Oral History Number: 396-031
Interviewee: Edward Smith
Interviewer: Bob Brown
Date of Interview: July 7, 2005
Project: Bob Brown Oral History Collection

Bob Brown: Okay, we’re interviewing Ed Smith, “Big Ed” Smith at his home in Dagmar near Plentywood in northeastern Montana. Ed began his service in the state legislature in the election of 1966. He was a Republican candidate for governor in 1972 and served also on the Highway Commission following his terms in both the state House and the state Senate. Ed, what got you interested in politics?

Edward Smith: Well I always was very vocal in certain issues and because of that, I guess there were two couples. One was Goodman from Plentywood and his wife Mary, who (unintelligible) and they did everything possible to convince me to run for the legislature. I just thought it was because I was very active in a lot of organizations like the Sheridan County Stockman Association. I was on the Fair Board for many, many years. Then also I was a baseball pitcher. I got to meet a lot of people and always was good natured at the ball games. I did play to win, like I did also in politics. All of those things fit together and they came and—

BB: Did they encourage you to run as a Republican?

ES: Yes.

BB: Because your area here was heavily Democratic and it has been traditionally for a long time. So it was a long shot to run as a Republican.

ES: A lot of them told me I was running on the wrong ticket. I said, “As far as I’m concerned, there isn’t a right or a wrong ticket. You should believe in the two-party system. I should just have as much right to expect your vote as I would otherwise.”

The thing I did first before I did file, I talked to a lot of key people. I said, “Okay, what do you think of me running for the legislature?” If they said, “Oh, just fine,” then I said, “I can count on your support?” So I did line up a lot of support to run for the legislature in a very well-known, key Democrat who served as my campaign treasurer.

BB: Who was that?

ES: Arnie Nielsen from Dagmar. So that was a stronghold for the Democrat Party and that was in the Dagmar community.

BB: Why did you run as a Republican?
ES: Because I did talk to the Democrats about it and they told me that I would have to sign a pledge that I would go by the Democrat platform. I told them that I certainly would not sign a pledge for anything like that either to the Democrats or the Republican Party. I said, “I want to run as an individual to represent the people that elect me.”

BB: Philosophically, did you feel like you were being more comfortable as a Republican than a Democrat?

ES: Yes, because they told me that if I did run on a Democrat ticket, being they already had their candidate, who was Magnus Aasheim, that they would not support me.

BB: But you did consider running as a Democrat?

ES: Yes, but as a conservative Democrat.

BB: You were well in demand obviously when you ran for the legislature for the first time in 1966. Was there anything that’s in your background as a young person growing up that caused you become interested in politics or perhaps to help formulate your political philosophy?

ES: I guess it all goes back to the 1920s and ’30s when the Communist Party had elected candidates for the county commissioners, all of those offices. I thought this was awful because of their philosophy. I certainly don’t have a communistic philosophy. A lot of people that I worked with and played ball with got to know me personally, and they knew that I was not the kind of person that would go along just to get along. They knew I would do a good job representing them regardless of what ticket I ran on.

BB: So did you consider yourself, say in the 1950s, as a Republican? Do you remember if you voted for Eisenhower or Adlai Stevenson, anything like that?

ES: I guess the only Democrat president I voted for was Roosevelt. The other thing that it goes back to is that my father was a conservative Democrat. It ended up that the secretary for the Communist Party in Sheridan County then was elected by the Democrat Central Committee as their county chairman. My dad, that turned him off. He was a Jeffersonian Democrat, but after that happened...So pretty much after that I just felt that with that kind of leadership, they weren’t going to represent the people of Sheridan County because you don’t go clear off the deep end and think that you’re going to be able to do anything for the public.

BB: So your principles have always been on the conservative side.

ES: Yes, definitely on the conservative side because I found out very quickly against bending yourself to prosperity. That does concern me right now about our national offices and the way we have run the nation into debt. I think that’s wrong. I hope that it comes out all right, but I
feel that we’ve not run the country in the interests of our young people, my children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren.

BB: So the first time you ran for the legislature you were elected.

ES: No, I ran for the legislature on the Senate side in 1965.

BB: Oh in the ’64 elections?

ES: Yes. I lost by 58 votes.

BB: Who was your opponent?

ES: Lloyd Michels.

BB: I see. You were narrowly defeated by Lloyd Michels running as a Republican in ’64. Of course that was a good year for Democrats.

ES: Oh, yes. He was a well established and a fine individual. These people that came to talk to me thought that would be a good place to start. The way it turned out, it was for the best because then I was elected to the House and had more knowledge. Like I said, I found out one thing and that is don’t jump into the race until you (?) some people to vote for you.

BB: That probably was a real good strategy. So had you had much experience down in Helena before you were elected to the legislature?

ES: I went down there and testified on a Wheat Commission bill to set up a wheat commission and appoint a board. I testified at that hearing and it just so happened that the people who testified and chaired, the Grain Growers asked me if I would carry a bill in the 1967 session. I carried the bill and it was opposed by both Farm Bureau and Farmers Union.

Through the efforts of a lot of people, we got the bill passed. As a matter of fact, I had some people tell me that you don’t introduce legislation the first session because you’re supposed to learn the process. I said, “I thought the best way to learn the process would be to get in the middle of it. I’m not going to ensure that I won’t be here the next time so I thought I’d give it a shot now.”

BB: So the bill passed and was sent into (unintelligible)

ES: Yes, we got the bill passed even with the opposition of both Farm Bureau and Farmers Union.
BB: Now the 1967 session was the first session...There was a period of time in the late ‘60s and early ‘70s for the sales tax. That was the big issues in the legislature. It surfaced in 1967. Had you taken a position on the sales tax?

ES: The people that I represented, I would say two or three to one were opposed to a sales tax unless it was written also in the bill that you were going to get a certain amount of property tax relief. As far as I’m concerned, the property tax is more regressive than a sales tax because if you don’t pay your taxes for three years, you can lose your property.

If you don’t buy...don’t have the money to buy things, why you’re not going to pay much sales tax anyway. I just felt that the people that I asked to vote for me were—I would say—at least 75 percent opposed to a sales tax. So I felt that was my obligation. I know several legislators that I served with were defeated because of the sales tax issue.

BB: So Ed, was that a hunch? Your instinct was that the people here in your area were overwhelmingly against it?

ES: No, no, like I told you I was involved in all of those different things and organizations and also a ball player because after you have a ball game, a lot of time you end up in a bar and have a beer or two. It’s pretty easy.

BB: You know what people are thinking.

ES: I found out that by gosh, you can get a lot of good information from people. I don’t care whether it’s in church or in a bar. By far, a large majority of the people asked me, “Are you going to vote for a sales tax?”

I said, “What do you think?” Like I said, 75 percent of the people were opposed to the sales tax. So I told the people that, “I’m going out to represent you. I’m not going out there to represent the Republican Party or any other party.”

