Bob Brown: Okay I’m with Lloyd “Sonny” Lockrem in his home in Billings, Montana, on March 29, 2008. Sonny was a member of the state House of Representatives and the Montana Senate from about 1971 to about 1981. Sonny, welcome. I guess I could begin by asking you to tell us a little bit about your roots. Where were you born, when were you born, a little bit about your childhood.

Sonny Lockrem: I was born in Billings. My father worked construction for a company W.P. Roscoe. They were bridge builders. We were construction nomads almost from the time I was born until I started the sixth grade. Then we moved to Billings on a permanent basis. I think I’ve lived in almost every town in Montana from Hardin when the war broke out, to Fallon, Terry, and West Glacier for the Two Medicine Bridge. We were up there when they built that. I was in Great Falls when they built Malmstrom Air Force Base, and then Lewistown Air Force Base was actually built by the Air Force. It was a ferrying base. Russian airmen came down and picked up DC-3s there.

The only tough time I remember in growing up, there was no standardization in education. So every time we moved, and I was in the first, second, third, fourth, and fifth grades, one place would be printing and one place would be writing. One place would be learning to carry and so I remember nights, my mom would sit there with me trying to get me up to speed with the new school that I just moved in. They were all different.

BB: You were about five, six, or seven school probably during your—

SL: Oh, yes, more than that. So the standardization of education, I learned the basis for that real early.

BB: Then you came back and graduated high school from here in Billings?

SL: Yes, I graduated from Billings Senior. It was the only high school here then.

BB: And what year was that?

SL: Nineteen fifty-two.

BB: Then you went to Montana State University?
SL: Yes, and I think my primary motive for going to school at that time was to keep 1-F draft registration to keep from ending up in Korea. School wasn’t really a high priority at that time. I came home at Christmas and a friend of mine was disillusioned too. We went down on Christmas Eve and enlisted in the Marine Corps.

We didn’t leave until after the first of the year, but there was a lot of guys that were in the same boat as we were. When we headed out of Billings, there were 26 of us that had come home from school that Christmas and 26 of us ended up enlisting in the Marine Corps together.

BB: So did you go overseas?

SL: Yes. With two years of college, particularly in engineering, when I took the GED test with the Marine Corps, I ended up with a four-year college equivalency. The platoon graduated and left. And I didn’t have orders yet. I qualified for Navy Aviation Cadet. So they left me there waiting for orders about two or three weeks. I had eight bed-wetters. I had to get their rubber sheets on the line and then I had liberty. My orders finally came in and a carton of cigarettes, re-enlistment pay, and orders for Pensacola, Florida. It had taken them three weeks to get them and re-enlistment papers. I looked at the re-enlistment papers and I told the colonel, “I’m just not ready to pop for another three years.” The gunney turned red in the face and dismissed me. The next morning I had orders for duty and transportation beyond the seas for Korea. It took them overnight to get those orders.

BB: So you were in Korea?

SL: Yes, with the first Marine division.

BB: Were you on the Chosin Reservoir deal?

SL: No, that was all before I got there. I got there just towards the tail end and got my ribbons. That was about it.

BB: Did you hear a gun go off ever?

SL: Oh, yes.

BB: You were in a combat situation?

SL: It was pretty well toned down then. That was hard to believe that Korea today with their economy and everything. Those days, sewage was running down the streets of Seoul and there were no paved roads. The worst part about Korea was weather. There were monsoons, tropical in the summer and the wintertime. That winter came out of Manchuria and it was just brutal. But we were living in tents too.
BB: I don’t think you served with him, but Dell Gage was a member of the Senate from up in the Cut Bank area.

SL: Yes.

BB: I remember him telling me one time how desperately cold his hands were in the winter. He said you didn’t dare do anything. He said they’d kill you if you lit a match to light a pipe or something to keep your hands warm, a sniper would shoot right at you.

SL: I went to Japan for “r and r” (rest and recuperation), the week before Christmas. It was a great time, four or five days or whatever and then we’re flying back to Korea sitting in a DC-3. If you ever had a dream, while you were dreaming and you woke up and everything around you, your surroundings, you thought the dream was real. I woke up and I was on that plane and I’d dreamt I was going home. Then I looked out the window and there was nothing but red hills and frozen rice patties.

BB: Not a good ending to it. So you returned home after one hitch in the Marine Corps. Did you go into business yourself then or what did you do? You returned here to Billings?

SL: I went back to school.

BB: In Bozeman?

SL: In Bozeman. I never did graduate. Then my father had gone into business for himself. I quit school, got married, and went to work with him. We built a pretty successful construction business.

BB: And what kind of construction business?

SL: Utilities, sewer, water, almost all over the state. We had projects of one kind or another. I referred to myself as a subterranean sanitation installation specialist.

BB: I remember that. So that was during the ‘50s.

SL: Right.

BB: Then you took over the business from your dad eventually.

SL: Yes. That was in the late ’70s.

BB: Was there anything in your experience in Korea or in your life traveling around Montana or maybe a school teacher or something in your formative years that may have caused you to become interested in politics or public service?
SL: I’m not so sure it was that so much. I think that the first and probably the most important lesson I learned in the Marine Corps, I finally got into something you couldn’t walk away from. You couldn’t quit. I mean there was no other alternative. That was a lesson learned the hard way, but it was a very valuable lesson. About my first recollection of politics, the irony of it, I served in Korea and I couldn’t even vote when I was there. I was 18 or 19 years old. My first interest in politics was when Eisenhower was running for president. He indicated he was going to have a troop reduction in the first Marine division which was the first one to go out. That was my first big issue in national politics.

BB: Politics affected your personal life directly by that decision of Eisenhower’s. So then maybe you were motivated more to be interested in politics by being in business?

SL: I think being in business was certainly one of the motives. I had become interested in politics, I don’t know why I was interested in politics or the social issues, but I was president of the Republican Club and my wife was a committeewoman.

BB: What motivated you to do that? Not every young businessman becomes president of the Republican Club. There must have been something that kind of directed your attention that way.

SL: It’s kind of crass to say it, but there was a frustration of listening to politicians telling what’s best for us, what they thought their vision was for Montana and they weren’t making a payroll every Friday night. They weren’t paying property tax on equipment that was parked through the winter for four months. So on that basis, I think that probably was a start of it.

BB: Were these things ever discussed at your parents’ house when you were a kid moving around in Montana? Did they ever have political discussions?

SL: No, not during the war.

BB: I see.

SL: My recollection of the early years, war, and I think I’m of the opinion right now, that Americans couldn’t make the sacrifices that Americans did in World War II. They wouldn’t make those sacrifices to win a war. As a kid, we’d save our quarters and we’d buy a red stamps for our war bond book. We’d peel the aluminum foil off of cigarette packages. Each of us had our own ball of aluminum. We saved string. There was no bubblegum, no candy. Gas rationing—we were living in Fallon, Montana, when my grandmother died out in California. The construction crew chipped in their gas rationing books so that my dad and his brother could go to the funeral. I remember meat rationing. People really don’t realize the rationale or the commitment that Americans made to win World War II.
BB: When sacrifice was really required.

SL: Right. It wasn’t just an occasional person. Everybody did it. It was just a way of life.

