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Bob Brown: I'm interviewing state senator Dave Lewis at his home in Helena on Friday, August 22. Dave, where were you born?

Dave Lewis: Actually I was born in Rapid City, South Dakota. My mom and dad were long-time South Dakotans. Their families went back after the Civil War in fact. They lived in the Black Hills and I was born in Rapid City in 1942.

BB: Do I remember you were brought up in Idaho?

DL: Yes. I had a younger brother who had a very tragic accident. In 1946 he drowned in a stock tank on our farm. He was like two or three years old. My mother and father were so devastated that they sold the farm and moved west. After a short stop in Colorado, they ended up in northern Idaho. My dad had a wheat / cattle farm operation and logged, because in Idaho, everybody logs. So I really grew up east of Moscow, Idaho, out around a place called Deary.


DL: D-E-A-R-Y.

BB: Okay. So you had a farm / ranch background?

DL: Yes. I grew up on a farm, a diversified farm operation. I just loved it. That's what I did and being the oldest son and all of that, I did a lot of the work with my father in the fields and logging and everything else. I would have just stayed there, because that was kind of my dream was to just do that. But my dad was so obsessed with me going to college. My dad had only gone through the second grade. He had some real severe learning disabilities. They sent him home when he was in second grade and said, “This kid can’t learn anything.”

Then when he married my mom—when he was 30 he married my mom—and she was a schoolteacher. She taught him how to read. We found out he was dyslexic, very severely dyslexic, and she got him reading. From then on, he was just obsessed with learning. He read everything he could get his hands on. He was obsessed with us kids going on to college. So for a whole series of reasons, one of them was that he had a heart attack, but the secondly, and most importantly, that he wanted me off the doggone farm because he didn’t want me wanting to stay there. He sold the place in 1960 and said, “Okay, kid. Go to school. There’s no future in farming. Get out of here and go to school.” So that’s kind of the way things evolved. Otherwise,
I would have just stayed there because I always enjoyed it. I probably would have just kept on doing it.

BB: So you went to college at The University of Idaho?

DL: I spent two years up at junior college at Coeur d’Alene. I was working nights at the sawmill at Coeur d’Alene. And then I transferred down to The University of Moscow.

BB: What did you major in?

DL: That’s a great story. I was thinking about being a teacher because my mother was a teacher. I was standing in line when I registered as a freshman at the junior college at Coeur d’Alene. I was behind this really cute girl and she told the advisers when she got ready to register that she was going to be an accounting major and then go ahead and get her CPA and become a tax accountant. She was really a nice looking little gal. And so when I got to the advisor I said, “You know, I want to be an accounting major.” So I ended up taking—I was an accounting major for three years and I finally said, “I hate this. This is the most boring thing in the world to me.” So I flipped over at that point to become a finance major, which was basically econometrics without calculus. I couldn’t take calculus because I would have never made it. So I took all the econ courses offered at the university in my senior year because I carried like 22 credits a semester. I loaded up and graduated with a degree in finance.

BB: You were working in the mine too during that time weren’t you?

DL: Yes. I worked in the mines in Idaho in the summertime when I was out of high school. Then I started fighting fires for the Forest Service and I spent four summers fighting fires.

BB: So then you got married and you ended up in Montana?

DL: Well, it’s a little longer than that. Karen and I got married. She’s a Coeur d’Alene kid. We met and got married in ’65. I was going to grad school at Gonzaga at that time. I decided to go ahead and get my graduate degree in econ over at Gonzaga. I was going to grad school. We got married. Gosh right away we started a family unexpectedly and so I took a job. I got an offer from Boeing. They came over and interviewed all the kids in grad school at Gonzaga and gave me a real nice offer in 1965 and I went to Seattle.

We moved over to Seattle and really enjoyed that. My dog (?) has been real helpful here. Anyway, we went over to Seattle and worked for Boeing for three years and we just couldn’t stand the weather over there. And so I was looking at job openings in Montana. My dad was logging down in the Bitterroot at the time. My mom and dad were living in Stevensville. So I grabbed a job with the Forest Service and we came over to Helena in 1968 from Seattle. Then I worked for the Forest Service for four years I guess it was—no, longer than that. Five years. And then they were moving us around every year.
At that time I was a budget person for the Forest Service. We were in the Helena National Forest in the Beaverhead and over in the regional office in Missoula. They were moving us so often that—we had three little kids at that point—so there was a job in the paper advertised in the budget office for the State of Montana. And the salary was about half of what we were making with the Forest Service, but we just said, “Gosh, we have to settle down. We can’t do this to our kids.” So I applied for it and was accepted to come to work up here and started on my birthday in 1973 in October. I figured it would last for a while.

In fact, I was trying to get on at the smelter because I’d had some smelter experience. They paid 11 bucks an hour and I think I started at seven bucks with the state. I was here during a time when a lot of people were retiring and I had an opportunity to work with Keith Colbo, who was kind of a mentor. I started to get some promotions and just ended up staying there.

BB: Was Keith the director of the budget department?

DL: When I went to work, Keith Colbo was the director of the Department of Revenue. Then I think in the early ’74, or right after the 1974 session, which was the first annual session, [Gov.] Tom Judge brought Keith over to run the budget office, and so I kind of worked for him directly. Then he ended up going down to be the executive assistant I think that same year, later in the same year.

BB: The administrative chief...what do you call it? Chief administrator for the governor?

DL: Yes, the chief of staff.

BB: Yes.

DL: And I kind of ended up working with him because I don’t know why he thought I knew something because I did have quite a bit of budget experience from my Forest Service years. So he put me on special projects and things like that. And I got moved up to a lead analyst. Gosh, I think that was in ’76 was made the deputy budget director. Mike Billings was the budget director and then I got picked to be the deputy in ’76. So it was the right place at the right time and kind of working for the right guys who recognized that you may not be the brightest guy in the world, but you work real hard.

BB: In that position as the deputy budget director, you would have probably come in personal contact with Governor Tom Judge?

DL: I think in 19...right after I came to work in ’73, because I’d come from the federal government and we had a classification, personnel classification system and the state was in the process of implementing one. Keith took me down to talk to the governor and talk about how it worked and what the process was. We’d never had one in state government before. I mean hours are set by individual departments. Then the legislation had been passed in the ’73
session to do it on the state level. But the governor and his staff were kind of like, “What the heck is this anyway?” Keith took me down one morning—midmorning—to talk to the governor, which I remember my knees were shaking. I mean, I was like, “Going down to talk to the governor?”

Tom was sitting behind his desk and they had those little chairs in the governor’s office that were tipped so you had to sit right on the edge. They were uncomfortable because they didn’t want you to stay real long. So you know you perch on the edge of this chair and Keith said, “Well, tell the governor about a personnel classification system and how they work.” It was like, “Holy smoke.” I could talk for a day and a half. I kind of ran through it and Tom was not real deeply interested, but kind of got it. He said, “Okay, well I guess you guys have got to get to work on this.” So that was my first introduction to Tom. And then I would go back after that because Keith put me in charge of writing all the fiscal notes in the ’74 session, which was really a great experience. I don’t remember how many we did, but for somebody new to state government that suddenly worked the normal 20 hour day that you do in the budget office and get to write the fiscal notes on all the bills that came through. It was a big deal.

BB: Just so we clarify too, Dave, the law in Montana has required for a long time—probably beginning about then—that any time a bill is introduced in the legislature, if it has any kind of fiscal impact, if it could cost the state money or make the state money, there’s got to be an analysis done on it and then an estimate attached to the bill of what the fiscal impact of the bill would be one way or another. In the budget office, your primary responsibility was carefully reading the bills and trying to determine their fiscal impact.

DL: Right. So I would look and figure out which departments were affected by the bill and then asked them for their input and then take all that and put it together and write the note. You know, for somebody new, what a great learning experience.

BB: Because you became greatly familiar with every piece of legislation that had a fiscal impact.

DL: And I worked very closely with Francis Bardanouve, who was House Appropriations chairman and Bill Groff who, in that session, was chairman of Senate Finance and Claims. Those guys knew everything. They’d come down and say, “You are really stupid; what are you doing here?”

They were wonderful to work with because they knew absolutely everything. Bill Groff used to walk around with an envelope in his inside coat pocket. He kept track of the budget. You’d say, “Well Bill, where are we?”

He’d pull it out and say, “Well, I think we’re about balanced right now. And we got a little extra here, a little extra there.” And today we have dozens of people and huge computer systems and we don’t do any better than Bill Groff did with his envelope.
BB: Dave, I literally had that experience myself with Bill Groff when I was a young legislator. I had an idea in mind that would cost a little bit of money that involved the Department of Transportation, the Highway Department. So it was recommended to me as a young freshman legislator that I go over and talk to Senator Groff, and I just explore it with him in a general way. He said, “Oh yes, I think we can afford to do that.” And he reached in his shirt pocket just like you mentioned and he had half a dozen—they were kind of irregularly torn scraps of paper—and he took out a ball point pen and he doodled a little bit on one of them that apparently had the Highway Department money in it or some key figures for the Highway Department. And he assured me that would be okay. It was simple as that.

Now, you know, there’d be a formalized procedure and computers, as you mentioned, and spreadsheets and printouts and that sort of thing and half a dozen different cooks all making the same broth. Then he carried this around in his shirt pocket pretty accurately I think too.

DL: Oh, he was very accurate and it gave him tremendous power because really, Francis had kind of a general idea of where we were, but Bill knew exactly. He was it. I mean the whole legislature, if you wanted to know where the money was, you went and talked to Bill Groff.

BB: Yes, that’s what I learned.

DL: Our job in the budget office was to try and get as close to Bill’s number as we could. We knew he was right and we tried to reconcile it.

BB: And he was a banker by background.

DL: He was a banker from over in Florence. He spent his whole life with numbers and in politics. He understood it real well. If I did a fiscal note that was off, and that happened all the time—particularly with the Department of Revenue, they’d slip me bad numbers. I was new enough that I would go ahead and put them in and sign the thing. Then the next thing I knew, Bill was down there saying, “Well you know, you’re either really dumb or you got had on this one.” Generally, it was both. He was just so wonderful to work with. Those guys in those days, they were pretty experienced and they knew what they were doing and just sitting in...at that time, see, there wasn’t a legislative fiscal analyst. So the budget office staffed the committees. So sitting in with—

BB: The governor’s budget office staffed the legislative committees, is what you’re saying?

DL: Yes. Bob Marks put me in a terrible spot one time. He was a subcommittee chairman and I handled the Department of Administration budget. One of the division administrators in the Department of Administration was a very powerful man. He’s passed away some time ago, so I won’t mention any names, but he’d slipped a position in because he wanted a secretary. He had his eyes on this little gal who he thought very highly of. He put this position in the budget and it came up in the budget in the hearing.
Bob looked at me, Representative Marks from Clancy, and said, “Well, Mr. Lewis do you think that guy really needs a secretary?”

Here I was because I kind of worked for him in a roundabout way. I was working for the committee and my proper answer was to Mr. Marks, “No, I don’t think he needs one.” I was working for the guy so I thought it through and said, I think Bob Marks is going to be here when this other guy is gone. So I said, “Bob I think you’re right. They don’t need it.” It was an awkward situation.

BB: Wow, yes. But you obviously survived that.

DL: Yes. I managed. I’d never had any real political influence. I didn’t have any connections. I didn’t have any big constituency behind me. I just figured out that if you worked real hard and were as honest as you could be with everybody, that was the only defense that you had. You had to be fairly good at what you did. And you had to play straight with everybody and I actually turned that into a 30-year career.