BB: I think because the sales tax was defeated in the state-wide referendum four years later by a three to one margin, your assessment was probably exactly correct.

ES: If you know, like I mentioned earlier, you’d better remember the people that elect you and what their thoughts were. You’re not representing yourself. You’re representing the people that elected you and the people that live in your district.

BB: I want to visit with you about your important involvement with the territorial integrity legislation, which happened in the ’71 session. Before we talk about your role as a legislator, let me just ask you briefly: You unseated an incumbent in 1966 who had served four terms in the legislature, who I think was probably—by most odds—probably would have considered the favorite in the race. You ran against him. You ran a close race for the state Senate two years
before. Were there any issues in the 1966 campaign that made it possible for you to win that victory? You mentioned you lined up important support on the—

ES: Yes and that was number one. It was Magnus Aasheim. I just well mentioned his name. He and I are still good friends. I like the fellow. The trouble was, at home he was a conservative, but when he went to the legislature—that was his own business, but when he went to the legislature, he voted very liberally. That, I think, is what kind of set the people off. I just pointed that out, where he and I differed. It was a very tough race. When they found out that it looked like they were losing, they called people “mugwumps” and everything else. You had to be on one side of the fence. You can’t sit in the middle of the fence. It was a very heated campaign.

BB: Did you appear jointly with Magnus Aasheim?

ES: Oh, sure. They had meetings and they had people interviewed giving them a chance to ask questions of the candidates, where you stood on particular issues. That’s another place where I found out that the people were very much opposed to a sales tax. That kind of took the bite out of their campaign. That is, they were opposed to a sales tax. One of the other things that we’re talking about—territorial integrity. There were a lot of people that knew what made it when you got to rural electric to the farms. We would have never got it if it were done through the cooperative. I know when they were putting in the Hi-Line and the poles up. It was the most beautiful site I’ve ever seen. That’s what made agriculture and we got electricity to the farms.

BB: So you were elected and you went over to Helena in 1967 session and you successfully carried the Grain Growers legislation, which was important agriculturally, that the Farm Bureau and the Farmers Union both opposed, which is really—

ES: Yes I remember Clyde Jarvis and Hank Wilson and that’s the only time I ever saw them visit. That was when they were trying to defeat the bill. Otherwise they were just at odds.

BB: So you unified the farm movement.

ES: Yes, and the other thing like I mentioned to a lot of the Republicans and as you will recall, I told them that when I get these issues out of the way because the opposition were defeating a lot of Republicans because they didn’t support territorial integrity legislation. My gosh. Why, I don’t know. We all discussed that a little more when we get into the territorial integrity legislation. These are the issues that I run on and that is the first time.

Then I continued to run on. I served three terms in the House and then I ran for governor in ’72. Then I served, after I was not elected that position, then I served for 14 years on the Senate Finance and Claims, which is a very important committee. I guess the thing that really surprised me and that was Francis Bardanouve, who was the leadership in the House, and C.R. Thiessen from Lambert, who was in the Senate. They were the two people that came and asked me to serve on the Senate Finance and Claims committee.
BB: Bardanouve, of course, was chairman when the Democrats had the majority of the House appropriations committee and Senator Thiessen was chairman of the finance committee. They both asked you to serve.

ES: Yes, they came to me and said, “We want you to serve.”

I said, “My, gosh. This is my first term in the Senate. You’re going to get yourselves in trouble with some Democrats because of them not being appointed on it. Why are you doing it?”

He said, “We feel that you got your head screwed on right and we want you to serve on the committee.” I did and I served then for 14 years. Then I also served on the subcommittee that set the budget for nine state agencies like the Department of Agriculture, Livestock, Fish and Game, and so forth.

BB: It made your responsibility of course.

ES: Yes and I really enjoyed it because we did a lot of good things on the finance committee.

BB: Now Ed, you served with many people in the legislature. Service in the legislature gives you an opportunity to do that. You meet people from all over the state. I can think for an example from the ‘67, you were a freshman in the House of Representatives and so was Pat Williams, who later went on to be a congressman. So you would have probably gotten to know him somewhat.

ES: Oh, yes. That’s a nice thing about it. The thing that I’ll always practice and not make partisan politics an issue, like different pieces of legislation you introduced. The one thing I never did in my 20 years and that was trade a vote. I had people who would come and say, “Will you vote for my bill and I’ll vote for your bills?”

I said, “No I don’t operate that way. I’ll explain my bill to you. You explain your bill to me. Then we’ll make a decision on how we’re going to vote.” That worked very well because my dad taught me when I was a young boy and that is your word is your bond. If your word isn’t any good, your name isn’t either. I don’t think anybody can say that I went back on my word. I was very careful.

BB: Any thoughts or impressions of any legislators that you served with that stand out in your mind particularly?

ES: Yes, there are so many of them that did. Jim Lucas was the Speaker of the House. He was a good legislator. The only thing that defeated him, and I tried to convince him not to introduce a sales tax, I’m sure Jim Lucas would have been the governor. He was very articulate, very sharp individual and there were a lot of different people I know that you got acquainted with and it

Edward Smith Interview, OH 396-031, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
would be hard to start naming very many by serving on the various committees. The other thing that when I served in the Senate, I served on the Senate Education Committee.

That was a real experience of how to work out the differences of properly funding. One of the big issues was that home school, religious schools, and public schools. It turned out that there are places for both. So I wasn’t around when I made my point as far as that letting these people, if they want to educate their own children, I had people come to that committee and testify that they had to take their children out of the public school and put them in a private school or a religious school. They said you couldn’t believe the improvements. So there’s a place for all of those and all we want to do is make sure that we educate our children. I didn’t have that opportunity when I grew up, but I certainly have seen to it that my four sons have certainly gotten their college educations.

BB: Ed, ’69 session...Your ’67 session you talked about the sales tax surfacing then, the Grain Growers legislation that you filed through the legislative process. Anything that’s occurred to you that might have happened in the ’69 session?

ES: Well, I did introduce a territorial bill in the ’69 session. Rural electrics weren’t really prepared at that particular time. By going through the process, both rural electrics and myself and several other people learned the process and how to approach it. The legislation they asked me to introduce, I think, went too far. As a matter of fact, they wanted to replace our REAs with Montana Power. I told them, “There has to be a middle ground.” That’s what we worked on.

BB: Now Ed, just for the benefit of people who will listen to our interview sometime in the future, maybe you’d better explain what territorial integrity means and is. What was in dispute? What was the issue in? What were you trying to solve?