BB: That’s one of the things I think that importantly unified the country too.

SL: Yes. I think it did too.

BB: Do you know what your parents’ politics were? Was your dad a Republican or your mom a Republican?

SL: My dad was a staunch Republican.

BB: You knew that.

SL: Oh, yes.

BB: And again it was because of his business or was it a traditional thing in the family?

SL: It was because of the business. I think my mother was a Republican, but she came from a Democratic family. My dad was such a Republican. Willard Fraser ran for mayor as a Democrat. This was early TV, black and white, you know. They did have a few political broadcasts between the test band. But anyway, I saw him throw a shoe at the TV set. He became pretty rabid.

BB: So you then, in your early twenties in the 1950s somewhere along in there, you became president of the—

SL: Yellowstone Club. They had a separate club here. That was about the time the old Republicans, if you can’t get your own way, you started a new club.

BB: Who are some of the other folks, do you remember, who might have been in that group with you?

SL: Well I had thought about running for office and the big opening came in the 1966 election. That was right after the reapportionment. Yellowstone County, historically, has been the “straight eight.” There are eight representatives, eight Republicans. It was a bloc that was hard to break in to. With reapportionment, we ended up with 12 seats. So there were open seats. That was the only time we ever did it. It was an August primary.

BB: In 1966?

SL: Yes. Twenty-five candidates and I ran 11. I got the Republican nomination. Bill Mather ran 12th. That ’66 election, I got tagged late by a newspaper reporter as supporting the sales tax.
BB: You commented to a newspaper reporter that you probably did support a sales tax?

SL: Oh, yes.

BB: That hurt you in the election?

SL: Yes. I was the odd man out. I was the 13th man. Harold Gerke was the only Democrat—the first Democrat elected from Yellowstone County.

BB: That must have been disappointing.

SL: Yes. I have the distinction of being the only Republican not elected in Yellowstone County.

BB: In 1966?

SL: Yes. Then during that ’67 session, rumors started running that Jim Battin was going to get a federal judgeship. Jack Rehberg and I had been close friends. I stopped and had breakfast every morning at his Milky Way up there by Eastern. I went up to Helena. Jack had said he was going to go for the nomination if Battin stepped down.

BB: Jack was what, a state representative?

SL: He was State Senator then. So I made a commitment to Jack. I started laying the groundwork if and when Battin didn’t make the move. Battin ultimately resigned his seat and got the federal judgeship. So we went to work, myself, Dr. Dick Nelson, Sonny Hanson, and Jack Rehberg. We did hire a young attorney by the name of Gerald Neeley. He worked with us on the campaign and we started battling. We went right into the precincts to get delegates for the Convention that was to be held in Lewistown.

BB: Because when Battin resigned, the Republicans had to nominate somebody in a special election. And that happened at a Convention, I presume on their side too. So the group you just described started working right away to find the people who were going to be delegates to identify them and to get—

SL: And get our slate. We put that slate forward. First of all, we started filling the precinct seats. Then, when we went to the county Conventions, then we had our list. You vote for these people as a vote for Jack Rehberg. It was pure grassroots politics. Surprising, a lot of the people we had were those same people that packed the precincts for Ronald Reagan later on. What we didn’t know—we suspected it, but Bill Mather was from Billings— not the Bill Mathers from Miles City.

BB: Bill Mather, the lawyer from Billings.
SL: He was the opponent. Of course, he had the wherewithal of both the Anaconda Company and the Montana Power.

BB: They tended to support him.

SL: Right. They didn’t tend to, they just did. We weren’t naïve about it. We just didn’t quite have the horse power. If we made a mistake, it was not having people on the Convention floor. We ended up losing it on the third ballot.

BB: Don’t I remember that Dr. M.F. Keller—the Republican state party chairman was also—

SL: Yes.

BB: And he went down in the first volley, I presume.

SL: Right.

BB: So then the run-off was between Jack and Bill.

SL: We lost—county treasurer in Yellowstone County took some votes. The one that really killed us was a guy by the name of Tom Asay, who ended up serving in the legislature. Tom took Hysham and that county. He was committed to us and like I say, we lost him on the third ballot.

BB: I’ll be darned. That’s what made the difference?

SL: Yes, it made the difference. (unintelligible) didn’t take that many. Again, if we made a mistake, we just didn’t have control of the floor like we should have. Of course, Mather and the power company were jerking them off in the corners and everything else.

BB: I didn’t know that story until just now. I know that there was a battle royale between Bill Mather and Jack Rehberg for that nomination to Congress. And there was some bad feeling around here for a long time afterwards.

SL: It elected John Melcher.

BB: Because the Jack Rehberg people were unhappy enough that they didn’t vote for Mather?

SL: I think so. They voted for John, but it was a special election. You had a light turnout anyway.

BB: Why did it end up in such a bitter way? Contests happen. There are winners and losers and that sort of thing. Do you have any thoughts on that?
SL: Oh, I think there was probably the beginning of a division between conservatives and liberals to a certain extent. Then you go back to the Rehbergs. They had been an old-time family in Billings, the Rehberg Dairy. Jack had been in politics for a long time. Bill was relatively new. He had just moved in to Billings and joined that law firm. It was a knock-down, drag-out. After delegates—we put a lot of pressure on a lot of people. Once we got them elected, they were committed. Then I think going three ballots and losing it the way it happened, and it was almost on top of the general election too. So there wasn’t a lot of healing time. It was quite an experience.

BB: I remember you when I first became acquainted after you arrived in the Legislature in 1971. You and I and Jack Rehberg all stayed in the same little motel near the capitol building. That’s how I became acquainted with you and Jack.

SL: Right. There was you and I, and Tom Hager was down there, and Jack Healy and Jerry Lombardi. We had that kind of a back row down there. That was the old log cabins. If I remember right, their switchboard went off at 9 o’clock. Jack McDonald, lobbyist with AT&T, wired a telephone there.

BB: That’s right. So then you were defeated just barely in 1966 for the Legislature. Then Nixon was elected in ’68 and that’s what resulted in the appointment of Battin. So you were involved with Rehberg.

SL: I did not run in the ’68 race.

BB: Not then. Then in ’70, obviously you did run.

SL: No, I was very active in politics then. I whetted my appetite. Right after the session, Bill Goan had taken his kids in an airplane and flown down to Yellowtail Dam. He got into a down draft. He took the plane in on his side, saved his two kids, but he was killed in a plane wreck.

This was in ’69. It was right after the session. So there was the appointment available to the House of Representatives. I went after that appointment.

BB: I got you. So you got there by appointment?

SL: Yes.

BB: Then you were elected in ’70.

SL: Yes. I stayed. I had seniority on you. As long as I was there, you would have never been the dean of the House.

BB: That’s right, yes. You got there by appointment before the election.

Lloyd C. Lockrem Interview, OH 396-052, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SL: The other thing, when I ran in ’66—and very few people know this—but the control of politics in the eastern district of Montana was flat congressman Jim Battin. It was just pure and simple. I didn’t even think about running for the House. Battin had Lou and Ada Aleksich running his office. When I decided that I was going to run for the legislature, they said, “Make an appointment and go see Lou.” I don’t even think there’s a fair board appointment in the eastern district of Montana that Jim Battin didn’t have his hands on.

