachers said, "Bring it

on. You know, I'm not scared of a test." Now but their misgivin' was that—the older black teacher's misgivin' was that it might be a test that transcended their generation and their experiences, and they might be—have to deal with somethin' that was totally out of their realm or something that was not even relevant to teachin'. And again, a lot of these people taught in a different way. And strangely enough, if you look at the way teachers taught in the predominantly black schools, it's a much tougher deal than it is now. It was a much tougher deal on youngsters 'cause you had to produce. So the teachers are now saying, "You're asking me to do the same thing that I'm asking my students to do." So we said, "Well, that's what it oughta be, right?" And we kinda pushed that a little bit. But you got different—it was a different kind of response from—depending upon the area of the state. [01:32:30] People in the southern part of eastern Arkansas responded differently than people in the northeastern part of the Delta, say, for instance, or responded to it differently than people in, say, Little Rock because you had an age difference in the teachers, and you had an experience level different with the—with teachers, again. Once you got to the older teachers—and we figured out that they could influence the younger teachers. Then we said, "Look, my teachers"—I could

name every one of them from the first through the twelfth grade. I can tell you what this teacher did for me. I can tell you what this teacher did not do for me. I said, "Teachers are always"—I don't care how you cut it, when you're talkin' about what's the relevancy of a good teacher, the product of a good teacher is a good student. So you look at, say, Slater, for instance. You look at what Slater has become. He's a product of a good teacher. You look at me and Nash. Slater probably came from a integrated system, and he got in at the end of the integrated system, where Nash I came from on the fringes of people saying the freedom of choice and that kind of deal. So the experience was different. So we didn't experience white teachers in high school. Well, Slater had. So he had a—he could make a pitch sayin' that all white teachers are not bad to black students and that kinda thing. [01:34:09] So we use—and we actually would kick it around sometime every once in a while. We'd come back and compare notes and see how could we approach this thing. And if we run across the governor, we'd say, "Look, this is"—especially if we had an event and we knew a teacher was there that had a lot of respect for the governor or the governor knew 'em personally—go over and say to this teacher, "This is what my deal is about. You know me. I'm

about doin' good. I'm about makin' students better. I'm about the same thing that you're about." So that was kinda the throw-against-the-wall mud approach if you would. Didn't work with everybody 'cause you had some groups who just believed that this was a racist ploy, period. And we were not goin' to convince them about that. But they were the minority because you—good teachers are just good teachers, black, white, Hispanic, in between, they're good teachers. And again, the product of a good teacher is a good student, and here's the product.

[01:35:17] BW: Well, and it worked.

CW: Yeah.

BW: And the truth of the matter is most written tests are racially biased.

CW: Yeah.

BW: Even today, although I think that we made—we tried really hard to minimize that in the test that was given and had more than one shot at it. We lost very few teachers.

CW: Very few.

[01:35:43] BW: Well, another time when you were sent to the hustings was over the ethics legislation when we lost it in the legislature, and then we decided to do a petition campaign. How did you go about getting people to amass petition signatures?

CW: Well, I think—in my last interview, I think I said that black folks are probably more conservative than the average person think they are. Most black folks are church-going folks. So you got this church-going background. And you use the black ministers again because ethics, to most people, is about right and wrong. They don't understand the difference between what lawyer's ethics are, that being a lawyer, to some degree, you push the envelope to the very edge of legality. Politics is very much the same. You push the envelope as far as you can push it, but you don't go over the edge. And that—ethics is the difference be—for me or for most people—is the difference between right and wrong, especially in people that you elect and public service people. That is a public trust. That means if I vote for you, I've given you my trust. So what I expect in return is for you to be at least honest and fair and truthful about what it is that you tryin' to do. [01:37:27] So that is where the black church came in. You take political ethics or legal ethics or whatever ethics you're talkin' about, and you couch it into the religious background of a person. Usually when you put it in that framework, it usually work—it usually—well, in fact, I think it did work for us. I think that's the way that we phrased it. 'Cause I think that there were a lot of questions about exactly what does

it do? You always heard this notion about crooked politicians, you had in the newspaper about guys stealin' money, and nobody likes a crooked politician. But you don't wanna penalize good politicians for what crooked politicians or crooked lawyers or crooked doctors or crooked anybody's doin'. And then you ask the question about "What do you think about your lawyer?" The same kinda deal, you ask a person about—for instance, with the Congress now. You can say Congress is at its lowest ebb as far as what people think of 'em as a group. But you ask people "What do you think about my local congressman or my local JP or my local person?" most of 'em say they're pretty honest. Most of 'em say that they're pretty fair. Why? Because they know 'em on a personal level, not with this broad strokes. [01:38:54] So that's the process that we used. We used the church, we used the ministers, and we used community leaders. Now at the same time, this is when there was a flourishing of black people bein' elected into office. This was the high mark in Arkansas. Black people bein' elected mayors and city council people and JPs. So we are sayin' to these guys, "Look. You don't want the FBI or the federal courts or anybody else or the state police knockin' at your door one day because somebody has accused you of doin' somethin' wrong. When you got an

ethics forms, you disclose your income, you disclose the gifts that you got, you disclose who you got 'em from and what was the reason for 'em." It wasn't a bribe. It might be somebody's knowin' you. I mean, say Bill Clinton always sends me baseballs, you know. He knows I likes baseballs. So you can't construe that as a bribe. That's a guy who knows his constituency, so he runs across a baseball, and he don't care about a baseball one way or the other. But he knows that I collect baseballs and I keep baseballs and that kinda stuff, so he sends 'em to me. So but if I'm an elected person and the state law says I'm supposed to disclose the amount of a gift that's ten dollars or fifteen dollars, then that's simple. Put it on the form and move on with it. You know, nobody's gonna think you takin' a fifteen- or twenty-dollar bribe. [01:40:35] So you put it in the simplest of terms. And the guys have a tendency to understand that because if you write ethic laws that are convoluted or above the average Joe Q. Public, they gonna make a mistake for the simple reason that they don't understand. It doesn't necessarily have to be a mistake on purpose, but it still can be a mistake a court or a prosecutor or anybody else can construe it any way they want to if they're out to get you.

[01:41:10] BW: Well, I don't think there is—the legislators who voted

against it in the session honestly did not believe that Bill Clinton would sponsor a petition drive to put it on the ballot. And there's no question but that you personally were responsible for organizing a huge proportion of the signatures that put it on the ballot. And so this is a good example—I mean, you've given a good description of how you approached that. [01:41:42] At the same time, Bill Clinton sponsored a tax reform proposal which was not an initiated act but was a constitutional amendment and much more difficult to explain. Were you able to get the same kind of signature operation going at the same time? Was it easy to get it across?

CW: Well, it was difficult because nobody likes taxes. But I think the approach that we took was that you don't get nothin'—you don't get somethin' for nothin'. And don't none of us like taxes. I don't like 'em, and you don't like 'em, and nobody likes exorbitant taxes. But taxes pay for your roads, taxes pay for your elections, taxes pay for your schools, so you got to look at this. You gotta look at it this way. Would you rather for Little Johnny to have a good education and pay a little bit more taxes now, or would you rather be payin' for Little Johnny down in the prison? It's as simple as that. We also said, "Look. We all understand that all taxes, to us"—us. I'm talkin' about the black

community, now. "Regre—is regressive." We always say that. And people would come back with a counter-argument. We understand that y'all talkin' about puttin'—removin' the taxes on groceries. Well, we can live with removing the taxes on groceries, but we don't know about this other tax. You got to explain it to us a little bit more. [01:43:21] But the key to any issue that is complex is to break it down in the simplest denominator as you possibly can. You gotta figure out who your audience is. You're not talkin' to Ph.D.s from Harvard and Yale, and you're not talkin' to college graduates all the time. You might be talkin' to Joe Blow over here who has a small business. You got to explain to them, "This tax is a small tax." You know, it just might be a half a cent on a half of a cent, and it sounds like a bunch in the newspaper when they say, "Bill Clinton proposes $2 billion tax." All right, you ain't payin' the $2 billion tax. It's spread out across the board. But the way people perceive it is this is gonna cost me a lot of money. So you got to look at the trade off of what you gettin' as opposed to what you may lose or what you may get in the future and who is gonna benefit in the future. [01:44:26] Taxes—you always have to say to people—and you gotta put it in—you hear politicians doin' it all the time now. About—you're taxin' my children and my

grandchildren and my great-grandchildren. Well, nobody wants to tax their grandchildren, their great-grandchildren, et cetera, et cetera. But you gotta say that if you want Johnny to have a student loan, if you want Johnny to go to—be able to go to a college, if you want Johnny to be able to excel and exceed, whatever it is you want, somebody gotta pay. The bottom line. And it's much easier for us to pay as a collective group and as a community. And think about the kid that's in the twelfth grade right now. Think about the kid that's gonna be in the twelfth grade right now—I mean, next year, who wants to go to college. What's this gonna do—what that's gonna do to him 'cause that's gonna eliminate the opportunity for him, for them, to do better. So those are the kind of arguments that we had to make. And again, we had to get the preachers to make a lot of these arguments. [01:45:40] Now what—generally what preacher would do—we would brief the preacher as best we could as to where we were. Usually preacher would say, "We got Mr. Willis here, we got Mr. Slater here, we got Mr. Nash here. They're representing Governor Clinton. Can y'all explain this to us?" We'll explain it to him in front of whoever. Whoever's there. We'd explain it to 'em as best we could. Now sometimes we didn't understand it either. But [*laughs*] we would give 'em the

best explanation that we could. And then we'd have the preacher come back, come behind us, and endorse it. And once we got the [*unclear words*]. Again, it goes to our credibility, it goes to the credibility of Bill Clinton, and it goes to the credibility of the preacher.