BB: That’s great. That’s a good story in itself. But in a position of significant responsibility, relatively newly into your career into state government—and close enough I’d think that working in the governor’s budget office—you know a governor’s priorities are reflected more by his or her budget than anything else. As you think back, what were the priorities of the Judge administration?

DL: Well honestly, and I thought very highly of Tom Judge from one perspective. I mean he had the best feel for public opinion of anybody I think I ever saw in the state government. One day I went in there and I had a proposal that I’d been sent down to talk to the governor about. It had to do with staffing at the state hospital because at that point, I was handling the budget for the old department of institutions. And for whatever reason, I think the executive assistant got called out to a phone call. It was just me and the governor. So I lay out this proposal. It took like half an hour and when I was done, Tom leaned back in his chair and he said, “Well, Mr. Lewis, tell me what the headline in the Tribune is going to be when I put this out?”

I’m an economist by training and trying to just do a good job of the budget and the governor says, “What’s the headline in the Tribune going to be?” It was like a question coming from Mars. I said, “I really don’t know.” He stopped and he said, “You know, if I can’t sell this to the public, it’s going nowhere. The first shot fired in the battle will be the headline in the Tribune. You’ve got to think about stuff like that.” He was very good at that. He had just a real feel for public opinion.

So what was his priority? In all honesty I think in the first term, his priority was being re-elected in 1976 in the second election. I mean, everything was basically, “Okay let’s think this through. How is this going to play out and how am I going to handle it?” He was very upfront about it.

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and I don’t think it diminished the job that he did. I think it was very clear, from my perspective, that’s what it was all about.

BB: Thinking about his administration and looking back now, is there an important accomplishment or maybe more than one, two, or three that you could identify with the Judge administration?

DL: He hired really smart, good, administrators in general, I think, with very few exceptions. So I think in that administration, the state government changed from being kind of a loose collection of boards and commissions to actually being a line organization with the departments and lines of authority, that type of thing. And he wasn’t—Tom wasn’t a management guy, but he hired people who were. Colbo and [Ron] Richards and Gary Wicks and I could go on and on. There was a lot of real solid management talent in that administration—Dave Fuller and a lot of people—who leaned over backwards to try and make it work. I think that would be the biggest contribution. Prior to executive reorganization, which was approved in ‘72, I mean, goodness, I don’t remember how many boards and commissions there were.

There was, from my understanding of what happened and I came in right at the beginning of the executive reorganization process, it was pretty disjointed. They turned it into the executive branch into a pretty doggone good top to bottom organization with the department heads who had some authority and were held accountable, that type of thing. It may not have been Tom himself, but he hired the people who knew how to do it, and he backed them.

BB: Because executive reorganization was something that started in the administration of Governor [Forest] Anderson, but what you’re telling me is that it was carried into effect in a good way during the Tom Judge administration. It was actually implemented so that our state government was more modern and more accountable?

DL: When they hired the directors—when Tom was elected in ‘72 and they hired the directors for the new administration—I can remember people telling me this, they hired modern type management people. They were people who had management abilities. It was much less of a good-old-boy kind of thing than it was in the past.

BB: Shortcomings of the Judge administration?

DL: Well, I think that number one, Tom was really bored with state government. He got bored with it. He liked going out and talking to people and he really enjoyed interaction with folks. He was not a manager and I think it got boring to him. I can remember some discussions when—see, [Sen. Lee] Metcalf passed away and they appointed [Paul] Hatfield to fill the position. Tom really wanted to take that Senate seat. He was bored. He wanted to move on. His advisors basically talked him out of it on the basis of, “God, if you appoint yourself and you have to run in a year, it’s going to be a real disaster.” Ideally, deep down, he wanted that. He wanted to go to D.C. and be a senator. I suspect he would have been a pretty good senator as that goes.
BB: As I remember, he was plagued by a 64,000-dollar sort of whispering scandal at that time that complicated him getting into the U.S. Senate also.

DL: That hung over him. I had worked later with some of the guys that were involved in that ’72 campaign. Apparently, a lot of money was raised in Butte and may not have been recorded, let’s put it that way. I can recall walking into his receptionist’s office in ’76 during the campaign with a strong friend and supporter from Havre who had two big Safeway grocery sacks in his arms. We walked into the receptionist’s office and I’m just standing there waiting to go in and talk to the governor about something. He dumps these two grocery sacks full of 100-dollar bills in the gal’s desk and said—

BB: The receptionist?

DL: Yes. He said, “Here I’m done with this. You guys figure out what to do now.”

She was like, “What?! What am I supposed to do?” They finally decided that they’d call Spike Fuller at the time. He handled—he was involved in the campaign and that kind of thing. It was pretty loose. So this money that was raised in Butte may not have been totally accounted for. As I recall, after the election, he bought a restaurant down in Billings for Tom.

BB: You remember it was Tampico Café?

DL: Yes that’s it. It went belly up because it was not managed correctly.

BB: But the suspicion was that the Tampico Café was purchased with unreported campaign contributions? Is that how to understand it?

DL: I heard that and having seen the way the money went, I was sent down. Even though I was the Deputy Budget Director at that time, the old boys came around before the election and said, “Okay, you’re an appointee of the governor. You’re expected to make the maximum contribution and you’re going to help us raise some money.” Even though I was the deputy, I was in the governor’s office and so here I am. I didn’t know anything about this. Jack Crosser, who was a wonderful guy and a good friend and subsequently played a big role in my future career down there, he said, “We need some help here. If you’re going to be part of the administration, it would be a good idea to get on board and help us out.”

I said, “Okay, what do you need me to do?”

He said, “Well, here are the names of a couple of people that owe the governor some campaign contributions. I’d like you to go visit with them and make sure they get that money.”
So he sent me down to talk to a tavern owner here in Helena. I went in and the fellow was still around so I’m not going to mention any names. I said, “Well, I was sent down to pick up campaign contributions for Governor Judge.”

He said, “Come on back,” and he takes me back to the back room. He had about ten five-gallon buckets full of quarters. He said, “Okay well here it is. Back your truck around or something and we’ll load it up.”

I said, “What the hell am I going to do with 50 gallons of quarters?”

He said, “I don’t care. Do you want the money or don’t you?”

So I called my contact in the governor’s office in the Office of Administration and he said, “Bring it on up.” So it wasn’t like it is now. Let’s put it that way.

BB: And obviously none of that was reported. You didn’t even know for sure how much money was in those buckets or anything.

DL: No, no. I always really liked the adjutant general, General [Jack] Womack from Dillon, because I had known him when I worked for the Forest Service and we were stationed in Dillon. My eldest daughter started school down there and they had her at a morning kindergarten and we wanted her in an afternoon kindergarten. So we went over to—and he was superintendent of the schools—we went over to the office at like nine o’clock in the morning to see if we could change this kindergarten thing around. The secretary said, “Go on down to the Moose Bar. Superintendent Womack is down there.”

“Oh, okay.” So I went down there and he was in a poker game in the Moose Bar. I had to wait quietly until he was done with that hand.

Then he turned around and I introduced myself and said, “I was wondering if I could get this little girl moved from the morning kindergarten to the afternoon kindergarten.” He said, “Yes, we can do that. Go ahead. I have to get back to my hand.”

So I had known General Womack from those days. So he was one of the major fundraisers. He sent me off on a couple of missions to collect money. I didn’t know what the hell was going on because I’m no expert in this stuff. I haven’t even been involved in a campaign before. I was just trying to help the guys out, that kind of a thing. It was not a real tight organization when it came to that.

BB: I think we’ve touched on this pretty much already, Dave, but who were Governor Judge’s key advisors?

DL: I think Jack Crosser—
BB: Was he Forrest Anderson’s brother-in-law?

DL: Yes. And he had been in the state auditor’s office for 100 years and then he had Jack working over as deputy director in the Department of Administration. Jack was a good adviser. Ron Richards and Keith Colbo and General Womack too, as far as that goes, were good. Ross Cannon, here in town, was an old friend.

BB: Lawyer and lobbyist—

DL: Lawyer, lobbyist, friend and all that kind of stuff. I think he listened to a lot of people, but I think the guys who really had an impact were those folks who had the old connections. Gary Wicks was, in the beginning, but Gary and Tom got crossways over Colstrip 3 and 4. Gary, if I recall, Tom wanted them built and Gary didn’t and he was head of the Department of Natural Resources. I think he kind of lost his place at the table a little bit to some extent. Certainly old legislators like—he listened to Groff and was never real tight with Francis because Francis was a pretty straight arrow. Certainly some of the old time legislators, some of the Butte guys I think he listened to quite a bit.

BB: You’ve touched on this already too, Dave, but just to ask you directly: how would you describe his leadership style? What kind of a guy was he?

DL: He was pretty disengaged. He was quick. Like I say, you go talk to him and the things he knew about, which was like how to get the right PR out of an issue, that kind of a thing, he was right there. A lot of the other stuff, he was just like, “You’re boring me.” He listened, I think, a lot to Ron Richards, Keith Colbo, those folks, on issues that came up in the departments, that kind of thing. He would get taken in on things. I was subsequently appointed in 1978 by him to be the director of the Department of Administration, which is a whole funny story I’ll tell you in a minute. When I was director of the Department of Administration, [at] that time the board of investments was under the department.

The head of the board of investments called me one morning and said, “Goodness gracious, Tom wants me to buy a mortgage on Fairmont down there at Anaconda. It was some friend of his in British Columbia wants to buy it and I don’t remember what the numbers are now, but he can’t find anybody who will issue him a mortgage. He just called me up and said, ‘Geez, buy this guy’s mortgage so I can buy Fairmont.’”

I said, “Well is it a good deal or not?”

He said, “No, it’s way overvalued. We can’t do that, but he called me up and told me I had to do it.”

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I said, “Well let me go talk to him.” So I called Pat Douglas, who was a professor at the university—

BB: In Missoula.

DL: Yes in Missoula, and the gal from over in Two Dot that I had known—

BB: She was originally from Two Dot.

DL: Yes; her family lives up Big Elk over out by Two Dot. But anyway, I called Pat and I said, “My goodness, I’m in kind of a jam here.” She was chairman of the board at that time.

BB: Chairman of the Board of Investments?

DL: Yes, of investments. I said, “The governor wants us to buy a mortgage on Fairmont on a way overvalued price and we just can’t do that. This is one of those deals where I have to go tell him that if he wants that to happen, then I’m resigning because I’m not going to do it.” And she said, “Well, wait a minute. I’m going to drive over to Helena and we’ll both go tell him that if he wants us to do that, we’re both resigning.” So we went in and talked to him and said, “Geez, governor, we’d do anything to help you out but this isn’t a good deal. This is a bad deal for the state because they wanted a five million dollar mortgage on a two million dollar building.” He heard us out and was just kind of disgusted and said, “Well, if I can’t get you to go along with me, then I guess that’s that. I don’t want you resigning or anything like that.” Afterwards, it became apparent that he had gotten some bad advice from one of his cronies. I guess that was kind of, in summary, these kinds of things happen off and on through my time in that administration where something particularly bad would come up, but if you went to him and said, “Look. I’m not doing it. If you want it done, you’ve got to get another boy.” He would say, “Okay, okay, okay.” So that was kind of the essence of my contact with him.

I just wanted to say, he called me down to his office in the summer of ’78, I think it was. He said, “I’ve got to appoint a new director of the Department of Administration. I’ve got to make a change down there.” He said, “Forrest Anderson’s brother-in-law, Jack Crosser.”

I said, “Yes, I work with Jack a lot.”