ES: Well, what we tried to solve was the investor-owned utilities pretty much had a monopoly. If the rural electrics build in a line, if they decided that there was going to be good revenue from it, they could force rural electric to take out their line and they could build a line in and provide the electricity. Actually what the legislation did, and that is, they allowed the rural electrics if they were closer to a person that wanted electricity to do it at a lower cost than the investor-owned utility. The REA could build in the line. I think that’s one of the big things. I do have some of the things that—

BB: So you got a situation where it would cost the investor utility company more money to put in the line than it would the rural electric co-op. If that was the case, then the co-op would build the line instead of the investor-owned utility. It would work the other way as well.

ES: Yes, whoever was the closest and whoever wanted to put the power in could do it. I think that the big thing is, and like I said, actually and I talked to...I’m not sure who he was. He was a lobbyist and I talked to Bob Corette afterwards and he said, “Ed, we really fought you, but it
turned out to be the best thing in the world because down the road, we’re going to have plenty of environmental problems. We’re going to have problems of providing electricity to a lot of different people. Actually the legislation is good.” What the bill really said was that whoever could build power in the cheapest, which saves the consumer dollars, because somebody has to pay for the added cost, and I just felt that in all our debates, we spent at least 100 dollars on writing the bill so that it was what I felt was reasonable and something that I could support and the public could support.

As you can see, the key vote was 53 in favor of the amendment that I put on the bill. The Montana Power and the MDU and Pacific Power and Light, they had Boots Asbjornson, Representative Asbjornson from Lewistown sponsor a bill. The things that were in it, I didn’t think were fair. It still left Montana Power—or the investor-owned utilities—to have a monopoly. I don’t think that when it comes down to supplying the public, whether it be a water project or an electric project or road, whatever it is, it should be done at the least cost. It goes back to the people that use it.

With the amendment that I put in did pass the House 53 to 46 with four recorded as not voting and one absent. In the group, there were 53 legislators, 35 were Democrat and 18 were Republican. So we did get support from both sides of the aisle. The key issue was that as I mentioned earlier, whoever could provide that service...In our particular case, you know as well as I do, the people that bought stock in a big corporation would not allow them to go out and build power lines to all the farmers in the rural area because I think in some cases now, they had to build in power where I was the only customer at that particular time.

They had to build in three more miles of line. This was one of the arguments and I guess why some of the people opposed it, they felt that was probably a little bit too liberal. Like one fellow said, “You did have Communism up here and you’re sure this isn’t on the fringe of Communism and cooperative?” I think since then, Bob, it’s been proven that cooperatives by the farmer, it was a good...not only the farmer but even people in small communities by a cooperative, they have done wonders. We own it. We go there and we vote Board of Directors in and we’d carry a lot of the responsibility in providing that power.

I don’t know what we’d do without it. I have to tell you one thing. You see, they hired Everett Shuey as a lobbyist, who was when I was President of the Montana Wool Growers Association and he was our executive secretary. They hired him and I’m sure part of it—

BB: The Power Company hired him.

ES: Yes, the Power Company—the Montana Power Company—hired him to be their lobbyist. Actually, the way it all turned out, and you did have some experience and I’d just like you to mention what happened there, but it just turned out that it was the best thing in the world because it was Everett Shuey and I that negotiated that bill.
BB: But it was a hot issue. My first session in the legislature was ’71 when you had that amendment and just in background, you’d introduced this bill in ’69 and it had been a festering problem for a long time. In fact, I—

ES: Yes for five sessions.

BB: And I was virtually unfamiliar with it because it hadn’t been an issue up in the northwestern part of the state like it had been in other parts of the state. So I came to the legislature with almost no knowledge of this issue, but it had been an explosive issue in other parts of the state including your own. I guess in some cases, there were even competing power lines on opposite sides of the same county road.

ES: On the same side of the street, different sides of the street.

BB: It was such a bizarre situation that there needed to be a solution of some kind to it. The laws, as they were written, tended to favor the investor-owned utility company. So they would have to give up quite a bit if there was a change in the law. So they fought it fiercely. In 1969 when you introduced your bill, obviously you telegraphed a signal at that time. You were serious about it and you probably reintroduced the bill again in the next legislative session. So at that point, as I remember the story, the background was that some of the Montana Power Company people and perhaps other investor-owned utility people got together, I think, with the Sun River Electric Co-op.

ES: That could be.

BB: Fergus Co-op.

ES: Fergus, yes.

BB: Fergus, okay. One or two but maybe just one co-op and they worked out an agreement, which was the bill that Representative Asbjornson ended up introducing. So when you got to the legislature, you of course introduced the bill on the same subject in 1969. You got over there and looked at the bill that Asbjornson had and thought, “Gosh, this is really inadequate. This isn’t a fair compromise. This isn’t at all what needs to be done to put this problem behind us.”

So you decided to amend Asbjornson’s bill to make it into a more realistic compromise from your point of view to legislate a real solution to the problem.

Then the story that you mentioned, when you and I visited about before, that was my first session 1971. I was going to be one of the legislators who read all of the bills. So my desk just looked like a big white haystack. I was coming in early in the morning and I get out the code books because the bills would always refer back to sections of the law. It was so bewildering
and so discouraging and so overwhelming. I wasn’t making very important progress. Of course, I learned better as years went on that you generally don’t need copies of the bills until they’ve passed a committee because you may never see them. If they are introduced in a committee and they are killed in the committee, you never see them. So there’s no point in reading a bunch of bills that will never see the light of day. I didn’t realize that at the time.

So I had come into the House Chamber I suppose at six-thirty or seven o’clock in the morning. I was sitting trying to read through this haystack of bills on my desk and the only other person in the House chamber that morning was you. You were seated, working at your desk and this fellow who I didn’t recognize came in and sat down next to you and you and he acknowledged each other. Then he sat next to you for what seemed like for a very long period of time. It was probably a minute, but it was an obviously uncomfortable situation between the two of you.

Then he broke the silence by saying, “Are you going to amend that bill of Asbjornson’s on second reading today?”

You said something to the effect of, “Yes I’m going to try. I’m working on the amendment right now.”

He said, “Don’t do it. I’m warning you. We’ll kill the amendment and we will make trouble for you if you do that. This is a big deal to us and I’m warning you, don’t attempt to amend that bill.”

You said, “Well look, you can warn me as much as you want to, but I’m going to give her a try and if I succeed, fine. If I don’t, I guess you’ll win. You can count on me doing the amendment today if I can get it on the bill.”

He said, “You can’t say you haven’t been warned because this is important to us and we’re going to fight this really hard. I’m warning you that you’ll be sorry if you do this.”

Then he got up and walked out. I was shocked. So I went up to you and I said, “Who in the heck was that?”

You said, “Oh, he’s an old friend of mine. He used to work for us when I was in the Wool Growers Association.”

I said, “What’s his name?”

You said, “His name is Everett Shuey. Now he’s working for the Montana Power Company.”

I said, “How can he threaten you like that?”

Edward Smith Interview, OH 396-031, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
You said, “Well, I don’t know if he was really threatening me or not. He’s new at this job and he wants to succeed. It’s a big deal to him,” and that sort of thing.