[01:46:33] BW: Well, you've just made an incredibly persuasive argument for why we were successful in raising the money for the schools from every community. What's sad is that that we were not successful in then raising the severance tax and the other taxes that we tried to get for it. We did do a petition campaign to try to require that all taxes take the same vote so that you could raise something besides the sales tax. And that you also got a lot of signatures for to equalize it so it wasn't always just the sales tax. But we failed on that one.

CW: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I think that was a little bit more difficult to explain. It was difficult because Joe Q. Public over here didn't understand how that impacted them directly. When we talk about Johnny, you can see the fruits of the product. When you talk about that tax, I mean, it's kinda—we know what it does, and we know what it does for an individual, but it's kind of a distance—it's in the distant future. Severance and all this stuff—I mean, what does severance mean? Severance on what? The

loggers, truckers, the gas, or whatever. That's—that ain't me. That's somebody over—else over here. When we talked about the truckers and the loggers, boy, they were tearing up the roads, I mean—you say, "Well, you see that big truck comin' down the road and when he—when that big truck hits that pothole up there, every time that tire that's twenty-five or thirty inches—every time that tire hits that hole, that hole is gonna get bigger, all right. And you got ten or twenty trucks going across it." And I say, "Well, yeah, 'cause I'm drivin' behind that truck, and every time that truck hits that hole like that, I gotta go pay $75 for a front end alignment on my car." You know. That's a little dau—that was a little bit more difficult to explain. [*Laughs*]

[01:48:38] BW: Well, it was, and even why a tax is regressive, what a regressive tax is, is hard to explain.

CW: Yeah.

BW: Why a sales tax is not fair for everybody.

CW: Right.

BW: Which is something that rich people use as an argument that everybody pays the same. [01:48:57] Well, we also once did a postcard campaign on Grand Gulf where we got people to fix postcards to go to Ronald Reagan 'cause the federal energy regulatory commission was fixing to make—well, they had made

a bad decision, and we wanted it appealed. And did you organize postcards, too?

CW: Well, we did postcards, and you know we did a lot of 'em out of wherever we were. I don't even remember where we did 'em. But we took a lot of 'em bundle by bundles to communities, and again, we used the churches. That was always the avenue where you could get a large crowd of people. And they understood. They understood Grand Gulf, you know, 'cause they don't want this nuclear plant blowin' up in our face and killin' our kids.

BW: And we payin' for it, too.

CW: That's right. So we understood that. [01:49:45] Plus you had a lobby out there that was workin' it the same way that we were workin' it, and there was a lot of money involved in that. And you also have to understand that the energy companies always had, at that time, say if was arkan—might've been Arkansas Power & Light or energy or whatever it's called. You had a energy or Arkansas Power & Light office in every little town. So you had a—whoever ran the office or the people that ran those offices, they were sayin', "They're gonna take away my job," right. Now people in the community had some kind of relationship to these people whether it was—guy might come in,

say, "Look, Mr. So-and-so, Mr. X, Mr. Y, I can't pay my light bill. Can you just not let the man come out and cut my bill—my lights off until the first of the month or until Thursday or until Friday?" So they had a unique presence in the various community. That's what we were up against. And if they were smart, and a lot of these guys, a lot of people in these local offices were younger people, so some of 'em had smarts about 'em—what do you call it. They had merchandising smarts. They know how to cover their bosses posterior. So they did some of the things that we needed to do. [01:51:28] Now the other part about that was that a—it was tough on—to get churches to get involved in that for this reason: at one time, power companies did not charge churches for electricity.

BW: I'd forgotten that.

CW: Yeah. So you had preachers said, "Well, you know [*laughs*], we run an awful lot of air conditioners here. And Mr. Joe Blow up here—you know, that might [*laughs*] cut into our deal a little bit." So you had that to work in. Now, I know, they do. But back then I don't think they did. I can't remember when they stopped doin' it, but I know that was always hangin' out there because I always heard that argument.

[01:52:19] BW: Well, another area of the governor's office where you

had an unbelievable amount of influence was on appointments to boards and commissions. And it seemed like there was no end to the number of qualified people, and I mean highly qualified people, that you kept coming up with on boards and commissions that had never had an African American person or anybody outside of the establishment on them. Where did you get those names?

CW: Well, that was a product of our outreach. I mean, that was more a product of a campaign than anything else. Now I went to college in Arkansas, went to school up at Fayetteville, and I'd been around Arkansas all my life, so you start to—you knew—when we came into the campaign, we knew a bunch of people already. [01:53:20] We always knew that we had to have the best and the brightest. Not necessarily because the best and the brightest was gonna do the best job. But we know that if you're gonna be first at anything, you gotta be clean. You gotta be able to take the scrutiny. You gotta know—and then, too, we always did what you call opposition research. When I wanted to find a guy or a girl, you got to know where they go to church, you got to know where they work. You have—if they ain't married, you gotta know who the girlfriend is, you gotta know who the boyfriend is, you gotta know if they owe taxes. You

gotta know everything that you possibly can know about this person for this reason: if I'm gonna make a recommendation to the governor, my credibility's on the line, too. So I had to try to find people that I know, that I've seen, that I trust. There were people out there with Ph.D.s, there were people out there who hunted [*laughs*] alligators, there were guys that did some of everything that, if you asked the average white person in Arkansas, they would say, "I don't know a person that does that. I don't know a guy that hunt alligators. I don't know a guy that hunt rams or hunt deer. I know a guy that's got a Ph.D. from Harvard. I know a guy that his credibility is beyond reproach. I know a guy or a woman that I would trust with my life." To some—and I mean, usin' that in a facetious way. But I would trust these people. [01:55:12] So we kept a good list of these folks. Then the other thing we said to these folks is, you got to be involved in the process. You got to become involved in the campaign. You got to volunteer. The principal, in this case being you, Judy, Mary Anne, or the governor, you got to know these people. They got to feel good about you. Then you ask the people in the community, "All right, who would you recommend for *x*, *y*, and *z*?" And we always worked with the notion that we want that local people to get as much credit for

that person as Bill Clinton does because this is the person that's gonna have to take care of us the next campaign. So we got to raise this person up to a level where they are seen as the player. So Willis don't need the credit for gettin' this person. I needed Joe Todd to get the credit for somebody down in Columbia County. I needed Lavester to get somebody for credit up in Mississippi County. [01:56:20] So once a decision is made, first call that we always made was them. Tell them. "All right, **Mac**, you can tell So-and-so that she got this appointment because you did it for 'em." Then I would call 'em and say, "Look, Lavester recommended you for *x*, *y*, and *z*, all right. You wanna do this?" "Well"—"Look, you know you wanna do this. Just tell me whether you wanna do this or not. You know you wanna do it, don't shoot me the breeze. **Mac** has went out on a limb for you. Now, you got any problem? You owe anybody any taxes? You got any child support? You got any children outta wedlock that you ain't told nobody about? Tell us the whole gamut of it," because I guarantee you if you're high profile—first guy on the Game and Fish Commission, Tommy Sproles. First guy on the Racing Commission, George Hammons. First guy on Highway Commission's Rodney Slater. You the first. Don't care what anybody says, when you're the first, you got to be the best. And

you got to be twice as good as whoever that is seeking. [01:57:27] In the case of Tommy Sproles, the governor was agonizin', and I'll never forget it. We came into his office one day, and there's a pile of letters over in the corner. He said—I don't remember who the other guy was. He said, "Some people over there are supportin' What's-his-name" or whatever the guy's name was. He said, "Now if y'all can go and get me as many letters of support for Tommy Sproles as for that guy, then I'll do that." No problem. We'll get you that. Plus he knew Tommy Sproles anyway. He had a good feel for him anyway. You had a good feel for him. Everybody had a fairly good feel for him. Same thing with the—with George Hammons, you know. Here's a guy, he'd been my roommate for four years. I knew him. I trust him. He's a smart guy. Never made an A in his life. He got a Ph.D. in chemistry from Harvard. He gonna understand whatever they're talkin' about at the Racing Commission. We're talkin' about brucellosis. He gonna know—I guarantee you, Governor, when he comes back, he gonna know more about brucellosis than anybody over there. We said Joe Hargrove. University of Arkansas Board of Trustees. He's a good guy, but he's strong. He can stand by his self. 'Cause you gotta get people who can stand by yourself. You understand you

serve at the pleasure of the governor, but you serve to take care of the will of the governor. Ninety-nine and nine percent of the time, the governor ain't gonna call you and say, "I need this done." But there may that one time. And he ain't gonna call you. He gonna tell me to call you. There'll be this one time when we want you to go this way or that way on the deal. I cannot say. And we had incidents like that with the guy on the parole board. Hell, I had to come back from Las Vegas to get this guy to come off of the parole board. But you serve at the pleasure of the governor. The governor put you on these boards because you think—you Black. There might be seven whites. You ain't gonna win the vote. But you got to use your power of persuasion, and you gotta make your case in order to get things done. And if you can't stand by yourself, and if you're crying about what they're doin' to me because I'm Black. If they're cryin' to you because of my race, and I can't get this done, and I wanna quit, you're in the wrong place. If you can't do this deal, don't take it. [01:59:59] Now fortunately, he made a bunch of good appointments. I can't think of two bad ones. Might've been—probably was some. But I can't think of two glaring bad ones. But it might've been. I don't know. I can't think of 'em.