He said, “He says that I have to hire you. Jack said that I had to hire you because Lewis is the only one around here too dumb to steal.” He said, “We can’t put anybody over there who is a little shaky.”

Because at that time, the director of the department made the architect appointments, handled all of the state construction, and everything else. He said, “Jack said I had to have somebody too dumb to steal and the consensus is that you’re the man.” He laughed and said, “So I’m appointing you director of the Department of Administration.”

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So in a five-year period, I went from making seven bucks an hour as a beginning budget analyst to being appointed as a director, which was just unbelievable. He was, I guess, kind of in summary, he tended to get sucked into things, but if you really laid that out for him and said, “That’s a bad deal and count me out,” he always backed off.

BB: A big development that occurred at about that time, Dave, when you were director of the Department of Administration was in 1978, and then probably I don’t know when it started to happen, but I’m guessing within a year or so of the time that happened, Governor Judge’s lieutenant governor, Ted Schwinden, ran against Judge for the Democratic nomination for governor in 1980. That must have put those of you in the Judge administration in the spotlight big time.

DL: Oh boy, I’ll tell you, because I always liked Ted. I worked with him when he was lieutenant governor and I think I handled his budget a few times. He put together a little organization down there. We were going through an energy crisis and he had a little organization in the lieutenant governor’s office to work on that. That basically turned into a campaign organization. I didn’t know that at the time. I helped him get it funded and set up. Yes, it was really awkward because right away, there was a kind of, “You’re either with us or you’re against us,” type of thing going on.

BB: Within the Judge administration?

DL: Yes, within that. I had thought it over and I said, “Look, I owe Tom Judge a lot. I moved up from nothing to a department director and he’s always been good to me and I like Ted. I respect Ted. I’m going to stick with the horse I rode in on here.” They had a dinner over at the Governor’s Mansion. Spike Fuller was kind of the...Dave Fuller was the guy at the end of the table. They had all of the directors over, all of the appointees over, directors and I think some of the staff people from the governor’s office, that kind of a thing. It was a big dinner. He laid it out that, you know, we’ve got a challenge here from Ted, and we know a lot of you guys know and like Ted, but we want to know that if you’re going to work for the governor, you’re 100 percent behind Tom Judge. If you’re not behind Tom Judge, you might as well just get out.

So they went around the table and they were suspect of me because I didn’t come in with them originally and they knew I had worked with Ted a lot. They asked me where I was and I said, “If I decide to back Ted, I’ll resign, but until then I’m working for Tom. I’ll do everything I can to help Tom.” I did, in fact.

Then they went to some of the other guys. There were two or three others and it was really an unpleasant deal. It was like passing the black spot in Treasure Island or something. Three or four of the other guys said, “No, I’m sorry. I’m going to stick with Ted. We are good friends and I’m going to support him. You do what you have to do.”
BB: Do you remember who those guys were?

DL: Leo Barry was number one I think. I’m trying to remember the fellow from the Department of Livestock. I’m not sure about this, but there were several people that went way back with Ted, you know. They weren’t going to back off. So it was just awkward for those fellows, well for everybody who was there as far as I was concerned.

BB: Did some of them end up resigning as a result?

DL: Nope, nobody did. They were just kind of ostracized I guess. They were the outsiders looking in, but they didn’t leave. So I helped raise money for Tom going into that primary and helped with the campaign to the extent that I could. Basically, again, feeling that the best thing that I could do was to do a good job and keep him out of trouble. I didn’t want him to do anything real dumb. And after the primary, the day after the primary, I told Karen in the morning and I started to figure out, maybe a month or two out, that it looked to me like Ted was going to win because Dave Hunter and he were traveling the state and meeting with all the Democratic Central Committees around the state. I had a lot of friends that I knew from some of the counties that would call in and say, “Oh man, Schwinden’s got this thing put together.”

BB: What was Dave Hunter’s job at the time?

DL: Dave Hunter was working at the Lewis and Clark County, but he signed on to run Ted’s campaign. Dave had run Baucus’ campaign when he ran for Congress, you know. Dave was good. Ted had, goodness gracious, 30 years of working with all these people too. I think people were just a little nervous that Tom was eventually going to screw up. That was kind of the feedback.

BB: There was still that mysterious unreported 64,000-dollar thing hanging in the background.

DL: The Democrats at that point said, “Look, we’ve got to win this next election. We’re not sure that Tom can pull it off. We think Ted can.” That’s what it got down to in my evaluation. So the day after the primary, I thought—I told Karen, I said, “Well I played that one wrong.” We better start looking for work because come November here, this is going to be all over with. I got a call from Ted asking me to come up to his house. I thought, “Well he’s either going to tell me to look for work or ask for some help or something.” So I go up there and he said, “Look, I want you on my team going into the election and I want to work with you. We need your assistance.” I said, “Well geez, the Judge administration is over with. That’s an easy call for me. I’ll do anything I can to help out.” So I ended up doing some stuff through the campaign. Jack Ramirez—when he ran against Jack Ramirez—

BB: When Schwinden did.

DL: Yes, through the general election campaign. Then when he won, he called me and said, “I’d like you to be the budget director.” That was really a total surprise to me. I thought I’d be lucky
to hang on as a department director. To go over and be budget director—and that came from Francis. Francis Bardanouve was really concerned that they put somebody in there that he could talk to and work with. So that’s how I ended up going into the Schwinden administration, which was totally unexpected.

I didn’t have any great political connections and hadn’t been a big-time Democrat or anything else, but I certainly knew that I better get my money in the campaign. So that’s how I ended up going over there to be the budget director for Ted. I loved working for Ted because without a doubt—and certainly not putting down anybody in politics now—but he’s the most brilliant politician I think I’ve ever dealt with. His mind was—he was so far ahead of the rest of the world that I was just in total amazement all of the time. So it was a great education working for him.

BB: His approach to the job was different than Governor Judge’s leadership style?

DL: Oh yes. He’s very involved in policy issues, very, very involved. He didn’t want to sit in the discussions, but he wanted to make the decisions. So there was the policy group—which I served on for eight years in that administration—made up of four or five the directors that he relied on for political advice, that type of thing. And I was involved mainly because I was down at the budget office. By that time I had quite a bit of political experience with the legislature and everything else. So I served on the policy group and we would discuss things and make recommendations to him. Rarely he would come in and participate. He just didn’t want to spend the time with us. I think he knew that he was so goddamned much smarter than the rest of us that it was like a waste of time for him.

He would ponder what we had to suggest and sometimes he’d go along with it and sometimes he wouldn’t. The problem with that administration was that in ’81 we had a huge surplus and Bob Marks was a very smart Speaker of the House. Bob made the decision that by golly, we were going to spend that thing. We’re going to make Ted raise taxes here before the next election. So we had a pay plan bill for like a three or four percent raise. Bob Marks and the House Republicans raised it up to a 12 and 12. We had an increase for the schools of maybe three or four percent. They raised it up to like a 17 and 18. It was unbelievable. The House Republicans just passed them. Some of the political advisors told Schwinden that he had to veto it.

I argued very strongly, why? At that time we had a huge surplus. Even though things out in the future could go to hell, why would a Democratic governor veto huge increases for key constituencies at a time when he had a surplus? We did. We had a 100 million-dollar surplus, which was big money in 1981. So he signed them and then in ’83 the economy fell off the cliff. So that was the budget for the ’84 session. He was in the middle of an election and everything else. The ’83 session, I’m sorry. It was the budget before the ’84 elections. So I had to go down and tell him—like the first of September, we thought we were in good shape. Then like over a 60-day period, everything just collapsed. Oil prices, corporate income taxes, everything

Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
collapsed. I had to go down and tell him, “Man, we don’t have any money.” That was a tough walk.

Terry Johnson was the revenue estimator for the budget office and the guy that I worked with. So I made Terry go with me because I was afraid to go by myself. I said, “We have to go tell the governor. Shit, we’re up the creek. We don’t have any money.” We’re going into an election and this thing has just gone 180 degree spin here in the last two or three months. It went down so quickly that I thought we could slip through the ’84 elections without it falling apart. So I can remember that very well, going down and explaining to Ted, and he had Dave Hunter in there. I don’t remember who he had in the meeting, “You know 90 days ago we told you that we were in good shape? Well, we were wrong.” He almost had a Ph.D. in econ. He understands all this.

BB: Schwinden.

DL: Yes. Schwinden did. He really cross-examined me. There was nothing we could do. It was really unprecedented to have things turn that fast. So he said, “Well we’re going to have to go out with a real bare-bones budget.” And he said, “Dave, you’re going to have to go—I’m sending you to Great Falls, Missoula, and Billings to have public meetings to talk about the fact that we don’t have any money at all.” That was bad. Eric Feaver from MEA-MFT [Montana Education Association and Montana Federation of Teachers] will never forget it because I’m the one that had to go out and sell this zero-zero school program. We ran out of money. It was very unpleasant.

BB: Wow, and that happened before the 1984 election?

DL: That happened going into the ’83 session.

BB: So it was the bare-bones budget that was proposed in the ’83 session.

DL: Yes. We didn’t have any choice at all. Goodover ran against Schwinden—

BB: Senator Pat Goodover, Republican senator from Great Falls.

DL: He ran against Schwinden in ’84, but Ted basically turned a silk purse into a sow’s ear here in that we had been the big spenders in’ 81—the friends of the public employees, the friends of public education, and we had no money in ’83, so Dave Hunter coined the slogan, “Hard times, hard choices.” And Ted Schwinden ran [on the rationale] in the 1930s when I was growing up in the northeastern Montana, we had to watch every penny. We’re going to have to do it now. And he turned it into an asset and got most of the Republican votes as part of the deal with a huge margin.

BB: Yes, I remember that.
DL: Yes, it was very good.

BB: Before we leave this subject, you mentioned the policy advisory group that you were a part of. You mentioned that there were several people on that. Can you remember any other names?

DL: Well in the Schwinden area, Gary Buchanan was always on it. Gary Wicks, Dave Hunter, myself, Dave Wanzenried when he was executive assistant, Terry Cohea, when she was executive assistant—

BB: They were the key policy advisors to Governor Schwinden?

DL: Right.

BB: I see.

DL: It was very formalized. We had to submit written—and usually the executive assistant was the person who had to write up the paper. We’d have these very good discussions. It was really exciting because they’re a bunch of real sharp people. We’d have some real bare-knuckle arguments. Then we’d condense that down to a policy paper that would be submitted to the governor. He’d mark it up as any good professor would and send it back. Sometimes, rarely, he would come in and participate in the discussions. Sometimes we’d say—I can remember when Wanzenried was the executive assistant—we’d say, “It would really be helpful if he would come in and kind of hammer this out with us.” He said, “No he’s not going to do it. He doesn’t want to. You have to work it out. You give him a recommendation, a consensus recommendation.”

If you didn’t like it, you could file a minority report. So it was very formal, but I think it was pretty darn good. We had some tough times. The mid-'80s, if you recall, we had several special sessions to cut budgets. After the election in ’84, I went to Governor Schwinden and said, “You know, Ted, I can’t do this budget job any longer. I am simply—I have been devoured by it because we had just gone through several special sessions and that terrible ’83 session.” He made me go out and be the front man on cutting the budgets and everything like that. I said, “I’m just mentally exhausted. I can’t do it anymore.”

So he said, “Well, you’re going to have to.”

I said, “No I can’t do it. I’m telling you I just don’t have anything left here.” So he sent Dave Hunter over one night and I can’t remember...He came to my house one night and sat down with Karen and I and he said, “Are you serious? You really want to move into something different or you’re going to leave?”
I said, “I have to. Dave, I really don’t have any capacity to think about it or do it anymore.” This has just been a killer because I felt personally responsible for the budget going to hell and worked my rear off to getting through the ’84 elections to put the right spin on things.