BB: Is that right?

SL: Of course when the appointment time [came] for me to get into the legislature, the three county commissioners were of course Battin people. Sonny Hanson had been on the inner group with Battin. So it was almost a lock for me to get the appointment.

BB: That’s good. And did you know Judge Battin?

SL: Yes.

BB: Any impressions of him?

SL: I’m not sure he served more than one term in the legislature. [Elected to the House in 1959.]

BB: I think he did just serve one term late in the fifties in the legislature, yes.

SL: The other thing I think that is really interesting about the eastern congressional district is the fact that it’s neither Republican or Democrat. It’s an incumbent’s district. There has only been one incumbent going back, I don’t know how many years, that’s ever lost that. That was Orvin Fjare from Big Timber. And he lost it because they passed the bill for the Yellowtail Dam and he convinced Eisenhower to veto it. So it’s one of those districts once you’re elected to it, you’re there.

BB: So Melcher replaced Battin and stayed there for quite a while.

SL: Until he decided to move on to the Senate.

BB: So you arrived in the legislature then in 1971. Are there any experiences that can stand out in your memory, especially early on in the legislature?

SL: I think 1971, of course, was the sales tax year. I don’t know how you feel about it, but I think the first really big bill we had a knock-down, drag-out on [was] territorial integrity. It was Ed Smith’s amendment. They worked out the co-ops and the power company had worked out a compromise. Smith stuck an amendment in there and the key vote was on the Smith amendment. That was the first really tough lobby that I think any of us had at that time.

Lloyd C. Lockrem Interview, OH 396-052, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: I remember it very well too.

SL: I remember those days you had a division. Second reading was secret ballot and the division came up, a flashbulb went off and Will Domer screams, “Sargeant-at-arms!” They tried to seal the chamber and everybody knew who had taken the picture was somebody for the co-ops. Sure enough, all our voting records on that amendment appeared in the co-op paper before the end of the session. Clyde Jarvis.

BB: It probably was Clyde Jarvis who took the picture.

SL: Yes, or somebody that did it for Clyde.

BB: And Clyde Jarvis, of course, was the lobbyist, I believe, for the Farmers Union. Just so people listening to this tape sometime in the future know, territorial integrity is—

SL: It was trying to define the areas of service between electrical co-ops and private utilities. Of course the big argument was that two percent money built the co-ops. They shouldn’t compete with the private sector and they didn’t pay taxes. So it was a battle between who got what service area.

BB: And so as Montana became more populated, it became profitable to serve some areas for investor-owned utility companies that the co-op had been serving. So there was a conflict.

SL: And vice versa.

BB: So there was a conflict. This legislation was designed to somehow or other stop the fight. There was a compromise reached early on. Ed Smith, who was a Republican representative from up in the rural northeastern part of the state, a co-op area, felt that the compromise wasn’t fair to the co-ops, I guess. So he introduced an amendment to strengthen the co-op’s position in the compromise, which passed by one vote.

SL: One vote. It was very close.

BB: That was the picture that the lobbyist...the picture of the voting board on that particular vote—

SL: So they had a recorded vote that was supposed to be secret.

BB: Under the 1889 Constitution, the debate stage vote wasn’t a recorded vote. So the people at home would never necessarily have known who really did vote for and against Smith’s amendment except for the photograph.
SL: We always used to say we had a free ride on second reading. Then I think ultimately the sales tax overrode everything. We ended up—you remember, that was the old 60-day session straight through. We covered the clock when you were through. With the 60 days I remember we got a tremendous amount of criticism because we debated the death penalty on a Sunday. There was a bunch of letters to the editor about how we could take up the death penalty on the Sabbath. We ended up 106 days. At that time, we were only trying to come up with 185 million dollars for general fund. That’s just unbelievable.

BB: It seems hard to believe.

SL: We did set the Constitutional Convention. That was Jim Murphy’s bill.

BB: Representative Jim Murphy from Kalispell.

SL: I don’t think the Republicans...and I don’t think the bill would have had that much support. It was almost a conviction of Jim that there was going to be a Constitutional...he worked awfully hard on that.

BB: He felt the Constitution needed to be greatly worked over. So he introduced legislation to call a Constitutional Convention, which ultimately passed.

SL: Right. And we probably made the worst mistake in history right there. We set up the election for the Constitutional Convention, special election, and it was supposed to be bipartisan. We put it right along side the ballot for the sales tax. So you had two issues: Constitutional Convention, and the sales tax. With the AFL-CIO, the Montana Education Association, the Farmers Union—everybody who opposed the sales tax, they came out in droves. We ended up electing every unelectable Democrat in the state to re-write our Constitution.

BB: Because when the people showed up at the polls to vote against the sales tax, they voted for the Democrats. That’s what gave the Democrats a near two to one majority in the Con Con.

SL: We had Leo Graybill that ran for Congress half a dozen times elected to the Constitutional Convention. Hell, even Bob Kelleher got elected to the Con Con.

BB: You’re not the only guy that’s told me that same story.

SL: Is that right?

BB: Yes, that’s the interpretation of probably what caused the Con Con to be so overwhelmingly Democratic. I’d be interested in your thoughts and observations on the 1972 Constitution, but before we go there, let’s talk a little bit more about the legislature. Is there a lobbyist or two that stands out in your memory in your years in the legislature?
SL: Yes, there is. The power company of course had two. They had Everett Shuey was supposed to be the Republican lobbyist and John Lahr was the Democrat. Somehow, I ended up on Lahr’s list. Weidler with MDU—

BB: Perry Weidler was a lobbyist from Montana Dakota Utilities.

SL: He was really classy. Jack MacDonald, Clyde Jarvis even, and of course Jim Murry and all of the henchmen for the AFL-CIO. I really stayed in good touch. Jarvis was the frustrating one. You’d drive into the Capitol in the morning and he always had a radio show. He just ripped the Republicans apart.

BB: “Featuring the Facts,” it was called.

SL: Yes. He’d rip you up one side and down the other and you’d walk into the Capitol just steaming. The first one you saw after you got off the elevator up by the coffee board would be Clyde wishing you good morning saying, “Can I buy you a cup of coffee?”

BB: Even though he just ripped you on the radio.

SL: Yes. Things weren’t personal in those days. We could take each other on the floor and depending on who won, you could walk off and go have a drink together. It really wasn’t personal. I think that’s the difference between then and now, just from my perspective.

BB: Do you have any story or anything that illustrates any relationship with any of the lobbyists you’ve just mentioned?

SL: Oh, I guess this would have been ’72, that the debate on the coal moratorium. It was fabulous, great to be a legislator.

BB: That was the great debate for us who were there and remember that. We’ll always remember it, I think.

SL: The two debaters were Lucas—

BB: Jim Lucas, a Republican from Miles City.

SL: And John Hall I think.

BB: He was a Democrat from Great Falls.

SL: Right. And what they did—
BB: And Sonny, I think that might have been in the ’73 session?

SL: It might have been in ’73, yes. The Democrats had Walter Laas in the chair. I remember that. They always recognized the speaker that moved the bill first. In this case it was Dorothy Bradley, Representative Bradley from Bozeman.