BW: Well . . .

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

BW: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:00:21] BW: One of the things that became apparent to me—and I know how hard it is to be the first and the only woman on a board or a commission, and it has to be as bad or worse and harder to be the first black on a board or commission. After they got appointed, it seemed to me that you all, you and Rodney, stayed in touch with 'em, helped them not feel isolated, that you were there behind them whenever they got into those tough situations.

CW: Well, not only were there us, but we had a chief of staff who was behind 'em, too. I can remember one gentleman that was appointed that chief of staff called me one day and said, "Look, we wanna do this guy, but Willis, he on your shoulder. [*Laughs*] And if I appoint this guy—he has a few flaws, but I think he would do a good job. But he's on your shoulder." And I said, "Well, this guy's been working with us, he's been with us a long time. And the only thing that I can tell him is that chief of staff did this for you. I'm your contact person. If you mess it up, it's on my head. It's as simple as that." The guy went on to do a fairly good job and survived a whole bunch of years and a whole

bunch of governors, all right. [02:01:53] But the key to it was, I think, that—and I didn't come—I didn't necessarily come up with him. I didn't. Somebody else came, the chief of staff, came up with his name. And when I was asked about it, I said, "Yeah, I think he'll do a good job, and I will take the responsibility, the stand, on top of whatever it is that he's trying to do." And we explained that to him in no uncertain terms, and he understood that. And he took it on. And again, I think he did a pretty good job. There were some other folks who—that was good, loyal Clinton supporters that had good credentials and good background, but you know, we were kinda a little shaky about 'em. And most of 'em panned out.

BW: But that was white people too.

CW: Oh, sure, sure.

[02:02:46] BW: And there were a number of white appointments where somebody had to put—had to hold onto 'em and be responsible for them . . .

CW: Sure.

BW: . . . all the way through because it was real shaky. But we had very few problems.

CW: Well, I think—but again, that is—that, too, was a result of good staff work more than anything else. You know, Governor made

the appointment, but he wasn't gonna appoint anybody that we were vehemently against. But I think there was an understanding with people of the staff. And it wasn't just me. I mean, we would say, "Look, if you appointed to a board or commission, we got a liaison here, right. If there's something that you don't understand, then you need to call the liaison and develop a relationship with the liaison as well. I'm the political person. These are your technical people over here. So if you don't understand something, don't think you're the John Wayne of appointments or politics and [*BW laughs*] go out here on your own and screw something up. Ask somebody, you know." [02:03:56] One of the things that I have tried to impress upon young people all the time, you don't know everything. If you don't know something—I mean, I guess I'm bad about it. I'm gonna ask four or five people and get their opinion. Now you make the ultimate decision, but get the best input that you got. But again, that was good—that was about a good staff and a staff that could relate to appointees. They understood that this was a team, and that if one part of the team drops the ball, then there's egg on all of us face.

[02:04:33] BW: Another area of appointments that were troublesome when we were trying to break the color barrier were the

regulatory boards and commissions where the governor was supposed to make the appointment from a short list submitted by the trade association. And it was very difficult to get them to add anybody of color to those recommendations. Sometimes we'd send 'em back and say, "No more three lists. You send me a list of six, and two of 'em have to be African American" or—you know, it was . . .

[02:05:07] CW: It was tough. But we figured out how to start workin' that as well because—all right, let me use this. Let's use, say, the funeral industry. I know a bunch of white guys in the funeral industry, all right. I know the ones that was our supporters. I know the ones that were not our supporters. And I would go back to these guys—and we did this with a lot of others, too. I'd go back to these guys and say, "Look, the governor wants to do a black person. Now this can be easy or this can be hard. Now if you wanna be a hero, you will go back to your friends and say, 'Look." Governor can't say this, and I ain't—I can't say this, but you need to find—you've got some black friends. I mean, the white guy in McGehee? He friend of mine. The white guy down in Dumas, he's a friend of mine. The guys in power in various kinds of—in the legal community. We know guys in the legal community. We know the guys in—

you're just sayin' look. [02:06:20] But again, all that goes to the atmosphere that Bill Clinton put out there. So these guys didn't wanna buck the system because one thing they did understand why, where they might not have a black on there, there were gonna be some other white appointments comin' up too that the governor was gonna have to make, and you might not get the person that you want. It might be one of your favorite people, and it might be one of your unfavorite persons on that same list. And we might go with that unfavorite person as opposed to your favorite person. So you kinda—and that started to work once the word got out that that's what we wanted to do. Then that barrier started to break down. [02:07:07] But it was about breakin' down the good old boy system that these folks had been used to dealing with all their life. That was the system they'd been used to dealing with. Okay. You got a new sheriff in town, all right. This sheriff does not deal under that old system. So either you go confirm with this old system, or you don't wanna get into a fightin' match with the governor's office over—you know, some of these boards and—it was so trivial it wasn't even worth fightin' about, right. But there was some big ones that would've been worth fightin' about. But the word would get out. You gotta fight. You gotta

fight with the governor. Not only do you gotta fight with the governor, but you got a governor's staff over there that will fight you tooth and nail to get done what we need to get done. Now you might run across the governor. He gonna say hmm, umm. He gonna mumble a little bit. But I guarantee you when he comes back, he gonna say, "This is what I want done." And whatever he wants done, we're gonna carry that out. It's as simple as that. [02:08:15] So the word—my point is, the word started to get around that that is what the new sheriff wants. The atmosphere has changed. The way the good old boys is used to doin' it is gonna change. Now the good old boy network is still alive and well, and I think we had to learn to play the good old boy network as well 'cause we had a legislature that was good old boy, so we had to figure out how to play that as well. Now you also could get legislators involved. You know, you could go—if you had a good relationship with some of these guys, you'd say, "Look, you need to talk to your boy over here that's got somethin' goin' on that's negative, and guess who's gonna suffer for that. You know, that little old bill that you gonna bring up, that little old bill, you know, it might be easy, might be hard, you know." There's things that we could say that the governor couldn't say, wouldn't say. "See, but now, you

know, it could be easy, or it could be hard, so you need to go back down to Crossett, or you need to go down to Eudora, or you need to go to Dermott and say, 'Look, we don't need to fight the governor on this 'cause we might have a big fight comin' up where we need that stick, and we don't wanna lose somethin' big over somethin' trivial or somethin' small.'" There are a number—for guys that are—black guys, now, that are elected that—in various campaign stops. Governor would say, "You know," to some of the good old boys. I mean, some of the pure power role. [02:09:58] We're on a barge one night somewhere, I don't remember where it was. I do remember where it was. I think so. He said, "You know, it's time we need a black judge in this county. A black municipal judge in one of these counties down here, in these towns—in one of these towns down here." Now these old boys were good old boys. I liked 'em even though they wasn't exactly my stripe, but they were guys that I could always deal with. Said, "Look," and he said, "Carol, what the governor mean by that?" I said, "I think the governer mean y'all need to go see if y'all can't get you a black judge elected somewhere, all right. 'Cause I think it would bode well, and it looks good for the state of Arkansas, especially deep down in this part of the country, that there is a black municipal judge on

the bench. Now we know we can't get a black ele—can't get a black judge elected in this part of this county unless you boys get behind him. Now if you boys get behind him, we think that boy can be elected." That boy got elected. He's a judge right now. But that was the kinda thing that Bill Clinton would throw out there. My guess is he probably forgot all of this kinda stuff.

BW: I don't know.

CW: My guess is he will never forget—he will forget that kind of conversation. And like I said, we're floatin' down some river on some barge somewhere. I can't remember where it was. But I'm listenin' to the conversation. Next thing I know, some old boy come and said "Carol, that—well, who you think we can get?" I say, "Well, hell, there ain't but one black lawyer down here. You know who he got to be." Simple as that.

[02:11:37] BW: Well, you were as adept at coming up with a strategy about who needed to talk to who in the white side of things as you were in mobilizing the African American community, so that people who thought that you only knew the black community were wrong. You were smart about it. You were as smart a politician as I've ever known. We also had trouble with—at one point I know we had a lot of judgeships. We'd created a lot of new judgeships, and the governor was going to appoint the

initial ones, and the bar association absolutely balked at the women and mino—and blacks that the governor wanted to appoint. And they kept sending them back as not qualified. You member that?