It worked out fine, but boy it was an exhausting process. So then Ted had me come down and talked to me. He said, “Well, I’ve got good news and bad news. The good news is that I’ll let you change jobs. The bad news is that you’ve got to go over to SRS,” which was the old social re-up (?) services, the big human services agency. John LeFaver had been over there and he was a real bright guy. He’s passed away now, but had made some enemies with some of the constituent groups and that kind of thing. He said, “You’ve got to go over there and kind of settle that down.” He said, “That’s the trade-off.” I said, “Look, I’ll go to hell rather than staying more. I just can’t do the budget job anymore.” So anyway, that’s how I ended up going over there.

BB: Dave Hunter, did he replace you at the budget office?

DL: Yes.

BB: With no background?

DL: No, he’d worked in budget down in the city and stuff. And he knew what he was doing. He had good people down there too. There was a good staff there. That was always important to have top-notch people there.

BB: I know he was regarded by Republican legislators as pretty much a political operator. I guess maybe we didn’t understand...I don’t remember that he was—

DL: Certainly he was a political operator.

BB: I don’t remember that he did a bad job particularly. He didn’t really seem qualified I think to us. We thought of him as the political guru in the administration. Obviously he was competent enough to handle the job.

DL: And he had good people. He’s a real bright guy. He could do anything. I then went over and spent three years at SRS and that was the time when we had to eliminate the welfare sort of program. We had a whole general assistance program where we used to pay people, single, unemployed [people, who] got a payment that went back to the ’30s. We ended up having to run a constitutional amendment to eliminate the program. I had to kind of lead the charge on that with the help of Stan Stephens, who then stepped in as a senator. It was challenging—

BB: He carried the legislation?

DL: Yes, and went out on the road to get it passed. We had to do a lot of cutbacks. I’m fearful that we’re heading into a similar period.
BB: Now.

DL: Yes, right now. I think that the next four or five years could end up being the same kind of a period because—

BB: Of having to tighten our belts?

DL: Yes, substantially, because we’re coming off a period of pretty good prosperity. I think it’s going to be very similar to the mid-‘80s. A lot of people now don’t remember how grim the mid-‘80s were in Montana. That’s when we lost the Anaconda Company, Milwaukee Railroad. Oil prices crashed. Everything went to heck in a hurry.

BB: And I remember too that Governor Schwinden hated the thought of raising taxes. So we had some trust money sitting aside as the result of the coal tax. And he was able to raid those trust funds and managed to keep general government afloat for the rest of his administration without raising taxes. Is that your recollection?

DL: Oh yes, I was the hatchet man. The education trust fund had like 50 million dollars in it. We didn’t have any money so I had...I can remember having to sit down with Senator Pat Regan from Billings and explain to her that, “If you want any money for schools, you’ve got to help us take the money out of the trust fund because we don’t have any other money. The bottom line is that the governor is not going to raise taxes.” Governor Schwinden always wanted to be a three-term governor. He wanted to be the first. He’s not going to raise taxes so we’re going to have to take that money out of the trust. Boy, she really chewed me out as only as she could, but finally agreed that we had to do it, yes.

BB: We’ve discussed this a little bit, but to kind of come back and focus on it: are there one or two key accomplishments of the Schwinden administration, the eight years in which he was governor?

DL: I’m trying to remember. It’s been a while ago. I think if there was an accomplishment is that he kept the ship afloat through probably the toughest economic time since the ‘30s. It started out with those huge increases for schools and things. He had an opportunity, or he wanted to really kind of push back the frontiers on knowledge and education. His son Mike went to Harvard or somewhere and got a Master’s in educational administration. And Ted really wanted to put a huge investment into public education. We were out of money. So he was basically stuck with a “hold the line” kind of a situation for a year and a half. A year and a half? What am I saying? I mean three years there, in the middle of his administration.

BB: Shortcomings?
DL: He’s a brilliant man, but boy I’ll tell you if you cross him, he never forgot it. I can remember a fellow...he’s passed away too so I can talk about him. Everett Shuey was the lobbyist for the Anaconda Company—

BB: Montana Power Company.

DL: And then Montana Power. I think he did them both. He was lobbying for Montana Power and I think it would have been in like ’83. We needed a real important piece of legislation. I don’t remember what it was now, but we needed something pretty bad. I was part of the lobby team. Everett came to me and said, “I can get you four or five votes on that. I can help you guys out.”

I said, “I really appreciate that.” We were in a tough spot in the House. I don’t remember the specifics again, but Everett delivered the four or five votes. I went to him afterwards and said, “Geez, Everett, I just really appreciate you doing that. That was kind of above and beyond the call of duty. You don’t normally step in and bail out a Democratic governor.”

He said, “It was the right thing to do, but I want something in return.”

I said, “Oh well anything I can do.”

He said, “The governor’s going to take a friendship force group to Taiwan after the legislature. I would really like to be on that. I’ll pay my own way and everything. I just think that would be wonderful. I’d like an opportunity to go on that.”

I said, “Well let me go talk to him. It certainly sounds like a fair trade to me.”

So I went down and talked to Ted. I said, “Ted we got that bill. We got it because Everett Shuey went all out and really helped us out and called in some chips and everything else to get the votes. He’d like to go on that friendship force thing to Taiwan with you.”

Ted looked at me and said, “Do you know that Everett Shuey in 1959 came to a Farmers Union meeting in Wolf Point and called me a Communist? I’m never going to forget that. Jean was there”—Ted’s wife was there—“and he stood up and he called me a Communist. I wouldn’t take that SOB across the street with me.”

I said, “My god, that’s 30 years ago.”

He said, “I don’t care. You don’t forget things like that.”

You ask about weaknesses because it came up...things like that came up over and over again where he would drudge up things from 20 to 30 years ago. That’s the way it always was. You remembered those things and even above sometimes. Personally, I always thought, “Move on.
Get them next time.” Otherwise, he was so smart. God, he was just a wonderful guy to work with because I did a lot of analysis in the mid-’80s when we were hurting so bad and I concluded that we had to have a sales tax. I said, “Ted, doggone it, we can’t make this thing work. Our property taxes are too high. We’ve got to balance our tax structure out. That old three-legged stool argument is valid. You’re an economist. You understand that. You could be like Nixon going to China. You could be the Democratic governor who steps forward and says, ‘We’ve got to fix our tax system in this state.’”

He looked at me and he said, “Dave, I don’t care what your analysis shows. Since 1968, Democrats have been winning political races in Montana by waving the bloody shirt of the sales tax. I’m not going to give that up. I don’t care what your numbers show.” I laughed about that through the years because he was really down and dirty. Bottom line, he understood politics real well and still does, I’m sure. He’s never forgiven me for becoming a Republican. When he comes to town, I try and go up—if I have an opportunity—and visit with he and Jean before she passed away because they’re just wonderful people. I have to start out with—the first 10 minutes he just beats me up for becoming a Republican. I said, “Well hell, I was never a Democrat. It wasn’t like I changed.”

BB: You know, though, he wasn’t particularly liberal. My recollection of him...

DL: He was the most conservative governor I ever worked with.

BB: Yet he’s very partisan. He’s a very partisan Democrat.

DL: You bet.

BB: But not philosophically a particularly liberal Democrat, not at all in fact.

DL: He always talked about—again, he came from Tooley Creek and he grew up in the ‘30s. Those old Farmers Union guys were socially liberal but fiscally conservative. They never had any money either. I can remember—well, I did the ’81 budget and the ’83 budget for him before I moved on to a different job. I can remember him coming in and spending to midnight or one o’clock, four or five nights in a row, going through. I had to defend every line in that thing.

BB: To the governor?

DL: Yes. And he knew it. Yes, to him personally. I mean he knew state government well enough that I really better have my answers together. He was not a great friend of public employees. He told me more than once, “If you’re really any good you’ll go out and get a job in the private sector.” God, thanks a lot. He did want to do more with public education. He was a great believer in public education. As far as travel budgets and things like that, he just hated that stuff. He thought it was a waste of money. Ninety percent of the time he was right.
BB: Why didn’t he seek a third term?

DL: Polls. Hunter looked at them and I don’t remember the numbers, but he came out having to chop, chop, chop. That took a toll. It wasn’t like they did anything wrong. I don’t remember any scandals or anything. I don’t think there were. He just ended up being the guy that had to take the bad news out so many times that I think...I remember that Hunter told me that his approval rating was in the 25 to 30 percent range.

BB: I’m surprised at that. I guess I remember him as being pretty competent and a pretty solid governor. I guess I was a little bit surprised—I remember too at the time when he decided not to run again. Sometimes people just get tired too.

DL: No, I think that if he—he really wanted that third term. He wanted to be the first three-term governor. I think that if he thought he had a shot, he would have done it.

BB: Yes.

DL: He looked at the numbers and the numbers were really bad. It wasn’t again like he had done anything wrong. I think that he had just been governor through such an ugly period in Montana history.

BB: Really tough to have been successful in the time that he was governor, I think.

DL: It’s hard to go from being captain of the Titanic to a political wonder boy, you know. It’s pretty tough.

BB: Now you went on, then, to serve in the administration of his successor, Republican Governor Stan Stephens. You had been a cabinet-level administrator in both Tom Judge administrations, a Democratic administration, and all eight years of the Ted Schwinden administration. But you were retained by Governor Stephens and you’d mentioned before, Dave, that Stephens had actively worked with you as you had gone around the state on the welfare reform project. Is that you how became acquainted with him?

DL: Well, I knew him from his service in the legislature. He was always on Finance and Claims. So I knew him there. I always liked the guy. Geez, I still do, of course. Nothing’s changed there. Ted, in 1987, sent me over to the Board of Investments.

BB: To be the director of the State Board of Investments?

DL: The first executive director of the Board of Investments. So I had spent, gosh, let me see...when Stephens ran in ’88, I guess, I had only been over there a year. I’ve forgotten now who the Democratic candidate was in ’88.

Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: Tom Judge.

DL: Oh, it was Tom? Oh, my goodness. Yes, now it’s all coming back to me. I had actually gone out and tried to help Tom Judge, but those guys hated—the old Judge guys—anybody who had gone ahead and gone to work for Ted Schwenden. So I had offered to help for old times’ sake. In fact, Tom had called me. I said, “Yes, I’ll help with the campaign.” But boy, they didn’t want anything to do with me.

BB: The other Tom Judge people?

DL: Yes, his political cronies. I guess we didn’t talk about that but after the election in 1980 when Ted put his cabinet together, and there were four or five of us who went ahead and took jobs with Ted, the old Judge people just thought we were the worst turncoats in the history of the world even though, in my case, I had been with Tom right up through the primary. He lost, he lost, move on. So even though in ’88 I was contacted by Tom and I said, “I’ll help you out. You were always good to me and I’m not going to forget that.” I never really was part of the campaign because those guys didn’t want anything to do with me.

BB: Who were those guys?

DL: Well I think Dave Fuller was the campaign chair as I recall and Doney and—

BB: Ted Doney.

DL: And, oh goodness, some of the old directors, you know who had been part of that. I think we’re personal friends, but just professionally they thought I was a turncoat. So I was never really involved in the campaign. Then after Stan won, which was a surprise to everybody, but I wasn’t real surprised by it, I talked to Steve Yaekel, who was Stan’s campaign manager. I knew Steve real well from church and from a lot of places. I said, “You know, if you guys need any help, let me know.” I’ve always gotten along real well with Stan. I was running the Board of Investments, which was a fairly important function in state government. Even though I was hired by the board and not by the governor, I didn’t want to get crossways.

