

Maureen and Mike

Mansfield Library

UNIVERSITY OF MONTANA

Archives and Special Collections

Mansfield Library, University of Montana

Missoula MT 59812-9936

Email: library.archives@umontana.edu

Telephone: (406) 243-2053

This transcript represents the nearly verbatim record of an unrehearsed interview. Please bear in mind that you are reading the spoken word rather than the written word.

Oral History 390-001 a,b,c

Interviewee: Joe Reber

Interviewer: David M. Lewis

Date of Interview: April 8, 2004

Joe Reber: My name is Joe Reber. I was born in Butte, Montana on February 17 1919. I just passed my 85th birthday. I now live in Missoula to be amongst my family.

David Lewis: I'm Dave Lewis I've been involved in Montana politics since 1968. My father was a logger who worked in the Bitterroot Valley. He and I got involved through that. So I've been listening to Joe's stories for as long time so I think it's time to share them.

JR: Well, I suppose that we can start off with why I ever got into politics. Most men growing up hunting and fishing, they have other sportsmen and they have a position they want to take in life. I didn't do that. I had an uncle whose name was Ben Rooney who was elected County Treasurer in Butte, Montana in 1927. I was nine years old. I hung up his signs, and he won by ten votes. That hooked me. So politics was my hobby for the rest of my life, and I spent almost 50 years in Montana politics. Never was an elected official. I was a state senator in 1968. I was appointed by the county commissioner because the senator, whose name was Tom Judge, got elected lieutenant governor. The county commissioners appointed me to the senate seat. Now I was always a businessman. I've been a Democrat all my life, but Democrats, especially in Montana, don't trust businessmen. They don't know much about business therefore they also wondered what I, Joe Reber, was doing as a Democrat because I was successful in business. I drove big cars like Cadillacs and lived in a big house. I was not successful in getting elected. Although when I was in the state senate that year I was on...a Democratic senator and I got some things done, that are in history, that I'll tell you about. The number one is the new Montana constitution. That bill came over from the house on a Friday afternoon and it was to be voted on a Saturday. We counted the votes and we were short of votes so I voted against it. On Sunday after the Anaconda and Montana Bar lobbyists and a few of the Republicans went home having voted on prevailing side, I moved to reconsider and we passed it.

DL: I'll be darned. See I didn't know that. In fact I was in Plentywood last week and I was talking...I was up there for a political dinner and I was talking to Big Ed Smith. The issue came up as to how in the world did that constitution ever get out of the Senate. Big Ed blamed it all on Lucas, he said Jim Lucas got rolled over by Forrest Anderson [laughs]. But you were the one who actually got the reconsideration vote in.

JR: I got Hank Hibbard, who was a Republican senator, and I said Hank that would bring a lot of business to Helena when they have a constitutional convention. Hank was a good businessman

a banker type and...but the fact is that Bob Corette and Glen Carney and Anaconda Company lobbyists went home [thinking] they had it beat. Well, they come back to me and old Bob Corette a good friend of mine he said, "What the hell did you do that for?" [laughs]

I said, "Well, we needed a new constitution."

Well, that's how we got it and then the other thing. I came from a workingman's family, and my father was a hard rock miner. We were not fortunate enough to get much of an education. I had learnt to be a pipe welder at a trade school. So I thought Montana should have trade schools so all those who couldn't go to college could go to school and learn a trade and make a living. I was carrying the bill to create vo-tech schools and there were five of them: Billings and Bozeman and Butte and Kalispell and Missoula. I argued that bill every day, and they'd kill [it] because the fight for education dollars is strenuous. Most of the people who objected to it were the educators. Well, I wanted that bill passed, and I kept on taking off of third reading and putting it back on second and arguing it.

One day, the balcony was filled with the alumni of Bozeman—Montana State College we called it. They were there because there was a bill to appropriate two and a half million dollars to build a football stadium down in Bozeman. You know it was moved to second and passed it took about 15 minutes. As soon as the gavel went down I said, "Mr. President I move Senate Bill 240 for reconsideration. Now you just appropriated two and half million dollars so 11 overgrown clowns can play football four times a year, and I want a school system so working kids can learn how to make enough money to pay taxes to pay for that stadium." Those people up in the balcony heard and they turned around and they gave me a great ovation. So the bill passed. So in 1968, the vo-tech schools were started. They're now part of the University system. As a reward for that effort, in the year 2000, the University of Montana gave me an honorary degree—a doctorate from the School of Business Administration. That was in recognition of the fact that I had done something for education. So that was a moment of history that not very many people know about. They have a meeting every year of the delegates to the Constitutional Convention. [laughs] Never been invited.

DL: Oh, is that right? You're the guy that got it back under reconsideration.

JR: There wouldn't have been one, at least that year. The man who fought for the Constitutional Convention was Skip Sheehy, who was a senator from Billings. He even wrote the bill when he was in the house but they'd knock it down all the time because the company ran Montana for 80 years. They didn't want any change. That was very interesting but the fact is that I wanted to get things done—what I could while I was there. Because I didn't feel I'd be there very long anyway. But it was a good session, and one of the things that you'll remember, they used to balance the budget all the time with last tax and they taxed the utilities. Well, I

was on the board of Mountain Bell, the board of advisors, and had been for some years. The Democrats thought, well, we'll embarrass Reber, so they can ask me if I'd carry the bill. Well, I carried the bill to increase taxes on utilities which was the telephone company and the power company you know what that one was. Well, of course, the bill passed because they needed it to balance the budget, but what I knew and most legislators—and with all due respect, a lot legislators don't know a lot about a lot—when you raise taxes on the utilities, the taxes just add that onto rate base and they make a profit on it. So the lobbyists for the power company didn't say anything. Everybody thought, well, Reber did a good job. I knew they weren't going to object because they just added it on.

DL: The public service commissioner allowed that 4-5 percent profit on all expenses and that was an expense.

JR: They were allowed about eight percent. They went out there every two years and got an increase after the legislature. They wrapped that into their package and so the people...It's just a sales tax. We keep fighting the sales tax in Montana. Now's a sale tax

DL: Joe, you're right. You know I mean that's the reason a lot of the old-timers told me that we'd never have a sales tax as long as we have regulated utilities because that was kind of the safety valve you put the...you just popped it to the utilities. The utilities spread it out across all the ratepayers. Made a profit on it and it was kind of Montana's dirty little secret. Now we don't have regulated utilities, and that's why the sales tax is going to be back on the front burner.

JR: Well, they at one time one session of the legislature wanted to tax the airplanes that not only didn't land in Montana, but the ones that flew over. [laughs] You know they were going to tax it. It's been quite a battle. Been very interesting to watch all these years because not much has happened. Montana, we've lost the mining jobs; we've lost the lumber jobs. We've lost probably 60,000 good paying jobs that are never going to come back. We have to redistribute our educational capabilities, and get people doing something productive. If you got a machine, we could maybe shut that off once in a while.

DL: I think you're right that we're going to see another sales tax vote in 2005 probably because we don't have the ability to use the utility taxes to hide what's going on, the deregulation. The games up. There isn't enough money. So I think we are going to go back to talk about a sales tax again. I don't know what's going to happen, but I think we are going to be back trying to get it passed.

JR: Well, if you, the legislature and other people would study South Dakota, South Dakota's got about the same number people as Montana. We're in about the same business. The only thing

they got that we haven't got is that they're closer to markets. Their whole budget is funded with a sales tax. There's no income tax, and it's...they raise enough money. It's four percent. They not only raise enough money but they set money aside to give back to poor families who can't afford to pay their property taxes. It's just Montana will have to study that. But they get into the legislature, and I remember when I was on the Board of Investments, you know when we started off the only thing you could invest the money in was treasury bonds. That was about it. We wanted to get the legislature to allow, to let, to invest in equities, and we set up that warehouse for...home mortgages none of that stuff was in the law. I went over to the legislature many times. I remember one time going over, and we were trying to get them to allow us to invest in pension funds and equities. There was a fellow there and I forgotten his name but he's from Billings and he was a businessman... [laughs] businessman, made a good profit, and I'm talking about equities. He stopped me and he says, "Joe" He said, "I'm going to have to ask you kind of a dumb question." I said well...and he said, "What's an equity?" The guy's a state senator. He's a businessman.

I said, "Well, do you own any stocks or bonds?"

He said, "Well, yeah I have stocks in the Montana Bar Company and IBM."

I said, "Well, an equity is a stock you have equity in that company."

"Oh" he said. Well, that's what you're trying to do with people. People thought that stock was something that was out in the barnyard. You could have a hard time teaching them we can make money investing in stocks. I was using the word equity. So it was tough to get it, but we did get all of those things.

DL: We got half the retirement funds, we got the work comp funds now, but we never did get the coal trust. I mean that was a shame because if we'd been able to put half of that into equities it'd have been worth billions today instead of what we have.

JR: Yeah, they wouldn't allow it, takes two-thirds.

DL: We put it out to vote a couple of different times, but the public turned it up. I want to go back to 1927 again. You mentioned that when you first got involved. Did you have any involvement with Frank Murray when he was in county politics down in Silver Bow County? Was he clerk and recorder or something? He was elected in like 1930 or something like that.

JR: Yeah, he was there forever, but I didn't know him until he was...secretary of state. He was perennial secretary of state.

DL: He used to tell me stories. Of course he passed away a long time ago now, but his main claim to fame working down there was that he figured out how to twirl the dials to the voting

machines. In the Clerk and Records office down there election night, they'd bring the voting machines in, and he could adjust them. [laughs] He was clerk and recorder down there I think until after World War Two. Then he was elected secretary of state.

JR: Well, my Uncle Bing was a sportswriter at the *Butte Daily Post*. He ran and he...young good-looking war veteran and all of those things. He ran against a guy whose name was Thomas Tutty (?). I was with him when they called him and said, "They're counting you out. You better get up here." So, he and I went up to courthouse. He won by nine votes. It was not a good thing for him, because he left his newspaper business and he threw it out there for 12 years. Anyway, it intrigued me to see what they were doing. In Butte, everybody voted, sometimes twice.

They had told a story about Pat and Mikard (?) going down to the graveyard, and they're getting names off the headstones: Kelly, and Murphy, and O'Brien, and Smith. They come to Stanakowski (?) and the guy says, "Skip that, I can't spell it."

He said, "You put Stan down. He has just as much right to vote as anybody else." [laughs]

DL: Well, that's what Frank Murray used to tell me was that I mean it was pretty wide...pretty doggone wide-open situation down there. Of course, everybody voted Democrat, but I mean boy, once they got into the clerk and recorder's office, they kind of made things come out the way they were supposed to come out.

JR: Well, the story was that they never elected a Democrat from Silver Bow County to the legislature but Bob Corette was the lobbyist for the Anaconda Company, and the Montana Bar Company just ran the Republicans on the Democratic ticket. So we always had about half of them...because they wouldn't vote. Once in while they voted. There was a fellow there who was the...his name was Evans, and he had been the director at the YMCA and all the kids loved him. He was a Republican, and he got elected to the Senate, first time in years. But they were most of them were labor guys, and they had, I think, maybe ten in the House at that time. They were mostly Democrats, but they weren't all Democrats.