CW: Yes, I do.

BW: Oh. But what he did was do 'em anyway.

CW: He did. [02:12:30] But if you look—just using the woman that he appointed. This woman's qualifications was impeccable. Not only was her qualifications was impeccable, she's what you wanted in a judge.

BW: Abso . . .

CW: She's tough, she's fair, and then she had presence. [*Laughs*] You know, she was a tall woman, and she was—she had a presence. And I think that was critical, too. I think you got—again, it goes back to that person that can stand up by them self. That person—'cause you had some black folks that didn't necessarily like the black names that we came up with, too. But you make the same argument to them. If not them, if not her, if not him, who? Show me somebody better. If you can show me somebody better, I'll throw it out there, I'll put it on the table with the governor, let him make the decision on it. But if you can't come up with somebody better, let's roll. And I think you

broke that barrier down in the legal community. You broke that down with the judges. And but I think that the judges, the big judges, was critical, but it was more critical to get that guy down at the . . .

BW: Oh, sure.

CW: . . . municipal level.

[02:13:47] BW: Well, I know that one of the professional associations that was really tough to deal with were medical doctors because they had two separate, segregated medical societies.

CW: Right.

BW: And it was the white one that got to make the recommendations. And I don't remember the details of how it got negotiated that there would be joint recommendations or else we would just take the one from the black medical association. Do you remember how . . .

CW: Yeah.

BW: . . . how that was done?

CW: I think what we went to the—now let me say it. We're talking about—sometime we're talkin' about white folks over here. The black folks had their problems, too. Because in the case of the black medical association, they didn't have they game plan together, either. So I said, "Look, you can't scream and

holler"—because we gave 'em plenty of notice. We'd give 'em notice, you know. I said, "Look, *x*, *y*"—'cause we kept up with Judy and Mary Anne. We always talked about the appointments that were comin' up. So I said, "Look. This is comin' up in March, or this is comin' up next year. You need to be thinkin' about [*sirens*] how you want to do it." Now in the case of the medical doctors, you were just now gettin' a group of medical doctors who were politically active as well. Up until then, you had guys that were doctor doctors. You know, they did the patients thing, they made the money, they did all of that, but they were not politically active. In the case of the guy that we put on the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees, Joe Hargrove, he was my doctor. He was my mama's doctor. He was a good doctor, one of the best cardiologists around. So I said, "Joe, look, why don't you get politically active? Why don't you come on, hang with us, and do *x*, *y*, and *z*?" "Well, Carol, you know, I don't think I can be a part of this. I just can't see how we can benefit from this." I said, "Joe. Do you understand how important the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees is?" [02:16:08] He said, "Well, I'm a doctor." I said, "Well, look. You can take care of the doctors. You can take care of the black folks. You can take care of UAPB." And I said, "Not only that,

the kind of connections that you will make with the people on the University of Arkansas Board of Trustees, you can also make some money. Somewhere down the road, you can make some money with these guys." "Well, Carol, I'll think about it." Said, "You ain't got but five minutes to think about this. 'Cause there are a couple of things you need to do, and then you get back to me." He got back to me. We made the appointment. [02:16:44] A year or so later, he come, and he said, "Man, I didn't know what this was all about." He said, "I didn't know what I was gettin' into, and how much influence, and how much authority, and what I can do for Black folks, what I can do for poor folks." I said, "Joe, just make sure you cover the governor. That's all I'm interested in. I know you. I been knowin' you all my life. I know you gonna do the right thing." I said, "But you are warned. Now, there are guys on this Board"—and I'd go down 'em one by one. I'd say, "Now this guy right here is from way up." I said, "Now this is a Clinton guy." Or "this guy right here, he's a Republican guy." So we'd break these, each one of these guys, down. I said, "Now this is the way you approach each one of these guys." I said, "Now you got one guy here you might have to get into his face." I said, "But you know, you're a tough guy. [*Laughs*] You know, you ain't no shrinkin' violet

yourself." I said, "You might have to get into his face a little bit, but he'll back off." I says, "Another one over here, you can finesse a little bit. Then you got to figure out who your allies are, all right? If you wanna get somethin' done for UAPB, they always want somethin' done for UAMS. They always want somethin' done for Fayetteville. It's called a tradin' game. If you want a dormitory down there at UAPB, and they're building a dormitory up in Fayetteville, or they building somethin' somewhere else or a stadium or whatever it is, you trade off with these guys 'cause they're gonna need your vote 'cause they wanna get their deals done. So you just—it's a trade off kind of a deal. You ain't compromising yourself. You ain't sellin' out. But just think about how many kids benefit from a new dorm down at UAPB, all right. That's the mode you gotta put your mind in." And he did well. He served for ten years, and he did well. Now the guy that came after him was a little suspect, but we'll [*laughter*] . . .

[02:18:50] BW: When—well, we had two or three instances of major, major appointments that we wanted to give to African Americans, and they're supposed to be confirmed by the senate. And we ran into senators who just would not do it, mostly from east Arkansas in the Delta. And where were their heads in terms

of who the electorate was. There was only one we really had to back off of 'cause there was no way.

CW: No. But let me tell you how—what really made that happen. This senator, six three, six four. Big guy. Boomin' voice. He was a intimidator, all right. If you didn't go his way . . .

BW: He was a bully.

CW: He was a—well, you can call him that. [*Laughs*] I called him somethin' else. But he'd stand up over you, and he'd say, "It ain't gonna happen. It ain't gonna happen my way." This particular time—you know, the governor's, what, six two? The governor's sittin' down at his desk, and this guy was standin' up in front of him. The governor stood up and looked at him eye-to-eye. Said, "I'm gonna do this. I'm gonna do this." And it is the case with all bullies—they always back down. Now the end of that story is two things happened outta that. First of all, this guy was forced to deal with that appointee. He found out that that appointee was a good appointee that could help him do what he wanted to do. He had this notion about him that he was this kind of a guy.

[02:20:35] BW: He was some radical, fringe element.

CW: Sure.

BW: Yeah.

CW: Some—yeah. He said, "This guy's this, and he ain't gonna do this, and he ain't gonna—they gonna do this to the white folk"—farthest thing from the truth. But he wasn't gonna get a lot of his deals done unless he had to go through this guy, and this guy carried his water for him. Now the guy didn't mind carrying the water for him. What—or it—'cause you know, there are still a few of us believe that you put your personal feelings aside when it benefits the multitude, all right. And I think that happened because you saw from another friend that you just had a recent conversation with was a friend of this guy, and they saw this guy, these guys, as the antiestablishment guys, the guys that's "We'll take 'em on in a fight," when if they'd've reached out to 'em, they would've figured out that we all can work a deal long as the benefit to everybody. You can work a deal as long as it benefits everybody. Can't be no one-way street. And a one-way street doesn't have any value. You create a bunch of confusion. You create a bunch of grief. [02:21:45] Now I had friends the same way, you know. I had friends up in eastern Arkansas the same way who would draw the line in the sand and say, "We're gonna do it this way, or we ain't gonna do it at all." Some of 'em were in the legislature. One of the things I used to stick 'em with was, "All right, Mr.

Legislator. You been elected. You been over here two term, two years. What is the difference between the benefit of the life of your people that you've been here as opposed to when you were not here? What have you done that the white representative hadn't done? Because you can't work with the other white representative over here or the other white senator over here. Now if your pers—if your people ask you the question, Mr. Legislator, 'What have you done?' you gonna come and say, 'Well, I put it on the table.' What the hell you put it on the table. You put it on the table, but you ain't gettin' nothin' done. Ain't no better school over here. Ain't no better health facilities over here. Ain't no better nothin' over here. So you been here two terms, three terms, whatever the hell your term is. You ain't done nothin' for your people." And if you're a legislator, or you're a representative, you got a district, the people that are first in mind are the people that you represent. [02:23:13] Now that—you know, we have these arguments too. They apply to the black folks as well. The needs of black folks in Little Rock could very well be different than the needs of black folks in Phillips County. Now if we can bond together and get somethin' done together, fine, well, and good. It benefits black folks in general. But if you got to make a choice, and you ain't got but

one, two choices, your folks in Phillips County or your folks in Pulaski County—you were voted in by these folks in Phillips County to represent your interests. Now if you ain't taking care of them folks, what you come over here for? You see what I mean? That's what you—we been fightin' all these years for "We want representation. We want to get things done. We want to make it better for our folks. We wanna make it better for everybody." You know, we used to say when we talked about poor folks, we used to think about black folks, right? I don't use that term any more. I don't use black folks anymore. I say poor folks. 'Cause plenty of poor, white folks over here, you know. When we were growin' up, you know, we always thought that white folks, don't matter who they was, they were white, they wasn't poor. [*Laughs*] But now we learned through a process that poor folks are poor folks, and a loaf of bread costs the same thing for a poor white person as it does for a black person, and it's just as hard to get. And it digests the same way. [*BW laughs*] [02:24:50] So you—but everything that I'm sayin' here is that it goes back to the lessons we learn from a guy like Bill Clinton, you know. You learned it from Bill Clinton. You learned it from the people that you worked with on the governor's staff. We learned to trade off. We learned to trade off for the benefit