I said, “Let me know if I can do anything.” They hired a couple of different guys, I think, to be budget director. Both of them kind of went to heck for various and sundry reasons. And so I don’t know, I think it was a couple of weeks into January I got a call from Stan personally. He said, “I’d really appreciate it if you’d come in and talk to me.” And I did. He said, “Will you take the budget director job at least for the session? I’d like you to stay for a couple of years, but get me through this first session.”

I said, “Oh yes, I’m happy to do that for the good of the order and all that kind of thing.” So I went to the board and said, “I need a leave of absence for four or five months here to go up and work in the budget office.”
I brought a couple of the guys in who worked with me before. Troy McGee was one of them. I’m trying to remember who else, but I think maybe Ben Johnson helped us out as well. We were trying to get them back on track because they were just adrift and were getting killed in the legislature. So that and just by default I ended up kind of being part of that policy group. John Brendan was on it. Gee, I’m trying to remember who the four or five key advisors were...always [Lt. Gov. Allen] Kolstad, of course.

BB: Key advisors to Governor Schwinden—excuse me, to Governor Stephens, that Governor Schwinden had. So you ended up being part of his group too?

DL: Yes, I was part of that. Who was the fellow that ran the Department of Revenue from—

BB: Ken Nordvedt.

DL: Yes, Nordvedt, and I, and Brendan and...Yeakel was always part of it, although not as much, particularly on fiscal things. That’s not his deal.

BB: And Kolstad at least initially?

DL: Yes. He was, I think, pretty much during the several months I was there. It was clear that the administration was at loose ends, let’s put it that way. They were having an awful time just getting organized, getting things going. Stan wasn’t a management guy. Stan’s greatest asset is his ability to communicate. You could go in and talk to him for a couple of minutes and he’d get out that manual typewriter and sit down and pound out a four or five minute statement on an issue and go on the radio and just kill with it. He was so good at that. I always admired that. I can remember many times being called down there in the middle of the night and giving a list of bullet points and he’d turn it into a wonderful little radio talk and put it on the radio. Man, he just single-handedly, I think, got the administration through the first session. I really enjoyed working with him.

BB: He told me that the transition was difficult for him because he said that he was pretty well connected to the private sector. There were some bright people around the state that he was aware of in the private sector that he encouraged to get involved in state government. He said he was unsuccessful with that. He said that in some cases, “In my top appointments, the people I ended up having to appoint were in some cases my second and even third choices for those jobs.” I think some of them didn’t work out and I think that’s what got him off to a rocky start. Would you agree with that?

DL: Absolutely. You know, government is a different deal and there were a lot of people—several people—who came in and made terrible initial errors in judgment. It got him in trouble and he just never really recovered from it. It was again, ’88 or ’89 that was a continuation of the

Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
‘80s. He kind of inherited what we got into all through the ‘80s, hard times, hard choices, that kind of a thing.

BB: A stagnant economy.

DL: Yes. It started to recover toward the end, but by that time, people had kind of made their minds up about him.

BB: Yes he got off to kind of a rocky start and never really fully recovered from that. What were his priorities, survival?

DL: Survival I think. He wanted to run for another term and he would like to have survived and been able to get his numbers up and that kind of a thing. It just was so difficult because we were still coming out of that crummy economy.

BB: How would you describe Stan Stephens if you could just use a few terms to describe him? What descriptive terms?

DL: Oh gosh, articulate, really a nice man. He was always very, very nice to me. When I worked for Schwinden and he was a prominent Republican and senator, if I needed something, I could go to him and sit down with him. Most of the time what we needed—we were so conservative that he was comfortable with, but he would step forward—

BB: The Schwinden administration was so conservative that Stephens, a conservative Republican, was generally comfortable.

DL: Oh yes. I can remember several important pieces of legislation. We had to build a Republican-Conservative Democrat coalition in the Senate to pass things. Bill Thomas was the senator from Great Falls and he helped with the conservative Democrats and Stan on really important things. I can go to Stan, and Stan would step forward and help us out. He liked to do the right thing.

BB: He was less politically motivated it sounds like than—

DL: Yes, I think so. He was not a huge partisan, you know. I can remember when he was in his prime, when he would stand up on the Senate floor, and you served with him, he was a force. He could articulate so well and make his argument so sound and so brief from his radio years that he was wonderful. If I could get him to do something, to carry something for us, man, it was like a huge deal. He was so good, I mean, I would go sit down with him and sometimes he’d say, “No, no. I can’t do that.” I would say, “Okay we’ll look for another player.” Most of the time if you laid it out and were straight up with him, if it was a good thing for the state, or he felt it was a good thing for the state, he’d help out.

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Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: Any story that stands out in your mind that might kind of typify Stan Stephens?

DL: You know, after the session—let me try this again. The ‘89 session, I was only there like a month and went back to the Board of Investments. I guess the one that was really interesting—

BB: So you didn’t see much of him?

DL: I didn’t have a lot of—

BB: Worked closely with him as the temporary budget director for that first legislative session?

DL: We had some problems with the board with one of the members being in some legal problems. He was a good friend of Stan’s. Stan called me up one time and said, “You’re going to have to drive up to this fellow’s home and tell him he’s got to resign. I can’t take a hit like that. There’s a big legal issue building here.” So he would come to me. He felt I had enough confidence in me to have me do some things like that for him. He was always just a nice guy to work with. If I had to go in there on something, I was always greeted warmly and treated professionally. I really liked him and got along with him real well.

That’s really where I started to drift away. I really wasn’t a Democrat to start with, but I had been involved because I worked for Ted. Well, once I wasn’t working for Ted, I started to drift away and kind of be more involved with Republican things. Stan really encouraged that and drew me into it. I wasn’t certainly really involved, but he was pretty good about trying to get me into that.

BB: You were impressed by his honesty and his—

DL: Articulate. He could explain things. That’s a huge asset.

BB: Why didn’t he run for a second term?

DL: Numbers. Well, I mean the stated reason was with his health, but as I recall, his numbers were really low. I don’t know. My guess would be that had a huge amount to do with it.

BB: There was a little bit—he and Allen Kolstad, his running mate, were close personal friends. Then there was a little bit of trouble that got between them. Are you aware of that or do you understand what happened there?

DL: No, I really don’t. I mean I can remember going to visit with Allen several different times. He was kind of more and more isolated. He would have me come up and talk to him about issues and things like that. I had a group of bankers in one time from Wall Street that he wanted to meet. I took him up and had a meeting with him. But it became pretty apparent that he was
more and more isolated. I don’t really know anything too much about that. They were such good personal friends. That was just kind of hard to believe.

BB: Did you ever detect any friction between Kolstad and Steve Yeakel?

DL: Oh yes, yes. I think that was the heart of it. I don’t know why, but yes, very clearly.

BB: Yaekel was the chief of staff.

DL: Yes.

BB: More or less the gatekeeper to the governor?

DL: Yes he was the gatekeeper. He knew that he had a real problem making that administration work. So I don’t know all the details, but yes, that was certainly it. I can recall Allen making references at various times to that S.O.B that’s running the governor’s office. So I kind of understood there was a problem.

BB: So Stephens didn’t run for re-election and he was...the Republican nominee in the 1992 election was Attorney General Marc Racicot.

DL: Amazing, yes. Marc Racicot lived in the valley right around the corner from where we lived, down on Green Meadow. Oh my goodness, we lived over there in ’76. I built a house down there and he was shortly after that I think. So my wife sold Avon, so she got to know Theresa from selling Avon.

BB: Marc Racicot’s wife Theresa.

DL: Karen sold Avon to Theresa. So we got to know the family. He was obviously really a sharp guy. He decided to run for district court judge. He knew that I knew something about politics because I was working for Schwinden at the time. He asked me to help out with the campaign. I said, “You bet, darn right. I’ll help you out because I think you’d be great.” That was my first introduction to actual campaign politics because I was kind of de-facto campaign manager because we didn’t have anybody else. So it was really kind of awkward because Ted talked to me and said, “What the heck are you doing?”

I said, “You know, he’s a good friend and he’s a good guy.”

He said, “Yes, but he’s probably a Republican, isn’t he?”

I said, “I don’t think so. I’m pretty sure he’s a Democrat because I know his dad is.”

BB: Bill Racicot was an outspoken Democrat.
DL: Yes. So Ted just kind of shrugged his shoulders and said, “Well, don’t get me in trouble.” So I learned a lot about Lewis and Clark County politics. That was my first real immersion into Lewis and Clark County politics working with Marc on that judicial race. Doggone it. We came in second in the primary in like a six-way deal. We were up against Henry Loble, who was like God in Lewis and Clark County. So I went to some prominent Republicans and tried to get them lined up to get behind Marc, but their reaction was the same as mine, was: “Well, I’m pretty sure he’s a Democrat. What am I going to get behind Racicot for, for goodness sake?”

So we made a credible run at it, but I remember watching the precincts and figuring out that in the west and north valley that we had a Republican majority. That was kind of when it first kind of came to me like pretty clear. I helped him then. In two years he ran again and with that time, we found out that...I learned a lot about Catholic politics in Lewis and Clark County. He lost to another Catholic candidate and it was a great education for me. Anyway, he called me up after that election and said, “I’m not going to do anything politically.”

I’m trying to remember. Maybe he ran in ’84 and so this would have probably been in ’86 or ’87. He said, “I’m not going to do anything politically ever again. Not until my kids are grown up. Theresa and I have talked about it. I’m done with politics until the kids are grown.” I said, “That’s probably a smart move.” We talked and you know, saw each other socially, and that kind of thing around the valley here. Then in 1992, he called me one evening and said, “I’m thinking about running for governor.” I said, “What the heck?”

BB: In the meantime he had been elected Attorney General.

DL: Yes, I’m sorry. I missed that part. I guess that’s where the phone call came from. He said he was going to run for Attorney General in ’88. [Mike] McGrath was the probable Democrat nominee. I said, “Marc, you can’t beat McGrath in a Democrat primary. What, are you, crazy? What are you thinking about? You can’t do it.”

He said, “No, no. I’ve been studying the platforms and I’ve decided that I’m a Republican.”

I told him this, I’m not talking about him behind his back, but I was sitting on a bar stool in our kitchen and I nearly fell off. It never even occurred to me. I said, “That’s brilliant!” So I wasn’t really involved in that campaign at all, obviously.

BB: You couldn’t be, as a member of the Schwinden administration.

DL: Yes. Plus, Mike McGrath is a good old friend. We go back to the beginning for 20 years. At that time even, he was an old, old friend. I said, “I can’t get involved in this.” I thought McGrath was going to win. I didn’t understand how Marc would work. Marc worked like a crazy man and won. So I was always in contact with him during the Stephens administration and that kind of thing. So in ’92 when he asked for help on the campaign and I was still at the Board of

Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
Investments, a couple of different times I took a week off and drove for him. I kind of participated that way. He debated Dorothy Bradley during that election like 50 times.

BB: An incredible number of times.

DL: And I went to a lot of those because I was driving for him at the time. I knew it was going to be tight. And Dorothy is a wonderful lady. I just think the world of her, but this guy is a candidate. Christmas, he was obsessed. So I began to be pretty sure that he was going to pull it out. He talked to me and said, “Will you leave the Board of Investments if I’m successful here?”

I said, “I don’t know. I really like the job. It’s a wonderful place to be, but I’ve been down there at five years. It’s a long time for me to do anything.” So we never really talked specifically. After the election, like the day after, he called and asked me to be budget director.

BB: That would be the third time you’d gone to that office.