DL: Yeah, they voted together when it came to Butte stuff.

JR: Oh sure. But when something came up that was what Bob wanted, he'd get them. That's the idea. Somebody asked me one time who was governor of Montana the longest? I said, "Bob Corette." [laughs]

"Well, Bob Corette was never governor of Montana."

I said, "No, he ran it from about way back in '38 till our times."

DL: Yeah, I believe it entirely.

JR: He was on the phone and he would call them up, and they responded. That's why they've never elected ever a liberal governor of Montana, think about it. They've never elected a liberal, and I don't know if they ever will. But guys like Dr. Renny (?), who he was the president of the university in Bozeman, very qualified. I ran on Olsen's campaign, and Arnold got defeated by Hugo, Hugo Aronson. Hugo—he and I got to be good friends. I liked that guy. He came to Helena and the first month they would have a meeting of the joint...What did we call it?

DL: Rules committee meeting?

JR: No, the [unintelligible]—the lions and everyone. Hugo came one time and he was sitting right, and I was the chairman. He was sitting right next to me, and he said—now I'm not trying to imitate him, but that's the only way—he'd say "Now Joe I'm not going to be making any speech here. I just came here to talk and to have lunch and to visit."

I said, "Well, Governor, I'm going to introduce you, and you do what you want." I said, "Tell them a story."

So I introduced them and he got up, and he said, "It's a funny thing about these dinners. I've always got some Democrat introducing me and trying to... [laughs] trying to embarrass me. Here now I've got this Joe Reber and...but Joe said I didn't have to do anything but tell a story." So He said, "I'll tell you. I was up on the Hi-Line working on an oil rig one time. He's had a fellow working there and his name was Yates. Yates. It was 40 below zero, and the wind was blowing. Yates got down off of the scaffold, and he started walking away and he kept walking. I finally hollered to him, 'Hey, Yates, where are you going?' Yates said, 'I'm going to get my coat.' He kept on walking, and I say, 'Yates where's your coat.' He says, 'Down in Arizona.'" [laughs].

Well, I'll tell you, Wesley Castles was with him, and I said, "Wesley, don't ever do anything with him but have him tell a few jokes." He did that, and he never got defeated.

DL: Oh yeah, people loved him, yeah.

JR: Yeah, I had been appointed chairman of the...State of Montana Board of Plumbing Examiners. Now I'll tell you how that happened.

DL: I was wondering about that.

JR: When I first went to Helena, I was from Butte, and was after the war. I was working six hours a day five days a week, and I'm 25 years old. I wanted to get something done, do something. So there was a forest fire outside of Helena. I went over there to work the weekend. A guy, "What do you do?"

I'm in the bar, and I went...I said, "I'm a plumber."

He said, "Boy we need plumbers around here."

I said, "You do?"

He said, "Yeah." He said, "By the way," he said, "there's a plumbing shop up here for sale." He says, "Why don't you go take a look at it." You know, we're having a couple of beers. So I stayed over that night, and the next day I went up on Sixth Avenue and Ed Lorenz (?) had a plumbing shop. Ed Lorenz was ill, and he wanted to sell his plumbing shop. So I looked at. I said, "How much you want?"

He said, "Ten thousand dollars."

I said, "I got 2,800."

He said, "I'll take it." [laughs] So I bought it for 2,800 dollars. Well, then I went on, and I hustled some work. Then I found out I had to have a license. So I went down to the city, and I bought a license. Hung it on my wall, and I called up the union for a couple of men. They said, "Well, you have to have a master plumber's license."

I said, "Where you go to get that?"

"They go to the city council."

So I went down to the city engineer, and he said, "Well, you have to take an examination."

I said, "Well, fine." I said, "When can I take it?"

He said, "Well, the next meeting is January 2." This was September. Well, it's beginning to click. Somebody don't want me in business in Helena. So I walked up to the ramp in the old civic center, and there's a sign that says, "Mayor." God I haven't...I don't know if this is what you want on this, but—

DL: You bet.

JR: But I had never talked to a mayor in my life. That was something very important. So anyway, I walked past his secretary. She says, "Where are you going?"

I saw the mayor sitting in there. I said, "I want to see him."

She, "Well, just a minute."

He said, "Come on in." So I went in it was Ray J. Wine (?) was the mayor. He'd come back from the war. He was a colonel, so he was sitting behind his desk "What can I do for you?"

I said, "You know, I just invested my life savings in your town, and they won't let me go into business. What the hell do I have to do to go into business?"

He says, "What do you mean?"

Well, I said, "They want me to take an examination, and they won't give it to me till next January and by that time I'll be broke."

He said, "Who told you that?"

I said, "The city engineer."

He turned to the girl, he says, "Get the city engineer up here." The city engineer came up, and he saw me sitting there with the mayor. He didn't know what to do. Ray Wine said, "Now, you convene that examining board Monday, and you give Mr. Reber an examination so he can get his license."

"Yes sir." So he did and I got my license.

All right, politics, that was in September. In November, John Bonner got elected governor. Well, the deal, Dave, was that the Plumbers Union and the Master Plumbers Association control the business. They decide who'd get in and who wouldn't. So Bonner got elected, and he went into office in January. Frank Reardon (?) who I had worked for in Butte was in a house from Butte. So I told him, I said, "Frank, we got to get rid of this outfit. This is wrong because it's costing people a lot of money. It's taking too much time to get the job done. Let's get rid of the law." So we wrote a law eliminating all local plumbing boards and creating one state board. People never liked plumbers anyway because they charged too much. [laughs] So we got the bill through. Bonner signed it. Guess who he appointed chairman.

DL: You.

JR: Me. [laughs] So within a year, I'm issuing the licenses. Well, the unions were madder than hell about that and the master plumbers. But anyway, we got it done. I was appointed for six years. Well, Bonner only lasted four years. So that was two years under Hugo. So we changed all the laws. We got rid of all of the "make work" ordinances. There were ordinances in Montana that you couldn't use copper pipe.

DL: In Montana?

JR: In Montana. [laughs] I went to the Civic Center in Great Falls—Glen Carney and I—and he was a lobbyist for the Anaconda Company. We went up there. Here Glen and I over here, and all the plumbers over there. By god they were going to save that ordinance. [laughs] Let's take

five minutes, I want to show you guys something. In the Civic Center, where it is in Great Falls, and I took him out on the steps. I said, "Take a look out there. What do you see?"

"Stacks."

I said, "The smokes coming out of the stacks."

"Yeah."

I said, "What do you think you're making there?"

"Well, copper."

I said, "You guys got a rule and regulation and a law that you can't use copper. Montana, you got to be crazy." Or something to that effect. [laughs] Well, anyway, they...we changed the law. We got it all changed and...After Bonner was there, I was still there for two more years. Hugo was governor. He called me one time; he always called me "Yo." "Hey, Yo," he said, "you know you're the chairman of that there plumbing board." He said, "You're one of them Democrats." He said, "So I can't reappoint you." But he said, "You think you know a Republican plumber someplace?" [laughs]

I said, "Yeah, I think so." So I called up a guy in Billings. His name was Christiansen. He appointed him. But Hugo was a kick all right.

I'm on his politics. I'll tell you some more. You know the lot the governor's mansion is on?

DL: Yeah.

JR: Well, that was owned by a fellow by the name of Cy Mueller. Cy Mueller had a store in downtown Helena. He also had a small loan agency. He owned that lot. So I was thinking, I was living on 11th Avenue, I was going to build a new house. I knew that Cy had given that lot to the state of Montana to build a new house on. So I said to Cy, I said, "Did they ever take that lot?"

He said, "Not yet."

Well, I said, "I want to buy it. I want to build a house on it. How much you want for the lot?"

He said, "Five thousand dollars."

I said, "I'll take it." So I flipped him a dollar. That afternoon I'm going out to lunch with Arnold Olsen, who was attorney general, and Hugo and Sam Mitchell are all in the elevator. The governor turns to Arnold, he says, "Hey, Arnold, what are we going to do about that there lot."

Arnold says, "Well, I don't know what you're going to do. It's up to you. You know. You're the governor. You take it and do what you want."

I said, "You can't do anything with that lot. That's my lot."

Hugo said, "What do you mean?"

I said, "Well, I bought that lot from Cy that you guys never took."

He said, "Well, I don't know about that." So that afternoon he called me. I went out to the governor's office. He said, "I've decided we're going to take that lot and build a mansion on that one." He said, "You don't...not really going to buy that lot are you?"

I said, "No, you can have it." But I did buy it and that was my lot. I never did get my dollar back.

DL: You never got your dollar back—

JR: No, Cy's still got the dollar. So then I was in the plumbing business and they build a new mansion. The mansion costs like 385,000 dollars.

DL: Oh my, it was awful, I remember that.

JR: This is back in, well—

DL: Late '50s.

JR: It was bid, and a guy by the name of Mel Buck got the general construction. He lost money. A guy by the name of Joe Reber got the plumbing contract for 27,000 dollars. He lost money. Everybody lost money on it. The guy built it like a ship of state. It's got a bow and a stern.

DL: Who was the architect?

JR: Cohagen.

DL: Cohagen, Chandler Cohagen.

JR: Chandler Cohagen out of Billings.

DL: Chandler got the job because he was the oldest architect in Montana and he was—

[End of Tape 1, Side A]

[Tape 1, Side B]

JR: So 385,000 dollars was a lot of money for a house. A lot of people were upset about it. They'd didn't like the design and they...The legislature came to town, and they were going to investigate the contractors. Going to investigate it. There was this little guy from Big Timber who was a state senator...Leo Cremer. Yeah, Leo Cremer. He was in the business of providing stock to rodeos. He wore boots. He was a real cowboy type. But every time he came to Helena he would introduce a bill to move the capitol to Big Timber. [laughs] He'd get all this publicity. Well, we all hung out at the Montana Club. Montana Club is a private club in Helena, one of the oldest clubs into the United States. I was elected president of that one time too. But anyway, Cremer comes up to me and he says, "You, Reber," he said, "I want to talk to you."

"What about?"

"I want to talk about that plumbing job out at the governor's mansion." He said, "I looked on the plans," and he said, "I counted 14 bathrooms" He said, "I went out there, and there's only eight."

Well, I said, "Senator, in Helena we put them inside the building." [laughs] He laughed. I've never heard another whimper from him. It all went by. Hugo moved into it. Hugo came to Montana on a freight car, absolute broke. Swedish fellow couldn't speak English. They kicked him off the freight car at Cut Bank. He always told this story. He lived in a tar paper shack. Well, the governor's mansion, he just moved into it, and it had a big windstorm and it blew part of the roof off. I was very active with the Chamber of Commerce, and I introduced Hugo. He told me how he got kicked off that there freight train up in Cut Bank and lived in a tar paper shack. He said, "Now, I'm here in Montana, and I'm the governor of this state and I'm living in a tar paper shack again."

