Bob Brown: I’m interviewing Bruce Crippen in Missoula, Montana, at the Mansfield Center and the date is May 27, 2010. Bruce served in the Montana Senate from, I believe, 1980 to 2000 and held almost every, in fact, every leadership position on the Republican side. He was the whip, the floor leader, the president pro tem, the chairman of the Committee on Committees, and the president of the Senate. I believe he held the position of president of the Senate his last term in office. Is that correct, Bruce?

Bruce Crippen: That’s correct.

BB: When and where were you born?


BB: Now most people go through life never running for public office and yet you were inspired to do so. What, was there a person or an event or something in your formative years that caused you to run for public office and to become involved to the extent you did?

BC: Number one, I was trained as an attorney. I have two law degrees, although I never really practiced law. But my father was an attorney and my grandfather was a trial attorney of note at the turn of the century in Billings and was a friend of Teddy Roosevelt, as a matter of fact. When Teddy Roosevelt came to Billings, my grandfather was the one who, I guess, had him in his house and took him around and all that. Teddy Roosevelt was his hero. I say that because my grandfather spent one term in the Montana House of Representatives and he was the leader of his party, which was the Bull Moose Party.

BB: The Progressive Party.

BC: The Progressive Party. And then he went back and he told his wife that he would never go back to Helena as long as he ever—he’d never seen such a bunch of idiots in his whole life. (laughs) But that’s an aside.

I think that because of the background that I have in law, and especially in constitutional law, that politics would be somewhat of a natural. I can remember way back when Dewey ran, I helped campaign in Billings for Dewey. I just couldn’t believe it when he was supposed to win, he was going to win, and then this other guy won.
When I lived for a short period of time in Denver, Colorado, and I helped a couple of candidates down there—minor things for the U. S. Congress...Can’t even think of their names right now (unintelligible). Then when I came back to Billings, became involved in activities and there was an election coming up. Harrison Fagg had talked to me about running for the House of Representatives. Well, I wanted to run for the Senate.

BB: Harrison Fagg, just so we know, was a member of the Montana House of Representatives on the Republican side from Billings beginning in the ‘60s.

BC: And I think at the time was the majority leader. And of course I’ve known Harrison for all of our lives and (unintelligible). So I said, “I would rather run for the Senate.”

Well, he said, “There’s not going to be fun in the Senate.” He said, “You’re an attorney. You’re more adapted to the rough-and-tumble, fun-and-games we have in the House.”

I said, “Okay.” Well, I had never run a campaign for myself before, and I didn’t do anything for the primary. I was the third-top vote getter, so everybody said I was a shoe-in. And so I didn’t do anything. About two days beforehand I thought, “Something’s wrong with this scenario. I should be campaigning.” I started to campaign a little bit, but it was too late.

It was before single-member districts. We elected 12 Republicans, I mean 12 legislators, to the House, and I was 13th by about 200 votes. So I thought, “Well, okay.” As Nixon said at the same time, “They’re not going to have me to kick around anymore.” His famous statement to the press. But then the Con-Con came along.


BC: Yes, and so my mother and I decided that we would both run for that, and we did. But that was the time when everything changed in Billings. Billings was predominately a very strong Republican conservative county, and then it started to switch. And during Con-Con, that’s when it really switched. And we just didn’t make it, which is fine. It would have been interesting. But it sort of piqued my interest and then in 1980—

BB: After there were single-member districts.

BC: Yes, in 1980 there was a seat that was, a House member passed away who was going to run for the State Senate.

BB: Who was that?

BC: Porter.

BB: Howard Porter.

Bruce D. Crippen Interview, OH 396-068, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BC: Howard Porter. And they were looking for somebody to take his place. Well, they talked to Cal Winslow first, but he—

BB: Also a representative from Billings.

BC: But he wanted to stay in the House. And so I put my name in and they interviewed me.

BB: Who interviewed you, the local Republican central committee?

BC: Central committee did, and then the press did. It was interesting. But I knew the district. The district was, again, sort of a mixed district. But I was born and raised in this district, and the fellow that was running as a Democrat I knew, Norm Shanethall, great guy. When I decided to run he said, “Bruce,” he says, “I was running about Howard Porter. I’m not going to run against you, so have at it.”

I did, and I won 70-30 or some high number like that. But then again, you go door-to-door as I did—and I enjoy door-to-door and I always have gone door-to-door all my life—and that just started off. The next session I was unopposed, and then after that I’ve had some minor opposition. (Unintelligible.)

BB: No, that’s great. So there you are. Your grandfather had served in the House of Representatives—

BC: Yes.

BB: And maybe been somewhat of an inspiration in your life, at least there was an active political person in your immediate background in your life. You’d gone to law school and developed an interest in government and law and that sort of thing. So you run, get into the state Senate, and there you are. What are your impressions? Did you have early, first impressions of the Montana Senate?

BC: I had been there a couple of times just on visits, and you got to remember I was a little bit older. I was 48, I think, at the time, and so I figured I’d done a lot of things and sort of full of myself. The first impression I got is I can’t believe how many people disagreed with some of the things I said, especially even on my side of the aisle. I thought, “This is interesting.” It became obvious that I had to make a choice right away. And the decision I made I held throughout the whole 20 years there. I was pretty sure I knew where the Republicans stood, and when they disagreed with me, it was generally around territorial issues rather than political issues.

BB: Territorial meaning East-West, rural-urban?
BC: Yes, that’s correct. But I thought, “I don’t know where the Democrats stand on all this, so the best thing to find out is to become very acquainted with them.” I think most young people, when they get up there, they tend—birds of a feather flock together—they tend to stick with their own people. And, “Fie on the left wing, a pox on them.” I thought, “Well, that ain’t going to do me any good.” So I made an effort to become friends with a lot of Democrats. Joe Mazurek certainly was one of them.

BB: Senator from Helena.

BC: Yes, Steve Brown, another senator from Helena. And then, of course, you were there and you had a great reputation. And so we became fast friends. And you helped me get around a lot. And it served a purpose because I began to understand where people were coming from. And then I also felt that even though I might have been elected by 65-70 percent of the voters, I represented the entire district and I had more school teachers in my district than any other Republican senate district. I felt that, “Hey, I have to represent these people as best I can, and still be true to some of my political thoughts as well.” So I did that.

The other thing that helped me a lot is that I rented rooms in the Colonial Motel, the Colonial Inn, and a fellow by the name of Ev Shuey, who was the senior lobbyist for the Montana Power Company, and he was, no question, he was the senior lobbyist period. But Ev was right below me, and I became fast friends with Ev the first week I was there. And Ev invited me to his—after the sessions, down to his rooms where he would entertain Stan Stephens, Jean Turnage, the Corettes—all these big gunners. Here I was there, and I was smart enough to keep my mouth shut and listen. I did that most evenings, and then we’d go out to another party or we’d go out and have dinner.

BB: But Everett Shuey would just invite some of the movers and shakers from the legislature.

BC: Absolutely.

BB: People who would become his personal friends but who also could help him as a lobbyist. And they’d have cold cuts and a drink or two in his suite of rooms there at the Colonial. Cheese and salami and whatever, and then go your separate ways. It was a nice relaxing interlude at the end of the day. Did you discuss political issues?

BC: Yes.

BB: But it was pretty much Republicans and pretty much friends of Ev, right?

BC: Yes, although I think at times there was some Democrats there, but I got to meet guys that were just brand new at the company. Gannon for one.
BB: Yes, Bob Gannon. He was reading bills, I think behind the scenes. And then he later became president of the Montana Power Company.

BC: But I had remarked at the time that I had an interest in Swiss Colony, so I would bring up cheese and goodies and that endeared everybody.

BB: Now this was a by invitation thing though?

BC: Absolutely. By invitation. There wasn’t anybody else there that was not in it. And as you know in the caucus, there were those who were in power and so far in one group, and there were those who were not, even though they were both Republicans.

BB: There were factions in the Republicans which weren’t necessarily philosophical when you and I were there but—

BC: Well, yes and no. There might be some philosophical, but I think it was more, I guess, by invitation.

BB: Well, in the leadership contests, Bruce, typically it would be you and I, and we were part of the old Turnage crew. We were associated with him, and it didn’t always hold up, but Jack Galt, and Frank Hazelbaker were generally in our group, and Tom Hager and George McCallum and Larry Tveit. I think Dennis Nathe.