Then I said, “Well I think it was pretty disgusting what I just heard him say to you, warning you and ‘you’ll be sorry’ that sort of thing. I don’t know what the heck your bill is or what the amendment is or anything about it, but you can sure count on my vote.”

Then later that afternoon on Saturday afternoon, you went ahead and proposed your amendment and I was one of the people who supported you. The vote was fairly close, as you indicated. One of the members of my legislative delegation, the fellow who was presiding at the time I think probably must have voted against your amendment because I think he left the board open. We vote electronically. So generally what happens is the person who is presiding over what’s called the committee of the whole, the debate stage in the legislative process says something like, “The question now arises on the motion of Senator Smith to amend Senate Bill or House Bill number 26 or whatever number.”

ES: Number five.

BB: Number five. “As many as in favor will vote aye. Those in opposed will vote nay. Has every member voted? Does any member wish to change his or her vote?” Sometimes there’s a long pause there to give people time to change their votes or to get people in from the bathroom or from the cloak room or something to get to their desk to vote. I think there was an unusual amount of time because the person presiding was looking at the electronic voting board and the side he wanted to win was short on votes. During that period of time, which was probably just a few seconds, one of the members from my legislative delegation came over and said, “Bob, change your vote. You’ve got to change your vote!”

I said, “I’m not going to change my vote.” Then it was just seconds after that he said, “Every member voted. Does any member wish to change his or her vote? The secretary will record the vote.” It turned out the voting machine. Then I think what happened then was the legislature first didn’t meet on Sunday, but on Monday, we had what was called the “third-reading vote” or the final vote on the bill. Then miraculously it was a green board. It was unanimous.

Every single person—the 46 that voted against your bill, your amendment on Saturday—all voted for the bill as amended on Monday. It passed over to the state Senate who, as I understand, it also passed by a unanimous margin or close to it and signed into the law by the governor. So it was a big victory. Since then, I don’t think there’s been...I think that same law is completely intact, isn’t it?

ES: Pretty much, yes. There have been a few changes and the thing that I appreciate in that was the rural electrics, they would have liked to have gotten more, but they did not make an attempt, as long as I was in the legislature, but they have made a few changes since. They are minor changes. The original intent is still there.
BB: It still is there. So really what you accomplished was to end that war that had been festering for ten or more years.

ES: There’s more to it than that, Bob, now. On Sunday afternoon, I felt that they were going to make—over the weekend—they were going to make a real run at—

BB: Changing some of the votes on Sunday.

ES: And kill the amendment. On Sunday afternoon I got very concerned so I went and met in the motel in the room of Rod Hansen who was lobbying on the bill and Willis McKeon from Malta who was the attorney for the rural electric. I explained to them what I was afraid was going to happen and I asked them, “What do you think of me doing some things?” I explained to them first of all, and I did it because I wanted witnesses, I called Jim Lucas who was Speaker of the House. I said, “How are you going to vote on the bill?”

He said, “I haven’t made up my mind yet.”

I said, “I’ll tell you one thing, I’m going to expose this whole thing because I had a fellow come and meet with me and make a very substantial offer if I would not go through with the amendment.”

As a matter of fact, also, I don’t know whether it was a set up but I was in the Colonial bar and lounge one evening and they have dance floor there. A very charming young lady came up and wanted to know if I would dance with her. I said, “Well I’m going to warn you now that I’m not the best dancer in the world.”

She said, “That’s fine.”

So we go out on the dance floor and start up a conversation with her. I said, “Do you work here in Helena? Are you secretary for one of the legislative committees?”

She said, “No I’m a prostitute. We can go to your place or my place.”

I kind of floored me at first and I thought to myself, “My god.” I said to her, “I’ve only been away from home for five days. I don’t think I need your services.”

She said to me, “Go to hell you asshole!” She left me on the dance floor. I don’t know whether it was a setup or not. I also told them that this person met me one evening in the Jorgenson’s.

BB: Not the prostitute but another one.
ES: Yes, this was another person. He said, “This bill is going to cost us a lot of money. You don’t have to introduce it.”

BB: You’re talking about your amendment?

ES: Yes, my amendment because an amendment is what we felt made the bill. Anyway, he said, “It will cost us probably 200 or 250,000 dollars. You don’t have to introduce the bill you know.”

I said, “I don’t operate that way.”

He said, “Every man has his price. What’s yours, if that isn’t enough?”

I said, “Sir, you have found a person that doesn’t have a price. How could I go home looking at constituents and looking at my family and know that I sold out because of some dollars.”

I told Jim Lucas—

BB: You didn’t know who that was?

ES: No, he may have introduced himself, but that wouldn’t have made any difference. He wouldn’t have given me his right name anyway. I told him that I don’t have a price and the next day I told Jim Lucas that of all the things that they had done to try...He also offered me property and things like this. So I told him I was going to expose all of that. Then he gave me the telephone number of Montana Power to get in touch with. So I called the number that he gave me and Everett Shuey then called me back.

I gave him a number. It was the number of the motel. I said, “Call me back and let me know.” He said, “If you don’t talk to anybody between now and six o’clock tonight, we’ll give you where we stand on the issue, whether we’ll support it or not.” So I said, “I hope I can talk to my wife.” Anyway, they called me back at six o’clock and said, “if you will oppose any amendments to the bill, we’ll give you a green board on Monday.”

So I said to Rod Hansen and to Willis McKeon that were in the motel room, “What do you think of that?”

They said, “Fine. I never knew that you had that much on them.” They didn’t want this. I had a reputation of having credibility. Everett Shuey knew that wouldn’t work even with the people that he worked with all those years.

Everett Shuey then met with me at six o’clock that evening at Jorgenson’s and we had dinner together. He said, “Ed, I’m glad this is all over. I hope we’re still friends.” To this day, we’ve been good friends and he said that, “If you’ll oppose the amendments,” which I did—
BB: There were further amendments to change it?

ES: Oh, sure it was some of the people that wanted the whole bundle.

BB: This would have happened over in the Senate right? They would have tried to amend it further in the Senate?

ES: Yes. As a matter of fact, C.R. Thiessen was on the state board and said that, “After we get some amendments on it, it will be a good bill.”

I said to C.R. Thiessen, “If you introduce one amendment to it, another amendment to it, I’m going to vote to kill the bill because the rural electrics agreed that if they got this, that was good enough.”

BB: You know Ed, I had a similar visit with Gordon McOmber on this same issue. He was vitally interested in it as you were.

ES: He carried it in the Senate.

BB: He remembered a meeting of some kind that took place that included both you and him. I don’t know who else was there, but I think it was after the bill had passed over to the Senate from the House as amended by you. You laid down the law in the meeting and said, “Look, the bill has to be as it is. It can’t be changed or amended in one way or another. It’s a take it or leave it deal and it’s got to go the way it is.”