of the greater good. [02:25:19] You know, in constitutional law there's a test called the balance of interest test, right. And the balance of interest test says long as you can balance the interest, you give a little, you take a little. As long as the people benefit, then the interest has been balanced. You ain't never gonna get 100 percent. You ain't never gonna get 90 percent. In baseball if you bat .300, you're a hell of a hitter. [*Laughs*] If you can bat that, you're doin' all right. If you can—and that's the lesson that you learn from a guy like Clinton. You know, people say Clinton was a—would fold. They say he'd roll over, and depending upon the eye of the beholder, I think probably some of us might've said that early on. But when you been around for a while and you startin' to see the bigger picture, then you develop a broader picture of what you take—what you think it takes to get somethin' done, right. And if you can't get somethin' done, going back to what I said earlier, if you can't get somethin' done—I'm sixty-two years old. [02:26:33] And the most disappointing thing in my life is that when I go back to McGehee, after every place that I've been and—around the world from Africa to Haiti to Japan and to Washington to the White House and all the stuff I've done in my life, and I go back to Church Street or School Street in McGehee, and it looks the

same as it did when I left, that bothers me. That's why I'm back down there now, you know. [02:27:05] It ain't because I want to be—to do something in McGehee, but I just feel like we have to try to do something to make it better. If we've had all these opportunities and we can't make it happen—and I'm sure Clinton feels the same kind of frustration, and you, and all the rest of us. We feel the same kind of frustration that we've been given unique opportunities, and that we've come up short on our expectations. I think we've done some good. Don't misunderstand me. I think that we've done some good. But I have to question about whether Clinton could've done more, I could've done more, all of us could've done more. And is it too late for us to still try? You see what I'm sayin'? At sixty-two you say, "Well, I wanna give this up." But I look at my ten-year-old grandson, and I'm sayin', "This is a pretty sharp kid here, and his IQ is probably equal to mine right now. I can't let that kid fall on his face." And I see little kids runnin' around the streets and don't have that opportunity. [02:28:23] So I think what drives Clinton to some degree and what drives the Foundation and what drives him goin' to Africa or goin' to Haiti or goin' to all these places is that we have not filled the destiny that we were given, the opportunities that we had, you know.

And we've had some good—I mean, you cannot—I don't care how you cut this deal, you could not have told me in 1966 when I finished at Desha High School that I'd be able to walk into the White House or that I could walk into the state Capitol bein' a kid from McGehee in Desha County, Arkansas, you know. And but it happened, and I think it happened for a reason that we should do a little more even when we don't wanna do a little more. And it's hard. [02:29:32] You know, Olly and I were having this conversation this morning. We . . .

BW: Olly being . . .

CW: Neal. Olly Neal. We had this conversation this mornin'. I said, "Neal, we been out here"—he been out there longer than I had. I said, "We been out here sixty, sixty-five years of our life. Do you really think that we made a difference?" He said, "Well, Willis, I don't know." I said, "Well, Judge," I said, "you got to look back at them health care clinics you had over there in Marianna. And you got to look back at all of the opportunities that these kids would have—probably wouldn't have survived, and these young mamas would not have survived had it not been there for you fightin' the battle." So I said, "I look at myself. I ain't got no money. I'm gonna die broke. Gonna die poor." I said, "But in a week or two I think that I have an

opportunity to say that I been the mentor of the first black Speaker of the House." I said, "Now that's worth more mon—that's worth more than money to me." [02:30:45] I gotta guy that worked for me for eight years who is now the mayor of Jacksonville, Florida. The mayor of Jackson, Mississippi. I said, "Every time I get down, I tell myself that that would not have happened had it not been for Bill Clinton 'cause he put me in play. I put these guys in play, and hopefully they will put some other people in play so that my ten-year-old grandson can rise above everything and whatever they have accomplished. [02:31:18] My daddy used to use a phrase to me all the time. He'd say—I get a college degree. I came home. Throw it on the bed. I got a lot of gro—he said, "What's that." I said—he'd look at it. He said, "Give it to your mama." I get another degree. I threw it on the bed. He said, "What's this?" I s—I'm thinkin' I done somethin'. He said, "Let me tell you somethin'." He said, "Until you have come—until you have done what is equal to or greater than what I have done, you can't talk to me." Now I ain't never gonna be able to accomplish what he did. But I'm always gonna try. And I want my grandson to say, if in ten years he see this interview, I want him to be able to say, "I got to be equal to or greater than what my grandfather did." That's

what it's all about. But all of that happens, all of that started right here in Arkansas with a guy named Clinton. Right. [02:32:35] And people that I worked with in the governor's office who we will always be joined at the hips whether we like each other, whether we dislike each other, don't even matter. But every person, and I like to think that I made the impression on somebody—that we make that effort. That's why what we're doin' here is critically important. Because I don't think people—history will be kind to us. History will be kinder to Bill Clinton than anything that we are talkin' about now—that's gonna look back and say, "We did well. We did well, but we could've done better." We—I mean, I say we as a collective group, we could have done better. Now, that's gonna haunt us. Now we can take solace in the fact we did pretty damn good. [*Laughs*] But we could have done better.

[02:33:33] BW: But we have to still keep doing.

CW: Oh, no, you gotta keep—you can't—you know, I wanna quit. Trust me. I truly wanna quit. But if you quit, these kids—and now—you know the biggest problem in Arkansas right now, black and white? Leadership. There is no leadership. There is no vision. You got to have leadership across the board, from the lowest common denominator of elected positions, from the

community to the legislature to the state house to the senate to the White House. If we don't have leadership, people perish. There's this . . .

BW: We're not developing it, either.

CW: No. No.

BW: We don't have a pipeline.

CW: No, we don't. We don't. And we gotta do something about that. That's something I think we can do something about.

BW: Absolutely.

CW: I think that's somethin' that—that is somethin' that we can do somethin' about. We can go find kid. And I'm like a football scout. I constantly look for young people to do something with. Pick up—what you do is you pick 'em up, you raise 'em up, you beat 'em down, you kick 'em, you cajole 'em, you threaten 'em, you do whatever it takes to make 'em get the best out of them, whatever it takes to get the best out of 'em, you know. All of us, you approach all of us in a different way. But we got a foundation. You got a foundation of success. You can say, "Look at the Clinton years." But if it hadn't been for Winthrop Rockefeller, wouldn't have been a Bill Clinton. Hadn't been for Sid McMath, wouldn't have been a Winthrop Rockefeller, right. Clinton built on Winthrop Rockefeller. He took it to the next

level. [02:35:23] Last night we were at a deal with William Sonny Walker, who was one of the Rockefeller's guys. And I could see myself fifteen years from now sayin' the same thing about Clinton that he was sayin' about Rockefeller that—and he said it loud, and he said it strong, and he said it proud. "We made a difference." And I can only say had it not been for Sonny Walker, wouldn't've been a Carol Willis. They broke the barrier. They still understand that the work is not done. So I have to understand that the work is not done. And he probably eighty years old, right. So the work is not done. So in ten years or fifteen years, I hope I'm around, I wanna be able to stand and say, "If it was not for Bill Clinton, then this would not have happened. You would'nt've been here. This would not have happened. This guy over here—there wouldn't have been a black speaker of the house, there wouldn't have been a black this, there wouldn't have been a woman this, there wouldn't have been a poor, white person doin' anything in this state because the atmosphere that Bill Clinton put out there is a contagious atmosphere." [02:36:37] You know, the present president talks about bein' agent of change. Had it not been for Bill Clinton, there would not been a Barack Obama. You can use the biblical term of—and Clinton probably ain't gonna like this.

Jesus and John the Baptist. Clinton was John the Baptist, and you can say Obama was Jesus. But if it had not been for Bill Clinton breakin' the mold in this country state, wouldn't been no Barack Obama. Would not have happened. Trust me.

[02:37:09] BW: Well, that all reminds me of another remarkable thing you did when you were on the governor's staff, which was to constantly identify Arkansans who had left the state and be—had very distinctive careers and awards and honors, and you got them linked back to what was going on in Arkansas. How did you take that on and what—why did you want them to know what was going on?

CW: Well, because I think I said yesterday that I come from McGehee, Desha County, Bayou Mason, Arkansas. I don't care where you go. Your roots are where you started. We knew John Johnson, the *Ebony-Jet* guy. He grew up four miles from where I live. You had all these city councilmen in Chicago. You had Haley with *Roots*. You had the lady from down in Stamps, Maya . . .

BW: Angelou.

CW: . . . Angelou. You had all these people. So you got to—you must understand that you still owe your roots somethin', right. It was the idea—and durin' the Clinton thing—during the year—

during Clinton's years we b—a bunch of these people came back from—for the—was it seth—sesquicentennial, whatever it was.

[02:38:43] BW: Sesquicentennial.