BC: Pete Story would be the best example.

BB: Pete Story was probably the leader of the other group.

BC: Well, they were never there. Actually I think Galt was rarely with us.

BB: With the Shuey group?

BC: No, this was generally Stan Stephens, who was the Majority Leader, Turnage, who was the president of the Senate. On occasion Hazelbaker and [Allen] Kolstad would be there. Jim Mockler as the coal lobbyist would always be there because Kolstad and Mockler played cards afterwards. But the interesting thing is that afterward would generally be Ev Shuey and myself and Turnage.

BB: Would go to dinner?

BC: Would go to dinner. Now—

BB: So you learned a lot, a freshman with those two.
BC: I learned a heck of a lot. Of course we always drank Piesporter wine because that’s what
Turnage liked, but it was great. And that really helped me. I think the other thing that helped
me a little bit there was one of the fellows that I replaced was a good friend of the family, Bill
Lowe, who was a good friend of Kolstad and Stephens. I’m sure that he put a word in for me
because those guys grabbed me right away and got me into Judiciary Committee and the
Taxation Committee because I was a tax attorney, so that makes sense. So I had an in.

But as far as reflections of it, you’re in there and you’re doing work and you’re going through
bills. That didn’t bother me. Reading bills didn’t bother me. I had done a lot of that in law
school. But it was just the magnitude of it.

BB: Overwhelming volume of bills.

BC: And the work. There’s a lot of work involved and a lack of staff. I was fortunate because the
second year there I was vice-chairman of the Judiciary Committee, my second term. Second
time of my first term. Turnage gave me an office and I could use a secretary and a phone, which
was unheard of as a vice-chairman.

BB: Turnage was president of the Senate?

BC: At that point he stepped down then because he ran for chief justice two years later, so he
was chairman of the Judiciary Committee.

BB: That’s right. He’d been president of the Senate and then when his term expired, he
(unintelligible).

BC: I wanted to be chairman of the Judiciary Committee. You were really senior on the
committee, the senior Republican, and Turnage knew that but he told me, he said, “You can run
the committee, do all the bills, handle all the other stuff. The only thing I’ll do is sit on the
podium and act as chairman,” because he did. He sat where the chief justice [sits in] the
Supreme Court chambers. All of us sat around the table, and Turnage was up above by himself.
(laughs)

BB: I think I remember.

BC: He was in his glory.

BB: How interesting because he ended up, a short time later, being Chief Justice of the State
Supreme Court. The old Supreme Court chamber was where the Senate chamber you’re talking
about [was] then. So Jean ended up in a different chamber sitting where the Chief Justice sits.

BC: Well, the thing about Turnage is if you knew him as the Chief Justice, you would think,
“Well, this guy is sort of a wuss.” He was not dynamic. He certainly was not a dynamic speaker.
When he gave the state of judiciary he was terrible. So it’s hard to believe that he was voted the most powerful legislator in the state—to the new people. But if you worked with him, he had...You talk about friends across the aisle. I remember the story where Kelly Addy came up to me—

BB: Representative, Democrat from Billings.

BC: He was a freshman, but he was assistant deputy whip. They made him a little something. He had a couple bills that Turnage had disposed of. So Kelly came over to me, and he said, “I want those bills brought up again, by gosh.” He had this dingle-dangle on his badge telling me who he was, “Or else I’m going to make sure”—he had some bills over there—“I’m going to make sure they’re going to kill them.”

I said, “Kelly, that ain’t going to happen.”

He said, “Oh yes it will.”

I said, “Okay, you talk to the Speaker Kemmis”—Kemmis was the Speaker—“and see what happens.”

Well he came back two days later with his tail between his legs and he’d learned. He said, “I learned a lesson. I learned a very big lesson. I’m not going to screw around with Jean Turnage at all.”

I said, “Kelly, if you had come to Jean and just said, ‘What can I do to make these bills palatable to you?’ he would have bent over backwards to help you.”

BB: That’s right. Turnage was a great guy at helping people with amendments.

BC: That’s why he was so popular and why he could get anything done. I remember one time when we were having some meetings and we were in session, one of the pages came up to him and whispered in his ear. Boy, he just stopped everything right there and stand at ease, and he took off and he went back into the House. That was the day the Democrats had taken over. Came back and kept on doing it with a big smile on his face. They’d killed one of his bills, and he went back in there and got it revived right now.

BB: I agree with you, Bruce. He was a small man in physical stature. I’ve done one of these interviews with him too. What we remember him both as our leader in the State Senate and also as Chief Justice. Golly, I agree with you. When he’d come before the legislature for a joint session to give the state of judiciary, it was as though he was reading legal briefs. It was hard to imagine this guy...even though small, had powerful eyes, remember? Powerful dark eyes, black eyes, and boy he’d look at you like laser beams. Sometimes he could really be strong, deceptively so, and he had a dynamism about him that was...you didn’t always expect it. He was

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definitely decisive and definitely a leader, but he could also be low-key. He had a wonderful, self-deprecating sense of humor.

BC: A good example was we were having a joint caucus with the House. Well, nobody in the Senate liked joint caucuses, and some doctor—Olson and some of the other guys—didn’t say a word. The House was doing their usual thing, trying to shove it down our throats.

BB: The lower House (unintelligible) Senate members. Turnage always hated that because then they’d come in and monopolize all the chairs. He was the guy that was supposed to preside over this, and it was way more anarchical than he liked.

BC: Yes, but they said—they had these bills out there—and they said, “Well, we’ll support you all in this.” They wanted us to support them.

I said, “Mr. President, I’m not going to support a bill I haven’t read.” Wrong thing to say.

Because Turnage at that time said, “Okay, whap,” he said, “You got 28 Republicans in favor, and they’ve got Crippen against. Next thing.”

Well that really jerked my chain, so I went into his office afterwards, and I said, “Hey Mr. President, we got to discuss something because don’t you ever do that to me again.” Now here’s a freshman senator, but I thought, “Screw you, buster.”

And he looked at me and he said, “Well...”

Then I thought, I said, “But I will apologize because I probably put you in a very embarrassing position.”

And he said, “Well, yes, you did, but,” he said, “I probably overstepped my bounds.” We became close friends after that. He knew that I would stick to it, and I learned a lesson too.

BB: But you gave each other a way out and that was classic Jean Turnage.

BC: Yes, and so those are the things that you learn. Sometimes you learn other things that take a little longer. But back to your original question, “What are some of the first things that you saw?” Also you learn to rely on lobbyists, and everybody thinks the lobbyists are poor but they’re not. They helped a great deal, and the staff helps a great deal.

BB: Legislation. Do you remember the stream access?

BC: Oh, yes.

BB: That was relatively early in your legislative years.
BC: It’s a bill that came across from the House, and the House was in a majority. I mean the Republicans were in a majority at the time. I think I was the whip, but Jack Galt was vehemently opposed to it.

BB: He was president of the Senate at the time?

BC: No, Jack was just on the Judiciary Committee.

BB: Okay, it must have come over twice then didn’t it?

BC: Well, it came over twice and got sent back. But—

BB: I remember Bill Yellowtail carrying it, and I wondered how it worked out.

BC: So what they did in the Judiciary Committee—and I think that it was probably Joe Mazurek was chairman at the time—had a subcommittee work on it. The subcommittee was chaired by Bill Yellowtail. It had Tom Towe and maybe one other. Maybe it was two and two, I can’t remember. Then they had Jack Galt. Well, Jack Galt wasn’t in the position to...He was getting older, and he was tired, and he’s not a debater. I mean here we have Tom Towe and Yellowtail. They’d eat him up alive. So I was asked, “Would you be willing to serve on it and help Galt?” Well, I didn’t have any ranchers in my district, although I did know some.

I said, “Well I’d be willing to do it to see if we can clean the bill up.” This is exactly what we did, but it became obvious when Yellowtail folded his arms that the discussion was over. This was an Indian way of saying, “That’s it,” maybe, or “Anymore talk from you and we’re going to tie you to a stake.” So people were in the gallery looking down, and you could feel the waiting for an arrow to go in and split your skull because we were standing up for Jack Galt and his ranchers. Interestingly enough, the Montana Association of Cattlemen, or whatever the group is, was in favor of the bill.