ES: We got all the things we wanted and if it wasn’t, why does it work so well? Like I was mentioning earlier, after that, Everett Shuey called me up one day and he said, “I would like to go grouse hunting up in your area. I’ve got a fellow that I want to bring along.” I said, “Who’s that?”

He said, “Bob Corette.”

BB: Of course, Bob Corette had been the lobbyist for the Montana Power Company. He was basically Shuey’s boss.

ES: Oh, sure. I said, “That’s sure fine.”

He said, “It may hurt you politically if the people find out that I and Bob Corette came up and went hunting.”

As a matter of fact, they stayed a couple of nights here at our place. I’ll never forget the evening. My wife had a roast turkey and had a big meal for them and as lobbyists do, they’re
good to brag. He was telling my wife such a wonderful dinner that she prepared and I looked at Bob and I said, “You know those are...They don’t look too bad either.”

It ended up Everett Shuey and I were the best of friends. I found out one thing in politics, you can disagree but you don’t have to be disagreeable. That’s the way it worked and so many people in the wool wars thought that Everett Shuey and I would never be friends. It never affected our friendship whatsoever. I realized he had a job to do. I had a job to do. I let the chips fall where they may. It just so happened that I think we came up with something reasonable and that’s the way it went.

BB: So that of course was a huge victory for you and it helped—

ES: For the people, there were a lot of rural electric users.

BB: For the rural electric users across the state and their publication, you have a copy with their...before we were having our visit, features you on the front page. So that was in the household. Many rural Montanans all across Montana and [it] made you a pretty wellknown figure in the legislature.

ES: They knew that I was going to stand up and represent the people that elected me.

BB: So then also in that same session in 1971, there was a protracted battle that turned into an impasse over a proposed sales tax. What do you remember about that?

ES: There was lots of pressure put onto me by—

BB: You first voted on the sales tax in ’67 and voted against it. It surfaced again in ’71.

ES: Yes, and again, like I mentioned earlier in our comments, and that is that when I found out the majority of the people were opposed to it, I know a lot of good legislators got beat the next election because of the sales tax. One of them was Jim Lucas. Jim Lucas, I tried my best to talk to Jim Lucas and tell him, “Well, it’s going to destroy you politically.” If Lucas hadn’t come out in favor and carried the sales tax bill, I’m sure Jim Lucas would have been governor. He was a very astute individual.

BB: I think he realizes too that his association with the sales tax was probably fatal to him politically for the ambitions he may have had.

ES: As a matter of fact, Jim Lucas told me one time, “I sure wish I had listened to you.” Let’s face it, being on the board of directors of the Montana Wool Growers Association, I served on the board of directors for the Montana Grain Growers Association and a lot of associations, you get a feeling of how the people feel on different issues. You don’t do anything but carry out the
wishes of the people. Then it gets back to electricity. Right now, we just got Congress to pass an energy bill. Look at how long this took.

We’ve got to find ways to provide cheaper fuel because now like in our farmer / ranch operation as a matter of fact, I just had a fellow deliver propane because the price has gone 1.10 dollars a gallon for propane. He said that diesel fuel was two dollars. At the price of wheat, and we have—to give you another example—we have two diesel pumps pumping irrigation. We have one electric one. At the time I put in the diesel pumps, it cost too much to get the line built in. Now it had been cheaper if I had built the line in because the diesel fuel is two dollars gallon and I filled it up four years ago for 51 cents a gallon.

So you can see how our cost has escalated. The grain price doesn’t increase that much to make up the difference. Can you imagine if we hadn’t been provided electricity? It would have been a big open. Look at the products that the consumers spent their money on. Hot water heaters, dryers, washers, it’s just marvelous and after I’ve seen what electricity did in our operation, in my, I couldn’t do anything but put up my best fight. I know I was so busy on the bill, but it was a big joke around the Helena capitol. That was that, “Who does Smith think he is taking on Montana Power?” Well, it just happened that they stubbed their toe and because of that, we got the legislation passed.

BB: That same session as we’ve discussed, that was a big story in the newspapers statewide and a significant piece of legislation that passed that you were principally involved with. In that same session, the sales tax drug on, as I recall while I know then under the 1889 constitution, which was still in effect then. The legislature met for 60 calendar days. So at the end of the 60 days, the legislature hadn’t balanced the budget because it didn’t have the money to do it.

They then made cuts sufficient to balance the budget. The Democrats, who had the majority in the Senate, favored an increase in the income tax to raise the money to balance the budget and comply with the constitution. The Republicans felt that the sales tax was still something we needed. So they preferred if we were going to have new money that we have it generated from a sales tax. The Republicans had a majority in the House. So there was a stalemate that resulted in that legislative session lasting something like 107 days and not concluding until June sometime or other.

You continued your opposition to the sales tax. Your analysis is, and I think it would be shared by Jim Lucas, that the way the sales tax played out, which was ultimately that Republicans wouldn’t give and neither would the Democrats. So the proposal to raise the income tax by 35 [40] percent, which was the Democrats’ proposal, or have a two percent sales tax. Those measures would go on the ballot side by side and the people would decide what to do.

By a nearly three to one majority, the people voted to raise the income tax 35 [40] percent instead of to impose a two percent sales tax. The referendum was so overwhelming that it discouraged Jim Lucas from running for governor. There was another big issue in that legislative
session, which was a huge one, I think, in your life. That was executive reorganization that was proposed by Governor Anderson. What do you remember about that?

ES: Well, I vehemently opposed it, rigorously opposed it for the simple reason that I like grassroots boards. That gave the governor the power to appoint the director of each of the state agencies. I think it’s turned out to be a horrible mistake.

BB: Now Ed, what did the old system do?

ES: The old system was that you had boards, grassroots boards that served on the major decisions for that agency. I know right now I don’t think there are any boards that are really active. The governor appoints the director and then the director makes the decision.

BB: The governor appointed these grassroots citizens’ boards before and there were a lot of them?

ES: Oh, yes.

BB: And so the governor still appoints boards, but there aren’t near as many. Your concern was that many of the boards were eliminated, is that right?

ES: Oh, yes.

BB: Maybe scores of them were completely done away with and some of the remaining ones were consolidated and then they were placed in one of 20 departments. The governor appointed the director of each department. So your concern was that this had really lost a lot of its grassroots, is that right?

ES: Oh yes. It really did.

BB: It put the governor in more of a direct—

ES: Dictatorial authority because if he appoints just like the director of the agency of reappraisal property, that was one of the things that no other state in the nation allows a state to appraise your property because every county is different. Every county has different income. They have different costs than others. I will admit, I think that the Board of Equalization was doing a poor job, but it sure didn’t help by just...the only agency that survived, and that was the Department of Livestock. The appointed commission members appoint the director. That’s the way it should have been. They tried different times after that to change that to livestock and agriculture. A lot of people have seen that it didn’t work like...they were promised it would. At least we’ve kept the Department of Livestock separate.