BB: She had the coal ban, or the coal moratorium bill.

SL: Yes, and they recognized Wally Edland from Scobey first. He made a motion that the bill do not pass. Then Walt immediately recognized Dorothy and she made a substitute motion that the coal moratorium bill do pass.

BB: Which gave her an opportunity to close on it.

SL: Yes, to close. They took Jim Lucas out of the mix on the closing. I remember that parliamentary move to get started. I started looking around the floor and I was short one representative.

BB: Now the reason you looked around the floor, Sonny, is because you were whip.

SL: Yes, I was whip.

BB: In the 1973 session.

SL: And Kvaalen was the—

BB: Oscar Kvaalen.

SL: From Lambert was the Majority Leader.

BB: Minority Leader.

SL: Yes, right.

BB: So you were whip to Oscar.

SL: Right. Tom Clemow from Dillon was missing. Tom was an old mustang. He had been there for years. He smoked big cigars, liked to drink whiskey and he liked to play poker. He wasn’t in his seat and I knew he was a vote against the coal moratorium. For the coal development bill. At that time, one vote meant everything. So I went back to our office and had our secretary start calling to find Clemow. I went back out on the floor and she called and said that she hadn’t found him. So I started down the aisle and I looked up at the Montana Power lobbyists, both Shuey and Lahr. I gave them a flick of my eyes and of course, they came down out of the gallery...
and met me out in the hall. I said, “We’re short Clemow. My secretary has been calling and she hasn’t been able to find him. We’ve got to have him.”

So that got the full force of the Montana Power, and I think MDU was in on that too. They started looking for Tom Clemow. Dorothy had just started her close. Clemow was senior and, remember, we had lockers? At that time, a few lockers were actually near the phone bank on the floor. I looked up and here was Clemow. He was taking off his cowboy hat and his coat and putting it in up there. I ran up to him back off the floor. Before I’d say a word to him, he blew cigar smoke in my face and said, “I hear you’ve been looking for me, kid.” (unintelligible) I think he had been playing poker some place.

BB: He got back there just in time to vote.

SL: Yes, and the other thing with the lobbyists a lot of times, people don’t really understand it, but we had no staff. We had no secretaries. We had no privacy. That little piece of wood in front of us was all we had. There have been a lot of times on something that was related that you needed information on. It may not even be related to any bill that the power company or anybody was interested in, but you would go to them and use them as a resource. That’s all we had. I think people had a misconception of just what they were. They were there to serve us.

BB: And lobbyists have specific knowledge.

SL: And resources.

BB: So if you want to find out something about any bill of any kind, there’s usually, if it’s controversial at all, there are lobbyists on both sides of it. It’s the best way to become informed in a hurry on the two points of view. It’s still what’s commonly done by legislators.

SL: Right. We use them and there’s nothing sinister about it.

BB: Now how did you become whip?


BB: Did you and Oscar form a team?

SL: No, not really.

BB: Were you recruited to run for it? Did you decide to run for it yourself?

SL: I’ve always said the first prerequisite to serve in politics, the first prerequisite and the most important one, it’s an ego trip or you wouldn’t be there. And the other thing that happens is when you get there, you’ve got state employees. You’ve got legislative employees. You’ve got Lloyd C. Lockrem Interview, OH 396-052, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
lobbyists. And keep in mind if it’s an ego trip, you’re surrounded by a bunch of professionals that feed that ego. It’s kind of like a merry-go-round. You get on it and it’s hard to get off. So besides a little bit of stature and a better parking place, that was about it. It was just one of those things that I think I had the ability to lead and I went for it.

BB: It turned out you beat Bob Marks who was later speaker of the House of Representatives.

SL: Then I beat Bob again the next session—we both ran for Minority Leader.

BB: That was in the ’75 session.

SL: I think it was...it was the annual session.

BB: Yes, you were whip in ’73 and ’74 and then in the ’75 session, I remember you were Minority Leader. We couldn’t even stop a rule suspension.

SL: No, we were outnumbered 67 to 33. We didn’t even have to show up. That was the problem that was most interesting historically. Small minorities are tight. And conversely, large majorities are unwieldy. My tight little group of 33, we block voted. We would catch the education group one time. We’d catch the Butte delegation another time.

BB: When you say catch, you’d get their votes?

SL: Yes, get their votes. And if we voted as a bloc, we would pick up some from the Democratic Party.

BB: You’d get some bloc of Democrat votes and once in a while, prevail.

SL: Yes, absolutely. It was a ball. I told Pat McKittrick, who was the speaker, and we were so outnumbered, he was right behind me. The speaker was sitting right behind me. One day I turned around to Pat and I said, “You know we can’t stop. We’re outnumbered 67 to 33. We can’t stop the suspension of the rules. If you want to charge us, no matter what you guys fight, we’ll pay.”

BB: You’ve mentioned Pat McKittrick, I’m just interested too, Sonny, in your thoughts and observations on some of the legislators that most stand out in your memory. You have mentioned Jim Lucas and Oscar Kvaalen and Bob Marks. There were many.

SL: I guess this is a story during—I’m not sure which session it was—when Gary Marbut and George Turman—

BB: Gary Marbut from Missoula and George Turman from Missoula.
SL: They were both Republicans. They were both liberal. They decided to change parties. They set up a meeting with me and Oscar. So it had to have been that year. My first reaction was to grab them by the seat of the pants and give them a swift kick and get them the hell out of the office. I got a real good lesson in politics. Oscar sat there and talked to those two people and told them that he was firmly convinced that the Republican Party was broad enough based that it could fit them in. They could both fit in and their views would be represented. He gave them a talking to, trying to convince them not to—it was one of those closed door deals. It was just fantastic. Both of them really took it to heart. It wasn’t that clear and easy of a decision for them when Oscar got through.

BB: That’s a good story and one I never knew. So they didn’t change parties?

SL: They did change parties, but Oscar—

BB: I don’t think they did during that session?

SL: No, it didn’t affect it during that session.

BB: I see.

SL: They both went. George went on to become lieutenant governor.

BB: As a Democrat and Marbut, I think, was beaten by Bud Gould, a Republican. Gary changed parties and became a Democrat and ran for reelection to the legislature as a Democrat. Then he was beaten, ironically, by a Republican.

SL: That’s right.

BB: Gould was the blind man. He went door-to-door with a white cane, which was pretty powerful. He was extremely memorable, of course, because of that.

SL: Because of the handicap. It didn’t seem to slow him down. The other thing that always surprised me about Bud, it didn’t take him very long when he was up there with 100 representatives. He could almost tell each and every one of them when they said good morning. He had voice recognition that was unbelievable.

BB: He recognized all our voices. I remember that about him. Remember too, there was a wonderful tradition, which I think still exists, is the basketball game between the Senate and the House? So the officiating was notoriously horrible during those basketball games. So one time, to try and make that point, the House’s lead official was Bud Gould.

SL: I think one that I remember was Elmer Schye. He’d been there for a long time. He went all the way back to when his claim to fame was trying to tax the Hutterite colonies. Elmer was one
of those guys, when I was in the leadership, for some reason there was a motion they did. They had people scattered and they weren’t in their seats. I pointed to Elmer and that was my signal for him to pick a fight. Elmer had the distinct ability to come right straight up with that white hair and that red face. The minute he started to speak, he had the Democrats stirred. You could buy time with him and the first one that would come up against him was always Francis Bardanouve. Elmer was kind of the rabble-rouser for them.