CW: Yeah. They came—a lot of 'em came back. Now a lot of Arkansan didn't know where these people came from or what they had accomplished. So you got to say to these folks, "Look. You got to let Little Johnny over there know that you can come from Arkansas City, or you can come from Marianna, or you can come from Dermott, or you can come from wherever, and you can be successful at what you're doin'. So it's critical that you come back and let these people see you. It's also critical that you come back and make some kind of contribution to the state, whether it's just showin' up, bein' seen, reachin' out to somebody, givin' somebody a scholarship, give a kid an opportunity, give 'em an internship. Do somethin' to let people know that this is where you came from." If you look at the northern migration, my classmates in—my high school classmates. There were only fifteen men in my class. Every one of 'em went to Detroit to work in the . . .

BW: Auto industry.

CW: Auto industry. [02:40:07] Once they got to be my age, most of 'em retired. So we started to look, what can we do to get these

guys to do something for the community? They got money. They made money, they retired. Let's see how many of 'em we can get to come back to McGehee 'cause they got money, they're independent, they're gonna build them a good-lookin' house, they're gonna be able to be in the community, they're gonna be able to speak up, they're gonna be able to talk to these kids, so that's a resource. Out of the fifteen, we got about seven back already, right. Why you wanna build a house in San Francisco or Martha's Vineyard or some suburb of Detroit when you can come back to McGehee? It don't take but two hours' drive between—hour and a half now to drive between McGehee and Little Rock. And you—we don't have to have that much entertainment. Once or twice a month [*laughs*] is enough anyway. So think about where you were in 1966 and what your options were in 1966. Give these kids and give these communities a better option because you're smart. You done learned something. You got to—you got wisdom, and I hope in forty years you done learned somethin'. You can tell a kid how to make a mistake. Not only a kid, but you can also—you can reach back to people our age who didn't take the northern migration, who stayed and fought and struggled in the community. Lift them up as well. Teach 'em. [02:41:49] You

got guys that were in my class that—I found out don't—didn't know how to read to this day. Didn't know how to read. Amazing. I never would've thought it. Just happened upon it. You got people that are retired schoolteachers that were in my class. I said, "Look. We ain't gonna embarrass nobody, but let's figure out a way—I don't care if they're sixty years old or sixty-five years old. Joe wants to know how to read. Let's figure out a way that we can teach him how to read. So let's tee—Miss Ex-Schoolteacher, Miss Retired Schoolteacher, here it is. Once a teacher, you're always a teacher. You wanna teach. You don't need to just have—on once a month have a retired teacher's meetin' and have lunch and sip tea. If you're a teacher, teach him, right. The best feeling that you ever gonna get, Miss Teacher, is that you said you wanted to see your students do well. What kinda feeling you gonna get when you see a sixty-five-year-old student do well as opposed to a sixteen-year-old student or a twelve-year-old student? And that person will be eternally grateful to you that if you just do it in a diplomatic way." [02:43:18] So those kind—those are the kind of things that I think when you started talkin' about teacher testin' and what good teachers are about. You go to them teachers and say, "Well, you been teachin' forty years, fifty years. You passed

the teacher test. Now you got another teacher test to pass. Teach this guy to read. Teach him science, teach him math, teach him whatever he wants to learn or she wants to learn. Teach him that, all right." [02:43:53] I don't have the answers, but we started down the path. I think Clinton—and when I say Clinton, I mean all of us—we started down the path of progress, right. And we cannot let progress come to a screechin' halt in a state like Arkansas. 'Cause it's very easy to have a relapse. And right now we are in the process of relapsin'. So what does it say to Bill Clinton's legacy if the state that he was born in and the state that catapulted him into greatness—and we still get back to this notion of thankin' God for Mississippi 'cause we still forty-ninth. So what have we accomplished? We did some good stuff. We did a bunch of good stuff. People will be impressed at some of the stuff that we did.

[02:44:58] BW: So what are you gonna do about it now?

CW: What are we gonna do about it now? You got the Clinton Foundation over there. I'm raggin' them already about it.

BW: You're ready to do some strategy.

CW: Yes, I'm ready. I'm raggin' him right now. We're takin' care of Haiti. We're takin' care of Africa. What are we gonna do about from Mississippi County down to Chicot County? That is a third

world over there. Now that's somethin' we can help.

BW: Well, you know that you can recruit a lot of us to come help with that . . .

CW: Well, I will.

BW: . . . strategy, too.

CW: I'm puttin' him on Front Street last time he was here. I said . . .

BW: Well, we can also help make it happen . . .

CW: Yeah.

BW: . . . once you get the commitment.

CW: I think—let me tell you, I think he's willing to make that commitment.

BW: Mh-hmm. I do, too.

CW: 'Cause, you know.

BW: I do, too. [02:45:45] Let me talk to you about a couple of more things on the campaign. One of the things that the press went ballistic over was the black Get Out The Vote because it was so extraordinary. And there was a sense that we were doing something really wrong. Well, were we?

CW: No.

BW: What was it that enabled you all to organize these extraordinary turnouts?

CW: Again, it goes back to Bill Clinton. You know, people had the

notion that we were payin' a whole bunch of money. We . . .

BW: Payin' people to vote.

CW: We didn't have a bunch of money. You know, we beggin'. We grovelin'. You know, I betcha I went through five grand juries. "Where was the money?" "What money? Ain't no money here. We paid some car haulers. We paid some people that put out some literature. Ain't nobody gettin' paid no money." It was about people havin' a vision that we gonna do better. Here is the horse. We're gonna ride this horse into the sunset. We're gonna ride this horse to jubilee. This is our horse. We're gonna ride him. We believe in him. He's sayin' the right thing. He look good. He's sincere about what he's sayin'. We think he gonna do the right thing, right. He surrounded himself by people who think the same way that he does. The people that he surrounded his self with is an extension of what he believe. We didn't have to go beg folks. We didn't. You know, we stayed on top of the game. [02:47:36] People wanted to participate. We only had to provide them with the structure and how we wanted to do this deal. If I called a guy up in Crittendon County and said, "Look, this precinct needs to have ten people in it. We need six cars over here. Only way we're gonna get this little old lady that's eighty-five years old up to the polls. We gotta get

her there." Do she need a walker? Do she need cane? Do she need whatever? She says she wants to go vote. Some of 'em said, "I wanna vote for the first time." There was this young white boy who we think gonna be all right, you know. The first one was tough. The second one—the second time he ran for—was all right. I'm talkin' about—not the time he lost, but the comeback. That was tough because we had to se—we had resell it. We had to repackage this thing, right. But after we repackaged it the first time, then we delivered. You got the boards and commission. You got the black folks on the staff. You got the black directors of agencies. So it was much easier than . . .

[02:48:51] BW: And he's following through on the programs.

CW: He's following through on the program. So it was much easier to say we delivered this. Now just wait to see what's comin'. You see what I'm sayin'? It's gonna be better. It's gonna be more. [02:49:04] Then you got the social aspect of it. You got black folks rollin' up into the Mansion. You comin' to the Christmas parties. You com—you're a part of a process that we ain't never been able to touch before, you know. So people said—I call and said, "Look. We got this going on at the man"—"Uh, the Mansion?" "Yeah." "Well, what do we wear?" You can

remember when ladies come in to the Mansion with their fur coats. [*Laughs*] I mean, you know.

BW: Dressed to the nines.

CW: You got the line of fur coats. And I'm sayin', "Look. It ain't that kind of party. We don't have to do that." But, "Mr. Willis, I'm goin' to the Governor's Mansion. I ain't never been to some Governor's Mansion. I'm gonna wear my fur coat. I don't get a chance to wear my fur coat nowhere else. I don't get a chance to wear my"—whatever shoes you got. "I don't get a chance to do that." So we saw that, and we encourage 'em to do that. This was a social event. This was a political event. This was a cultural event. This was an ev—these were events that could move this state forward.

[02:50:12] BW: And the Clintons loved every second of it.

CW: Every minute. And Clinton in his grandeur loved the adoration. You know. Ain't nothin' wrong with that. I mean, that's what a politician is.

BW: Well, he loved the people.

CW: Sure. And he in—and then he interacted with 'em. You know, you gotta run 'em off, you know. [*BW laughs*] He gonna—little boy from down at White House said, "Mr. Willis, Mr. Clinton kept me there for two hours, and he's sayin' the same thing over and

over." I said, "Hey, you know, you could've left"—"I can't leave the governor." Hey. But that—it all goes back to atmosphere. It goes back to Clinton himself. And again, I cannot say how important it was to people bein' around him. [02:51:02] When I say that—I seen you as the feminist givin' ol—good ol' boy—pourin' coffee for him. You see what I'm sayin'? I mean, I did stuff for white boys I would never do [*laughs*], you know, under normal circumstance. But we put all that aside for the greater good and the balance of the interest because that was the kind of atmosphere that was there, and I have not seen that atmosphere—it wasn't even—it wasn't at the White House. You know, it—that wasn't—and I suppose I shouldn't've been disappointed in that, but you know, there'd be plenty of times that we got events goin' on up at the White House. Little social secretary come up to me. "Mr. Willis, tell that lady"—I said, "I'm not tellin' that lady to let the president go." I said, "If I go up there and tell that boy or that man or that preacher to get away from the president, President gonna go off on me." I said, "These people got roots. Long, deep. Let 'em alo—what he got to do. If he got to do somethin' and whoever is puttin' the heat out there, I'll take the heat." I said, "But I ain't gonna take the heat from him by runnin' his folks off." [*Laughter*] You see

what I'm sayin'.