DL: Well, when Schwinden was elected, he hired me to help do the transition. Ted and Jean didn't want to live in the governor's mansion. They wanted to live in the old one, which is a whole another story, but anyway. So they had me try and put together a deal to turn the governor's mansion into office space for the highway patrol. Then they'd live downtown. Well, the press came and talked to me about. I said, "Well, it isn't a very comfortable house. In fact, it's a lot like a 1950s Holiday Inn." Chandler Cohagen, the architect, called me up, and he was in his late 80s then—this would be in 1980, and he was pretty elderly—but he chewed me up one side and down the other for calling that place a 1950s Holiday Inn. [laughs]

Well, I was wondering about Bonner. Did you ever know very much about Bonner? Because I just heard a lot of interesting stories about Bonner. But I never knew him. He was before me.

JR: Well, I knew him, and Bonner self-destructed. That's a story but I'm not going to tell that story. See, he was attorney general, and he resigned as attorney general and went to the war. So he became a war hero and came back and got elected governor. He was a good-looking Irishman, had a family, and he...Hugo beat him. In fact, I was in the old governor's mansion with Bonner watching the return. Yeah, he turned to his wife, and he, "Well, honey, I guess we are going to have to get the hell out of here." [laughs] He did. But Hugo—

DL: He got himself in all kinds of trouble, caused his own problems. Yeah, I know what you're talking about.

JR: Yeah, that's right. So Hugo, I remember, Hubert Humphrey came from Minnesota, and he made a speech to a joint session. I knew Hubert. I took him out there. I said, "Now after you're finished with the speech, you're going to go down and meet the governor." I'd arranged ahead of time for him. So we went down four or five of us. Hugo said, and he was such a character, he said, "Well, Senator," he said, "I've been reading about you bragging about all them there lakes in Minnesota." He said, "We've got more lakes in Montana than you got in Minnesota." Well, they had a good time, and Hubert Humphrey was a very liberal Democrat. Well, I think we walked out after that, I think, nobody's ever going beat that guy.

Had to be in 19...let's see, he was elected in '66, and then he was reelected in—

DL: '56

JR: '56, yeah, '56 he was elected in. Bonner was elected in '48 to '52. Hugo was there from '52 to—

DL: To '56.

JR: Till '56.

DL: Was he elected again or—

JR: Yeah, he beat Olsen.

DL: Yeah, then Nutter came in '60.

JR: Then Nutter came in in '60, that's correct. Nutter got killed in the accident and then Tim Babcock.

DL: Tim took over, and then was reelected. Now, Tim wasn't reelected, was he? I'm trying to remember now.

JR: No, he wasn't, he ran—

DL: Forrest came in in '64 then, I guess. I don't know I'm trying to remember. [laughs]

JR: Well, I'll tell you. Forrest Anderson was elected governor in 1968.

DL: Well, then Tim was elected, wasn't he?

JR: Tim was elected and then he ran for the Senate. Then he got defeated by Metcalf, then Forrest Anderson beat him. Forrest, of course, was a great friend of Bob and Jack and everybody. He was a good guy. Forrest got some things done.

DL: Yeah, the new constitution.

JR: Well, the new constitution, which I told you. He implemented it. Then he took all the agencies and put them all together and made seven or eight. He was a good governor, but Forrest had cancer. He was dying all the time he was in office. So he didn't run again. That's when Judge got elected, yeah, Tom Judge.

DL: '72

JR: Then under Judge, I was a chairman of the...he appointed me chairman of the Court of Personal Appeals. This is where employees could appeal if they...See, what they were doing there getting away from the political system of firing everybody and hiring all of their friends when they got elected. I think now the governor hires about five people.

DL: Well, the department directors, which is like 15 or something like that, yeah.

JR: Yeah, not very many. But in those days they just cleaned everybody out. So the legislature, in its wisdom, set up this system where if you were [unintelligible] or abused, they could complain and get some relief. So he appointed me chairman of that. Of course, we're all Democrats. Tom was a Democrat.

I'll just tell you one for instance. Down in Billings, at the university, they had a librarian. She was a little elderly lady who had been there since the library started. Well, they had a new young director, and he fired her. He required that the librarian have a master's degree or maybe a doctorate, but this little old lady didn't have it. Well, she came in, and I read her case. She was represented by a Republican lawyer who had beaten me for the Senate. He came in and he looked at me and says, "Boy—"

DL: Who was that Drake?

JR: Glen Drake.

DL: Glen Drake.

JR: Thank you. He looked at our board, and he said, "I don't have any chance with these guys. She's got the wrong lawyer." Well, they come in, and the lawyer for this side and the lawyer...and I said to this lady, and I asked her...I said, "How long have you been there?"

"Well, I've been here since they started." Billings came in the last one, one of the last ones. I forget what it was. It had to be back in the—

DL: '30s

JR: '30s or something, she'd been there. I said, "You know where all the books are?"

"Oh, yes, I know." She said, "I know where all the books are."

I said, "And I bet you know everybody that's got a pass to the library."

"Oh, yes, I do."

Well, I said, "I'll tell you what we are going to do, we're going to reinstate you and we're going to give you back pay." I said, "The next time, when you retire, then they can hire somebody with a master's degree." Well, the director walked out of there. Of course, it was the right thing to do. You're going to be a judge you got to do the right thing. People would call up and say, "Well, he's come before your board. You know he's a Republican." One kid told me that. I won't mention his name, but I said, "Don't ever call me about any case ever comes before us." I said, "We have to judge it on the merits. If you ever do that again I'm going to file a charge against you." Well, we got that job done. I guess they still have that board.

DL: Oh, hell yes.

JR: Yeah, but I made that librarian happy because she knew where all the books were.

DL: Now did you serve on any other boards for Judge, or just personal field?

JR: Forrest Anderson appointed me to the Water Board because I was a plumber I knew all about water.

DL: [laughs] See that whole irrigation business—

JR: You know you asked me a question Dave, and it just clicks because I just got to tell you I...they had a Water Board and I...Forrest Anderson put me on the Water Board. He didn't know what else to do with me. I would go to these meetings. They were farmers mostly because they know about water.

DL: Yeah, its irrigation, yeah.

JR: So this little old fellow, little old fellow, he was the chairman. They would have each one of the department heads of the Department of Water come in and make a report about this dam someplace or you know just...and I'm trying to run a business. I'm sitting there. These guys come in on Monday and bring their wives. They go down to the Holiday. We meet on Tuesday and Wednesday and Thursday and then on Friday we go home. I'm there four or five days listening to all this stuff. I told Forrest, I said, "Forrest, they're wasting the taxpayers' money. They're not doing anything. Who cares what size spike they're using in a...you know?" Well, there was a director of the water board. I don't know maybe you can...but I'll tell you this story. Maybe you don't remember his name, but he was having an affair with one of his employees.

DL: Hmmm, that sort of wasn't unusual in those days. [laughs]

JR: So this chairman, who I'm sure had been married for 40 years and never glanced at anybody. Absolute—

DL: Straight arrow.

JR: Straight arrow guy, yeah. This meeting on a Thursday, he goes into the executive session, everybody out the door except the five-member board. He tells this in a very low voice. I know the guy's name but I'm not going to mention it, but what he's been doing. He said, "I have an appointment with the governor at three o'clock." Forrest Anderson. Oh boy. So I'm sitting there. I couldn't laugh, but I had to stifle. But because Forrest, you know Forrest—

DL: Oh yeah.

JR: Yeah, okay, he was going to report to Forrest that this guy was having an affair.

DL: Well, now, I think the fellow you're talking about was the director of the department, right?

JR: That's right.

DL: Yeah, okay, he's still a fairly prominent citizen so we don't need to go any further than that.

JR: But the funny part of it is that I had talked to Forrest, he knew he was coming. He was really uptight with this chairmen. He wanted to make sure that the chairmen knew that Forrest Anderson wouldn't tolerate such action. Well, anyway, the guy come back and made the report. His term ended, and he made me chairman. From then on we met one day. We met on a Monday. They stayed Monday night, and they went home because it was senseless to sit around. Well, then, that board became the State Board of Natural Resources.

When Forrest appointed me chairman...but a couple of the Republican lawyers, in Helena, had brought an action, they'd found a law that said, "That no person, firm, or corporation, who did

business with the State of Montana, could hold an appointed or elected office.” Do you remember that?

DL: Yeah, I do because that was when Colstrip came up, I mean, I think that was what they got all worked up in a frenzy over, wasn’t it? The—

JR: No, it was...it was the Attorney General, who was a Republican attorney general—

DL: Woodall.

JR: Woodall, found it. It was the law, so everybody had to resign. The publisher of the *Great Falls Tribune*, who was the chairman of the Board of Regents, had to resign.

DL: James, yeah.

JR: Everybody. Forrest said, “Well, you know people...” I didn’t work all the time with the state. So that ended that part and they had to appoint new people. Then they changed the law. So, that was a political hollow balloon. I said, “Forrest, what am I going to do?”

He says, “Well, you can either quit business or quit politics, one or the other.” I couldn’t afford to quit business.

DL: I wanted to go back and talk about...You mentioned running Arnold Olsen’s campaign, when he ran, let’s see whose—

JR: Hugo.

DL: Yeah, okay, ran against Hugo. Didn’t that get to be...that was a pretty dirty campaign, wasn’t it? Wasn’t there a lot...old...maybe not on the part Hugo, but I mean there was a lot of mudslinging going on and things going on in that campaign was there?

JR: Well, Arnold was a liberal. Arnold as attorney general had picked fights with everybody: the power company, the Anaconda Company, the oil companies, and anybody else. But he was very popular. Good-looking, articulate, smart guy. He got into an argument about a bill that the oil companies...Arnold was right, and I don’t know what they’ve done but the law...Montana’s a land grant state. Montana got a lot of land granted—income from that land—to go the common school fund. That’s probably still a law. But they discovered oil in Eastern Montana. Oil leases were bid and the lowest...or the highest bidder, the guy who bid the highest, would get it as a percentage. What do they call it the—

DL: Royalty.