BB: I remember him very well too.

SL: Bob Ellerd comes to mind too. He was a good legislator. He got very little press. He just kept digging.

BB: A representative from Bozeman, a Republican.

SL: Right. He was a conservative cow man. He was an ex-marine. Bill Norman, I sat in front of him. That was just an experience in and by itself. Tommy Harrison was Majority Leader and he could never remember the motion to get us into second reading. He actually had a cheat sheet written out and taped on his microphone.

BB: Mr. Speaker, I move the House resolve the committee of the whole for purpose of reading second—

SL: Consideration of business under second reading.

BB: How about, I still want to talk about the Constitution, but you know the Anaconda Company was a bold and important presence in Montana politics from the early part of the last century until relatively recently. It was still a presence when you and I were there in the 1970s. Any thoughts or recollections on their lobbyists or their influence, how you would characterize their influence, how they exercised it?

SL: They were good and they spent a lot of money. I always felt that I had a business background and a business philosophy. I’d get into debates with other Democrats, you know, accused of being a lackey of the Power Company or Anaconda. I always countered by saying that I have a philosophy of business. I make my payroll. I pay my bills. I’m not going to apologize because my business philosophy happens to coincide with Montana Power or the Anaconda Company because I ended up, because of that a lot of times being aligned with them. My last session, I voted a couple of times against the company and Lloyd Crippen, lobbyist for Anaconda, came up to me and wanted to know if there was something wrong. I said, “No, not really. I guess I’m just a little bit tired.” There’s a frustration in politics with lobbyists. Like I say, they wine and dine you. They build your ego. Having gotten out of politics, it was superficial in the sense that unless you’ve got a light on the board in the Senate or the House, they’ve got no use for you. They’ve never stopped by since then. It wasn’t a lasting friendship, but that was
their job. They were using us. I think that hurt a little bit because I always felt that they were friends. In reality, they weren’t.

BB: They were doing their job. Their job was to cultivate legislators.

SL: I asked John Lahr about that one time and he said, “Well, that’s true, Sonny. At the same time, if my car wrecks and I get killed, before the bodies go, they’re going to have to hire Joe Quilici to take my place.” It’s just the facts of life.

BB: Yes, that’s probably true. Any other thoughts on the Anaconda Company? It was such a big presence for so long and then it just kind of disappeared pretty suddenly. I guess—

SL: Yes. Of course I was right in the middle of the union contractors. In those days, unions were strong. Joe Crosswhite, operating engineers, and Jim Murry—head of the AFL-CIO—they kept yelling at the Anaconda Company. They were trying to mine coal over there with 25 or 30 craft unions. They kept saying, “We can’t afford it.” The unions would scream, “You’re talking productivity. We’re talking jobs.” Pretty soon it was all gone. To me, it seemed to me that the labor movement in Montana and the AFL-CIO or Anaconda Company, they almost paralleled their demise in political strength and the fact of even existing. They were almost parallel.

BB: Did you have the impression that the Anaconda Company maybe was a little closer to the Democratic Party and the Montana Power Company was a little closer to the Republican Party?

SL: I didn’t. The first thing that comes to mind is the fact that Butte-Silver Bow, that delegation wasn’t really Democrat or Republican. It was company, Anaconda and Montana Power. They were the biggest employers in the county. They did lobby the Republicans a lot, but at the same time, I think there was a pretty good blend between the two. The Farmers Union had a significant and strong lobby. That was predominantly Democrat, primarily from rural areas. They didn’t have the impact in the urban areas.

BB: They were a pretty important force in politics in Montana in the ‘70s weren’t they?

SL: Yes.

BB: Did you see a cooperation between the AFL-CIO and the Farmers Union?

SL: I think going back, I think probably one of the most genius, when it comes from the standpoint of pure power politics, was the coal moratorium that Dorothy Bradley passed. If you remember, she passed it by one vote on second reading. Then it was scheduled to go to third reading and she set the vote on it to the last day of transmittal, if you remember that. It hung on the board right up until transmittal date for probably three or four weeks.

BB: She wanted some concessions in the Plant Siting Act or something like that.
SL: She had the AFL-CIO by the throat, the environmental people. And if you remember that session, labor was going with those environmental bills. It was Dorothy calling the shots for them because she had them over the barrel with the moratorium.

BB: They wanted the union jobs connected with the developing coal.

SL: Right, they did not want that moratorium—

BB: They didn’t want the moratorium, so Dorothy said, “Well, we can probably mine coal, but I’m going to need your help to get these mine reclamation environmental protection bills through. When they’re safely through, then you can kill the moratorium.”

SL: So she hung that up there and put a chokehold on them. You had labor and I introduced an economic impact bill. All the bill said was that if there’s an adverse impact to the economy because of an environmental regulation, you have to have that in a fiscal note. God, the AFL-CIO crawled all over it. Jim Murry accused me of taking the lady off the capitol and putting the dollar sign up.

BB: And you knew him, right?

SL: Oh, yes. We went back to the old days and fistfights and nightclubs in Laurel.

BB: Is that right?

SL: Oh, yes.

BB: Was he a pretty good hand in a fistfight?

SL: Oh, yes. Jim and I went back a long way.

BB: Now you served both before and after the 1972 Constitution. The ’71 session of course preceded the ’72 Constitution. Then you were there for most of the rest of the seventies, all the rest of the seventies. Any thoughts about how the Constitution affected the legislative process or Montana?

SL: Oh sure. I think myself, personally, it was a contradiction. The Con Con delegates said that we were going to go to single-member districts and we’re going to have more representation back to a smaller group of people. But then they turned around and said, “You don’t have to live in the district.” They were absolutely hypocrites and they did it to be politically expedient, which they said they really weren’t. To me, when we went to single-member districts, it completely diluted the representation in Helena. I can only speak from my own personal...and here’s how it worked. When we ran countywide for 12 seats—
BB: Here in Yellowstone County.

SL: Yes, as an example. You always had the frontrunners, four or five guys that were already elected by nine o'clock after the polls closed. From about the number five or six to about number 13 staying home. There were very seldom more than 300 votes difference. So in order to get elected, you went to the Montana AFL-CIO PAC meetings. You went to the Farmers Union meeting. They all put out endorsements. You went to the Farm Bureau meeting. You went to the Billings Chamber of Commerce meeting. You went to the Billings Education because some place you had to get 300 votes. These people then had a significant say in—they had clout. In other words, you had to listen to them because you needed their endorsements. You needed to talk to them. You had to represent them.

BB: So it forced legislators to deal with a broad spectrum of people in the whole county rather than just some—

SL: So what happens, they go to single-member districts, my district was north of Rimrock Road, north of Grand Avenue to the Rimrocks, and 27th Street to the Country Club. They did a demographic study, both the Department of Commerce and the Republican Party. There were 42 schoolteachers living in the districts. So don’t mess with the BEA or education. There were 12 farmers living north of Grand Avenue. Forget about the Farm Bureau and Farmers Union. No matter how it worked—and even the political parties lost their clout. We used to get the money from them and everything. So all of these various—

BB: All you had to do was just keep out of trouble with your neighborhood.