DL: Yes. And I said, “Well, I should know better,” because I’d been there, “but yes, I’ll do it.” I wanted him to be successful. I thought, “Well if I have any abilities here that I can help out, I want him to be successful because he’s just a good guy and a good friend and all that kind of stuff.” So that’s how I ended up going into his administration. At that point then, I became obviously much more involved in Republican politics, which was just part of the deal. It was clearly much more comfortable to me.

BB: Now, there weren’t too many of the Stephens people who were retained by Racicot, were there?

DL: Oh, I’m trying to remember. It’s a pretty short list, yes. Just off the top of my head, I don’t remember many.

BB: Marc made kind of a clean break from Stan.

DL: We talked about it very specifically that Stan, God bless him, his numbers were pretty bad. This could not look like a continuation of the Stephens administration. I can remember talking—I was on the transition team with Mick Robinson and I...Gosh, I can’t remember who else was on the transition team. Oh, Mike Lavin.

BB: Judy Browning?

DL: Oh, yes, and Judy Browning. So we talked about that. I can remember having some input in the department and director selections, that kind of thing. The idea, again, was to get the very best people that you could get. That’s about the only way that you survive. You’ve got to have the very best people. I was so busy trying to put a budget together because the Stephens administration didn’t exactly leave things in good order when it came to that. They just kind of
moved on. So I worked really hard during the interim between the election and the first day of
the session. As always, it seemed, when I got into something like this, we were out of money.

We were short of money. It was very, very difficult to make the budget work. Marc had certain
things that he wanted to accomplish and we didn’t have any money. So I had to get pretty
creative to make it work. We did and got through that first session. I always felt that if a
governor can get through that first session after the election without getting murdered, then
he’s got four years to kind of put his act together.

BB: The first impression is really important.

DL: That goes back to Tom Judge, that first series of headlines in The Tribune, as Tom always
said, “In that era, The Trib was the political paper.” Now it’s the lead paper as well. That first
impression is so important.

BB: And Stephens got off to a stumbling start and never really recovered from it. Racicot got off
to a much better start, is what you’re saying?

DL: Yes. Really, almost a tougher situation, but we had some really sharp people. Marc’s a
workaholic. He’d be up there 20 hours a day if necessary. He’s no numbers guy but he
understands politics pretty well. So that was a good administration. It was a challenge getting
through that ’93 session and setting up to run in ’96.

BB: I remember, Dave, a great funny story when Racicot was governor. He’d go home and have
dinner with his family and then sometimes, quite frequently, go back up to the office in the
evening when he could work. He told me once that he felt his day was pretty much—he was
pretty much obligated to meet the public during the day. So his day was pretty much consumed
about the appointments with members of the public and legislators, members of the
administration and that sort of thing.

He told me he was the kind of a guy who kind of needed to do his homework. He had to have
time either early in the morning or late at night when he could read and focus on things in an
uninterrupted way. He’d often go up to his office at night and he’d be there until 10, 10:30 or
11 o’clock. In fact, I remember meeting him at his office one time pretty late at night to discuss
something with him. So the story is—if I remember this correctly—he was troubled by the fact
that the window outside the governor’s office had some bird poop on it. The janitor, the
janitorial staff in the Capitol Building had a regular rotation process of going around the
building periodically and cleaning off the windows.

He inquired about that and he found out it would be a couple of weeks before they got to his
office. Instead of pulling rank as the governor and saying, “Get somebody over here to clean my
window,” he was up there one night and he was still bothered by that. He brought a bottle of
Windex with him and a dish rag or something. He climbed out on the ledge outside the
governor’s office and pulled that window down a little bit and got the bird poop off of it. Someone was driving by the Capitol Building at night and saw some individual. It looked like he was breaking into the Capitol Building. They called the police and they came up and Racicot had to explain that. Do you remember that story?

DL: Oh yes, oh absolutely. He’s a neat freak. He would dust and sweep. He just hated clutter. We used to kid, way back when he was a neighbor, that the people in the neighborhood—that you could eat dinner off of the floor of Marc Racicot’s garage. It’s unbelievable. His work bench was laid out with a laser. He’s a neat freak. I remember that. There were many other incidences when he would just grab a broom and clean something up. He can’t stand it.

BB: That related to his approach to his job too because I know that in my conversations with him when I was a member of the state Senate—and he and I had known each other when we were college kids so we went back together—I had very high regard for him personally then, and still do. He always seemed, I think, to be kind of troubled and even disgusted with the messiness of the legislative process.

DL: He hated that. Maybe that’s too strong of a term, but he did not like the legislative process. When I retired and told him I was going to run for the legislature, he thought I was nuts. Why would anybody want to run for the legislature? Part of it was that during most of his term, John Mercer was the kingpin in the legislature. John and he were oil and water. So it was just kind of a constant thorn under his saddle in the legislature.

BB: There was some kind of a rivalry between Speaker Mercer and Governor Racicot. Maybe it was just that their personalities didn’t click.

DL: I think they were like the two smartest kids in the student body, do you know what I mean? There’s just inevitable that it wasn’t going to go well.

BB: They had a different approach too. Would you say that?

DL: Oh my goodness, yes. They had a very different approach to how they thought things through and how they acted on their conclusions, that kind of thing. So that kind of kept them constantly on edge. As budget director, I spent eight years in between them. It shortened my life. There’s no question about it. It made me a new man. I think that’s part of it. I tried to talk him into running for the Senate. I thought that if there was anybody that could beat Max Baucus, it would have been Marc. He just couldn’t even contemplate being a legislator even at the federal level.

BB: What were his priorities?

DL: Oh, I think again, he got beat up a lot for not being a conservative but he understood where we were economically. He didn’t want to raise taxes. So it was kind of a “live with that you’ve
got” administration, which was reasonable. He always was a friend of education. To that extent, I think, shared that with Schwinden.

BB: But he didn’t have much money either, just like Schwinden.

DL: That’s right. We went through the ’90s. My goodness, we were hanging by a thread all the way through. It was really down to the last year almost. So he wasn’t able to do as much as he wanted—would like to have been able to do more for the university system. He was a real fan of the university system. Again, we didn’t have any money. I think he’d like to have helped the natural resource industry as well.

BB: Timber and mining?

DL: Yes. There are a lot of jobs. He was from Libby. So it just broke his heart to see Libby go through what they’ve gone through. It just broke his heart. He would have liked to fix that.

BB: You described Stephens as a skillful communicator. Was Racicot a good communicator?

DL: Well, you know Stephens could get the point across. Racicot was so articulate. I loved to hear him talk, but sometimes when he was done, I wasn’t sure exactly what he said. It was so well done.

BB: It was uplifting. You always felt like a better person after you’d been to Marc Racicot’s speech. You’d walk out of the room thinking, “You know I’m really not sure what the heck he said.”

DL: It’s a skill. God, he thought in paragraphs. That’s what I used to think about when I’d help him or get involved in doing a speech or laying out an issue that he was going to take [to] the public or something. I mean I can think in phrases, maybe sometimes on a good day in sentences. He conceived things in paragraphs. They were perfectly constructed paragraphs. They were absolutely perfectly constructed paragraphs.

BB: Do you think he wrote most of his own speeches?

DL: Well he would get drafts and then re-work them. We used to, as staff, laugh about the fact—don’t spend a lot of time drafting letters for him because he’s going to rewrite it anyway. So I write reasonably well, but he’d make it better.

BB: His key advisors, we’ve already touched on some of them, but do you remember a fellow by the name of Andy Malcolm? Andrew Malcolm?

DL: Yes, he brought Andrew. I never did understand what that was all about. He brought Andrew in from out-of-state to be a speech writer, but it was like a waste because Andrew’s a
wonderful speech writer, but Marc isn’t going to give a written speech. I mean he is so good on his feet that standing him up in front of a crowd with a written speech was just a waste of time, effort, and money. I mean it was just a shame to do it. So Andrew was here for a couple of three years and I think Andrew wanted to position to him to be more of a national...what am I trying to say...figure kind of a thing. I don’t think Marc was particularly into that.

BB: Accomplishments and shortcomings of the Racicot administration, or of Racicot?

DL: It was an absolute straight-arrow administration, you know. There was never any hint of anything wrong. That’s certainly an accomplishment. Certainly, again, it was a tough time economically. We had a little break at the end of the ‘80s and then we went right back into the bad economy thing. So he ran a good administration, very professional administration, hired good people. He had been a program manager so he understood things like budgets and personnel and those kinds of things. Basically he kept the ship afloat. I think he would like to have done more, but again, kind of suffered from the same thing Schwinden did. Gosh, if you haven’t got any money, you haven’t got any money.

BB: Dave, you probably knew and maybe still know Governor Racicot as well as anyone. You lived neighbors to him. You were involved in his early political campaigns here locally. You served as one of his key advisors in his administration. Do you have a story or an anecdote that kind of typifies Marc Racicot?

DL: Oh, my goodness. You know, he’s not the kind of guy that you think of funny stories about. He was just serious, professional, just a good guy. My goodness gracious, I can remember with my kids and stuff, when my kids would do things or...he was one of those guys, a neighbor who was there. He was a good guy. He and Theresa just—everything went into raising that family and Theresa was, of course, the major player because he traveled. I can’t think of anything off the top of my head. There are some, I’m sure, some humorous moments, but he’s just a serious professional.

BB: I knew him pretty well too, even when we were college kids together. I have to say that I always found him just a little guarded. He always kept a little distance between you and himself. Did you notice that?

DL: Oh yes, I think so. We were, I think, probably—I knew him pretty well and we worked together on a lot of things and a lot of campaigns and stuff, but it wasn’t like we were going to be bosom buddies. The only person who could really get him going was Mercer. For instance, one of the sessions, the budget was in the Conference Committee. Mercer was still chopping away at it. Marc insisted that he was coming to the final Conference Committee with me to go through the final issues. I mean, I’ve worked for a lot of governors. I’ve never had a governor come to a budget Conference Committee. I said, “My god, this is crazy. You’re just going to get beat up. Why do you want to do this?” He said, “I can’t let those guys get away with this.”
So we went up at sat there. I can remember him and I don’t know if you remember this or not, but he had a number two pencil in his hand. Mercer stood up and started to talk one time and there was never any hint on Marc’s face or anything else that he was even paying attention. In the middle of Mercer taking one of his shots, that number two pencil snapped. I said, “Oh god, I’ve got to get him out of here.” He was good. He was very controlled.

BB: Yes, very controlled.

DL: I can remember really quite well sitting there thinking, “Gosh, if I were Marc I’d be really pissed off.” Not a sign on his face except “click.” And the pencil snapped. He just squeezed his hand and snapped it.

BB: We’re nearing the end of this tape and I’d maybe like to continue the interview for a little while on another tape because there are some other things I’d like to talk to you about. Just as we end this one, there are a couple of people who are, I think, important advisors to Governor Racicot. Just maybe your thoughts real quickly on Glenn Marks and John Etchart?

DL: Well Glenn, yes. He’s brilliant. He was there, I think, through the first term. Then he went off to run the paper down in Whitehall.

BB: He was a key communications director?

DL: Yes.

BB: He had also been involved in Marc’s campaign, hadn’t he?

DL: Oh, yes. He was the campaign manager I think, the first time out. Boy, he is a top notch. He’s just a brilliant guy, you know. Etchart and he and Marc went back to—they played football together at Carroll [College] kind of a thing. If there was anybody who was like a buddy, I think it probably would have been John Etchart, you know. So he served on the Northwest Power Planning commission and was real close to Marc as well. But Glenn was the intellectual father of that first campaign and was—and continues to be—one of the sharpest guys you’re ever going to talk to. The guy is really—

BB: Is he a Montana guy?