BB: This idea was sold, I think, by Governor Anderson under the slogan, “Twenty is plenty.”
ES: Yes.

BB: The idea was efficiency. We need to streamline our state government. We need to make it more efficient. We need to eliminate a lot of these unnecessary boards and bureaus and things that really don’t belong and are costly. That was the—

ES: Twenty is plenty.

BB: Twenty is plenty was the argument. So it prevailed in the legislature. You argued against it, but it prevailed in the legislature and it was signed into law by Governor Anderson. Now did that have anything to do with motivating you to run for governor against Anderson? We didn’t know whether he was going to run. It turned out he didn’t run. That was obviously something you had a strong feeling about in opposition to him.

ES: Executive reorganization and a procedures act, Administrative Procedures Act, which was implemented. I would say that possibly the reason that so many people had encouraged me to run for governor was because of my position on the Wheat Commission—to set up a Wheat Commission that (unintelligible) and then they represented the grower. They’ve done an excellent job. The other one, to take on Montana Power and won, I think that was the reason. And I know [Duane “Doc”] Bowler, the editor of the Billings Gazette, wrote quite an article and he said that at least Ed Smith has proved that he isn’t controlled by a big corporation. I think that was probably that so many people asked me to run. I thought, “Well if there’s that many people that asked me to run, why, I’ll give it a whirl.”

BB: Ed, at the beginning of the ’71 session, had the thought occurred to you to run for governor?

ES: No, not really, not at all.

BB: That kind of played out over that ’71 session I think.

ES: Yes, it was after that. That’s the reason so many encouraged me to go ahead and do it. I had a lot of support. I guess one of the things that did disturb me was that a lot of Republicans wouldn’t support me because they didn’t vote for a sales tax. If it came out for a sales tax, it could just as well after that...You see, the Republican Party didn’t support me because I wasn’t the kind of person that would fall in line.

BB: Because most Republicans supported a sales tax. Most Republicans didn’t vote for a territorial integrity bill and so there was the feeling that you were a little bit too much of a maverick.
ES: Yes, I guess so and they figured that maybe I was some kind of a liberal, which as you know, I am certainly not a liberal. I'll tell you that. Having a farm and a ranch operation I think proves that.

BB: But gosh, just think about it, five or six years before, you were a farmer/rancher up here in the Plentywood area. You served in the legislature three whirlwind terms. People, I think for a long time, just assumed that Jim Lucas would someday be governor.

ES: He could have been.

BB: He could have been probably.

ES: I would have supported him.

BB: I think he had been planning for several years to run. Then his situation just collapsed. Did you think, though, that you may end up having to oppose Lucas in the primary?

ES: Oh, no.

BB: He might still run, or did you know that he wasn’t going to run?

ES: I knew he wasn’t going to run, yes. The only other person that was running in that particular time was Frank Dunkle who was—

BB: Okay, tell about Frank Dunkle.

ES: Frank Dunkle was the director of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. There were a lot of things that went on. See—

BB: Frank Dunkle started out as being viewed as one of the early environmentalists I think. Would you say that?

ES: Oh partially, yes. The other thing—

BB: He had been director of Fish, Wildlife, and Parks in Anderson’s administration, a Democratic administration.

ES: Yes and before.

BB: Oh, he kept over from Babcock?

ES: Yes, and then the other thing was, in those 20 years that I served in the legislature, I served 18 years on the Legislative Finance Committee that set the budget and reviewed the budget for
Fish, Wildlife, and Parks. So I had a pretty good idea of how it would run. There was a lot of things that went on there that certainly I didn’t think he would have made a fit governor. Again, that’s—

BB: Were there issues that surfaced in that primary?

ES: Not too many.

BB: How did you raise the money? What a daunting task to raise the money for a common guy that’s a farmer, you know.

ES: I had so many people that encouraged me to run and they were the ones that raised the money. They had a fondue at the Blue Moon one night, and I forget how many thousand dollars—

BB: Where is the Blue Moon?

ES: The Blue Moon here in Plentywood. It was the largest crowd that was ever at the Blue Moon in their lifetime that came out and supported me for governor. Some of them were even from Canada and North Dakota. As a matter of fact, over in North Dakota here, they had a jar for campaign funds for Ed Smith. The people really came out and supported me and I really appreciate it happened. I was disappointed that I didn’t win because they made an investment that didn’t come through.

BB: It was close.

ES: Yes, it was.

BB: You carried most of the counties in the state. You carried you own county by, what was the percentage for Sheridan County?

ES: There was supposedly a strong Democrat county and also one time a Communist party, but I got 86.3 percent of the vote in my own county. I beat Judge in Lewis and Clark County by 1,000 votes.

BB: Tom Judge was your opponent in the general election. You beat him in his own county.

ES: Yes.

BB: As well as carrying your own county by an overwhelming majority. Did you have a strategy in the campaign? Was there a—
ES: The campaign—being I couldn’t get support from the Republican Party and it was hard to get a committee organized. I know that didn’t work good because the news media came out and said that Smith is changing chairmen of his campaign committee like a lady does when she changes shoes.

BB: You did have more than one chairman of your campaign committee?

ES: Oh yes. Socks started out and then we ended up with...As a matter of fact, the Democrat wanted said, “We aren’t going to give you any support unless you hire this California group,” which was another thing that wasn’t the right thing to do because you should be able to—

BB: Your first campaign chairman was Socks Braths (?) who was a lobbyist for the retail department stores here in the state. Then he was replaced by whom?

ES: Oh, I forget the name now. Well, it ended up in a California firm.

BB: Socks was actually running your campaign and then who suggested to you that you get a—

ES: The Republican Party said, “We won’t support your candidacy unless you hire this Californian.”

BB: It was a professional outfit.

ES: Yes, professional. I guess they figured that we weren’t professional enough.

BB: They recommended a particular company that turned out to be from California. You feel that maybe that might have been a mistake?

ES: Oh, yes, it was definitely a mistake because with as many people as we’ve got in the state of Montana, we sure should have been able to find a chairman that would have—

BB: What they did was produce your television and radio spots?

ES: And let’s face it, Judge was very articulate when it came to spots.

BB: Judge owned an advertising company.

ES: That’s what I’m saying. This country boy didn’t have that kind of stuff. Again, I think it’s even gotten worse as far as to whoever can get on television. If I was as articulate as Governor Marc Racicot, it wouldn’t have been any problem in winning the election.

BB: Now did you have a slogan or anything? Did you focus on a particular issue?

Edward Smith Interview, OH 396-031, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
ES: Oh, on a lot of different issues, yes. Still I was a people’s candidate and I guess some of them thought that sounded a little bit liberal to a people’s candidate because I guess that’s what some of the more liberal people support, and that is people. I guess every person in the state of Montana, as far as I’m concerned is “people,” and if you want to be a candidate, you want to be the candidate for the majority of the people who live in the state of Montana.