JR: Royalties, yeah. So, there were the little guys and big guys. Well, a little guy would bid less upfront but more royalties. That was a better deal for the state because the law said that you must get the largest or the biggest—

DL: The maximum amount—

JR: The maximum amount, yeah. So the legislature, in its wisdom, passed a bill and they plugged the royalties at 12 and a half percent. Olsen was attorney general. He said, "That's illegal," because that's not bidding, that's setting a price. So that got all the oil companies against him. Then he'd shut down gambling. So he had all the saloon guys against him. Hugo never did anything. Hugo never got on the radio. I don't know, I forget, maybe...there wasn't any television then, but Hugo just went around and he'd say, "I'll use my mud hooks," and he'd shake hands. He was an affable guy. I raised a lot of money for Arnold, but the money...we had the money. The week of the campaign, the Aronson crowd just stopped because there was a guy whose name was Al Wilkinson, who was a lobbyist for the Anaconda Company, who later went to Washington as their lobbyist. He was the first pollster. I think he invented the poll, and he knew what he'd call the "cow counties." The returns would come in, and we'd get the cities first because they had machines. Olsen's way ahead, but Al Wilkinson was there. He went down, and he told me. He said, "Olsen's going to lose by 5,000." Because he knew the votes were where the cow counties were, and he did. Hugo got elected, got reelected. Then Arnold ran for the Supreme Court and got defeated. Then in 1960, he ran and got elected to Congress. He was in congress for ten years but he had...That was a bad campaign. It was a destructive campaign. I'm not going to repeat here what they did because it's history but the idea of destroying the candidate is not a new idea. It's an old idea. I think Cicero did it first.

JR: But Richard Nixon in the '60s...no, in the '50s, finessed the destruction of candidates. He ran for the House in California. The guy who had the seats name was Jerry Voorhis. Jerry Voorhis, he called him a Communist, which he wasn't, and he beat him. Then he ran for the Senate against Helen Gahagen Douglas and he destroyed her. Helen Gahagen Douglas was the wife of Melvin Douglas, the actor. He destroyed her. Now, we're to the point where it's not arguing about issues. It's who can destroy the other guy, which is a terrible thing. But be that as it may—

DL: I remember that that was...got pretty dirty. There was a lot of mudslinging at Olsen during that campaign and that kind of thing. That was kind of the hallmark of it.

JR: Well, then after that we had Tim...Tim and I were always good friends, and I don't know. About that time I was beginning to go to the desert. I had a home in Indian Wells, but before that we had a group in Helena who played cards all together. Tim was one of them...We, all together went down to Indian Wells. We had about four airplanes. I had my airplane, and

Babcock had the state plane. We all went down there to play cards. Babcock invited me to have lunch with General Eisenhower. Me, Gordon Dorian (?) and Dwight Eisenhower and Tim Babcock and Harold Armstaf had lunch at Indian Wells Country Club with President Eisenhower. Eisenhower?

DL: Yeah.

JR: You know who he is?

DL: Yeah. So this was when he was president, right? This is...

JR: No, he was not president.

DL: Oh, he was just running then.

JR: This was in the '60s.

DL: Oh, it was after.

JR: After, yeah.

DL: After it. I got you.

JR But he was one of the greatest men in the world. I sat right next to him. Babcock said, "This is my friend Joe Reber. He is from Helena."

I said, "Pleased to meet you Mr. President."

He said, "Joe, there's only one President of the United States at a time. Lyndon Johnson's president, you call me general." He preferred that. He was a general. Well, the Secret Service said, "You've got an hour and 30 minutes, starting at twelve o'clock." We were still there at four o'clock.

I've been used to being around important people—political, politicians. Because this was after Kennedy and Johnson was president. So we talked politics and...then he told us all about his funeral. He had it all laid out. What he was going to do, where he was going to be buried. He said, "There will be no one in my final resting place except my family." Well, that happened, and there was one other person. That was the President, Nixon, was there. So he told great stories about the Goldwater and Johnson campaign. That's the last eight years of peace we had in this country. Under Eisenhower. His final speech was "beware of the military-industrial complex." JR: I'll tell you, I can sit down, Dave, and just about write verbatim everything he said. I was so entrenched. Entrenched or—

DL: Impressed with the guy. Yeah.

JR: Before we left, in those days we all carried silver dollars and I had some silver dollars. I said, "General, how many grandchildren do you have?"

He said, "Three." I gave him three silver dollars.

I said, "Here's one for each." Because I said, "They're disappearing you know."

He said, "Yeah, I know." So he took them. Well, on the way home, Babcock and Gordon Dorian flew home in a Montana Power Company airplane. I don't know if you remember this.

DL: No, I don't know. I'm trying. It seems to me I do remember a lot of that.

JR: Well, they flew home. I flew on my own. Bill Scrivener was there. Anyway, they flew home in a Montana Power airplane. Over Salt Lake, Gordon Dorian had a heart attack. Well, they were going to land and Gordon said, "No I'm not going to die. I might as well, die in Helena." So what they had done, they had called and couldn't get an ambulance and alerted the Montana Power plane was coming with the governor and with Gordon Dorian. There was another fellow with them too...I can't think of his name. But anyway, when the plane landed, and the press was there and the whole story then, "Where'd you come from? What were you doing?" Well, they'd taken pictures of us. I remember telling Babcock, I said, "Babcock, you know, I don't know whether you want these pictures."

"Oh, we'll take them." Well, the pictures ended up in the front page of every newspaper in Montana. The question was, "What was Reber doing there?" [laughs] The Democrats didn't like that. They got the story going that Babcock was going to run for Senate, and I was going to be the chairman of the committee. Eisenhower had made a speech, and it was a fundraiser. They blew it up. I think they still believe it. It was just a visit with General Eisenhower.

DL: Having lunch with General Eisenhower, yeah.

JR: Yeah, well, that was in all of the papers.

DL: Well, I'll tell you, Tim tells some great stories about Nixon. Of course, he got involved with Nixon during that campaign and that money-raising stuff afterwards. But he's a guy they ought to get, sometime, in front of microphone to do that because I mean that's fascinating stuff.

JR: Well, he, they're...he is writing a book.

DL: That's right. Betty is writing a book, yeah. Now, Betty is doing the work, and he's talking to her, yeah.

JR: Well, it's really being written by a couple of [unintelligible] because they asked me for some input. I gave them some stories that I knew about, social stories not political. Because he was

hired by Arm & Hammer and he was Arm & Hammer's lobbyist when Nixon was president. There's lots of stories about that.

DL: Yeah, but he should just tell them, yeah.

JR: Tim will tell those stories.

DL Well, we got into that because we were talking about Arnold Olsen and some of that stuff but...Now who did you start in with...The big thing you got involved in was building the missile , and that started along in the mid-'60s, didn't it?

JR: Yes. At the end of the Eisenhower administration, we were in a recession. The '60s...during the '50s...All right, in '56, I was a delegate to the convention. That's the year Arnold was the candidate for governor. That's when I met Jack Kennedy [John F. Kennedy]. Jack Kennedy was running for Vice President. Adlai Stevenson picked Kefauver, which is the luckiest thing that ever happened for Kennedy. But I really liked him. He and his mother...He was from Boston, and my mother was from Boston. So we talked about that. Jack Kennedy always called me "Joe Reber from Helener, Montana." That's how he said it.

I was with him 60 days before he was murdered in Texas. He was in Great Falls. I advanced that for the president. We had 100,000 people in Great Falls, which was the largest crowd of people ever assembled in Montana, before or since. I have a picture of he and I and Olsen, and He said, "Joe, I'll never forget the party you had for me in Helener." Because I had a party in my backyard. I've got pictures of 500 people. I said, "We'll have one again next year, when you're—

[End of Tape 1, Side B]

[Tape 2, Side A]

JR: He took my name and address. Immediately after that convention he started putting together a campaign committee for the presidency. I was his man in Montana. My job was to send him names and addresses of prominent Democrats so that he could contact them and get them lined up. Well, he was Irish, and he was Catholic. He didn't know the Labor Temple from Shirley Temple. He was not a working man type. Somebody hollered at him one time, "Hey Kennedy, I hear you never had a job in your life."

He says, "That's right," he said, "keep it up, you'll never miss it." [laughs]

You know they were fun people. They had great jokes they...I remember with...coast to coast with the Holy Ghost was one of them. I was in the White House one time, and Bobby Kennedy was introducing the Cabinet and he said, "My brother wanted to have at least one Republican in the Cabinet, and he wanted to get an honest one so he picked Douglass Dillon." Douglass Dillon was the secretary of the treasury. He said, Bobby said, "Douglass Dillon has so much money that when he writes a check the bank bounces." Well, they were...it's just a terrible tragedy for America when that had happened.

I was in the White House a couple of times. Kenny O'Donnell was the secretary. Just a politician, I had nothing...what did I want? I didn't want to be the secretary of war or anything. Or didn't...couldn't qualify. Anyhow, but I knew him then he...When he came to Great Falls, Mansfield was there, and this entourage went down and they made a quick stop. They went into Mansfield's father's house. He lived in a little, cheap little old white house in a old, bad neighborhood. I mean they never had any money. Mansfield didn't like money. He didn't. He didn't want to be bothered. We stopped to see the father, then we went to the stadium. We had that stadium out at the high school absolutely full of people.

Mansfield, of course, was the senior senator and he...I was in charge of this...the advancing it's called. He sent me 25 tickets for important people—25, Mike did. Well, I knew more than 25 important people myself. I took the tickets, and I had 2,500 printed. I went over to the *Great Falls Tribune*, and I had them printed because the Republicans were hollering that this was a political meeting. Kennedy was out there, supposedly, to...on behalf of the Interior Department to look at the dams or something. Of course, it was political. I've got all these tickets and I've got the Democratic Women's Club. We went down the basement in the sheriff's department, his name was John Kersel. We got a bunch of typewriters and we sent out 2,500. We sent them to night and poor clubs, Republicans and Democrats. The Secret Service were there, and they were there to protect the president. The head, the guy's name was Dave Grant. He said, "Reber, where are you going to put all these people?"

I said, "We're going to put them in front of the president where he makes the speech."

"Well, you got to...you have to put a fence up." Well, where do you get a fence on Saturday afternoon? I call the highway department. Well, that had to be when Babcock was governor. So I called, and I said, "We want a fence stretched across the field, the football field."

Well, they called in okay. So that's what we did. Kennedy was up there on the platform. Babcock was there. We had the fence. We had all the people with their invitations from Mansfield. Well, I'm sure that when they thanked him for the invitation he wondered what the hell was going on.

DL: Yeah, 2,500 of them you give him 25 tickets.

JR: But I wanted to make sure we had everybody there. Then another...you know politics can get tough, and the other thing about it is...The Republicans wouldn't let the schools out. I wanted the schools out so the kids could see the President. Chairman of the school board was...boy, I got to think of that name. He was a good Republican. They just didn't want to let the schools out. So I had Kenny O'Donnell, who was President Kennedy's secretary, appointment secretary, call him on the phone. When you get a call from the White House, it's pretty important. He said, "They're not there...the children will not be there to see a Democrat, or a Republican. They would be there to see a president of the United States." Well, they gave in and let the schools out. So it was the biggest crowd ever assembled. Kennedy was so pleased with it. He made a speech, but he was more...He was so personal. Johnson wasn't personal. But everybody liked Jack Kennedy. When he came to my home in Helena, I had all the leaders there in the backyard. I got pictures of that. I've got them right there.