SL: And you listened to them.

BB: Rather small—

SL: Yes, and then you’re just into this area where both people that had very special interests, for the want of a better term, that had political clout. You listened to them. They could call you. You had to. That no longer existed when we went to single-member districts. So on that basis, I think it really narrowed the scope of representation. You could go door to door. You could do a general mailing and that was about it. You didn’t have to worry about all of those other people.

BB: With the single-member districts.

SL: Yes. So I think it did just exactly the opposite of what the intent was, particularly when you didn’t even have to live in the district to run. I lived across the street from Tom Towe and a block from the Wennekers. Neither one of them ever ran for it.
BB: Now the thinking on the single-member districts, obviously, is that you represent that group of people so you ought to live among them. I mean, it seems like there’s some logic that you should have to live in the district, but apparently—at least how I think I’ve understood this—is that there was the belief on part of some, at least, that the Constitutional Convention delegates thought that the problem is we want the support of most of the legislators if we can get it to ratify the Constitution. There were a fair number of those guys that lived pretty close to each other in different districts in Montana. If you’re in Yellowstone County, but that happened in other places too. I think there used to be the story that there were four, five, or six state representatives that lived within half a mile of each other on Poly Drive. So there had to be some way or other to make it possible for those guys, if they wanted to continue to be in the Legislature, to find a single member district. If you forced them to stay in one, there’d be some kind of an armor ridden primary in one district and they’d probably all be mad about the Constitution.

SL: The *Billings Gazette* ran a story and had pins showing where all of us lived up along Rimrock Road, or Poly Drive. Then we go to single-member districts, Herb Huennekens is carpet-bagged. Tom Towe was carpet-bagged. Pat Regan was carpet-bagged. It ended up—they charted the Republicans had ended up—there were five or six of the Democrats carpet-bagged because they all lived in the same area too.

BB: Yes, they also lived in the same area too.

SL: I think they took the residence requirement out of there just as a practical matter to get it to pass.

BB: I think that’s kind of the common interpretation. Any other thoughts on the Constitution? You mentioned, Sonny, that when the guy took the picture of the voting board, well, of course on the ’72 Constitution, the second reading votes, a vote of record. So you wouldn’t have had to do that.

SL: No, right after the Constitution passed, I got a telephone call. I think it was from Bill Groff.

BB: Senator, Democrat from the Bitterroot.

SL: And one of the senior members in the Senate. There were eight of us. We went to Helena, kind of an ad hoc committee. I think Jim Lucas—at some place there’s a record of it. There was Jim Lucas, myself, Groff, Turnage, probably Kvaalen and the problem we ran into—we had a legislative session coming and much of the Constitution, particularly the open meeting, the structure, even the rules, plus the statute that had to be changed because of the new Constitution. We had that Legislative Council, which is the interim arm of the legislature. We didn’t have the funding to do it. So the eight of us sat down and we made a list. We just said, “They’ve got to have more staff. They have to have more lawyers.” So the eight of us, Rosie...I can’t think of what her name was—
BB: Rosie Weber, she was the director of the Council.

SL: The eight of us told her—actually no legislative power was behind this—to go get the people and what had to be done and that we would meet monthly. The eight of us would see to it that the funding of the supplemental bill to pay for it would come through. So we did get an awful lot of the groundwork laid early. I remember open meeting, it got to the point now that it’s ridiculous. I wish the Republicans would have dug in their feet and kicked them out of the caucus. They don’t belong—there’s no recorded vote in the caucus. There’s nothing of state interest in there. However the caucus decides is going up on the board. When you come outside and it’s public record then.

BB: I think one of the problems there, though, was that when we were legislators, a caucus was somewhat of an unusual thing. We’d have a caucus not more than once a week. A lot of times it would be every couple of weeks before we’d have a caucus. Beginning in the eighties, there was one session when the House was tied 50 to 50. They started having caucuses every day. The press corps really became resentful of that because—

SL: Paranoid.

BB: Yes, because they thought almost all of the real discussions are taking place behind closed doors. Well these guys didn’t used to have that many caucuses. We left them alone. Now when they’re having them every day, we’re kind of hacked off about this. I think that was part of what led to the—

SL: They moved it to the bar. You’re still going to—

BB: There’s still closed meetings. There are still guys that get together out of earshot of the press and talk things over.

SL: The other thing that, it was nice to go into a caucus. We used to walk down to the Highway Department auditorium in ’71, remember?

BB: Yes.

SL: You’d get a breath of fresh air and some place to sit down where there’s nobody grabbing at your arms. I used to think of somebody grabbing you by the coat sleeve and say, “Do you got a minute?” You get to the point you’re about ready to punch them because you don’t, but you have to listen to them.

BB: They know you have limited time because the schedule is so cram-packed. So you’ve got this poor guy, you know, and he thinks, “Well you know I really need to talk to Representative Lockrem. He’s on the Highway Committee. Gee, it’s really important. We’ve talked this over
with my association,” and his only chance at you is when he catches you when you’re going maybe from the House chamber to the bathroom or something.

SL: How many times did you say, “Walk with me,”? That’s the only time, that’s all you’ve got.

BB: You barely have a chance to talk to them. You feel as though you should talk to them. I know what you mean. But sometimes you just feel harassed too.

SL: Yes. Then of course I went back and lobbied for a couple of sessions.

BB: You lobbied for whom?

SL: Montana Contractors.

BB: Okay now that was in the ’80s?

SL: Yes.

BB: But before we go there, you didn’t run for reelection to the House of Representatives in 1976. Instead, you ran for the state Senate.

SL: Right.

BB: Now whose place did you fill? It must have been an opening of some kind or another that occurred.

SL: It might have been Jim Haughey. Jim’s up in this area. He just retired.

BB: It was just an opportunity? If you’d stayed in the House, since you were already Minority Leader, you might have become Majority Leader or Speaker or something. What motivated you to run for the Senate?

SL: Four-year term. Not running every two years is kind of nice. It’s a little bit of a different atmosphere too. It’s not like the gymnasium over there in the House.

BB: So compare the House and the Senate. The House is more “rough and tumble”?

SL: There’s more people. It’s more chaotic.

BB: The Senate is—

SL: Staid.
BB: More deliberative.

SL: The Senate gets jammed up a little bit after transmittal when you get all those House bills over there, but for the most part—and you’ve got smaller committees. In the Senate, you can be much more effective. You’ve got eight guys. You only have to talk to seven of them.

BB: Which did you prefer?

SL: I enjoyed them both. They both had their positives. I think I liked the Senate a little bit better. I was on the Appropriations Committee, Natural Resources. So five, six, or seven guys there that were going to climb on your light or that you could talk to and get a vote when you really got into a pinch.

BB: When you say guys climb on your light, now explain that phrase.

SL: Well, it’s so busy and so hectic up there that you can’t possibly, one, read all the bills, or two, get to all the committees. So generally guys—and I think everybody does it—they’ll find somebody who has a very similar political philosophy to yourself. If you don’t know or have any doubt about a bill or an amendment or something else, you just glance up and see where they vote. You know you can’t get in trouble. It’s being expedient.