I think I would have done that and could have done that. The other thing we’ve lost from government is common sense and our bureaucracy has supposed to have been reduced by executive reorganization. We have more people involved in state government than we ever had as far as bureaucracy is concerned. I talk to different people. The bureaucracies are now harassing people. They aren’t representing people. They are harassing them. I have a son that’s county planner in Plentywood and he told me that now the county is going to open up a gravel pit.

If we don’t have a gravel pit, then we can’t gravel our roads or pave roads. He said that in a certain radius around the gravel pit he has to write letters to every person that resides in that area and get their permission or get their ideas on whether it’s going to be a detriment to it or what. If we keep going the way we’re going, we’ll have so many regulations. I know that (unintelligible) when I was on the finance committee and then I served for several years with Francis Bardanouve in the Legislative Finance Committee, which is a watchdog.

BB: That’s the interim committee—the state finances between legislative sessions.

ES: Yes, we’re the watchdog committee. I served on that for many years. Francis Bardanouve and I were the ones that organized it. The thing about is that if you just turn it over to these state agencies and they have their director, they’d just run away with the thing. The other thing that we always came up with so many supplementals. Francis Bardanouve and I introduced legislation that disallowed supplementals. I think it helped a lot.

BB: (unintelligible) supplementals?

ES: Supplemental is when they overspend the budget.

BB: So you come back in the next session of the legislature and see that the government has spent a little more than they appropriated for.

ES: Yes, and the session before we put them, they exceeded their budgets by 16 million dollars.

BB: So then a bill would be passed which would contain supplementals to basically—

ES: It would stop their supplementals.

BB: So you stopped the supplementals.
ES: Yes, we did. That’s why I say by working together, whether you be a Democrat or a Republican, it’s the only way that you can really run the state decent. I hate to see partisan politics when it comes to that. Sure, you have to have the two political parties, but at least there are balances that you’d better take a look at.

BB: Do you feel that there’s a little more partisan politics now, perhaps, than there was a few years ago? There’s always been partisan politics.

ES: Yes, and there should be because you have a two-party system. I would say I’m not too sure. I’m not too sure where Schweitzer, how it will all come out. He’s got a lot of publicity, and I guess the one thing that...The one piece of publicity he got was to come home and say that he had...I don’t know what. He had to take a bath to get away from the stench of the lobbyists—

BB: Back in Washington, D.C.

ES: Yes, when he went to Washington D.C. I think that was a terrible statement to make for the simple reason that we need lobbyists. It doesn’t mean you have to agree with all the lobbyists, as you know. You’re supposed to make your own decisions. We have lobbyists that are representing agriculture, rural electrics, industry; all of those things. I only had one person in my 20 years lie to me, and that person when I reported it, the next day he was not a lobbyist anymore. They can’t lie to you for the simple reason that you get the information from both sides. Once you do, it’s your job then to make your decision on which way you’re going to vote.

BB: Now, Ed, you served with several governors during your career in politics. Maybe I’ll just ask you go comment briefly on Governor Anderson, Judge, Schwinden, Stephens. You served also in the legislature extensively with Governor Stephens. What are your thoughts on Governor Anderson?

ES: I would like to start with Tim Babcock.

BB: Oh good, fine. Tim Babcock was governor when you came there.

ES: As a matter of fact he even gave Lou Perry from Malta and I a plaque. I’ll never forget—

BB: Representative Lou Perry was a Republican from Malta.

ES: Yes, and I’ll never forget I got a message after we got the Wheat Commission bill passed in 1967 and he wanted me to come down and meet with him. I thought, “Sure, he’s going to veto it.” So I went down there and said to him, “Well, what’s up?”

He said, “You big devil, you wanted that bill so bad, now that you’ve got it passed you picked the committee members and see that it works.”
So I said, “I’d be happy to.” Tim Babcock asked me to pick the commission members—

BB: Which was what the governor would ordinarily do.

ES: Which he would do automatically himself, but no sir. I really appreciated Tim Babcock because of that. So I picked five members on the Wheat Commission and it just worked out excellent. He told me afterwards, “Gosh I’m sure glad that I had you pick them because you knew these people that we could work with.” They’ve done an excellent job.

BB: So it was important for him as the chief executive in the state for the commission to succeed and it was important to you that it succeed.

ES: In the interest to succeed because I can recall it’s our biggest industry.

BB: That sounds like it was a really good decision on his part. So you had a pretty good experience with him generally?

ES: Oh, yes, very good experience.

BB: And then Governor Anderson?

ES: Well I can’t say too much about him. At least he did sign the territorial integrity bill. I have to give him credit there. I will say that he wasn’t our best governor.

BB: Governor Judge?

ES: No, all the different things I heard and I didn’t ever say anything about it. And just like some of the things that’s happened since that he had some problems.

BB: Governor Schwinden?

ES: A good governor.

BB: Did you ever have any dealings with him, any conversations?

ES: Yes, I did one time. That was on an oil well site in Sheridan County. It was up here by Westby. He, at that particular time, was the director for the State Lands Department. I told the committee that I didn’t appreciate...I contacted Schwinden, who was the director of State Lands. The fellow up there wanted a road rerouted so it didn’t go right down through the middle of his grain field. I talked to Schwinden about it and he said, “We need those oil wells for state income. As far as I’m concerned, the oil company can build the roads wherever they please.”

Edward Smith Interview, OH 396-031, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
I brought that out to committee and when he came out of the committee he shook his finger in my face and said, “You shouldn’t have said those things.”

I said, “Mr. Schwinden, don’t you ever shake your finger in my face again, or you’re going to lose it.” That’s the only—

BB: This was while he was governor?

ES: No, he was director.

BB: Director of the Department of State Lands. So this would have been...and that was in probably the first Judge administration?

ES: Yes, it was the Judge administration.

BB: He was Lieutenant Governor in the second Judge administration.

ES: Yes. Outside of that, I had a very good relationship with Schwinden.

BB: Because you served in the state Senate while he was governor.

ES: Yes, and when they had the farewell party for George McCallum and I on our retirement, as a matter of fact, Governor Schwinden was invited to come and make some remarks.

BB: I remember that too.

ES: Stephens did a good job. As a matter of fact, I was the assistant to majority floor leader, as you remember, with Governor Stephens.

BB: You were whip when Stephens was minority leader or majority leader or something?

ES: Yes, majority leader of the Senate.

BB: Now you knew Stephens well. Any thoughts, any stories or—

ES: He did a good job. There was one thing, though, that he got a lot of static for and that was when he got a limousine that was going to escort him around. Oh, some people were very irritated. Stephens asked me to be a part of his administration. I told him that I had enough of Helena and that’s why I was resigning. Stephens was the one that came to me and said, “Now that you’re retired from the legislature, I want you to serve on a commission.”