BB: The Stockgrowers Association.

BC: Stockgrowers. They were in favor of the bill, which was interesting.

BB: They wanted to do something to settle the problem, but I think there was some sentiment for Jack’s point of view. Many of their members had Jack’s point of view. But they wanted to get something settled. There you are with way more fishing poles in your district than you have ranchers, and yet you’re kind of expected to help Jack protect the property rights of the ranchers from encroachment into their ranch property by sportsmen who were trying to fish. That was the whole stream access concept.
BC: Bill Yellowtail, great guy as he is, was not a problem. The problem was Tom Towe and how Tom liked to amend it. But the mere fact that Tom always wanted to amend something was a real plus for Galt and myself because I would point out areas that were just abhorrent in this bill. Frankly, if a stream was going through a cattleman’s yard, the way it was originally written, anybody could just walk up that stream, put up a tent, dig a hole for a privy, light a fire and be 20 feet away from the guy’s front yard. There was availability to do those as long as it was a navigable stream—float a log down it so to speak—then they could do that. Of course we changed that, and Tom was willing to do that. So we used his ability to and his willingness and eagerness to amend something, then we got it back. But then I think we sent it back to the House, but lo and behold the House passed it back out again. The second go round, I think a number of Republicans had enough of it, and the bill passed. Then we had one guy, whose name I will not mention who was a solid supporter of Galt. I mean, I couldn’t find a nicer guy to support Galt other than myself. But when they took lakes out of the bill, he just sort of changed his tune. And—

BB: Well, remember my problem was the same as the ranchers because the people around Whitefish Lake, who were constituents of mine, had purchased their lakefront property because of that gravelly beach that was within the mean, annual high water mark. The lake certainly would float a log, so it could qualify as navigable, so you could have had the Al Bedoo Shrine or the Boy Scouts or whomever having a picnic in the front of this guy’s lot. Anyway, I reached an accommodation with them where if they took the lakes out of it and made damn sure that this applied only to a flowing navigable stream, they’d have my help. But they’d have my vehement opposition if they didn’t. So they took the lakes out, and I left you standing. (laughs)

BC: (laughs) You sure did. And Galt. Then you had the audacity to ask him if two weeks later when were they coming over to his house for dinner?

BB: I probably did.

BC: Well, I don’t blame you if you got to make a choice, but I just thought that [Ron] Waterman, who’s a lawyer, [was] obviously pushing this thing through—

BB: Waterman was a lawyer for the Stockgrowers.

BC: Yes, and if he came to you and he found your button, you know, I mean that’s great. I admire that. It was fun, and the fact is that I think because was it—my grandfather or my father were criminal lawyers and generally very good criminal attorneys—was sort of in my blood that here’s Jack Galt and he needed help, even if I probably disagreed with his position to some extent. But it was a good thing to do.

BB: How did you end up voting, do you remember, in the final forum of the bill?
BC: I voted against it, of course.

BB: Because I think by then, by later on, we’d received somewhat of a consensus.

BC: Oh we did, but it was the fact that Galt was there.

BB: Yes sure and Galt still couldn’t—

BC: Then a couple of years later he beat me when we were both running for president of the Senate. (laughs)

BB: Yes, I remember that too.

BC: But he was a good guy.

BB: He was a good guy. Sales tax. There was a big bill that you were prominently associated with that went by the nickname of Godzilla.

BC: Well, that was not the first bill, I don’t think. I’m not sure.

BB: That’s the sales tax bill that got the notoriety.

BC: Yes.

BB: I can’t remember quite when that was.

BC: Well, I think that was the first year of Marc Racicot’s administration, I think, because I carried four bills. One of them didn’t make it out of committee. But I carried one with Dorothy Bradley. But the first one I came out...Jack Ramirez was always trying to get one in, and I think he talked me into doing one. My whole point was there from a tax standpoint.

BB: Jack Ramirez was the Republican representative from Billings and the floor leader.

BC: Yes and the floor leader.

BB: And the Republican leader in the House, and a pretty strong legislator.

BC: Oh yes, very capable guy. We put together this sales tax bill because...It’s interesting, in other states the unions are for the sales tax but are against an income tax. But this was another lesson that we learned: that the opposition, whether it be the unions or whatever, generally have a point of reference where they can point to and say, “Rally the troops around.”

BB: And in Montana, the unions hate sales tax.
BC: But on the other hand, it was doomed for failure, so if something, as they say to you, is doomed for failure, then that’s something you want to say, “Well, I don’t care. We’ll see how far we can go with it.” So it was good. The first one made it through but then it died. The Godzilla bill, I think, was the one that…They’re all thick, and then we have the final bill and it was going to be debated. If I ever find out who did that they would be speaking in a high voice or for that matter a low voice, but it came back and on the top it was entitled “Godzilla.”

BB: Just so listeners later on may understand this, it runs in my mind there was a movie where there was a big horrible creature from outer space or something.

BC: From Japan.

BB: A big giant creature kind of like a huge lizard and his name was Godzilla. So the people who were probably involved in the drafting, some of the staff people who probably were becoming a little frustrated because the bill was big and it kept on getting amended by whomever and whatever, soon became a bigger and bigger bill, and one of the last versions, maybe the last version that came up, they had labeled it “Godzilla,” this monster bill.

BC: I wouldn’t have been a bit surprised if J. D. Lynch or some of those guys were—Senator Lynch from Butte—was behind it. I mean if he was, great, because I thought it was a marvelous thing. The only thing that I could do is try to use it to my advantage. I don’t think it was that one, but it was one of those. Then the bill we finally got through was the one that Marc Racicot endorsed and I carried, and it made it through both houses. But then it was put on the vote of the people, and it died a death. But that was great, and I still feel that the tax structure for Montana is out of whack. Maybe I might feel a little differently about it now because I don’t like to pay sales taxes everywhere I go and the fact that the legislature has become more…has become less conservative in their spending. That was a big argument that I think a lot of the jackrabbit Republicans had, that they’ll end up just spending and spending more money. They’re probably all right.

BB: If the state has another tax, it’s another source of revenue. What it will do is, instead of leading to reduction of other taxes...We were hoping that it would reduce the property taxes to benefit education, reduce property taxes to benefit business.

BC: And income tax as well.

BB: As well, reduce the income tax somewhat. We’d be able to collect money from tourists that we weren’t collecting now. Here we are, a state situated between two national parks, so we could make a pretty good debater’s case for it. But the conservatives continued to believe that it’s still an additional tax. And then we had the liberals who were fighting us because they said, “Well, the—”
BC: Taxing the poor people.

BB: Tax on the poor people because if you don’t have, if you’re not paying much income tax and you don’t own property, then all you do is pay the sales tax.

BC: Well we really tried to make that as progressive as we could.

BB: We gave an exemption.

BC: Big-time exemption.

BB: Just like they would for income tax. And you took medicine and groceries out of it.

BC: But it was the rallying cry you could have given—

BB: Them anything and they still—

BC: They would have gone against it. Which was really interesting because if they’d looked at it from the long-term point of view, if they wanted to spend more money, there’s nothing better for us but (unintelligible). Because you don’t have all the deductions, exemptions are no longer in play, so all it takes is we’ll raise that thing maybe a quarter of a percent. That’s not a big deal. That’s how people think.

BB: And that’s the trouble with the sales tax, though you and I, I think, agree on the sales tax. We look at it as a reform, generally a good idea. But as you mentioned, you look at some states, California in particular, and they’ve inched that thing up just incrementally a little bit at a time until it’s nine or ten percent.

BC: So that was probably one of my big bills, and I enjoyed doing it. The ones that passed are great. The ones that don’t pass, you still, that’s what you’re there for.

BB: What were your impressions of Governor Schwinden? You and he arrived, he became governor at the same time you were elected to the Senate. So for the first eight years you were in the Senate, he was governor. You must have formed some impressions.

BC: I did. I did, and especially with this program, Build Montana. Having been in the development business, as well as being an attorney, (unintelligible) a development business in Billings and built Rimrock Mall and I was working on a business park at the time. Anything that we could do on the statewide level to attract capital into Montana, I was in favor of. I looked at his program, and it had some things that didn’t (unintelligible), but it wasn’t that bad a deal. So I and Jean Turnage the same way—we both signed onto this thing, much to the consternation of some of our Republican colleagues.
BB: And Build Montana was a package of bills?