I knew Bobby, and then Ted Kennedy was campaigning for his brother. I had an airplane at the time. I was flying him around Montana. His old man had 600 million dollars or something. I'm flying Kennedy in my airplane. So we went to Miles City, and Miles City is a cowboy town. In the middle of July, they're not too interested in politics. But there was a rodeo going on. I said, "You know, the only place you're going to see anyone is at the rodeo." So we went to the rodeo. They introduced him and booed and clapped. Somebody said, "Ride the bronc." Teddy Kennedy was 28 years old. "Ride a bronc." Well, he rode a bronc. When some big cowboy got a bronc and put him in chute, and Kennedy got on. My wife was along too, so he got on and, of course, the horse bucked him off. Well, he got off of that, and he was holding his crotch. This cowboy said—he didn't know Ted—"Kid, did they give you a jock?"

He said, "No, [unintelligible]." He didn't know whether he was a Kennedy or a Smith or...He could care less. But Kennedy gets off there, and he's limping. That afternoon we're flying back in the airplane, and he up in the... Bill Decker was the pilot. Did you ever know Bill?

DL: I don't think so.

JR: Well, Bill was the pilot. Kennedy was here. My wife was here, and I was here. Kennedy's got his legs stretched out. Oh, he's hurting. Terry said, "What's the matter, Teddy?"

He said, "Oh, I hurt my leg."

Then she said, "How's your leg?"

I said to my wife, "Terry, it ain't his leg. Don't ask him." So, anyway, and we...there was a picture taken of that—

DL: I saw the picture. You've got the picture of him riding that bronc. I've seen it on your wall, yeah.

JR: Well, I see him on the news every day. He's an old man now—

DL He's not going to ride no broncs now that's for certain.

JR: No, but he was 28 years old and...figure that out. That was in 1960 which is 44 years ago. So 44, 54, 64, he's almost 70 years old, but a great guy. I saw him many times in Washington. He always, you know, great guy.

DL: Now, when did you get into building the missiles? Now that was like...was that early '60s, building the missile bases?

JR: Yeah. Yeah, that was...I was going to tell you then I got off on Kennedy. But anyway, I was in Helena and I read an article in the paper about an impending missile base in Malmstrom. Now, we had been doing work in Malmstrom, but I was looking for work and there wasn't much going on. But I read in the paper, and it was a company in St. Louis called American Air Filter Company. Well, American Air Filter Company manufactured air conditioning equipment. I was in that business—mechanical business. So I purchased stuff from them. I read this article, and I was always looking for work so I called them on the phone. I said, "What's this missile business in Great Falls?"

"Well, we've got the job to provide the environmental control system." Now you and I would say air conditioning. In the nomenclature of the government, they change it—environmental control.

I said, "I'd like to bid on it." I said, "You're going to furnish the equipment, but somebody's going to install it."

“Yeah, that’s right.” So I took Tom Battershell (?) and Jim Rogers and Jim Allen—Allen was the electrical contractor—and we got on an airplane. We went to St. Louis. You know, big company—manufacturing company. We went in, and we had...I’ll never forget we called it the “green room.” We went in and sat down. I said, “We’d like to give you a price on this. Give us the plans and specifications.”

“Okay.” So they brought in a couple of plans, and there was nothing on the plans. It was, in the language of the day, it was a...what did they call it? It was a—

DL: Designed build—

JR: Well, I guess, anyway, they were research and development. So they were researching and developing. What they were doing, they actually had built a missile hole in Vandenberg Air Force Base in California. That was their test center. So we looked at these drawings and wasn’t any...much to bid on. But I did have the good sense to ask them the weights of this equipment. How much do they weigh? Well, there were 150 holes so 150 of everything. Then we multiplied and we came up, and I gave them a bid. As we’re going out the door, this fellow, who was an engineer, who turned to have been a graduate of Bozeman in engineering—his name will come to me in a minute—I went out the door, he said, “You got the low bid, but you’re not going to get this job.”

I said, “Why not?” I said, “We’ll put up a bond.”

“No he’s going to... the cheap engineer’s got a friend in California in Vandenberg that’s going to get the job.”

So I said, “What did we come down here for?” We got in our taxi and went the airport, got on the airplane, and flew to Minneapolis-St. Paul. Well, I just didn’t feel right about this. I said to Jim Roberts, and Battershell, and Don Allen, “Guys, go on back to Helena, I’m going to Washington.” So I went to Washington. Well, people think that congressmen and senators they’ve got all this power, but they really don’t have that kind of power. They wouldn’t know who to call. I knew that because I’ve been there. But I met a name whose name was Bob Oliver. Bob Oliver was a lobbyist for the autoworkers union. He was in the groups of people that I knew. So I called Bob Oliver. I don’t know whether or not...I guess...I called Bob Oliver. I told Bob I just bid this job down in St. Louis. I got the low bid, but the guy’s not going to give me the job because the engineer wants to give it to a friend of his in California. I said, “The job is in Montana. It’s in Malmstrom.” I said, “We’ve got a lot of work up there. Suppose you can help me out a little?”

Oliver said, “Well, I’ll see what I can do.” I never talked to Olsen or Mansfield or Metcalf or Kennedy or Johnson. I talked to Bob Oliver. I left Washington. I came home. About three days

later, I got a call from American Air Filter Company—their main office in St. Louis—they said, “Mr. Reber, we called to tell you that you’ve been awarded that contract.”

DL: All right, that’s good for you.

JR: So that’s how I got the contract.

DL: Well, you told me that story before. That’s why I wanted to talk about it. Because I thought that was really good. Because most people would have just gone home and said, “Geez, I guess I got beat.” But you went after it.

JR: Well, Tom Judge, writing the book, and Tom Judge came down one day and he said, “I want you to tell me how Olsen and Mansfield and Metcalf and Kennedy got you that job.” I bounced him.

DL: They didn’t have nothing to do with it.

JR: I said, “Tom...” In fact, I wrote him a letter. I wanted to record it. I wrote him a letter, and I said, “You were governor of Montana. You must understand what construction law is. You, as governor, couldn’t give anybody a job if you wanted to. Because the law requires that you bid the job, you post the bond, and it goes to the low bidder.”

DL: The lowest qualified bidder, yeah.

JR: I said, “That’s how it works. That’s how I got that job, and nobody had anything to do with it.” I said, “I can’t understand your stupidity.” I sent a copy of that letter to Ross Cannon because I ran into Cannon here at homecoming. I joked him. I said, “Well, you still practicing law?”

He said, “Yeah, I’m still practicing law.”

“Jeez you’re old enough to retire.”

He said, “Well, I never got as close to Olsen and Kennedy as you did.”

So I sent him a copy of the letter. He’s a lawyer he ought to know the law. I got the job. We were so good at it that we got them all. Nobody could beat us. We bid the job, and our bid would be two million dollars lower than anybody else’s. They’d all look, and they’d say, “Whose that crazy guy?” Well, we knew exactly what it cost because I ran it...I had a board. I put every piece of equipment on a board. Set it out in a field, which was 50 miles away, you drop that board down the hole and that guy didn’t have to go back for anything.

In fact I got a citation in...from the Air Force. They called it SATF—the Site Activation Task Force—for our efficiency. So that's how I got those jobs. I did them in Montana and Wyoming and in North and South Dakota and in Missouri. Did them all. In addition, I did work for Lockheed. We built a test station for them over in Bremerton, Washington. There was not that much work in Montana. You could run a plumbing shop and make a good living. But at one time I was listed as one of the largest mechanical contractors in the country. We employed over 200 people. So that's the story of the missile work.

Well, we went on from and I...We built the airport in Helena. We built lots of buildings in Helena in the '70s. Then one day I... I think I quit the construction business in the '80s. That phase...that ended that phase. But I went to the war. I was married, and I had two kids. Everybody wanted to get into the war. My brother Paul had a punctured ear drum, so he was 4F. I was what they called 3A, because I got a wife and a family. Well, along towards the end in like 1944, they begin drafting more people. I was draft-able. So by that time I had moved to California and lived in San Francisco. I worked in the shipyards. I was a welder. Then I got a job in a company called Anderson and Roe, who are a plumbing company. I worked for them. I became their shop foreman because I taught them how to produce. They were building barracks and had people standing on a bench wrapping an elbow on a piece of pipe, hour after hour after hour. I got a bunch of machines. I did it with the machines. The guy's name was Anderson. He was a Swede, and he had snoose [chewing tobacco] all the time. Come on he looked down and he said, "What's going on here? It looks like machine shop."

There was an old fellow there. He said, "Ask that kid."

I said, "Well, I found those old tools...machines back in the shop." I said, "It's a hell of a lot easier to do it this way and a lot faster."

He came back out and he says, "I just promoted you. You're now the foreman." So I run the shop. That was my first introduction to the plumbing business.

Well, then I came back because I got drafted. I went to work for Tim Sullivan, who was Sullivan Valve and Engineering, because they told me I would be there for 30 days. Thirty days was up—they didn't call me. I didn't like what I was doing. They were asking for men in the merchant marine. So the United States Maritime Commission...Serve your country in the Maritime Commission. Well, Paul could get in that and so could I. So we went down to California, and we volunteered to go into the Maritime Commission. They trained us at...on that island down there...oh boy, Wrigley...owned by Wrigley. That's where the Cubs...that was there their baseball...

DL: I don't think it was. Why do you think that?

JR: Oh, it's the island head off of L.A.

DL: Oh, Catalina?

JR: Catalina.

DL: Yeah, okay.

JR: Fancy so—

DL: I'll be darned I didn't know that you had spring training out there for the—

JR: That's where they used to go. It was owned by Wrigley. He owned the team. Well, I went there. Well, my brother Paul was younger, and he was single. I didn't want him to get killed in the war. So they had schools to teach...for pursers and for radio operators. You would go to school for 18 months and become a ship's officer. So I told my brother Paul, I said, "You sign up to be a radio man."

He goes "What are you going to do."

I said, "I have to go to work because I have a wife and two kids." Then I found that a Maritime Commission there was no allocation. Now, if you were in the army or the navy, they paid, but they didn't. You only got paid when you went to sea. Now I'm going to tell you a story...Shut it off for now.

[End of Tape 2, Side A]

[Tape 2, Side B]

JR: Okay, we joined the maritime service. I found out that I wouldn't get paid till I went to sea. Since my background as a workingman was welding and pipe fitting and that sort of thing, they assigned me to the black gang. The black gang are the people who work in the engine room. My assignment was as a wiper. Now a wiper is a guy that goes around with a rag and wipes up oil. The lowest possible job on the ship, that's where you start. So my brother went to Sheepheads Bay, New York. I went to San Francisco. Five years before I had worked—

[long pause]

—on a [unintelligible] in the shipyards, welding. There was a fellow there who ate lunch by himself. I went over—and he was a welder like me—introduced myself. His name was Phil Segal (?), he's from New York. [pauses] I had lunch with him every day. One day he said to me “Reber, why are you so nice to me?”

Well, I said, “You're a nice guy, Phil, why shouldn't I be nice?”