BB: It’s commonly done in a process where you’ve got committees and specialization and that sort of thing. So you’re saying that, for example, if a taxation bill was before the Senate or it could happen in the House too, and there’s somebody that you’re close to and whose philosophy you find pretty similar to yours and a member the Taxation Committee, and you’re a little bit in doubt of exactly how to understand that bill, you just look up at the voting board. The vote takes place and if you see his light’s on red, you’ll probably hit red yourself.

SL: A simpler analogy would be a logging bill, for instance. There’s no loggers in Yellowstone County. I could care less and be there in a battle with somebody over something to do with logging. I’d climb right on your back and ride your light because I really have no interest whatsoever.

BB: In my case, because I’m from timber country—

SL: Right or somebody that—

BB: You became acquainted with governors. There were two governors really in the ‘70s, Governor Anderson and Governor Judge. Did you ever meet Governor Anderson?

SL: Yes. I never really had that much to do with Governor Anderson. I had a ton of things to do with Governor Judge.

BB: Before we do Governor Judge, any thoughts on Anderson? Describe him. What did he look like?
SL: Short, I think he had the small man syndrome for whatever that’s worth, which is kind of a chip on the shoulder.

BB: Outspoken?

SL: Outspoken.

BB: Confident?

SL: Rough on the edges. Brilliant stand-up one liner—“Pay more, what for?”—that elected him. We got that thrown in our face every time we proposed a sales tax. I did rent a house from Jack Marlow, who was married to Forrest’s sister. That was one of the years that I was in the leadership. So naturally after Marlow left, we moved into the house. I spent a lot of time taking down pictures, or at least turning them over. I don’t know. I don’t really remember Forrest. I really don’t. He took Tom Judge with him as lieutenant governor, didn’t he?

BB: Judge was lieutenant governor under Anderson.

SL: He really gave him his break. He’d come out of the House with relatively undistinguished legislative record.

BB: Tell about Tom Judge. He was governor from ’72 to ’80, most of the time, actually, that you were a legislator.

SL: Yes. Under Judge, of course. Schwinden too.

BB: Schwinden was lieutenant governor.

SL: Tom, I guess my first and foremost, I was on the Legislative Audit Committee, and Tom had taken a state plane and gone down to Wichita Falls to watch the Bobcats play for the national championship. I don’t know why he didn’t say he took the plane down there. I don’t think they used it at that time. But they dummied up the flight records. Legislative Audit Committee went after him. They started digging there and started matching up the flight records with the press releases, pictures of him on national TV. They were going after Mike Ferguson, who was the head of aeronautics.

BB: He was the director of the Division of Aeronautics.

SL: Judge had appointed him. Mike was a close personal friend of mine. Well the staff kept digging and they had all this data put together and they were going to have a Legislative Audit Committee. Harold Gerke was the Speaker and I was the Minority Leader. That’s how we were
serving on the Audit Committee. Harold came up to me and he said, “This is a bunch of crap, Sonny.”

I said, “I agree. It’s a witch hunt. I don’t know why the governor just didn’t say he went to a football game.”

He just buried the report. He said, “Will you work the Republicans?”

I said, “Right. I will. Here’s how we’ll work it. If you go to the Democrats,” and what we did, we took the report, usually—

BB: Which committee was this?

SL: This is the Legislative Audit Committee.

BB: An interim committee.

SL: Yes. It was almost a standing committee like the Legislative Council. When the report was cleared, somebody would make a motion to accept the report and file it the usual way, which meant you put it on the shelf some place. That’s what Harold wanted to do with it. I said, “If you got all the Democrats, you make the motion to put it on the shelf. If I got all the Republicans, I’ll second motion. I’m going to get all the Republicans but one, the chairman, Matt Himsl. I won’t even talk to him about this.” Matt had so much integrity, it was unbelievable. So we had the hearing and the staff made the presentation. We had TV cameras, lights, reporters. When they got through, Matt said, “What’s the committee’s pleasure?” He was thinking that there was going to be questions and they were going to start grilling. Harold was trying to protect the governor. I was trying to protect a close personal friend, Mike Ferguson. So we had different motives.

When the staff finished the report, Harold made the motion that the report be accepted and filed in the usual manner. I seconded it and it was over with. The press didn’t know what hit them. Himsl didn’t know either. So there’s a sequel to the story. In fact, 31 years ago today, my mother had a stroke. I received the call in the Senate. I was in the Senate then. I went down—the airport was closed. It was a horrible spring storm. So I went down to the Governor’s office and asked him if by chance he could get me to Billings before she passed.

He brought the Baron. He said, “We’ll give her a try.” He got a hold of his pilot and they brought the Baron over from Great Falls. We loaded it up. The Swede was the pilot for the Highway Commission, the governor’s pilot, Mike Ferguson. We wanted to get as much weight as we could in that plane. We headed for Billings and they did get me in. I had to hike through a snow drift and I got to the hospital before my mother passed away.

BB: Judge did you that favor.

Lloyd C. Lockrem Interview, OH 396-052, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
SL: Yes. Tom did me that favor. In 1979, he was in trouble with the plane again. He had flown his mother, Blanche, out to Virginia Mason to dry her out. The press was all over him. We were on second reading and I got a note to come to the governor’s office. This is 1979. I went down. A guy named Ray Dore was Chief of Staff. He was a CPA from Bozeman. We sat there and chit chatted. He said, “Tom’s getting a lot of heat from the press on this airplane ride for his mother.” He had a piece of paper and he said, “You remember two years ago when we flew you home when your mother passed away?”

I said, “I sure do. I appreciated it.”

He said, “I’ve got a bill here for 498 dollars for that flight.”

I said, “Ray, I’ll clean it up. You can tell the governor that bill is paid in full.”

He started laughing and he said, “That’s just exactly what I told the governor you were going to say.”

How politics works, I took my family up and I had a first grader—my youngest son was in the first grade—and just did not want to go to school. It just terrified him going to his school. He cried and Pat Judge, the governor’s son was in the first grade too at that same school. I picked my son up to take him to lunch or something, to bribe him. I went one day and here’s this state car and the governor picked he and Pat up. He was up at the Governor’s Mansion having lunch with the governor’s son.

BB: That’s pretty neat. I think the children who grew up—the children of legislators got a unique experience and maybe a look into the legislative process. Both of your boys certainly had that opportunity.

SL: Yes. I had a house on Hauser one session. It had a foster home, the people—he was a state employee that lived next door. He had a young boy two years old that was mentally retarded—mentally challenged—that was playing with my—I guess they were about four years old then. There was no discrimination or anything with four year olds. My son knew he couldn’t pull the sled up the hill, so he pulled the sled up and they rode down the hill together. He wanted to adopt him and couldn’t because once he adopted him, he had to take over the medical expenses. With mental problems, there’s a lot more physical problems too. So I introduced the bill for subsidized adoption, which really surprised some of my Republicans. Finally we got it through so that they could adopt him.

BB: You probably—you had your name on it and probably steered a few Republicans.