BC: Yes.

BB: So Schwinden, part of his leadership style would be to reach out to prominent business-oriented Republicans and influential Republicans and try to get them involved in helping him get his—

BC: Yes, he did it somewhat on his own, but he also had guys like Gary Buchanan, very personable guy.

BB: Commerce Department director under Schwinden.

BC: Became the first Commerce Department director, and Gary (unintelligible) became good friends. So I’m sure he used Gary to large extent to convince me to go along with the program. But I didn’t really—

BB: He was someone you were well acquainted with from Billings?

BC: Yes. I really didn’t need it. I just said, “Hey I don’t care what’s a Democrat governor or whatever. This program is going to go, someway at least, to help business in Montana, then let’s give it a go.” The net result was, of course, is that in 1981 when Governor Schwinden led the delegation of business men and women and state officials and four legislators, Jean Turnage and I, along with Andrea Hemstad, were the three Republicans that—

BB: She was a member of the House of Representatives and later state auditor.

BC: Then Esther Bengtson was the other one

BB: Esther Bengtson was a Democratic representative at the time, I think.

BC: From Yellowstone County. And so I think that was probably at the time a little payback. I wanted to go because I was building an industrial office park—business park—and I wanted to show to some people over in Japan and in Taiwan. Well, we’re over there. Governor Schwinden, he was not one that would dress well, like you would see a lot of governors. He dressed like a good old boy. He’d have a J. C. Penney’s slack, a Sears Roebuck outdated sportcoat, tennis shoes and that sort of thing. When we’re in Japan, of course, we met with Mike Mansfield, did all that.

BB: Who was ambassador in Japan at the time.

BC: Yes. We were with all these trading companies, the Shuto, the Mitsubishi, met with their top people, had wonderful meals with them. We spent, I think, three days doing that. But when
we were in Taiwan, then we met with, I think, the vice president and other high officials. We were not alone because there were several, there was the Governor Lamm from Colorado, and a couple other governors that were there and plus other of the (unintelligible) around. They’re also there.

But I got to tell you, Ted Schwinden was head and shoulders above these guys in what he said and how he said it, and the respect that he got from the Taiwanese. You couldn’t help watch that. I would be in these meetings and see them talking, and it became obvious that the Chinese would listen to Ted more. Then I think he gave an address at our final meeting at the top floor of this beautiful hotel, the Grand Hotel, Madame Chiang Kai-Shek’s big deal. Clearly he stole the show and is very casual. And so—

BB: I’m sure he presented himself well, but more by the depth of his comments.

BC: I think the honesty that he (unintelligible). I had some relationships with him. I carried some of his bills. I always found him to be honest, forthright. I didn’t agree with some of the things he did, some of his fiscal policies. But I thought he was a great governor, and he was the one that was willing to go back and start looking at the coal tax and make some adjustments on that, which he did.

I think he suffered, as all governors do if they are two-term governors, toward the end there was a little baggage that he carried. It’s sort of sad, but I think the governors regardless of party started to fall out of favor with their respective caucuses. I saw that with some of the other governors, which we could talk about, and little bit with Ted. But I think he was a good governor. He certainly carried the state well, was a very good representative for the state. I was proud to serve under him. I would venture to say, if he’s if not the best, he was certainly (unintelligible). There wasn’t anybody better.

BB: —who was governor during the time you served.

BC: No, no.

BB: How about Governor Stan Stephens? How would you compare Stevens to Schwinden?

BC: Totally different type of people. Of course, Stan was a creature of the legislature, and I think Stan was very well-liked in the Senate, almost as much as Turnage was, and very well-respected. But something happened when he became governor, and I think he did a couple of things that sort of upset the Democrats and they expected Stan to open his office to them—this is the Democrats in the Senate—because we were good friends as you well know, Bob. In the Senate we tried to work together because there’s always a situation that next session we may be in the minority. So we got to remember that. They’ve forgotten about that now. It’s all for the moment. When we were there, it was the fact that we were going to be, this is a long-term deal and we’re going to be working together. Because about 97 percent of the bills are non-
partisan anyway, you need to work together. Stan, I think he changed a little bit. And then he had his chief-of-staff, Yeakel...Chuck—

BB: Steve Yeakel.

BC: Steve Yeakel, who eventually became a very close friend of mine, a strong Christian guy, but at the time was grab them by the you-know-what and squeeze until they yell. He was that type of a guy, and I think that sort of set the tone for the office up there.

BB: He had been Stan’s campaign manager, and then Stan made him chief-of-staff—

BC: Which was a big mistake.

BB: He had almost no experience in state government. He was a war-chief that had been brought in to have a very delicate governmental job, and it probably wasn’t a fit, at least to begin with.

BC: He admitted it to me much later that that was a mistake. I think that set the tone for him because Stan, I think, throughout this whole thing was under siege. He did some good things. To be sure, he was a smart guy, a good governor. But I think that had things been a little different—

BB: His administration got off to a rocky start.

BC: Well, one of the things was the Ford Motor Company gave every governor in the country a Lincoln Town Car to drive. Fine, what’s—nothing wrong with that. Well, when they got that, the press got ahold of it, the Democrats starting playing that. Stan had his sidekick, a guy that would chauffeur him around—

BB: Don Ramage.

BC: Don would do that, and the Democrats blew it out of proportion. And the press got ahold of it—

BB: Making this chauffeured black limousine—

BC: Whereas Stephens—

BB: Didn’t cost the state a nickel, right?

BC: Whereas Schwinden drove his own pickup, from the farm and he did his own stuff. He didn’t have a chauffeur. Well, I remember, I stood up on the floor and I said, “Hey, have you
ever seen Stan behind the wheel? If you look closely, you might see him. I mean, he’s got to have a driver otherwise he’d kill somebody if he was driving on his own.”

BB: Because he was short.

BC: He’s short, yes.

BB: Barely could see over the dashboard of that great big Lincoln.

BC: Yes, and the other thing, of course, was they started to take away his airplane.

BB: The Democrats did.

BC: Yes.

BB: The airplane was old and needed to be replaced. He and his wife were both frightened of flying, and the Democrats realized this was a power point. Well, I think primarily Senator [Fred] Van Valkenburg was the...he was the Majority Leader at the time, and they went after the airplane.

BC: So I made a deal with Van Valkenburg. I said, “Okay, I’ll support you on that.” I remember talking to Stan afterwards. He just had a fit.

“Why did you do that?”

I said, “Stan, you’ll be long gone, dead and buried before they’ll get around selling that airplane. Do you think people are up standing in line to buy airplanes, especially that airplane? There’s no way. I don’t think they can give it away. You’re safe as far as that airplane is concerned. You’re not going to lose the airplane.”

BB: Oh, I remember. What that boiled down to was, I think, I remember Fred saying on the floor that Governor Stephens was so interested in privatizing so we were going to privatize the air transportation for the governor. We were going to sell the plane that was owned by the public, and then the governor could contract on as-need-be basis with some private contractor to fly himself around the state. And you told Fred—

BC: I’m going to go along with it.

BB: But you knew that ultimately the plane wasn’t going to be sold anyway.

BC: And it wasn’t sold.

BB: Yes.
BC: Stan was long gone before they sold that airplane. But Stan didn’t understand that. As you well know, we had a good friend that we wanted to get to become a district judge in Billings that we thought was the top guy, and it was because he knew Stan that he could get in there that he did it. Stan made the mistake, and I tried to get his staff to understand this, was that he should have had, as difficult as it is, people over for dinner. Stephens didn’t—

BB: Over at the Governor’s Mansion.

BC: I don’t care, whether Republican or Democrat, who’s the governor; if you’re invited with your wife, spouse, to have dinner with the governor and his wife—

BB: Private dinner.

BC: Private dinner with maybe two or three other couples, that’s a big deal to take pictures of you. That’s a big deal. You could put that on the wall, signed by the governor, and you could show your grandkids that. That is a no-brainer. I could not get his staff to do it. Basically they said, “When Stan’s there, he wants to be by himself. He does not want to have any...He wants to relax.” You don’t relax in this business.

BB: You get the impression he was more at home and comfortable as a state senator and as a leader in the state Senate.