He said, “I'm Jewish you know.” “Jewish?”

I said, “It doesn't make any difference to me. We had a good friend in Butte we used to call him ‘Kikey’ His name was Rosenberg, and his father had a store.

“Oh,” je said, “you did?” Well, Phil and I worked on that job for...those jobs maybe for six months. We had lunch. He brought his family out to my house. This was down in Redwood City, California. We were all 21, 23 years old. The job ends, he ends, he's gone. Five years go by, I walk into the upgrade station in San Francisco. We wore uniforms, and they called out names “Smith, Kelly, Reber.”

“Here.” About maybe a minute and a half after I said, “here,” came over the loudspeaker, “Seaman Reber report immediately to Lieutenant Commander Segal in the upgrade station.” There he is, he's in the navy. He's running the place.

“What the hell are you doing here?”

“Well,” I said, “I'm going to sea.”

He says, “What's your rank?”

I said, “Well, I'm”—you know, I was a welder—“I'm a wiper.”

He said, “No, you're a wiper?”

I said, “Yeah.”

He said, "Say, do you know anything about bookkeeping?"

I never said no in my life. I said, "Well, sure."

He said, "Can you type?"

I said, "Yeah, I can type."

He said, "Well, I'm going to send you down to the RMO, and I'll see what I can do." I went down...I'm 22 years old, I'm married, I got two kids. They put me in filing. What do I got to know to be a filer? My ABCs. I knew my ABCs. I'd gone a year and a half to high school before I'd had to quit and go to work. So one day I get a call from Lieutenant Commander Segal. He said, "You be at Pier 90 at seven o'clock tomorrow morning. You're going to ship out as a junior assistant purser."

I just read that I had to go to school for 18 months to be a junior assistant purser. I go on and I'm looking, "Where does the crew sleep?"

"Let me see your ticket." They take me up. I have a room—"hooksall (?)" they're called. I call it a "boatcab (?)." But there's two beds in them—one up and one down. I got the upper bed. The down bed was the chief purser. His name was Jesse Rogers. He was from New Orleans. Jesse Rogers, it turned out, was the laziest man I ever met in my life. But he was the chief purser. The SSC Seacamp (?) was a big troop carrier. It carried 3,000 passengers, we called them. Now, you should have seen the 2,000 "passengers". They had to urinate and defecate. They had troughs and, oh, I got sick of looking at them. I get on that ship. Ship sails away. I go underneath the Golden Gate Bridge. I'm sleeping, and I think they got me in the wrong bunk. But I woke up the next morning I'm in Port Hueneme, California, which is a base. This is where the Seabees were. Well, that's what I should have been is a Seabee. Instead of that I was a junior assistant purser. We take the troops, and we are off to the Pacific.

One day that Chief Mate, whose name was James O'Holmes. I remember all these names because I used to have to type them. "Where the hell do you eat, Purse?" he called me.

I said, "I eat with the guys down there."

"What guys?"

Well, I said, "Down with the guys."

He said, "You mean down..."

"Yeah" I said, "Down there."

He said, "Come here. I'll show you something. Show you where you eat." He took me to the officer's war room. He said, "You're an officer on this ship. You'll eat here with me." They had the table clothes, silverware, black guys waiting on us. We didn't integrate the Army or the Navy until Truman. So that's what they did. "Yes, sir. No, sir." [laughs] Right behind me here was a corporal. All these guys are going by to eat. Three thousand going down into the alley. By the time the first hundred went by, there was a mess hall. That's why they call it the mess hall. It was terrible—smelled terrible. Well, on our table, it was right in front of me every day—cookies, candy, fruit. I used to just reach over and whatever it was and put it out the window. So the corporal always caught the windows. Somebody I know caught it. Then the black waiter would come in, and I'd say, "You forgot to set the table."

"Yeah, sir." He'd go set it again. Well, there I was. How in the hell did I get to be a junior assistant purser because I was nice to a Jewish kid?

DL: Yeah, five years before, yeah.

JR: Yeah, his name was Phil Segal. I went to New York. I looked up Phil Segal in the phonebook. There's 10,000 Phil Segals. I never could find the man because I wanted to find a steak or something. Because I made that trip, Jesse never did anything, I did all the work. I made all the payrolls, dealt with three different unions, and I kept the ship's log. One day the captain, whose name was Dunn...I mean he was a "Capitan." He said, "Why you got to do that?"

I said, "Well, I made a mistake. I was going to make a new one."

"Purse, you never change the log. Cross it off. The log is the log. That's the ship." So, anyway, I went out, and we went out into the Pacific and ended up hauling troops back and forth. We took troops into Manila when Manila was still...I'm not a war hero. But anyway, the reason I was there was because my friend Phil Segal. Then when the war ended, I came home. I saved enough money. That's the money I used to buy the plumbing shop.

DL The 2,800 dollars you put into the plumbing shop?

JR: So, Phil Segal—

DL: Kind of started it. That's great, that's great. Too bad you couldn't ever find him.

JR: Well, it's a lot of luck. You know. I just read Archie Bunker's biography—Carroll Connor's [Carroll O'Connor]. He says, "What is not expendable, or is it transferable...You either got it, or you ain't." I said to my...I read that part of his book. Did you read his book?

DL: No, I haven't.

JR: You got to read it.

DL: I'm glad you mentioned it to me.

JR: Well, Archie Bunker was his character, but I read the book and he is Archie Bunker. He came from a fairly well-to-do family, but he was a bigoted, conservative, white guy. Just like in the...It's a great book. But yeah, luck. I had...that was just luck. I don't know what the hell else could you call it.

Well, I went into business in Helena in 1946. I brought my brother with me. I was in business for forty...more than 40 years. I'm just going to say this because it's true. I became a multi-millionaire. Raised my family. They all went to University of Montana. They all graduated the University of Montana. The University of Montana gave me an honorary doctorate two years ago in business administration. I never gave them any money at that time. People say "Yeah, you know, that's how you get it." I didn't give them anything except they appreciated the fact that I was the guy who started the vo-tech schools. That was a contribution to education. But years ago I was on Carroll's board, Carroll College, I got an honorary doctorate from Carroll College because we put Carroll College on the map. When I first went to Helena, Carroll College was a school out there nobody paid any attention to. We committee of...Jack Corrette, Jane Blockus (?), Joe Reber, my friend from East Helena—

DL: Oh, Clark Patrick.

JR: No, no.

DL: Not Clark?

JR: No, no. The contractor down there that was very wealthy.

DL: Oh, oh, I know which one—gravel guy. I don't have information. I know who you're talking about.

JR: Yeah, that guy. Anyway, we got this committee, then we got the money and built that rec center. I was chairman of that committee. We raised several hundred thousand dollars, I've forgotten, but the bishop didn't think we could raise a nickel. But we had to make a deal. All the money that went to Carroll College went to the bishop. We made a deal that all the money that went to Carroll College, not to the bishop. So the non-Catholics, would...could justify, now, that they weren't contributing to the church they were contributing to Carroll College. So we raised money. Joe Maralee was on the committee and we raised the money.

DL: Marrone (?).

JR: Marrone, Joe. That's right.

DL: The other one was Marrone. [laughs]

JR: Yeah, well, we all put in our 50,000 and helped...got Carroll going. So that it became, and is now quite a school.

DL: Now, Marc Racicot's dad, Bill, was the first manager of that P.E. Center. When he came down from Libby, I think, he coached basketball for a while, but then took over, basically, running the P.E. center.

JR: Well, see, by then I was gone.

DL: Yeah, that's right.

JR: The last president that was there when I was there, Monsignor Brown then his successor. Then I built the current library. I had the construction contract for that. When I finished that building, the basement was left unfinished. I was doing pretty good and my good luck so I finished the basement, my expense. That's in nobody's record anyplace. They'd say, "You charged it off." I just did it. I didn't have time for a lot that ball robbing (?). But anyway, it's there, and it's a good building and we built it. In the early days, I did work at Carroll. Wally Wadell (?) did a lot of work down there. I met Racicot once in my life. I knew who he was, and I watched his career. He's gone further in politics than anybody else in Montana history. And I'll tell you—

DL: You were still on the board of investments when he came in as governor, weren't you?

JR: Oh, no.

DL: You left before '92? Well, '93 he was the...he came in.

JR: Well, I left in '88.

DL: Oh, I was thinking you had been around longer than that, yeah.

JR: No I left when Schwinden. What year did—

DL: No, he was later than that, Joe, because I went down there in '87...Maybe you're right, and then because Dr. Schreiber or Buster took over.

JR: Well, yeah, Schwinden, yeah that's a—

DL: Yeah, another story.

JR: Let that lay. But yeah, you came down there, and I knew I was in—

DL: Because you're the one who put that altogether, right.

JR: I was there in 12 years. Well, I was the one that created the job. Schwinden, I said to him, "We need some help. We're growing too fast." But I enjoyed those years.

DL: Well, you did some good tough things

JR: Well, we got the money loosened up. As we said earlier and we'll put it on tape, we loaned Eddie Washington to open the Butte mines over the objections...Were you there then?

DL: I came in just as it was going on. The staff was real opposed to it, I remember that, yeah.

JR: Everybody was opposed to it but me. I was from Butte. My father was miner. I wanted to see those mines opened because it was 300 new jobs.

DL: Oh yeah, plenty of collateral. It wasn't a bad loan because it was, well, collateralized.

JR: Yeah. On the board of investments you can't...it's prudent is the word. Jim was against it. Jim would rather push a button and transfer the money to New York. Anyway, we fought that, and they turned it down twice while I was in California. One day Denny Washington came to see me in California. I didn't know Denny Washington from a bale of hay, but I knew he was a contractor. He came down, and we had lunch at Indian Wells Country Club. He told them what he wanted to do. I said, "You're going to open a non-union mine in Butte?" I said, "Denny, I'm from Butte. They'll burn up your truck."

"Well," he said, "I don't think so." But he says, "I wish you would reconsider this." So he told me what he was going to do, so I got on the airplane the next day or so and I went to Butte. I went out to the mine. First, I went to see the former President of Butte Miners Union Number One. He was a Syrian kid that I went to St. Johns school with. He was [unintelligible] boy come on that name. I went out to see him. I said, "What are you going to do if Denny Washington opens a non-union mine?"

He said, "Joe," he said, "That's the only way it'll work."

So I went over to the mine, and I climbed up in the big truck. The guy was driving the big truck, and he didn't know who the hell I was and could care less. I said, "What do you think about the union?"

He said, "F the union. I got a wife and three kids, and I need a job." I climbed down off that. I went to Helena, and I called a special meeting. It was reconsidered, and we asked for some

more data from Washington. Then Jim Howett said, "Well, I want..." We had our lawyer. What was his name?

DL: Mike—

JR: Mike...yeah—

DL: Yeah...Mike—

JR: I don't know...Mike.

DL: Marrone (?).