SL: That could have been. I came back that following year and Jean—he’s still at Sweetheart Bakery—needed a house up here off of Virginia Lane for a group home. That neighborhood
called a meeting and wanted me to come up. I went up and they said, “Well, we’re going to have a group home across the street.” I said, “Now this decentralization that’s been going on for four years, none of you people even contacted me about it then. What’s your concern now? If you had someone like that next door to you, I just had that experience and I can say my son’s going to be better because of it.” I walked out of the meeting.

BB: Wow, a powerful experience that’s for sure. Anything else on Governor Judge? Did you ever go fishing with him or have dinner with him?

SL: Well he and Kent Kleinkopf went into a Chinese restaurant here in Billings down on—

BB: Kleinkopf was his bodyguard right?

SL: Yes, he was kind of his bodyguard. No, that wasn’t his bodyguard. Kleinkopf had been around. He had been in the work comp program. They’d stiff some people for 96,000 dollars here in Billings. Then Judge turned him around and appointed him to the Department of Commerce to regulate banks. The Republican caucus said, “There’s just no way we’re going to confirm that appointment.”

Kent and I subsequently became friends. He kept asking me. I said, “There’s just no way I can vote for you after what happened down there in Billings.”

BB: Because the assumption was that Kleinkopf had raised this money for Judge’s—

SL: They were taking campaign funds to pay off what they’d done. They took campaign funds to pay off the bills on the Chinese restaurant. They had gone broke.

BB: Who owned the Chinese restaurant?

SL: Judge and Kleinkopf and there was a bunch of them in on it.

BB: And the restaurant was going broke, so they accepted money from—got political contributions and they diverted it—

SL: Diverted them and paid it off. Everybody knew what had happened. Of course, Kleinkopf had been it. I said, “There’s just no way I can vote to confirm you down in Billings.” The caucus was fairly adamant.

Next thing you know, Frank Hazelbaker heard he wasn’t going to be reappointed to the Crime Commission, so he goes downstairs to the Governor’s office and he comes back. “I don’t think Kleinkopf’s going to be too bad.” Judge was just picking them off one at a time.

Lloyd C. Lockrem Interview, OH 396-052, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: He found a pressure point.

SL: He applied it and I can’t believe he worked that hard for that appointment to the Department of Commerce, but he did.

BB: He got him confirmed.

SL: Yes. He was a good politician.

BB: I remember that same story. I was involved in that too. Any conclusions or anything as you look back in your life in politics?

SL: I could say, when I decided to get out, I think this district up here was virtually safe and a guy would have a hard time running as a Democrat. I made the premise that ego was the first prerequisite for politics. So if this is an ego trip, then there’s three ways out: die in office, get beat, or walk out a winner. So knew I wasn’t going to run again. It was the toughest thing I ever did. I enjoyed every minute of it. I was up there 13 years.

BB: You missed it, I’m sure.

SL: Oh, yes. I was reluctant to go back lobbying.

BB: So you lobbied a few sessions in the 1980s?

SL: Yes, for the contractors. The Republicans had taken away all of the highway funding, if you remember. They hired me to help restore the highway program. The first time back up there, I’m sure I’ve told you this story, but the first bill I testified for was in front of the Labor Committee and J.D. Lynch was chairman. He had been a freshman with you and I back in 1971. When I started to testify, I had to identify myself as Sonny Lockrem of the Montana Contractors Association. J.D. in his usual way said, “Before you start, former Senator Lockrem, would you tell us what the difference is between serving and lobbying?”

I said, “Between the pay? Except for the pay?”

He said, “No, there’s got to be something different.”

I said, “There’s two distinct differences between lobbying and serving.”

I started to testify and he said, “No, former Senator Lockrem, tell us what the two differences are now between serving up here as a senator and lobbying.”
I said, “The two distinct differences now between serving and lobbying, as a lobbyist I have to read all the bills and tell the truth.”

BB: You would have gotten a chuckle out of it too. What do you see as you look into Montana’s future?

SL: In comparison, we’ve been doing a lot of traveling and you go through Wyoming, Gillette. Sure there are strip mines down there. There’s coal bed methane down there. There’s logging in Wyoming. There’s ranching. There’s tourism. It’s basically the same industries we’ve got. They’ve got a billion dollar surplus because they recognize the fact that they are an export state. The only thing they have to export is their natural resources. We’ve stopped the oil industry here. We’ve stopped coal virtually. There hasn’t been a new mine opened since the Towe coal tax.

We stopped fossil fuel on the premise that timber was a renewable resource. As soon as we did that, then we got the distinction between overgrowth forests that you can’t cut. So it really wasn’t a renewable resource. I guess the whole point is that it’s almost like our economy is dying on the vine because—and now Montana is trying to stop coal bed methane because the water runs in Montana. I’ve raised two sons who got a quality education in Montana. I’ve got a lot of friends that have done the same thing. Guess what we exported? We didn’t export natural resources. We exported our youth. We exported the future. In comparison to, at least my two sons, the opportunities that were available in other states because of the education they got in Montana has been fantastic, and a work ethic that goes with it. For some reason, we just keep plodding along in spite of ourselves.

BB: Do you see any renewed emphasis on the development of natural resources? Do you think that will change, what you’ve just described?

SL: I think we missed the peak. They’re already starting to talk about greenhouse gas emissions and fossil fuels. I’m not sure. We went through the boom and bust with oil. I’d like to be more optimistic about it, but in retrospect and in looking at what another state in the similar circumstance, Wyoming, and what they’re doing—their education, their teachers, their pay, everything is higher. At the same time, in comparison to other states, our capita income really doesn’t rise significantly to make it attractive for anybody to stay here.

BB: As we conduct this interview, I think it’s something around 44th or 45th among the 50 states. It’s one of the poorest. There are only half a dozen states that have a lower per capita income.

SL: A lot of that is attributable to agriculture I think. At the same time, now they’re talking about subsidizing some type of oil plants and utilizing agriculture as bio-fuel. Hell, nobody’s going to plant any seeds out there for oil when they get 26 dollars a bushel for wheat.
BB: Yes, the price is wonderful right now.

SL: The other thing: it’s rags to riches with agriculture. The cattle industry is stabilized. I remember back in the seventies, doctors, lawyers, they all had their own herd of cattle. Once they got them weeded out and back to the old cow-calf operation, enough of them got burned that they got out of it. Farmers, I remember when we’d finally hit five dollars a bushel. The next spring they went wall to wall. They had bumper crop in the field. They had one in the bin and the next spring they broke ground. They went fence line to fence line, tore up CPR and planted wheat. Then they sat back and wondered why the hell the price of wheat went down.

BB: Because of the possible continued demand for this bio-fuel, the price of grain may stay high.

SL: I think the price is going to stay high because of the world economy. They need food. They’ve opened up the world markets to the point where we don’t have to—the government used to pay them to store it. We couldn’t consume it. Even Montana’s taken, they’re a positive. They’ve looked at the global market and started to make that move with trade to emissaries and that sort of thing.

BB: Well the world probably still needs what Montana has. It’s just a question of when or whether we develop what we have.

SL: I guess that’s a good way to look forward. I’ve just been thinking that we missed a great opportunity.

BB: Anything else?

SL: I can’t think of anything.

BB: Well I sure appreciate the interview, Sonny. Thank you for your public service.

[End of Interview]