BC: Oh, no question.

BB: Rather than governor.

BC: He told me one thing. He said, “Bruce,” he said, “from the moment I walked into this office until the time I leave, some son-of-a-bitch is calling me or knocking on the door wants something.”

I said, “Yes. You’re the governor. Who else are they going to ask?”

BB: But it seemed to really take its toll on him as a human being.

BC: I think it did. Stan was a good guy. If he had had different leaders...He had Kolstad for two years—

BB: As lieutenant governor.

BC: Then he [Kolstad] ran against Baucus and got whipped. Remember that then Rehberg became lieutenant governor. Then I think Stan had some heart problems—he had some physical problems—that he decided not to run.
BB: That may have been stress related.

BC: I think he was stressful. Probably looking back on it now, we probably could have helped him more. He, certainly, I would consider him a friend. I think he had the capability of even being a better governor than he was. But he wasn’t a poor governor. Don’t want to get that impression. He struggled, and there was no need for it because he had a lot of good ideas. He did some good things.

BB: Now Bruce, you mentioned that he had that episode that we think was a heart-related thing—and seems to us to a lot of people that may be stress-related—that occurred late in Stan’s term in office. It resulted in an interesting meeting that involved you and I.

BC: Well, just to back up a little bit because what it evolved was that he had decided not to run for re-election.

BB: After this episode, whatever it was.

BC: After...I think that—

BB: He was in the governor’s mansion, lost consciousness—

BC: Yes, and so he decided not to run. I wasn’t there when he made the announcement, but—

BB: But he had been in the hospital for a day or two, and didn’t he make the (unintelligible).

BC: Well I don’t know. But I was at home—

BB: We’d just finished a special session. It was a stressful and rigorous special session.

BC: Dorothy Bradley was the nominee for the Democrats, who would be the nominee for the Democrats. She’s a very tenacious campaigner. She was no pushover by any stretch. She probably would have won. Odds are that had Stan run again, I think—

BB: She would have probably defeated Stan.

BC: She could very well have defeated him. He may have seen that, and he just didn’t want to put his wife through that or himself through that. So when I got the phone call that he had announced his retirement, that he was not going to run for re-election—

BB: Do you remember who you got the call from?

BC: I don’t right off hand. I think it was...No, it wasn’t...It was a—
BB: Newspaper reporter?

BC: Newspaper guy, but it was not the...What’s his name?

BB: Chuck Johnson.

BC: It wasn’t Chuck.

BB: Well, anyway.

BC: As Chairman of the Judiciary Committee, I worked with Marc Racicot closely—

BB: Who was then attorney general.

BC: Then attorney general. I got on the phone immediately. Called him up, got a hold of him. I said, “I want to come up and talk to you. Are you interested in running for governor?”

He said, “Let’s visit.”

I said, “Okay.” I was the second person to call him. Somebody else must have called ahead first.

He said, “Okay,”—this was in the afternoon—“I’ll call you. I’m going to take off now, well in the morning, but I’ll meet you for breakfast.” So I met him for breakfast the next day.

I said, “Look, Stan’s not going to run. Rehberg...Dennis is a good guy, but—”

BB: Had been appointed Lieutenant Governor—

BC: Yes, been appointed Lieutenant Governor. I just felt that Dorothy Bradley was in the catbird seat at this point, pure and simple. There might have even been some editorials about that. I heard something about that. Andi Hemstad in the meantime had announced that she was going to run—Andi Bennett [Andrea Hemstad Bennett].

BB: Against Stephens in the primary.

BC: Yes. I think it was against Stephens. As good a person as she was, I think that the Democrat or whoever would have beat her. From a political standpoint, I liked Marc. It made good sense to have this guy run.

BB: Who polls showed was a very popular attorney general.
BC: Very popular attorney general. We visited, and I said...he said, “Would you talk with my wife?”

That same day, I met with Marc and Theresa in their home for a couple-three hours, and I visited with them. I’m not this great guy. I’m certainly not a king maker, but here I am talking to this guy, trying to explain to his wife the downfall of being the wife of a governor and the responsibilities that she would have as First Lady of the state that she does not have now. But I think looking back, I think Marc wanted that. I think he wanted somebody to come in and give the push. I think there is no question in my mind (unintelligible) that he really wanted to do it. But he’s a smart turkey. This guy Crippen called him up, and he thought, “I’m sure—” I’d like to think I’m the guy that came in and convinced Marc Racicot, but I think that’s nonsense. I think Marc Racicot had that in the back of his mind all along. But that’s (unintelligible).

BB: Not necessarily to challenge Stephens in the primary?

BC: No, no.

BB: But after this heart episode or...We’re still, I guess, not certain of what it was, whatever it was that occurred and caused Stan to say, “I’m not running again.” Then there was just a brief interval there, not much time, and your theory is that during that time, it crossed Marc’s mind, “You know, Marc, you ought to step forward now.”

BC: Yes. An aside too, Bob. I had talked to Marc when he was attorney general, at one time, about running for governor. “Would you be interested?”

He said, ‘I can’t do it if Stan’s running.” Okay, but that was before. That was maybe a year or two before. I mean, it was clear. This is the Republican’s great hope. He’s electable. He’s going to be elected. There was no doubt in our mind that he would win from the beginning. The problem then that arose, that Stan Stephens had already blessed Dennis Rehberg with his endorsement. Denny’s a tough guy, and of course we’ve seen how he’s an upstanding congressman. I’ve known the Rehberg family since day one so it wasn’t difficult for me to visit with Denny and talk to him about it. The only way that this could be done was to...over a period of meetings. They had to be done off-campus, so to speak, off-camera. Denny said, “Why don’t we meet at the ranch that I’m renting now.”

BB: Who contacted Denny, you or Marc?

BC: (Pauses) Marc didn’t. No, Marc did not. Either I did, or I did it through somebody else.

BB: Mercer was involved.

BC: Not yet, not yet. But you became involved. Mercer came on shortly thereafter. I think later maybe John Harp did, but Mercer became involved when we decided to meet. I called John,
and of course John was the Speaker of the House at the time. It was just appropriate that he be involved in this. So we met, and I think we met on more than one occasion.

BB: Now the people in the meeting, and the meetings occurred at a little interesting log cabin heated by wood. This is in the middle of January, so it’s colder than the dickens in Helena. Who were the participants in the meeting?

BC: Well, as far as I can remember, Bob, it was myself and then eventually it was you, Mercer became involved in it, Marc Racicot was there, Dennis Rehberg was there—

BB: And Larry Grinde.

BC: Yes. Well, maybe, I don’t remember Grinde.

BB: He was there.

BC: Okay, then if he was, he was, but he didn’t take an active part in it particularly as I can recall. It was very difficult because you’re asking a sitting lieutenant governor to withdraw from the race, and run as a candidate for the office that he’s presently holding. That’s—

BB: That’s unusual.

BC: That’s unusual. During the course of our discussion is that Marc had his...the big guy, his sidekick was there on occasion too. But very few of us. I can’t remember when John Harp came on board.

BB: I don’t think John was ever in on it.

BC: Maybe he wasn’t, but then...We had more than one meeting, but I can remember when the deal was struck. [Strikes fist on table]

BB: Well, the deal was struck when their wives showed up. Well, Theresa Racicot and Jan Rehberg are different kinds of people. They were a lot younger then of course, and that sort of thing. But they had to kind of meld together, too, in that process, and there was some emotion connected with it. To begin with, remember, there was some—I think hostility’s too strong a word—but I remember Denny was a member or perhaps the chair of the subcommittee of the Appropriations Committee of the House of Representatives that handled elected officials’ budgets. So Marc Racicot came in, the brand-new attorney general with the blade of straw in his mouth, and Denny kind of put him through the ropes in terms of defending his budget. In a way that Marc thought, “Come on. We’re fellow Republicans; this is a little over the line.” That was about the only official connection they’d had with each other. But I remember also in the meeting that there was some real apprehensiveness on the part of Denny. He realized he was—
BC: Oh, on both of them.