BW: They're his folks.

[02:52:26] CW: And I can remember when we'd have some events and they'd have a some little White House guys or girls standin' up there next to him, you know how they do the line. I slide up to the line. I said, "Look. Here comes So-and-so and So-and-so. I'm gonna stand here." "Oh, you can't do that." I said, "Beg your pardon?" "You can't do that." I said, "I tell you what. You go tell that blond-head boy right there that I can't do that. That all his folks comin' through here, and I can't do that." I said, "Now you wanna tell him that? You'd do that?" I got two or three pictures like that, right. But we had to—it was a different fight because these are the people that got Bill Clinton to where he was. [02:53:14] You know, this PBS thing. Come on. I mean [*laughs*] . . .

BW: The *American Experience* documentary.

CW: I . . .

BW: There was no perspective.

CW: I can't fathom that. I mean, I don't know what Clinton's reaction is gonna be to it. But one black person in this deal. I mean, that—the guys—everybody walkin' up to me there at the Capitol sayin', "Oh, it looked good." I said, "Come on. I have to tell

you. First of all, we didn't do that. Clinton didn't do that. [*Laughs*] Number one. That was somebody else's deal." But he'd be disappointed.

BW: Oh, he's got to be furious.

CW: He'd be totally . . .

BW: One black interviewee is not the story of his life . . .

CW: No.

BW: . . . at all.

CW: He—no. And it—that kind of stuff is disappointing, but that's why we have to constantly be on top of our game, right. Because you don't ever wanna cut people out that's been with you from square one because them the same people that's gonna be with you when you're up, when you're down, when you're on the slide, when you're on the skid, when you're on the side. If you go there, it comes back to haunt you. I don't care where it is, who you are, you cannot do it. [02:54:36] So that was disappointing to me. As well as they say that I did, I mean, I don't feel good about this. I do not feel good about that. You know, I couldn't feel good about some of the appointments that he made to secretarial posts. I mean, even with the black folk—when you pass over Bob Nash, you know, I just—that just can't get to me. You see what I mean [*laughs*]—I can't get to that.

BW: Mh-hmm.

[02:55:06] CW: Right. I mean, he should have that option. You know. You can't explain to me why you don't take a Mahlon Martin to DC with you. You can't explain that to me. And I know how hurt Mahlon . . .

BW: Yes.

CW: . . . Martin was, and I know he wasn't gonna say a word about it, but I did, you know. I wa—I marched right over there that next day and told Clinton that Mahlon was hurt.

BW: Me, too.

CW: I said, "You can't—hell, I don't care about" . . .

BW: I didn't know he was hurt, but I was . . .

CW: Oh. He was.

BW: . . . I was personally . . .

CW: Oh, he was hurt.

BW: . . . insulted.

CW: Oh. And you know, Mahlon was quiet, easy goin'. He wasn't gonna rock the boat because he's a trooper. He wasn't gonna fight that. And I said, "Man, we need to let him know how you feel about this deal." 'Cause you cannot explain to me how, if you want a secretary, you done had a secretary for the last eight years. Give me a break. A secretary in waitin'. One that you

know, one that you can trust, put out on the reservation. You ain't gotta worry about a damn thing. But how can you pass up on that?

[02:56:16] BW: Well, I wanna ask you two more questions. One is that you have made reference several times to the importance of black preachers and the black church in the political work that you did in Arkansas.

TM: Betsey, excuse me. We need to change tapes before we . . .

BW: Okay.

[Tape stopped]

[02:56:33] BW: You were talking about the importance of the black ministers and the churches in the political work you were doing, whether it was for legislation or for campaigning, and that was during the [19]80s and the early [19]90s. Is the—does the black church and the black ministerial alliance still have the same kind of role in the community?

CW: Not as strong as it used to be because the nature of the black church has changed. You are now involved in the era of megachurches. When we were campaigning, you had the AME Church, the Church of God and Christ, the Missionary Baptist, Consolidated Baptist, and they were all solid denominations. You still have solid denominations, but you got all these

megachurches. You got television preachers. You got a diffusion of leadership, and it all goes back to leadership. The preacher used to be the leader, the local leader. This is where not only you brought your religion, but you brought your concerns and your complaints. That is not out there now as prevalent as it used to be. [02:57:52] Leadership—the church was a leadership vacuum for us. That is what we always used, and traditionally, before now. Not only with us, but in political campaigns across the country. Black ministers used to be leadership. Now—then you had a different kind of minister as well. Ministers today, the vast majority, don't take care of the needs of the community. They take care of the religious needs. But say a guy like here in Little Rock, Hezekiah Stewart. He takes care of the needs of the community, not only just preachin' on Sunday and Wednesday night and that kind of deal. That's the kind of preacher my daddy was. They take care of the needs of the community. Johnny go to jail, preacher gonna get him out. Mama get sick, preacher goin' to the hospital. Daughter got troubles with her husband, got divorce problem, preacher gonna be right there. [02:59:01] Now with the advent of the megachurches and television, there's an impersonal relationship. Guys know somebody in their congregations, but

they're—for every one person they know, there're four or five that they don't know. Don't know what people are goin' through. But that is the—that's the change. But again, all that goes back to what we talked about earlier, and that's called leadership. [02:59:31] Now when you talk about leadership, you got black politicians now. But the black politician is not as strong as the minister used to be. Fact, black politicians still have to depend upon a lot of black ministers. Now doesn't nothin' sayin'—it doesn't hold true for every community. Every community is different. In my little community in McGehee, for instance, all the preachers live outside of McGehee, so there ain't no connection with the community. They don't know what's happening over here with my parish and over here. They don't interact with each other, so you ain't got that closeness. I was lookin' at some of them pictures in there with Nash, and I recognize all these guys, and they were different denominations, but they bridged the denomination gap, and they come together, and they came together for Bill Clinton. We started with the AMEs. We start—we always started with the AMEs because you had strong bishops with personality. You had Brookins, and you had James. And these guys were politically astute. So consequently, their ministers were politically astute. And then

you had Bishop Walker and Bishop Lynn, and these guys were strong—they were strong leaders. [03:00:53] You don't have that strong leadership anymore. You got some good guys. You got some that have the potential. But I don't think they will ever reach the potential that these guys had. It's just a changin' world. It's a change in attitude. It's a change in people. It's a change in everything. But we got to figure out a way how we get these folks back, and I don't care if it's the preachers, the politicians, we gotta figure out how to get these people back into leadership roles and takin' responsibility for the communities at home. And it benefits all of us. And you gotta work the United Methodists and the Presbyterians, and you gotta get all these Southern Baptist boys and all these folks tied into one another. That's a fairly common denominator, except on Sundays, when you got segregation still prevalent.

BW: Absolutely.

CW: On Sunday, the most segregated day of the year. [03:01:59] So but there's hope. In McGehee, there's a preacher named Bonaducci or Ballalucci that is at the Baptist church in McGehee. Now when I was growin' up, the Baptist church in McGehee was not friendly to black folks. The preacher that was there before him—maybe—I don't wanna be in error. It might have been two

preachers before him. They were not friendly to black folks. Their leanin' was not toward black folk. Now my mother's funeral was at this church.

BW: Oh.

CW: When I rolled up into that church, and I say, "My God." The same guy who had members that burned crosses in my yard when I ran for county judge—my mother's funeral was at this church. This guy called and said, "Willis, we know y'all's church is small, and we know your mother's gonna have a big funeral. Do you wanna use our church?" Now initially, I said, "Nah. Don't wanna do that." But then I thought about it. I said, "My mother would want me to make this social statement. And I'm makin' this statement. I'm rollin' her up in here. And she gonna stand in this—she gonna stand—she gonna be in front of this pulpit where in 1976 some members from this church was burnin' a cross in her front yard, and she put a shotgun on 'em when I was runnin' for county judge." I wanted to make that statement because that county—that guy—that's the kind of guy—got a childcare center. He got a Hispanic as his secretary. When I went over there to see him, I said, "Oh, man. You know, I don't believe this is happenin'." Right. [03:04:03] But back to the church. That's the role of the church. The black church

and the white church gotta work together. My sister and this guy—my sister had my daddy's church for a while. She's an AME preacher, so she had to move and move them around. But they had a good relationship, right, so they developed their relationship over years, and they worked together. And she's a bap—I mean, he's a Baptist and in bap—in the black Baptist church, they don't let women in the pulpit. But in a white Baptist church, she can go in the pulpit.

[03:04:37] BW: Well, it could be that the churches are gonna be one facet of the new leadership development that you're gonna help put . . .

CW: Yeah.

BW: . . . together.

CW: Yeah. That's what it is too.

[03:04:48] BW: Well, I said I had two more questions, but actually I s—have two others now. Could you talk—could you just quickly list the things that you did after Bill Clinton left the governorship and became president?

CW: Well, basically I did the same thing. I went to the DNC.

BW: The DNC is . . .