DL: He’s from Minnesota.

BB: He just kind of emerged out of nowhere. I don’t know where Marc connected with him or happened into the scene.
DL: I don’t either. I think he may have been working for—I’m just not sure where he came from. I don’t think he was—I think he was a friend of maybe Bud Clinch or somebody like that. I think that’s where he may have come from.

BB: Okay, we’ll continue on the next tape.

[Break in audio]

BB: Continuing on tape two with state Senator Dave Lewis. Dave, you retired from state government at the end of the Marc Racicot administration at about the year 2000 or 2001. That was the same year in which you were elected to the state legislature. What motivated you to run for the legislature?

DL: Well I retired earlier—I had planned to serve the administration through 2000, but I went ahead and retired in May. I had been thinking about running for the legislature. So I went ahead and filed. I had always wanted to be part of it because I retired—I had 27 years with the state, but I didn’t want to just give it up. So I thought, “You know, I’d like to be in the legislature.” The gal who was the incumbent House representative for north and west valley was someone I felt was probably more liberal than the people in that district. So I thought—

BB: Who was that?

DL: Mary Anne Guggenheim.

BB: Oh, okay. She just served one term? She was a medical doctor I think, right?

DL: Yes. She was very well liked and a very, very nice gal, but I had been following politics in Lewis and Clark County pretty carefully for a long time. I felt that there was an opportunity for someone—for a Republican—to win in that district. It was going to be hard work, but I thought it would be fun to try. My wife and I had lived out here for a long, long time and knew a lot of people. I thought, “What the heck?” For all these years I’ve worked with the legislature, heard about campaigning, but never actually had gone out and done it. So I filed in the House and I went to almost every house in the House district. I think there were three to four thousand houses. It took me, oh my goodness...I started in June and didn’t finish until right before the election in November.

I was successful. I think I got like 54 percent of the vote or something like that. I was successful and won. It was seen as a, at least a mild upset, because she was an incumbent and the Lewis and Clark County is generally seen as Democratic. The outlying areas are much more moderate, and a swing district kind of a situation. So it was a great learning experience. Going to that many houses and listening to that many people talk about what they were interested in and everything else was a great learning experience.

Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: And so you entered the legislature after you had been close to the legislature for decades. You had experience with many key legislators and you were thoroughly familiar with the legislative process. Was it pretty much as you expected when you got to be on the inside of it?

DL: Well, the House was real partisan in the 2001 session. I think it was like 53-47 Republican to Democrat. It was pretty partisan. I knew a lot about the issues, but I was a babe in the woods when it came to actually being on the floor and having the leadership come to you and tell you how to vote, and those kinds of things. There was a lot of learning experience involved with that. So the question was, what I expected. It was interesting. It was challenging. It was hard work, but it was not entirely what I expected. The personalities were different. This was after term limits started to kick in and we didn’t have all those old timers around to kind of moderate things. So it was a pretty—I think when I was done with the first session, I really enjoyed it, but I wasn’t sure that...it wasn’t as satisfying as I expected. I enjoyed the combat portion of it. And there was way more combat than I expected.

BB: It was more partisan, more—of course, I think when you started out in state government working with the legislature, the legislative process probably wasn’t as partisan then as it was when you got into it.

DL: Absolutely not. In the ’70s and ’80s, you had a lot of old-time legislators who had worked together for a long time. Sure, there were party differences, but you didn’t have the extremes that we have now.

BB: And how would you describe the legislative culture, if we’re kind of understanding that in the same way, say 25 years ago and now that you’ve been a member of the legislature. Could you comment on that or do you feel that you could?

DL: Yes, I think so. When I was the budget director back—excuse me—cabinet member back in the ’70s and budget director in the ’80s and ’90s, I could put...My meat and potatoes was putting coalitions together. I don’t care what party’s in charge, trying to figure out how to put a moderate coalition together to get a bill passed, that type of thing. It was pretty easy. Today, those who are part of that process, those legislators who are part of that process, pay a real price.

BB: They’re considered turncoats by the hardcore members of their own party?

DL: Yes, the hardcore members of their own party go after them. We saw that even in this last set of primaries. That was kind of the way it worked. That was what made the process work in the past. There wasn’t the kind of animosity you get now.

BB: Would you—I think I’m going to assert what I think. It will just be interesting to see if you agree with this. I started in politics about the same time you did, although I did a long time in the legislature. It seemed to me in the ’70s and ’80s that the real important legislators tended
to be the ones in both parties that could actively work with the other party, not necessarily that there weren’t genuine philosophical differences between Democrats and Republicans. The most important legislators, for the most part, were the ones that could work with the other party. The legislators who were the least important were the ones that were stridently partisan. There were some of them. It seems now, and maybe it’s a factor of term limitations, that the real strident partisans are the most important legislators in both parties and the ones that can work across the party lines have somehow or other been marginalized. Does that seem accurate?

DL: That’s entirely accurate. There are still people—because you have to be able to work across party lines, you simply—Montana is not a partisan state, not an extremist state. They want moderate solutions. So it takes a handful of moderate legislators to be able to get things done. They pay a price.

BB: It seems to me like the people who were the really important legislators back when I was starting out, and I’m thinking about Bill Mathers. I’m thinking about Gordon McOmber. I’m thinking about Matt Hims, Jean Turnage, maybe a little more recently, Joe Mazurek. In almost every case of the names that I just mentioned now, they wouldn’t be able to function now. They would be considered turncoats and disloyal and, questionably maybe, Democrats and Republicans in name only. They wouldn’t be able to function very well in the way the legislative culture has changed. But by the same token, some of the prominent legislators today in both parties, the very partisan legislators, would have been minor players 20 or 30 years ago. They would have been considered sort of fringe kind of people who weren’t very influential.

DL: I think that’s entirely accurate. I was labeled a Socialist by the conservatives after the last session. Look, I’m not a Socialist, but I’m willing to try and get compromises through and accomplish something. That’s kind of my history because it comes from growing up in that culture, I think.

BB: Name, if you can, we’ve already discussed this a little bit, but to kind of go over it again, the most significant legislators in your experience going back to when you were in the administrative branch of government up through the time that you’ve been both a state representative and a state senator. Are there four or five or six legislators that, for whatever reason, really stand out in your memory?

DL: Well Jean Turnage, Bill Groff, the senators from the very early time; they were so good at getting things done. I mean Ted Schwinden and Jean Turnage were running the state. I had the good fortune of being the runner between them as they worked out things on bills and these kinds of things. Jean Turnage would pass bills and then write the amendatory vetoes for Governor Schwinden. To do that, he would send [the amended bill] back up and Mr. Turnage would then get what he wanted in the long run. They couldn’t do that today.
Those guys understood that somebody around here has always said that the legislature—everybody gets their say and nobody gets their way—and they understood that. They worked that way and term limits have cost us that, I think. I voted for term limits because I thought maybe more people need to have an opportunity. Maybe it’s gotten too “good old boy” if you will, that kind of thing. We pay a price. We definitely pay a price particularly when we only have a 90-day session. If we had full-time legislators, maybe it would be different. But in a 90-day session, it’s cost us. We have a much more partisan situation.

BB: Now in 2004, you ran for lieutenant governor and then you ended up moving into the state Senate in the 2005 session. How would you compare the House and the Senate?

DL: Well, in the House, I was chairman of the Appropriations Committee in 2003, which was a very tough deal because we had a 200 million dollar deficit. I think that gave me some clout, if you will, on getting things done. It was very hard. I mean, boy, I worked really hard getting that budget through and carrying that. In committee, we had an excellent committee in the House Appropriations Committee in 2003, particularly the Republican members were really warriors or we would have never gotten anything done. The Democrats worked with us. They certainly worked with us as well. I expected the Senate to be much more collegial, if you will. When I went into it in 2005, it wasn’t. They were very hard to break into. It was like coming into a new club or something. Even though I had been around a while and knew a lot about it and knew a lot of the players, I found it very difficult. I was pretty frustrated. I did get some bills passed. I think, some fairly good things in 2005. Finally in 2007, then, they did let me go back on the Finance and Claims Committee, which I wasn’t able to do in 2005.

BB: That’s just incredible.

DL: That helps because that’s where I come from.

BB: You were the budget director.

DL: Yes, that’s where I come from. I know something about it. There were a whole lot of reasons that neither the Republicans nor the Democrats wanted me on Finance and Claims in 2005. It was better this time, I think, but it’s still tough because we have our factions on both sides. I’ve talked to Democrats who—we’ve gotten to know each other better and they have a little more confidence in me. There is a group of moderate Democrats that share a lot of things with us and with some of the more moderate Republicans. So it got to the point toward the end of the session that we could put 30 votes together on most anything rational.

BB: That sounds a little bit more like the old political culture except that then, you were given the game ball for good work, now you pay a price.

DL: That’s the difference. You’ve got to be a tough nut here because you’re going to get beat up pretty good on both sides for trying to be what, I think, a legislator should be. He’s the guy who
tries to find the reasonable middle ground. You’re never going to get your way. You shouldn’t. The whole point is to kind of beat the rough edges off and come up with what’s best for the state.

BB: You served as—while you were in Governor Racicot’s administration, during his second term, what was your position? Did you continue as budget director or—

DL: No I stayed as budget director for the entire time.

BB: So you were budget director when Judy Martz was lieutenant governor before she became governor. Then you were in the House of Representatives and chairman of the House Appropriations Committee during her administration. So while you weren’t in her administration as governor, certainly you knew her when you were both in the Racicot administration and then when you a legislator when she was governor. What are your impressions?

DL: You know, Marc Racicot called me in the spring of ’96 I guess. I was baling hay out here and he wanted me to come in and he said he wanted me to meet someone he was thinking about putting on the ticket as lieutenant governor in ’96. It was a Saturday afternoon, I think, and I said, “God, I have to get this hay baled.” He said, “No, no. You’ve got to do this. This is important. I’m sorry I can’t give you any more notice, but I need you to come in.” So I shut the baler off and came in and took a shower and headed into town. I got to the Governor’s Mansion just as Judy Browning pulled up. She and I had both received the call and the governor had asked us to come in and meet this person he was talking about for the administration. I, at the time, had just assumed and in fact expected it to be John Harp for a lot of good solid political reasons.

So I go in and Judy Browning and I go in and sit down on the couch and Marc says, “I’m going to leave and let you guys have a conversation with this person.” This very impressive lady comes in. She was very tall, a blonde lady. She had a red dress on I remember. She was just a very, impressive gal. She sits down and introduces herself. I had never met her, Judy Martz from Butte. I don’t think Judy Browning had met her either. I don’t remember how we started off. One of us said, “Well, so you want to be lieutenant governor, eh? What do you think about that?” She’s a nice, nice lady, but boy it was pretty clear that she didn’t know a heck of a lot about government.

So I was really scratching my head about this. I didn’t understand why she’d want to do it. It’s an honor, you know, and secondly, how she would fit in? For whatever reason, Marc had really made his mind up. He wanted Judy and I to talk to her and I think if one of us had said, “This is insane,” but I think both of us—and I’m speaking for Judy here, but I think I’m fairly close—both of us concluded that she’s a nice person, a wonderful gal, but golly she doesn’t know anything about this. How are you going to put her out on the campaign trail, you know? She’s as green as grass. He said, “No, she’s the right one. She’s the one.” So literally within a couple of three days,
I think he announced it. And so I worked with her during that campaign and I think I did some briefings for her on budget and stuff like that.