BB: He realized he was young. He wasn’t sure he was up to tangling with Andrea Bennett in the primary and then Dorothy Bradley in the general election. There was some of him that thought, “Well, gee, now this opportunity to be governor of Montana’s fallen in my lap, and Stan Stephens has endorsed me, and I probably should step forward.” But there was some real doubt. Marc Racicot had some doubts too. I remember Theresa said, “Marc, you always wanted to be attorney general. And you’ve always pursued this legal aspect of politics. What makes you think you want to be governor?” They had that kind of a conversation right there while we were there in the room.

BC: Yes, but that was after—

BB: That was the second meeting.

BC: Well, yes. But see, Marc at the very beginning said, “I don’t want to run with Denny Rehberg.” He did not want to do it. He wanted to pick his own lieutenant governor.

I said, “That’s not going to work. What you’re going to do is you’re going to split the whole thing up, and the Democrats are going to walk in. If you want to be governor, you’re going to have to,” you know. That’s even before I talked to Denny at all. Long before, the first time when I visited him. You’re right. He didn’t particularly care for Denny politically. Denny is a hard charger, and sure, Marc was not a hard charger.

BB: Marc said—maybe in the first meeting—he just openly told Denny, he said, “Golly, honestly Denny, do you think we’re compatible? Do you think we could work together? Can we make this work?”

BC: He almost was going to say, “I’m going to run anyway Denny, so good luck.” But we don’t say that.

I said, “Don’t throw down any gauntlet here because it’s going to screw things up.” I mean, it was very tenuous. You’re right.

Denny on the other hand said, “Why should I do this? Why should I do this? I’m the guy that’s running, not—” you know. He didn’t say this is my right, but he was clear that he... “Why should I put myself in the second seat when I could be in the first seat?”

He had problems with it. Like you said the wives got involved, but what really got it is I just said, “Okay, the main thing is that we have got a strong candidate running against Dorothy Bradley, very well-liked, done a lot, got her name out there.” Not all the Democrats liked her, but they’re going to support her because she was going to win. She’d been campaigning. The race was no push-over—
BB: Close.

BC: Yes, he had to work. Racicot had to work. But I think that’s what finally boiled it down. I can remember I had to go to Butte to give a talk at a Republican deal in Butte, if you can imagine. I was asked the question, “What’s going to happen?” I think I told about that time, “I think is what you’re going to see is a surprise. We’re going to come up with a ticket that’s going to be unbeatable.” Poor Andrea Hemstad was left out in the cold. That’s sort of the way it was. There was a lot of gnashing of teeth, but Marc became a realist at that time and realized that he could maybe push this thing forward but he probably would not have the support of the mainline Republican Party.

BB: He was not really well-known within the Republican Party.

BC: No, his dad’s a strong Democrat.

BB: Yes, his dad was an outspoken Democrat.

BC: To give him credit, he could read it. He could read that. Why not. He had guys like Mercer and myself and you. We’re busting our butt to help him. He couldn’t ask for a better deal.

BB: So he gets elected governor. It’s an exciting campaign. He and Denny Rehberg are sworn in.

We’ve got about 30 minutes left in the interview, Bruce. That’s not a hard and fast thing, but we don’t want the tape to run out.

So do you have any observations about Marc Racicot as governor? What are your thoughts? You were president of the Senate, so you worked closely with him while he was governor.

BC: Yes, I was president pro tem, president of the Senate. I guess what I would say about Marc, he never really understood the process. He would tell me, “I don’t understand you folks. You hold grudges. You don’t like each other.”

I said, “Marc, how many children do you have at home? Tell me, do you mean you go throughout the whole year, and you don’t have grudges with your kids? You don’t have problems? They don’t like each other?” I remember telling him this one time. I said, “Why do you think we are professionals? We’re not professionals. We’re just ordinary people with ordinary feelings. Yes, this is the way it works, and you have to deal with it,” because I could talk to Marc. He told me this once—I reminded him of his dad. I said, “Well, your dad’s dead. Your dad isn’t here.” (laughs) I said, “I hope that isn’t anything,” but I was older.
He was smooth. He could charm a bird out of a tree. When Bob Dole came to town in Billings one time and Marc introduced him, Bob Dole looked at Marc and he couldn’t believe what he was hearing. Of course when George W—

BB: Because Marc was so smooth and so impressive.

BC: He probably helped elect George W. Bush at the end of that first campaign.

BB: With his legal ability.

BC: So I got along real fine...I’d get angry, you know because I have a short fuse. But in your position—as you’ve been president of the Senate—you support your governor no matter what. You would tell him if he’s wrong, and I would tell him he’s wrong on some of the things. But he was always open with me. The only time that we had problems really was when...I can remember when I was pro tem, and we would have meetings and Mercer would be there. Mercer and the governor did not care for one another, and I can tell you how that goes back to in just second. But I thought, “Well, when I become president, we’re not going to meet—we’re not going to meet with the governor.” I told John that.” John, I don’t want the governor in here. You two guys argue.” I told the governor, “I’m not going to invite you to these meetings here in my office,” and I said, “You and I will meet after.”

He said, “That’s great,” because he didn’t want to go through all the hassle of coming down. He thought it was a pain in the neck. But the thing that’s sad about it—

BB: So these are meetings, that were leadership meetings, involved the governor during the legislative session that were tense between the governor, Marc Racicot, and the speaker of the House, John Mercer?

BC: Very much so.

BB: So you thought, “Well, these aren’t even very productive.” You thought maybe we’d be better off if you and Mercer and the other legislative leaders met, and then you’d just go check in with the governor afterward.

BC: Kind of, sort of, tweaked him a little bit, tweaked Mercer.

BB: Well, sure because that takes Mercer completely out of the loop of the governor.

BC: Sure. (laughs) Which I don’t think he cared at this point in time. But after Marc was first elected, I got a call from John and he said, “Did you see who’s the opponent, his personal attorney?” and so forth like that.
He said, “These are Democrats. This is Steve Browning’s wife.” He said, “Were you contacted by any of these appointments?”

I said, “No. I don’t want to be.”

He said, “Well, he should have contacted us to get our approval or at least let us know.”

I said, “John, John, let him do it. Remember Stan and a couple of his appointments and how they went south. You don’t want to have your fingers on it.” Well, John didn’t feel this way. He wanted to have his fingers on it. I didn’t want my fingers on it. If Marc got a bad person, that’s his problem, not mine. I’m a legislator. Why should the governor ask me if I approve of who he’d like to have in his cabinet? That’s ridiculous. At that point, that’s where the loggerhead started with Mercer and John. Not taking away from Mercer, he had all these—the House—these orangutans, a lot of them. He had to hold his caucus together, a lot more difficult than we had pulling our caucus together. So he was under a heck of a lot of pressure, but he was a very eminent. In the history, he’ll be the only four-term speaker in the history of the state.

BB: Yes, certainly the most significant speaker of the House in the history of Montana, and arguably the most significant legislator in the history of Montana.

BC: Oh, I don’t know if I’d go so far as to say that—

BB: I don’t know who would be more significant but—

BC: Well, Turnage maybe, but John forgot one thing. He burned too many bridges. You don’t want to burn bridges in this business if you can avoid it.

BB: On this related subject, a big item of legislation that passed while you were in the state Senate in a leadership position and while Racicot was governor and while John Mercer was still there was the so-called electrical deregulation bill. What can you tell about that?

BC: It turned out to probably be a bad deal. I can remember when it came up, everybody was concerned about ENRON coming in, including Montana Power, including Montana Power’s employees, including a lot of the big power users. Some of the co-ops around the state were concerned that if the feds deregulated, as we were told they were about to do, and we didn’t have our deregulation in place, the federal law would take (unintelligible) and ENRON would come in and just wipe out Montana Power Company. I don’t know how, but they could. I think that was the big argument.

BB: That the train was leaving the station, and essentially Montana needed to get on board or we could get smothered—

BC: But it turns out the train wasn’t even on the tracks.
BB: Who deceived the Legislature or the governor and why?

BC: Oh Bob, that’s a tough question because when you say deceived and then there’s...that’s an intentional act. There probably were some intentional acts, and some people probably benefitted from it, as you and I both know. I won’t mention names, but I think that a lot of people were just...had been led to believe that this was going to happen. I can remember some of the meetings that we had even before the session where they talked about it. Not all the co-ops were in favor of it, but a lot of them were. Everyone’s in favor of it, and when you get a few Democrats in favor of it, Montana Power Company employees that were in favor of it, and would come up and tell you, “You got to do this or we’re going to lose our job and lose everything.” Well, then if you’re not involved in that—because this is not my area of expertise or some of the others, I guess, I can say fine, we have to rely on people, which you do—then you take notice of it.