I said, “Which one?”
He said, “Fish, Wildlife, and Parks and the Department of Transportation.” I knew that I could do a lot more for the State of Montana by being a commission member for the Highway Transportation Department. It did turn out just great. I served eight years on that commission. We got a lot of work done. We got the department kind of straightened out a little bit. Like I say, we’ve seen to it that the dollars were spent, the taxpayers and highway users paid in and the GUW fees...It was used to a good cause. We got a lot of roads built.

BB: So you were in the Senate from when until when?

ES: I was in from 1975 to ’89. I retired in ’87, but my term ran until ’89.

BB: Okay so—

ES: I was out the two years from ’72 and ’73.

BB: So ’74 you were elected to the Senate and stayed there until ’88.

ES: Eighty-nine.

BB: Yes, the election of ’88.

ES: Yes.

BB: Then you didn’t come back. You didn’t serve in the Senate.

ES: No, the ’89 election. I was out the ’88 session. See, my term actually expired at the end of 1988.

BB: So then you started service on the Highway Commission right after that?

ES: Yes and I served eight years on that.

BB: How long are the terms on the Highway Commission?

ES: Four years. Stephens appointed me the first time and Racicot the second time.

BB: Okay, so you served two four-year terms. Did you ever meet Mike Mansfield?

ES: Yes. As a matter of fact, in Washington, D.C. I also met Metcalf. I also had the opportunity on a couple of occasions to sit down and visit with several of the presidents and Governor Reagan.

Edward Smith Interview, OH 396-031, Archives and Special Collections, Mansfield Library, University of Montana-Missoula.
BB: Ronald Reagan?

ES: Yes.

BB: Did you support Ronald Reagan against Gerald Ford in ’76?

ES: Oh, yes. Then the other person that I met was George Bush when he was president and visiting Billings. My wife and I had a picture taken with him. Then also Pat Nixon when I was campaigning for governor. I campaigned in the Billings area with her. She was a very nice and petite person.

BB: So you were particularly impressed by Governor Reagan at the time?

ES: Yes. Then I have three sisters and a brother that live in California and they had very good reports and thought he did an excellent job as governor.

BB: And you had a visit with Senator Mansfield in Washington D.C., and Metcalf?

ES: Yes, Mansfield was a real good statesman. I won’t even comment on Metcalf.

BB: Okay how about Congressman Jim Battin?

ES: Yes, as a matter of fact, I was on the tour with Swift and Company to packing plants and into the different places. As a matter of fact, we went to Washington D.C., and I had the opportunity to introduce Jim Battin on the House floor.

BB: Oh, you got down on the House floor for the U.S House of Representatives?

ES: Yes.

BB: What did you do there?

ES: They had me introduce my congressman from my state. There were about 25 of us that were on the Swift and Company tour, the meatpacking company. We were looking at feedlots and packing houses and even the retail stores like Macy’s at retail. So when we went there then, each of the people that was on the tour got to introduce their congressman on the House or Senate floor.

BB: Where were you, up in the gallery?

ES: No, we were down on the floor just like you do here.

BB: Wow, I didn’t know they did that.
ES: Let’s face it: He served on the Appropriation Committee and that’s a powerful committee because you can...Once you have the strings, just like serving in the Montana legislature on Finance and Claims, you have a lot more authority in directing the agency because we’re the ones that set the budget.

BB: Congressman Ron Marlenee?

ES: Ronnie did a good job. The only problem with Ron Marlenee was that after he was there for a while, he kind of lost touch with the people. I know I talked to him a time or two and he said, “I know all about it.”

I said, “Well, you’ll know all about it when the next election comes around.” You don’t forget the people. You don’t forget the people that sent you there.

BB: The old saying, “Take care of the people, they’ll take care of you. If you don’t take care of the people, they’ll take care of you.”

ES: I think that Ron did a good job. Rehburg’s doing a good job. Burns is doing a good job. When they get up on these appropriation committees, the same way with Max Baucus, I have never campaigned against Max Baucus. When I served on the Department of Transportation, Baucus and Burns worked together and they got a lot of money for the state of Montana. So the people that are doing a good job for you, you don’t turn them out.

BB: Let me think, oh, Pat Williams defeated Ron Marlenee when they ran against each other. Pat had been the congressman from the western district and Ron from the eastern district and they were paired together when we lost one of the congressman. Pat won the election. Any thoughts on that? You knew them both by serving in the legislature with them.

ES: Oh, yes, but the thing about it...the thing that I found out, the resources of the state in eastern Montana are basic resources. The population’s in the west. You probably heard me say on the Senate floor that you never knew where eastern Montana was until we found coal and oil. That’s a fact. They never knew where we were at. Even when I went on the commission, we hadn’t been getting our share of roads in eastern Montana and I saw to it that we did. The thing about it is, and the same way in North Dakota, their population is in the east and their resources are in the west. They’re having the same problem we’re having in the state of Montana.

BB: Ed, we’ve got about five minutes left in our interview before the disc expires. So I’ll just give you an opportunity now for something I’ve left out that I perhaps should have asked you about, something we’d like to cover. That would perhaps be energy. We haven’t talked much about that. Perhaps it would be your experience on the Highway Commission or anything in the legislature, anything you’d like to say to conclude with what you’d like to talk about.
ES: Well, I would say that I appreciate the people allowing me to have the opportunity to represent them in the legislature and also on the Highway Commission. I made a lot of friends. I got a lot of things done. I know that there was a debate on whether or not I should be reappointed by Governor Martz on the commission again. There were 17 counties in my commission district. Every county commissioner, Democrat and Republican, every mayor, every city council, all supported me.

So I just felt that I should make a run at it and continue to serve them, which I did. I appreciate Racicot reappointing me. Like I said earlier, there are so many things that you can do for the people if you’re willing to do it. I think the thing that we didn’t appreciate was some people and that is they didn’t keep the word. Some of them talked to them and I did. I made sure. I never got a letter or a phone call that I didn’t return. Two sessions ago, I contacted different chairmen of my own party.

I never got a return call, even in the last session too. I don’t appreciate that because I didn’t care where they came from. Wherever they were in the state, if they called me and wanted to get some information, I gave it to them. We have all the opportunity in the world. We have secretaries that will type up...all you have to do is dictate a letter and they’ll type it up. I think that’s where the people are getting disgusted with the politics.

People are really teed off with politics and politicians in Washington, D.C., or in Helena. I think that’s why so many people don’t even go and vote. The other thing that I would like to say was that I urge everybody to vote because that is their opportunity to pick who they want to represent them in government. Outside of that, I think we’ve covered it very well. I appreciate you giving me the opportunity to do so.

BB: Ed, I appreciate your public service for the state of Montana very much.

ES: Thank you.

[End of Interview]