JR: Marrone, he was our lawyer. He had the letter from the EPA. The letter said, in effect, that if the board of investments loaned money to Dennis Washington and he went broke, then the state would be required to make the cleanup of everything in Butte which we didn't want to do. He read that, and Jim said, "Well, that takes care of that."

I said, "Well, I'll tell you what we'll do Jim. We'd get an appraiser to appraise everything above ground, no real estate. What's the value of all the tools—all the equipment—above ground." Jim didn't like that, and you know he's my best friend. So we had it had appraised, and it was worth more than 11 million dollars. So on the basis...on the strength of that we made the loan.

DL: Yeah no, I remember when that was done. That was the only way it could be done was to do it on the equipment because you didn't want the real estate, yeah.

JR: Jim thought...he was never for it. So the loan was made and he got to open the mines, and he became a billionaire.

DL: They paid it off real quick too.

JR: Oh, about three years.

DL: Yeah, it was all paid off.

JR: We made like, if you look up the record, we made like 560,000 in—

DL: Interest.

JR: —interest, yeah. It was 300 hundred jobs, and it brought—I've got all these records—it brought like 50 million dollars in economic impact into Butte. Then when the electrical energy went up, they shut the mines because they couldn't make it. Copper went down and...but now coppers way up again.

DL: Buck 35, and the mine is moving. Yeah, they're adding a lot of people.

JR: Well, coppers got to be more than 35.

DL: A buck 35.

JR: A buck 35. Well, I remember what it was when he started to mine, it was 56 cents. His breakeven point was like 72. At one time, it went to like a dollar 60. He made money hand over fist. It's great. He's an entrepreneur. We need more like that in Montana.

DL: I think it's doing real well over there now, as long as the price stays up. We did the other loan on the Livingston Rebuild Center. You remember that deal down there?

JR: Yeah.

DL: Dennis Washington was involved in that.

JR: Yeah, well, that was another deal and I something he sold that—

DL: He sold it to O'Brien (?) or one of these [unintelligible] or something or other. We got paid off, but it didn't work out as well. Didn't work out at all.

JR: Yeah, well, I don't...I presume that there were some loans that we made that might not have made it. But I can't remember anything where we really stuck our neck out. Now you remember that Colombia Falls Aluminum wanted a loan—Brack Duker. We went all through the gyrations. We approved a loan. That was 900 jobs, but on the strength of us giving him the credit he was able to borrow the money privately and we never loaned him any money. But we were instrumental in getting that going. He bought that whole thing for a dollar. He became...he's worth couple hundred million. Then he did a strange thing. Do you remember Duker?

DL: Yeah.

JR: The deal that we made with him...the union...he wanted to cut the wages. The union. It was something like this. They were getting paid like 18 dollars an hour, and they wanted to cut it to 12. Well, the union didn't like that. I went up there, to the union, and I said, "Yu know, 100 percent of nothing is nothing and he's going to agree—"

[End of Tape 2, Side B]

[Tape 3, Side A]

JR: —to profit better than nothing. So they did. He created a new system of manufacturing aluminum. He made that plant into a tolling (?) plant. You know about this? Because everybody else had to buy the product. They bought it down in—

DL: Jamaica or somewhere.

JR: Jamaica, yeah. What did you call it? I forget.

DL: Bauxite.

JR: Bauxite, yeah. So they haul it from Jamaica to Seattle, haul it over from Seattle. Then they would run it through the process. They owned it from the time they bought in Jamaica to the time they sold it. He didn't do that. He charged them so much a pound for toll fee.

DL: For processing.

JR: Yeah, and that's why he was so successful.

DL: Then that's another thing that I...I guess that's closed now.

JR: No, they just it cut it back. It's still running but it's a pretty low level.

JR: Well, the board of investments was instrumental in getting those jobs—saving them. Then he got the idea of somebody advising him that he didn't have to split the profits. So I read all about this in the paper. I went up one day to see the lawyers for the workers who I knew the father. I said, "You know all you have to do is go to the board of investments and get copies of our correspondence. Because our correspondence says 'split the profits.'" Now if I say I'm going to split the profits with you that means half and half I would imagine. It never went to court.

DL: Yeah, he settled—big settlement.

JR: He settled and he...I heard from somebody who knew him that he wrote a check and I think it was for 100 million, maybe 200 million. But they got their money, and they had it coming. Duker's rich and lives in California, and thank god for him too.

DL: Yeah, well, you were on the board for how many years?

JR: Twelve years.

DL: Yeah, that's a long time.

JR: Four years under...my term ended, but before my term ended, this is when you came on board, then he wanted Buster to have that on his program I guess. So he—

DL: Well, they merged those two boards. The whole loan board and the board of investments, and that's when I came down.

JR: That was my idea. I went to see the governor. I said, "You got two boards doing the same thing. Why don't you merge them? We're five men. We take two of them." I said, "Then we're going to hire a nice fellow by the name of Dave Lewis, director."

DL: Well, see, Ted owed me that deal because I went over and I took over the old welfare department. It was a wreck. I put in three tough years. He said, "Well, I'll get you something good if you clean that up." So that's how that all worked out.

JR: Well, I'll tell you exactly what he said. I went through this business of cutting the board down. Then we needed a director. The governor said, "I have an idea of who it ought to be."

I said, "Who?"

He said, "Dave Lewis."

I said, "He's hired. That's who I would recommend." Dave came over and took it off. You were there for...

DL: Five years. Five years, yeah.

JR: Five years. Well, it worked out. But that was about the end of my public service but in the meantime back in the '60s when I was active I was on the Democratic National Finance Council under Bob Strauss who later became ambassador to Russia. I was on the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee during those later years. As such, I met the political swells of the country. So one day I was invited to the White House by Lyndon Johnson. You want to shut it off?

[Break in audio]

JR: I was one of 50 invited by President Johnson to the White House. We met in the famous Green Room. The purpose of the meeting was to discuss the 1966 congressional elections. Johnson was concerned and he told this story. He said, "Down in Texas," He said, "Two of my friends were on the railroad tracks." Johnson talked like a preacher. He wanted to be loved by a preacher, and he wanted to be loved like a preacher. He says, "Down in Texas," he said, "they were standing on the railroad tracks." He said, "Jake looked, and he saw the train coming down the track going about 50 miles an hour. Then he looked the other way on the same track coming about 50 miles an hour." Then he says, "Jake turned to his friend, and he said, 'I'm

getting out of here.' He says, 'Where you going?' He says, 'I'm going to get my brother.' He said, 'Well, why do you want to get your brother?' He says, 'Because my brother ain't never seen a train wreck.'" That's the President of the United States. Now he said, "If you folks don't go home and send me back a Democratic congress, it's going to be a train wreck around here."

So I reported that in modest Montana, nothing would change. We would have Mansfield and Metcalf and Olsen and Jim Batten was the Republican from the eastern district. So then Johnson introduced Senator Fulbright, and he said, "Bill doesn't agree with me, but I've just announced upstairs to the press that I am sending 150,000 troops to Vietnam to get this here war over with." He said, "My secretary of state, Mr. McNamara, and the Pentagon advise me that this is what we have to have to win this war." We left, and I left, and I learned later in reading Mansfield's book that he had been there on the same day. I'd also had coffee with Mike that day, and he never mentioned that he had been to the White House. Neither did I.

But for historical purposes that's the day that Lyndon Johnson signed his political demise. He was prude later because McNamara spent 20 years apologizing for what he did in the Vietnam War. The Democrats—the liberal-Democrats, like Mansfield and like Senator Fulbright and others—just wanted to declare that we'd won and leave Vietnam. But the fact of the matter is in all the years we were in Vietnam, we never secured the runway in Saigon. The airplanes, people that were there told me they had to...When they took off an airplane, they had to go straight up because they were shooting at them from the end of the runway. We never were winning the war. We never had chance of winning the war.

The reason we were there is because our country had set up what they call the Domino Theory. They were fearful that if they lost Vietnam they would lose all of Southeast Asia to the Communists. That's what they were fighting—Communism. The fact of the matter is we had advisors there under both Truman and Eisenhower. Kennedy sent the first troops. Johnson sent the rest of them. You know the history is we lost 50,000 men in Vietnam. It took until Nixon was president to get us out of that quagmire, to coin a phrase.

So in the next election Johnson... the Democrats lost 46 seats; although, Johnson continued to have the majority in both the House and the Senate. But he could have run for president again because he served out Kennedy's term and then his own term. When he got elected in 1964, it was the largest majority ever elected in the United States. He had the highest majority, won every state but one. Within two years he announced that he wouldn't run again. He went to Texas, and he died shortly after. His friends say he died of a broken heart. He never wanted to lose that war. The history has proven now that the Vietnamese weren't fighting for Communism. They were fighting for their country and their freedom. We'd still be there. History repeats itself, and I believe it's repeating it right now in a place called Iraq.

Now having said that, I'll go to my friendship with Mike Mansfield who is probably the greatest person we ever sent to the Congress. He was the Majority Leader longer than anyone else in history. I first met him 1938. I was 19 years old. Mike was about 32. He was running for Congress. He was a professor at the University of Montana. He was in a race—the Democratic race—against—

DL: I can't remember.

JR: I can. Jerry J. O'Connell. He ran against. Jerry J. O'Connell beat Mike in the primary. Jerry J. O'Connell was defeated by Jeannette Rankin in the general election. Jeannette Rankin was, I think, the first member...the first lady member of Congress. She'd been in Congress and voted against World War One. She voted again against World War Two. That's one of Montana's historical stories. She didn't run again. Mike was elected in '42. But when he ran in '38, he came to the union that I belong to—the Brewery Workers Union—soliciting support. I made the motion that each member contribute one-half a day's pay to Mansfield's campaign and they did. One-half a day's pay was three dollars. I don't think that Mike Mansfield ever forgot it because as years went by, and he was all those years in Congress. His first ten years he was in the Congress. There wasn't anything great about that except that I think that about the time he got the dam built up here.

DL: Kerr?

JR: No.

DL: Oh, let me think which one are we talking about? The one on the Missouri?

[Break in audio]

JR: He was instrumental in getting Hungry Horse because...Well, he got that when Roosevelt was president. In any event, in 1952, he ran for the Senate, and he ran against the city senator whose name was Zales Ecton. Zales Ecton had been the first Republican senator ever elected in Montana. Zales Ecton was a senator from Bozeman who ran against and beat Leif Erickson. Leif Erickson had defeated...and defeated...

DL: Oh, you got me on that one Joe. I don't remember those names.

JR: Shut it.

[Break in audio]

JR: Leif Erickson had defeated—

DL: Burton K.

JR: Burton K. Wheeler who had been in the Senate for more than 20 years and was considered unbeatable. But there was so much strife and stress over that primary fight that Leif Erickson was defeated by Zales Ecton. So Mike chose to run against Ecton in '52, which is the year General Eisenhower ran for President. In 1952, General Eisenhower carried Montana by 50,000 votes. Mansfield won by 5,000. It was a tough, mean campaign that almost broke Mike Mansfield's heart because the opposition hired people to come in and destroy him, led by the McCarthyism and their crowd that called Mike Mansfield a Communist.