CW: The Democratic National Committee. Me and Craig Smith and then a whole group of young guys that I had because, you know,

we wasn't—all of us wanted to go to the White House. President said, "I need y'all to keep me in check. You can't do at the White House that—what you can do at the DNC. What we can do is—let me give you a White House pass, which means you can come to the White House any time you want to. Got no strings attached, you can come there, you can sit there, you can do whatever you want to do." But what we did—the same thing that we did in Arkansas, the permanent campaign. That's what we did. We hit the road. The week after Clinton started his presidency, we were on the road in the states. We had divided the states up, and we were makin' the thank-you tour. We went back to everybody that really, really, really stuck their necks out for a Southern white boy. Me and Lottie, all of us, we just said, "Look, we got to keep these boys in tow. We got to let these folks know that what we said about this white boy is right and what—this white boy is true, that he's gonna do what he said he's gonna do." 'Cause everybody was skeptical. You know, you got a Southern white boy from Arkansas. Come on. I don't care who he is or what you think he is, he's still a Southern boy from Arkansas. [03:06:44] So we revved it up, did vote—did some voter registration. But basically, we did everything that the permanent campaign did in Arkansas. We went to the meetings.

We went to community meetings. We did the relationship with the mayors and the congressmen and the local leaders and little guys down in the ghettos and the barrios. We went to San Francisco. We went to New York City. We went to Orlando, Florida. We went to places that we lost. We went to Texas because we—even though we lost, we developed a lot of relationships. So what do those relationships do for you? In Texas, for instance, we developed good relationships in Houston. So we . . .

[03:07:36] BW: So you did your Arkansas operation, but you did it nationwide.

CW: Yeah. That's what we did. So and here's—what did it do for us? Say, in Houston, for instance. The call came. Lee Brown was Clinton's drug czar, right. So he wanted to run for mayor of Houston. They said, "Well, what can we do to help him?" We had a little group we called the Buffalo Soldiers. We mounted up. We went down there. We put the Arkansas plan together in Houston. We did the same thing in Philadelphia. We did the same thing in Pittsburgh. We did the same thing in Mississippi, in parts of Mississippi. We got the mayor elected in Jackson, black mayor elected in Jackson, Mississippi. We did congressional races. We did all—I mean, come on. We had a

reputation of knowin' what to do and how to do it. And the proof was in the puddin'. We had a president, so we know somethin' about what we doin' about a ground game. [03:08:46] And again the most flatterin' thing that I think all of us can be proud of is a lot of these states adopted what we had did in Arkansas. 'Cause people would come to the DNC, and I would sit there, and I'd do a little pitch and a little schmooze about the permanent campaign, you know. I'd tell 'em about the—how y'all orchestrated the Clinton comeback, and what it took to put together the comeback, and how y'all sit down with the Wright, Lindsey & Jennings thing and did the strategy, and how we were the foot soldiers, and what we did, and how we coordinated the effort. I even told them about how you recently here with Dick Morris and all these guys, right. I said, "We kinda know a little bit about what we doin'." We won a bunch of elections. We won a bunch in North Carolina. We won a bunch of elections that people didn't think that we would win because we understood the permanent campaign. And they didn't challenge us on getttin' the resources to do it because they knew we came with the president. And you know, I'm gonna tell you, you know, "The president wants us to do this." Now you know, I'm gonna say that [*laughs*] whether he wants me to do it 'cause I think

that's what he would want us to do, right. I said, "I think president would want us to do it." So when the president goes to Houston, he can say to Lee Brown, "My guys came down here, and we pulled that off for you. So you owe me." [*Laughs*] Right.

[03:10:25] BW: Right.

CW: You owe me somethin' here. Same thing. Oakland. All over the place. We just did it. Now I think what we got into was that—you get into the mix of the DC and the crab game, and they saw us as country boys. And they came at us. They came at us at a whole different kind of approach because they saw us as successful. There was a jealousy component to it. But there was also a component to it that they know they needed us to get some things done. Plus, we got the president. I don't care how you cut this deal, we got the president. They came at me. They couldn't get me. Now they got Craig, you know. They got him. But he c—they got him 'cause he wouldn't fight back, you know. He just said, "Okay, I'm"—and Clinton took care of him, gave him the political director job over the White House. [03:11:25] But that was all right, but the political director's job at the White House is just the political director's job. The politics is done at the DNC. This is where the ground game is. This is where the

money is. This is where things get done. DNC was always the political arm of the White House. So we had to fight for that, you know. We had all these super strategists from New York and from Connecticut who always knew more than we did, but they never won. They had all the strategies. They had the big names, and you know some of the names. They had all of the big names. They had the newspaper clippin's. They had everything goin' for 'em, but they never won. We won. It's simple—and hey, I'm not a braggadocious person, but [*laughs*] we won. It's as simple as that.

[03:12:22] BW: But we did it out of hard work.

CW: Hard work.

BW: On . . .

CW: Sure.

BW: And it wasn't just talking and talking about it and drawing it out on paper. [03:12:32] Okay. Two more questions. What is the best thing that you think you got done? We've talked about what's not done. But name something that you're really, really proud of having done.

CW: Bringing young people into play. Givin' young people an opportunity to be a part of a organization, a presidency, a governor's office at the highest level they possibly could be.

That would be my clownin'—my crowning glory, in my mind. You know, I don't know. But I think, again, Clinton gave me the opportunity. I want—I gave them the opportunity. And I'm still lookin' for some more. I tell 'em now, "You got to take advantage of me before I have a stroke or a heart attack and die. So you better take advantage of what me and Nash got to offer. The experiences that we've had. And I think that we can be that encyclopedia that you need. We can help you through those tough times. We can save you from fallin' into those traps that you are inevitably going to fall into, but even more important we can show you how to get out of them traps." So I think—now my wife says that I'm guilty of not makin' money. And she right. So I think I let my grandkids down to some degree in that area. Now they ain't gonna be poor. But I think I could've done more if I had not been out here doin' all of this stuff, right.

BW: You could have. Sure.

CW: Right. I think I could've done it. I think I could've stayed in DC. I chose to come back to Arkansas because this is the genesis of where we came from. This is us. This is my grandfather, my great-grandfather, this is my daddy, this is my uncle. This is us. I think that is what my daddy and my grandfather would've

wanted me to do.

[03:14:54] BW: One of the things that I want to do with you is to go back through all of these people that you got into politics, got into appointments, and look at where they have come now.

CW: I'm doin' that right now.

BW: And the doors that you opened for them to go forward.

CW: I'm . . .

BW: It's a very important documentation.

CW: I'm doin' that right now.

BW: Good.

CW: I'm tryin' to think [*laughs*] of . . .

BW: Good.

CW: . . . some of 'em. I can't remember.

[03:15:19] BW: Okay, my final question. Are you ready for this?

CW: Mh-hmm.

BW: Do you really collect baseballs?

CW: Yeah.

BW: Is—are you a baseball—you like the game?

CW: Oh yeah. I played the game. Coached the game. I was a coach at Philander Smith for ten years.

BW: And so you'd really collect baseballs. How many do you have?

CW: Ooo, girl. [*Laughs*] Ain't no tellin'. I got baseballs from the

Negro League. I got baseballs from the Los Angeles Dodgers. I got baseballs from politicians. I got baseballs from Clinton. I got uniforms. I got gloves. I've got one glove that was used in the *Field of Dreams* . . .

BW: Oh.

CW: . . . the baseball thing. I got jerseys and caps and—you know, one of the best things that Clinton ever did for me was that he thought—it was thoughtful on his part, and I will never forget him for this. Went to New York. I was at the DNC. And we were goin' to Mets Stadium to do the Jackie Robinson honor thing. And just out of clear blue somebody called me and said, "President—we on Air Force One. President—we goin' to New York, and we're doin' the Jackie Robinson thing. President wants you to go." Now I got that picture.

BW: Oh, that's . . .

CW: Says, "The president wants you to go." We went. I met Rachel Robinson and got all the Robinson memorabilia. And you know. I just gotta bunch of baseball stuff.

[03:16:51] BW: Do your grandkids love baseball?

CW: Yeah, my grandson.

BW: Oh.

CW: I mean, it's all for him.

BW: That's wonderful.

CW: I'm savin' it all for him.

BW: That's wonderful.

CW: No, that's my deal.

[03:16:59] BW: Well, Carol Willis, you're a hero.

CW: I'm not a hero.

BW: Yes, you are, too.

CW: I'm a country boy from McGehee.

BW: Yes, and [*CW laughs*] you have done good for a lot of country people.

CW: Well, I hope so. I . . .

BW: Thank you for doing this.

CW: Well, I thank you for doin' this. And I thank the Butler Center and the Pryor thing for doin' this because I think that we would've faded away into the dustbowl of history. And I don't think anybody that worked for Bill Clinton should be faded away into the dustbowl of history for the simple reason that we accomplished so much and we got so little in return.

BW: Well, and we have to build on it.

CW: Sure. Right.

BW: We have to view it as the foundation.

CW: Yeah.

BW: Okay.

CW: You got it. All right.

BW: Thank you.

CW: Yes, ma'am.

[End of interview 03:17:43]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]