There was some opposition. Al Bishop made some opposition to it, but I don’t really know if he really—

BB: That was [a] Republican senator from Billings.

BC: —if he really understood why. Dave Ewer, I’d say, made some probably better arguments of anybody.

BB: Democrat representative from Helena.

BB: But the problem is people would look at David because it was such a—everybody thought he was such a left-wing radical that he didn’t have a lot of respectability on some of it, which is unfortunate because he was in favor of it—he was opposed to it and probably had some good reasons for it. But it was the thing to do, and everybody felt we were doing the right thing. Where it became a real problem is, of course, when Montana Power Company decided to become Touch America, and they wanted to do these other things that we had to deal with in the special session. Then it became obvious that we got a little bit more problem here, but it was too late. But even then, ENRON was the big gunner. You’ve talked to other people, I’ve talked to other people in other states who felt the same thing. That ENRON was—and others I suppose—would be, would come in there.

BB: What role did Governor Racicot play?

BC: I think he played a pivotal role because he could have vetoed the thing to begin with, like that. But I would have to believe that he felt that this is the way to go. He’s an honest guy. I don’t think there was any hanky-panky. I’d be amazed if there was. There might have been a legislator or two who felt that this was the best thing for their own personal use, and unfortunately—

Bruce D. Crippen Interview, OH 396-068, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: Who were the key legislators involved.

BC: Well, Fred Thomas carried the bill, but I don’t think Fred really understood it all that well. John Harp probably knew more about it than anybody in leadership. (Pauses.) The president of the Senate, I think he was president after you—

BB: Gary Aklestad.

BC: Gary Aklestad. But he was involved, but I don’t think Gary was involved in it very much. I was president pro tem, and of course chairman of Judiciary Committee. This was way outside of my thing. I’d listen to some of it; I think I listened to one of the staffers for Conrad Burns’ office one time talking about the possibility that the federal government certainly are looking at deregulating and what would happen. But then again we started carrying some of these other bills, and you don’t do it. Even after it passed I thought, “Well, give it some time. Give it some time.” I think more things happened afterwards to cause the demise of Touch America and Montana Power Company, and that was greed. Pure and simple greed. Greed on the part of Goldman Sachs, probably Paulson then became Secretary of Treasury.

BB: Harold [Henry] Paulson?

BC: You bet. He owned Goldman Sachs at the time. Goldman Sachs, as I understood it were the underwriters for this deal, talked him into it. What are they going to do with the jillions of miles of optic, fiber optics, that aren’t even being used. It was a snort job (?) on the part of them to do Touch America.

BB: Goldman Sachs?

BC: You bet.

BB: They seem to be the big beneficiaries of this whole thing?

BC: I’m sure they made a lot of money, and I may be totally off base but I have no love lost for Goldman Sachs because I know they were the underwriters that got involved in it. I think it was fact that some could see, “We’re going to get out of the power business. We’re going to get into Touch America. We’re going to be a 90...” I can remember listening to Gannon at the meeting, and I was in Billings with Royal Johnson and he gave this big speech about it. I looked at Royal, and I said, “Are you thinking what I’m thinking, Royal?”

He said, “Yes. Yes, I’m going to sell my stock.” (laughs) Because I just thought this was crazy. But that was after the fact.

BB: Then the Montana Power Company’s stock just plummeted.
BC: Plummeted.

BB: Well, you were president of the Senate, and you followed Gary Aklestad, the name we just mentioned as president of the Montana State Senate. There was an interesting ceremony involving Native Americans.

BC: Well, Bob, you know we would have the State of Indian Affairs. We would always have Chief Old Bull come in and talk—

BB: Old Person, I think.

BC: Well, I’m using just a name. Old Person, whatever. Who would go off in his native tongue, but you knew he was just ripping the crap out of the white man. It was going back to this whole thing, I’m thinking where he’d scalped us all if he had a chance. Nobody liked to go and listen to it, and certainly not someone—

BB: Called the State of the Indian Nations was a joint legislative session. There was a prominent Indian leader and they speak through an interpreter. I don’t know if they always did that.

BC: Not always, but I think so. So the president of the Senate—

BB: But it was known as kind of tedious—

BC: The president of the Senate as you know is a senior officer in the Legislature. He’s senior to the speaker of the House. And so as president of the Senate, I thought, “We’re going to have this thing, and we’re going to have former Democrat representative from the Blackfoot—” Is it Blackfoot or Blackfeet?

BB: Blackfeet.

BC: Yes, he’s Blackfeet—“Nation was going to give a talk. He’s the chairman.” Great, let’s do something that makes this thing a little more interesting. I’ve been to Marc Racicot’s mansion one time for a bowl ceremony where they light hemp and they go around and they put smoke everywhere in bowls. A big bowl ceremony. So I went down and I talked to the Indian Affairs guy for the governor, and I asked him, I said, “Look we’re going to have so-and-so that’s going to be the speaker. I’d like to introduce him in his native tongue.”

“Oh great.” So I worked on that.

Then I came back about a week later and I said, “Look how many nations are there?” Well, we had seven nations and then the Little Shell band. “I would like to introduce them in their native
tongue as well.” He was really gung-ho for that. So we get all this stuff up and where I could make some comments.

BB: This is the Indian expert of the office of Public Instruction?

BC: No, the governor’s office. So, he was an Indian from Spokane actually. So the only one we had difficulty with would be Salish-Kootenai because it’s not—everything else is phonetically. You’d be surprised, and so if you know phonetics you can do it. So it was really a simple matter—

BB: Kootenai language is a—

BC: Tough. Min Daly said she would hear me in there and I would be saying—

BB: Min was your secretary?

BC: Yes, and I say, “No, chief. No, chief. I’m sure your daughter’s a virgin. I didn’t mean it.” “Did I say this wrong?” (laughs) “Put down the tomahawk.” And then—

BB: Because you were practicing these Indian words—

BC: Of course Mercer was there, and I always like to jab Mercer. I said, “John, you realize, of course, I’m going to be in charge. You’re going to have to sit down below me a little bit.”

BB: So you’re in the House chamber where he’s the speaker of, the grandeur of that—

BC: I was going to have his seat—

BB: But always when we had the joint sessions, the president of the Senate comes up and occupies the speaker’s seat.

BC: Right. I said, “Do you know what I’m going to do, John?” I said, “I’m bringing drums in there. I’m going to get the drums. We need the drums. Let’s get the—”

“You’re not going to have drums in the House of Representatives.”

I said, “John, I’m the president. You have nothing to say about it. It’s my House now.” And those are the exact words.

John just went, “Urrrrhh,” and grit his teeth and said, “Okay.” Then I came in, a few days later, I came in with the hemp, and [he said], “You’re going to do what?” (laughs) This hemp ceremony.

Bruce D. Crippen Interview, OH 396-068, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: Is that what you smoke?

BC: Yes...No, no that’s not what you smoke, so they had the hemp in a bowl and all this stuff—

BB: But all that smoke was going around the House. I heard about that.

BC: Yes, so we had the drums going and the hemp going.

BB: I was out of the Senate, but I heard about it. Fred Thomas called me up on the telephone, and he says, “Bob, you wouldn’t know what Bruce Crippen did in the House chamber there today for the State of the Tribes address.”

I said, “Well, how would you describe it?”

He said, “Well, it was a happening.”

BC: It was, and so the next thing I thought is the peace pipe, that the tribal peace pipe guy or the medicine guy for the Crow Indian tribe had just come back from visiting the pope and smoked the peace pipe with the pope. Let’s smoke the peace pipe. All these sort of things I would tell John, “Guess what we’re going to do today, John.”

“Oh, what else are you going to do?”

“We’re going to smoke the peace pipe.”

He said, “I’ll be damned if I’m going to smoke the peace pipe.” John, I always wear a three-piece dark suit.

“John, you can sit up there in your little penguin suit with this big stupid-ass grin on your face, but the governor and I and all these representatives are going to be down there, and we’re going to smoke this peace pipe. But you can sit there by yourself, if you want to do it. I mean, go right ahead.” So we did this, and you should see the look on the faces of the representatives when I introduced them in their native tongue. It was this stunned look.