Again, I was always impressed with just what a personable gal she is and how well she met people and just a really authentic and nice Montana person. I was always worried about what her role was going to be. She's just not got a real background here. Then after the election, she would sit in our policy groups when we were discussing issues and how we were going to handle issues. She never really participated much, just took notes and that kind of thing. She kind of seemed to be learning. So when she decided to run for governor, I’m kind of vague on how that all unfolded now, but I think Marc urged her to and promised his support and gave her his full support. She was elected and then I was running for the legislature at the same time, so I ended up on the Appropriations Committee. Chuck Swysgood was our budget director and Chuck and I go way back.

BB: Was the Martz budget [director]?
DL: Yes, he was the Martz budget director. He and I had been friends for years and years and always got along well with him. He really knows his business. He was the co-chair of the Appropriations Committee in 2001 and we had to take a hard line on the budget. There were some hard feelings from the administration about it. It wasn’t that bad.

BB: He had a Republican House of Representatives. Chuck Swysgood, a former Republican state senator, known to all the legislators and highly respected as the budget director. Swysgood comes from the Appropriations Committee and there are just certain realities that needed to be faced. So you, as a prominent member of the Appropriations Committee and a former member of the Racicot administration, along with Judy Martz and a friend of Chuck Swysgood, find yourself in a kind of difficult situation.

DL: We had to chop it up. We didn’t have any choice. So there were some hard feelings. I mean the governor was just offended because it was her budget and how could we do that? We were like, “Look, if we don’t cut this thing, we’re going to end up having to raise taxes down the road and as Republican legislators, we’re not real interested in getting in on that deal.” So you got a little strain. Then in 2003—

BB: You think she was mad at you?

DL: Oh, I think disappointed. I always felt that when she called me down that I had just gone to talk to my sixth grade teacher, Mrs. Parks, who always just made me feel like I was an inch and a half tall.

BB: Except, did you really feel she had a good grasp even then?

DL: Not really. She was doing what Chuck told her was going on. Then in 2003 it got really bad because we cut the budget pretty deeply beyond what they wanted in the House. We took it
down all the way in order to get the thing balanced. It was tough. It went over to the Senate and the Senate decided to go ahead and raise taxes and put 70 million dollars back in the budget. Well when the bill came back to the House, the raised taxes which had an increase in rental car taxes and lodging taxes maybe and some other things and they tie into a subsequent cut in a capital gains tax. The cut was out two years. I voted against the bill. I thought we should just cut the budget and tough it out. Boy, she called me down and she just was terribly unhappy.

She didn’t shout and scream or anything like that, but she made it real clear that I had just really let her down by voting against that bill. Then subsequently they rolled one more Republican vote and got it passed. From then on, it was just grim. I just let her down. The administration had a lot of problems because they had some people who didn’t know what the heck they were doing. I mean, they brought in Tom Beck, but not until too late almost. If they had brought Tom in from the beginning, I bet she would have been a two-term governor.

BB: Senator Tom Beck from Deer Lodge became—was he a chief of staff or chief policy advisor or something?

DL: That’s what it was. He was the policy advisor. They didn’t bring Tom in until maybe a year before the end of the administration. If they had brought him in the beginning, I think between he and Chuck Swysgood, they would have probably made that thing work. It just got—it was one of those deals where the press was so bad. She just didn’t have a prayer. That was it.

BB: Why did she have such a bad relationship with the press? It was worse that Racicot’s relationship.

DL: I think from the beginning, they were very suspicious she didn’t know anything. They just were certain that she didn’t know a darn thing. Every now and then she convinced them even more thoroughly that she didn’t. Right at the beginning of the administration, her chief policy advisor, Shane Hedges, was involved in a tragic traffic accident. She appeared, to the press anyway, to have tried to cover up some important details. I don’t know if she did or didn’t, but they decided that she tried to pull something on them. So they just got to the point where there was a vendetta. She couldn’t say the sun was going to come up tomorrow without a negative article. She just made it worse every time she got into it with them. So that was part of it. This goes clear back to old Tom Judge. You have to think about what that headline is going to be tomorrow and if you get too many bad headlines, the game is over.

BB: She had less experience than Tom Judge.

DL: Oh my, yes.

BB: So she wasn’t as sure footed in dealing with the press I’m sure.
DL: And she felt she was doing the right thing. She was, I think, just hurt that she got that kind of response. So yes, I felt bad for her because she and her husband are wonderful people. They got beat up way worse than they deserved. They had some pretty darn good people in that administration. Once they got ex-senator Tom Beck in there and working with Swysgood, actually I think they did a pretty good job. Boy, that first six months or so, she just poisoned the well.

BB: Like Stephens, she got off to a stumbling start.

DL: Absolutely. That first six months, if you get nailed by the press as being incompetent or appearing to be, boy, it’s all over. You’re not going to get back out of that hole.

BB: When I think of Judy Martz, I think of several things, but one of them is that she had very deeply held—and still does—religious convictions. I think that influenced her approach to her job, would you agree?

DL: Oh yes. She kind of wears her religion on her sleeve a little bit. That’s fine. I mean goodness gracious, God bless her, but I think the press may have been offended by that too to some extent. She just kept giving them openings. So they kept beating her up. So to some extent, it was a replay of the Stephens administration.

BB: Except I think the Stephens administration eventually got on keel. Stan got off to a bad start but this is my impression that within a year or two, he was getting the ship righted again and even though the general public still had a mixed impression of him, his administration was running pretty well by at least the third year. I’m not sure the perception was ever that the Martz administration ever really got righted. Then again, I think Martz had a worse press than probably any governor in modern memory.

DL: She just had some incidents where she offended them and they felt she had not been honest with them. Boy, they wrote her off. Every time she had an opportunity, she would lash out. That just made it worse. It was a horror story.

BB: If you could use two or three terms to describe her, what would they be?

DL: Oh I think she’s honest. I think she’s a classy person, just a classy lady. And back to my very first, which was inexperienced.

BB: Governor Schweitzer replaced Judy Martz. She didn’t run for re-election in 2004. You served in the state Senate during the four years or nearly four years that Schweitzer has been governor. What seemed to be his priorities?

DL: Well, I think it’s been really interesting. I think he’s like every other governor. He’s got his eye on the next election, but he’s been really fortunate because it’s been the best economy
we’ve had since probably the early ‘70s and certainly in the last 30 years. So he hasn’t—I guess as a priority he’s paid for corrections. He’s paid for human services. He hasn’t put a lot of money into schools. There’s been money going there, but not as much as anybody thinks. So I think a lot of it has been that he doesn’t want to raise taxes. He wants to keep the budget balanced. In fact, I hear a lot of his rhetoric and it sounds like Ted Schwinden. There’s nothing wrong with that. I’m certainly not going to fault that. I think the polls would indicate that’s not a bad place to be. So yes, I think his priorities are basically to run the ship, don’t raise taxes, be very cautious about the future. That goes back to the people he has on his staff, I think, a very experienced staff. They know that things can go to heck in a hurry.

BB: Politically savvy?

DL: Oh, I think he’s definitely politically savvy, but I think there’s a little bit of Tom Judge in him. He’s a great PR man. He is good. I heard him on a call-in show the other day, a national call-in show. I was coming back from a meeting in Missoula and my wife and I were listening to this national call-in show on the radio. All of a sudden here’s Governor Schweitzer on there. Oh man, he does this “aw shucks, I’m just a plain old country boy” thing really well. So he’s got a great PR sense.

BB: His approach to government?

DL: I think it’s basically to get the very best people that you can and let them run it because I don’t get the impression that he’s intimately involved in a lot of administrative issues. He’s got a good cabinet, a good staff, and they appear to be pretty much able to make sure things run the way they’re supposed to run.

BB: Have you met him, talked with him, had any kind of a conversation with him?

DL: Yes. I’ve had a couple, three, right at the very first, right before the first session. I talked to him because I thought it would be a smart thing at that point to put in an early retirement bill in. A lot of states have done it. School districts have done it. Get the older, high-paid guys out and cut your payroll back a little bit. Then there are some real plusses to that. I called him up and I just wanted to have a simple little meeting. I go to this meeting and he turns up with five TV cameras and lectures me on the issue.

So it wasn’t like we had a real good meeting. Let’s put it that way. It was okay, I guess. The only other times I’ve gone in there, Betty Babcock asked me to go up with her to talk to him about this issue of trying to get the historical society established at the mall. We’ve had frank exchanges of views. I think that his eye’s on the national scene, and I don’t think he’s particularly concerned about the Montana legislature. He’s got excellent people working for him. So they’re doing a good job.

BB: Could you use a descriptive terms to describe him?

Dave Lewis Interview, OH 396-055, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
DL: I think he’s a bit charismatic because he has an ability to sell an idea. It’s like he got off in this energy stuff. He may not have really thought it through and there may not be a lot of solid policy analysis behind it, but he came up with this line: Why should we send American soldiers to die in the Middle East to protect oil? We should be spending out money developing domestic energy. Man, you can’t beat that. He’s got an ability to put a concept like that into fairly simple terms and sell it.

BB: Assertive?

DL: Oh my, yes. I found that to be.

BB: Ambitious?

DL: Oh yes, no question about that. I really think he’s high on the national scene.

BB: As you look back over approximately 40 years of involvement in state government, what do you see? Are there any themes or are there any lessons? I know it’s a hard question to answer, but how would you summarize what you’ve learned in the time you’ve had and the experiences you’ve had in state government?

DL: I think if I had to put it all one line...and I haven’t done it before, I’m just thinking about it right now...I think that government’s too important to let politics get involved. Once you’re running it, it’s like any other big organization. You have to get the best people you can. You have to give them some authority and a lot of them make good decisions. You can’t make decisions on a political basis. Sure, politics comes to play in getting elected and getting the chance to run. Once you get there, you can’t find yourself being a partisan politician. It isn’t good for the state. It isn’t good for you. It isn’t good for anybody. I think if there’s one lesson, that would probably be a way to summarize it.

BB: That we shouldn’t overdo the politics? There are political differences, philosophical differences, and that people are entitled to a choice and a competitive election, but once the election is over, then those who won the election ought to pay more attention to governing than politicking.

DL: Yes. Governing is a matter of trying to do a good job and trying to be honest. Boy, if you got yourself—if you’ve got somebody who’s wanting to reward their friends and punishing their enemies, that’s not the way to go. We’ve been pretty damn fortunate. We generally have people who wanted to do a good job and they may have some personal quirks and (unintelligible), but I think we’ve been pretty fortunate. Montana’s still a small state. Everybody knows everybody. Thank gosh we’re not New Jersey or New York or California for goodness sakes. We’ve got a chance to make it work here.

BB: What do you see as you look into Montana’s future?
DL: Well, I think we’re going to continue to grow because of the quality of life. I don’t know how big of a deal energy is going to be in the future. I don’t know if coal is going to be ever as big as a lot of people thought it was going to be. I don’t know how much oil is really out in eastern Montana in the Bakkan formation. I think the quality of life in western Montana is what makes this area grow. I was in a meeting in Choteau a couple of days ago and they were saying that people move in from out of state and buy up the houses as they become empty. Here in Helena, you can sit here and look across the valley. This is a pretty place to live. People move here because of that. I’ve got neighbors just down the road here who moved up from California a couple of years ago. They were just telling me the other day that they think they’ve found paradise. I think that’s what’s going to bring people here. It’s the clean air, the clean water. It’s not an oppressive government from a tax standpoint, that type of thing.

BB: Anything else?

DL: Nope. It’s been a good ride and I’ve enjoyed it.

BB: Thanks for your public service, Dave.

[End of Interview]