They hired a local...who was the head of the American Legion. Then they brought in a guy from the outside.

[Break in audio]

The opposition hired a person by the name of Harvey Matusow, who came to Montana to prove that Mansfield had connections with Communists. After he won the election, they had a congressional investigation into these attacks. Matusow went to jail. McCarthy—Mansfield ignored him and never would speak to him. McCarthy was later sanctioned by the Senate. That was the end of it, but that was a terrible campaign.

From then on, he had easy campaigns. He never raised a lot of money. He had a great friend from Butte whose name was James H. Rowe, who was a Harvard graduate. His nickname was "Bim." I knew him well. He had been law partner of Cochrane and Rowe, who were lawyers that wrote most of the New Deal legislation for President Roosevelt. Rowe was so necessary to President Roosevelt that he moved him into the White House so he would be at his side all the time. He's deceased, but he always handled Mansfield's political contributions and paid all of his bills. Mansfield easily won except one year he had introduced a gun control bill.

I asked him, because in Montana that was just not the proper thing to do politically, and what happened was there was a young man from Montana who was a Marine, who went into a liquor store in Washington D.C. to buy a bottle of liquor. A man—I was going to say a black man—a man came in with a gun to hold up the liquor store. He shot and killed this young Marine, and as a result, Mansfield introduced gun control legislation. Then the word got out that this again was a Communist conspiracy, you know, get our guns. I, at that time, had many employees, and every worker that I had working for me—or most of them—had a pickup truck and in the back of the pick-up truck they had two rifles, and in the side they had a handgun, and they were hunters. They began coming into my yard with a Wallace sticker on their bumper. Wallace was the guy that was running for the Senate against Mansfield. He is from Anaconda, and nobody ever heard of him but he was getting all of this support because of the gun nuts. So I warned Mansfield that this was happening. He sent Jim Rowe out to Helena, and we had a meeting out at the state capitol and decided we would get the labor unions to print a pamphlet

and deliver it to the [unintelligible] thousands of people. That was done. Well, it turned out that Mike won handily anyway and...but that shows you how...what an issue that was.

So then when he...he was so busy. Mansfield was the Far East expert in the Congress of the United States for nine presidents that he served under. The year he ran against Wallace, and it looked like Wallace had a chance. President Nixon had a mission in London where he had to go to discuss the war in Vietnam. He sent his personal airplane to Butte to pick up Mike Mansfield. That ended Mr. Wallace's campaign. But the people in Montana never ever realized the power Mike Mansfield had. They never realized how he was loved by his constituents and his contemporaries in the Senate. He was a very, very knowledgeable man when it came to issues. He never pushed anything on anybody, never made outlandish speeches, just did his job.

Now, he had been a Majority Whip under Lyndon Johnson. Of course, when Lyndon Johnson became vice president, Mansfield became the Majority Leader. Lyndon Johnson didn't like being vice president. Lyndon Johnson liked to run things. Kennedys put him on the ticket because they knew that without him they would have never won. Lyndon Johnson got them elected.

I'll tell you how he did it. He said, "You guys both fly in your airplanes. I'll do what Harry Truman did." He got on a train in Texas and went all across the South. He called in the Democratic leaders, and he'd say...in the one case where two Democratic senators in Alabama. Alabama was anti-Catholic, and they were not liberals, they were conservatives and they weren't for Kennedy. So the story is that Johnson called him in and said, "Give him a drink." That was branch water and whiskey. The first drink he'd say, "How do we look in Alabama?"

"Not very good, Lyndon, we're not going to do very good here. We can't support them. We'd get beat ourselves."

"Oh," he'd say, then pour them the next drink. After he pour them the next drink, he would say "Well, what do you think is really going to happen in Alabama?"

"Well, we told you, Lyndon, it's going to be tough."

"Well," he said, "I'm going to tell you something. If we lose, Jack Kennedy will still be in the Senate. Lyndon Johnson will still be the Majority Leader of the United States Senate, and there won't be a goddamn thing in the Senate for Alabama. So tomorrow morning I want to read in the paper Senators so and so and so and so have endorsed the Kennedy-Johnson ticket and will be out campaigning." That's how he did.

Okay, so in the South...and there was still segregation. They wouldn't allow...Of course, a lot of black people were for Kennedy because Kennedy was liberal, and they wanted to have

meetings but white people wouldn't sit with black people. So they were going to have a meeting in the theater, and the Republicans figured they were going to really embarrass Johnson because they're not going to let black people sit in a theater. So Johnson sent his crew and took all the seats up. So everybody had to stand up. So that's the way Johnson was. He was tough.

Anyway, he went to the first meeting of the Democratic Caucus in the Senate. Mansfield was elected Majority Leader. Johnson announced that as vice president he was going to sit in on all the Democratic caucuses and "guide you as I always have." Mike Mansfield, who had just been elected Majority Leader, and who Lyndon Johnson—he [Mansfield] was his protégé—said, "Well, I'm going to tell you Mr. Vice President, you are now part of the executive branch of the government. You're no longer part of the legislative branch. So you will not be allowed to attend the caucuses." That's how he did it. That's how Mike took over and became the Majority Leader.

Well, his book is a great... is a book about all of his accomplishments. Most Montanans didn't know what he knew and how he tried to get us out of the war in Vietnam and couldn't do it. So I remember all of that. I remember him coming to Montana. He used to campaign by walking the streets in the early days. He had his assistant, name was Jimmy Sullivan. Jimmy Sullivan knew everybody. Mike didn't know very many people, and he wasn't great at remembering names. So Mike didn't bring his wife campaigning with him because if she was with him he'd have to introduce her. So we didn't really get to know Maureen until later in his life. But as you know, all of you have read the history; Maureen is the one that made Mike what he was. She sent him to school, educated him, and taught him. But he left the Senate and was appointed, by Jimmy Carter, ambassador to Tokyo. I visited with him several times in Tokyo, my wife and I. He was probably the greatest ambassador because he did it their way.

I'll give an example. An American submarine came up under a Japanese fishing boat off the coast of Hawaii. Maybe you remember reading this. It killed everybody on that boat. Mansfield, of course, had to make an apology to the Emperor and to the Japanese leaders. What Mansfield did is he dressed exactly as the Japanese would in a swallow tail coat. He went in, and he bowed so far down he almost fell over. He made sure they took pictures of that so the Japanese people would see how sorry we were at this loss.

I never ever went to see him for my own business. He knew what I was doing. He knew I was a contractor, and I did a lot of military work. Never ever discussed my business with him. We would talk about Montana and Montana politics. We would talk about whatever the current situation was. I remember when Carter got elected they asked him, "Who's going to win the election?"

He said, "The Democrat."

"By how much?"

"Enough." They would have him on Meet the Press or some of these talk shows, and they'd have to have 150 more questions because that's how he'd answer stuff. He was famous for that. He was not a great press man anyhow. He wasn't looking...He was never looking to advertise his own capabilities—his own power. It was always just doing the job. You know politicians want access. They want to be known. They want the press. Not Mike Mansfield. Then his career in Japan ended. I guess it ended with the Reagan administration. But he was very well-loved. We went there with Governor Schwinden on a trade mission one time and met the leaders of all off...Japanese.

I knew him so well that one day a friend of mine from Georgia...his name was John Amos. John Amos was a very wealthy person who owned...he owned the American Family Insurance Company. John Amos called me and he said, "So I'm going Tokyo. Do you suppose you could make arrangements for me to meet with the ambassador?" He said, "By the way, my traveling companion is going to be Neil Reagan and his wife. He'd like to meet the ambassador."

I said, "Neil Reagan?"

He says, "Yeah."

I said, "You mean the President's brother?"

He says, "That's him."

Well, Neil Reagan was President Reagan's brother. I said, "John, what the hell you calling me for? Call the White House."

Well, he said, "Nancy doesn't have anything to do with Ronald Reagan's family, and so they don't want to do that."

So I said, "Okay." So I called on the phone, long distance. I was from California, and the phone..."Hello." I said, "Is Mike there?"

"Mike?"

"Yeah" I said, "Mike Mansfield."

"You mean the ambassador?"

"Yeah, the ambassador."

"Who's this calling?"

Well, I said, "My name is Joe Reber, and I'm calling from...I'm a friend of Mike's."

"Just a minute."

Then I get another click, "Hello, who is this?"

I said, "My name's Joe Reber. I'm a friend of Mike's."

"You mean the ambassador?"

I said, "Yeah the ambassador, Mike Mansfield. Let me talk to him."

She thought, well, you know, I got some nut on me now. So, "Just a minute."

Then I got another...Ambassador Mansfield's personal secretary. She said, "Well, I'm sorry Mr. Reber but the Ambassador is not here, but would you like to leave a message?"

I said, "Well, yes, I have a friend whose name is John Amos, and he and Neil Reagan, who is President Reagan's brother, are coming to Tokyo. They want to meet with the ambassador. Would you please give him that message?" I said, "By the way, the reason I'm calling is because they don't want any publicity. This is just a...going to be a personal meeting." I hung up. I got it in here. The next day I get this wire from Mansfield—

[End of Tape 3, Side A]

[Tape 3, Side B]

JR: Letter that says, "United States Department of State, Washington D.C., March 31, 1983. Mr. Joe B. Reber, Indian Wells, California. Dear Mr. Reber, we passed the following message from Ambassador Mansfield by phone to you today. Dear Joe, appreciate you letting me know about the visit of your friend, Mr. John Amos and his traveling companion, and looking forward to meeting with them at the time my secretary indicated or at another time at their convenience. We'll see that they are met on arrival at Narita Airport. I'm also looking forward to the visit of the Montana group. With best wishes, Mike Mansfield." [laughs] Imagine he would take the time—

Here some pictures. Here's Mike and my wife. This is in Tokyo.

Anyway, John Amos went to Tokyo, and I didn't know what John Amos was up to. But John Amos was in the business selling life insurance, and his main target was cancer insurance. He sells cancer insurance. Well, everybody in Tokyo smokes like a chimney. So I found out later that John Amos got the first license ever awarded to anybody outside of Tokyo to be able to sell insurance in Tokyo. So inadvertently, he used me. But, I wouldn't have ever done that had I known, but that's what happened. But anyway, poor old John Amos died about five years later. And guess what he died of.

DL: Cancer.

JR: Lung cancer. So I had that relationship with Mansfield and over the years...and I didn't realize this until I started all this business. I went through my files and picked out these letters, and I was writing him all the time. He was writing me very important things. How the hell...he had.....okay anyway. He signed personally all of his letters. Never sent a letter that he didn't sign.

Unidentified Speaker: You can ignore me.

JR: Well, I don't know what to do. I don't know what to do. Well, anyway I was just reading this letter—

[End of Interview]