One guy came up to me afterwards, and he said, “I don’t think half our tribe can even understand what you said. We don’t know it.”

BB: It was an incredible thing and a wonderful public relations thing, and it really made an impression on a lot of people. Then you circulated this peace pipe around the room.

BC: Of course Marc Racicot was a pipe smoker, and he did a beautiful job like that. John actually, he stepped forward and he sucked it up, and then I sucked it up. The whole thing, the chief justice sucked it up, and we all did this whole thing. John Mercer came through. I told him
one time, later on, I said, “John, you notice the little zit on your lip?” (laughs) So he did it. But they loved it. I just wanted to change things, make it interesting. The speaker did great. He enjoyed it. The Indians, they’re very noncommittal, but they really...you could tell that they really enjoyed that. The Democrats thought it was the greatest thing since sliced bread.

Our good friends like Swysgood and some of those guys would roll their eyes at...Some of the old-time cowboys from the Republican side were just shaking their heads. To me the struggles that we had, and especially after my little comment about the will of the people pales in comparison to what we do here, that faux pas. It set a tone that I tried to do as president of the Senate, and that is bring back the relationship that we had when I first came on between Republicans and Democrats. That was my goal. I didn’t carry a bill. I didn’t want to do that. That was my effort, and I think it worked.

BB: Well, it was a wonderful ceremony that’s for sure. No question about that, and it got the...it’s still being talked about around Montana to this day. Couple more things as we near the end of the tape. You weren’t governor while Judy Martz...You weren’t president of the Senate or a legislator, I think, when Judy Martz was governor, but you might have some impressions of her and the Paul Sliter tragedy?

BC: That was a terrible thing. Judy, a little bit like Stan Stephens, ended up in a bunker mentality.

BB: Bucker mentality?

BC: Bunker.

BB: Locked themselves in?

BC: Yes, us against the world. The press are like sharks. They like Republican blood and Democrat blood. I think they prefer Republican blood, but they’ll take any blood they can get. They jumped on Judy. I always asked Marc, “Where’s the lieutenant governor? She should be here at our meetings.” I remember asking Judy, “Why aren’t you at these meetings?”

She said, “That guy never has invited me.”

BB: Speaking of Racicot.

BC: Which I thought was crazy so she didn’t have that experience in dealing with the Legislature that she should have. When this unfortunate things happened with Paul Sliter—

BB: The car wreck that killed a young fellow who was the Majority Leader in the House named Paul Sliter.
BC: Probably one of the youngest, nicest guys (unintelligible). Politically—it was tough on his family, of course, but for the Republican party it was disaster because he was a leader and he would have been governor. He certainly would have had a shot at it. Very likeable guy. That thing came out and of course they found out that they played games with it.

BB: The aftermath of the car wreck. There were some controversial things that happened.

BC: But thing that I was upset with about it was I thought why—and I told one of her staffers, “She’s the governor. She’s not this guy’s mother.” Remember she took clothes...She took all his clothes and washed the clothes. Which is really tampering with evidence, and then I think, did she bring him out and bring him to her house?

BB: Yes, he came over to the governor’s house.

BC: I think they tried to show that Martz...that Sliter was—

BB: Shane Hedges was the young—

BC: The [chief of staff to the] governor [Shane Hedges] was driving, I think they found out, but they tried to sort of indicate that it was [Sliter]—

BB: Shane was Judy’s chief of staff, an identical deal to the one you talked about before when Steve Yekael was Stan Stephens’ campaign manager and then Stan kind of became dependent on him and he thought, “Gosh, I’m not sure if I can survive in this contentious world without him.” So he made him chief of staff, which wasn’t a right fit. Exactly same thing happened with Judy Martz. Whether Shane was the right fit or not I don’t know.

BC: I think J. D—

BB: But Judy did the same thing. She took this guy who’d been her campaign manager, and who she’d become dependent on in the campaign, and made him her chief of staff.

BC: Well Judy, and of course our good friend Chuck Swysgood were ones basically responsible for the huge surplus that they passed on to the Democrats way back, to our present governor. So fiscally she was very good. She just had bad advice.

BB: Swysgood was her budget director. Had been a state senator.

BC: Good friend of ours.

BB: Good friend of ours.

BC: Then she finally got Tom Beck on there as an advisor.
BB: Who was another friend of ours and a senator from Deer Lodge and succeeded you, I think, as president of the Senate.

BC: Yes, he was my pro tem. So I thought she got bad advice from—and they were kids, these people. They’re kids. They’re young people. Not that they’re not bright; of course, all of them are bright—Shane Hedges—always were bright people. They’re still a little bit wet behind the ears. They don’t have the experience. This is the problem with the legislature today with term-limits. By the time you start getting some experience, you’re gone, and experience is far more important than is the knowledge. You can be dumb as a post but you’re a good legislator if you have experience and you understand how the game is played, what makes the world go round politically. You can be a very effective one and still not be the brightest lamp...bulb in the lamp. I felt sorry for Judy because she’s a strong Christian gal, and she deserved a heck of a lot better than she got from the press. But then again, that’s the hazards when you get people that don’t have the experience and who are inclined to close the door and bar the door and fill the moat and pull up the drawbridge.

BB: Bruce, you’ve lived a long and good and very useful life. How do you want to be remembered?

BC: Just that I did a good job. The one thing that I always was proud of...and I shouldn’t be really be proud of anything because it was a pleasure to be there. I mean it was an experience. You just owe your constituents such a great debt that they believed in you enough to elect you to go back. But 20 years was enough...Is that I was the only president in the Yellowstone County. They never had a president of the Senate.

BB: Before or since.

BC: Yes, I think and that the only [other] one, to my knowledge, that held all five of those offices was Aklestad. Aklestad and myself.

BB: That went through all the leadership—

BC: Held all the leadership positions. I told him, I said, “I beat you because I was chairman of the Judiciary.”

BB: But he was chairman of Finance and Claims.

BC: I know but I said, “Judiciary’s more important than Finance and Claims.” (laughs) I would like to be remembered among the friends like you, Steve Doherty, Van Valkenburg—who was my bitter enemy on the floor and who I would support to the bitter end in any political campaign that he had now because he’s a friend. We were the spear-chuckers. If you’re not one, it’s hard to understand. But your caucus looks at you to be the guy that kills the other guy.
BB: You and Fred—you got put into a leadership position. I remember as a member of the Republican caucus, it was a determination we made that Fred was very assertive. He was strong; he was boldly partisan. We had to have somebody that could stand up to him, and we looked around the room and you were it.

BC: I was it. Of course I was in leadership and I had to be it. Yet Fred and I became, because of that, we became close friends. And Halligan. I’m naming a lot of Democrats—

BB: But Mike Halligan, who was the Democratic leader when I was president of the Senate, he was the Senate Minority Leader. Had a different approach, I think, than Fred Van Valkenburg. He was more of a conciliatory sort of guy. He and I had a great relationship and continue to have one.

BC: So they’re friends. Politically miles apart, and that’s fine. That’s the way it should be. But one other thing I would say—the friendship—is that while principles are important in politics. One would want to have principles, like whether it be on the sanctity of the family or sanctity of human life., those you stick with, but you ought not to have a whole lot of those type of things where you cannot negotiate. People come up and they figure they’re going to get everything done or they die trying. It doesn’t work that way. You don’t do your constituents any good. Especially if you lose and you’re out there and somebody’s totally opposite of your point of view is in there now in your place. So a lot of policy. You can deal with policy. People don’t like the word compromise. Okay, you can use another word. You can work out situations where nobody gets everything they want, but everybody’s happy. That’s the art of politics. That’s a dying breed I fear.

BB: Well, that’s the alternative—when people can rationally work out their problems through a political process—the alternative to violence.

BC: You and I have been friends for a long time, Bob. While we’ve gone our separate ways after you’re gone and I’m out of it, we still remember these days that we had together. I relied on you a lot more than maybe you thought that I would because you were a wise old bugger and still are a wise old bugger. So if it came down to one thing, I guess I’d like [it] to be remembered that I was one of your closest friends in the legislature.

BB: Well thank you, my friend. I appreciate that greatly. Thank you for your public service.

BC: My pleasure.

[End of Interview]