

Maureen and Mike

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**Interviewee: Matt Himsl**  
**Interviewer: Bob Brown**  
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Bob Brown: I'm visiting today with Senator Matt Himsl. Senator Himsl served in both the State House of Representatives and the State Senate for a total—I believe—24 years. Prior to then, in the 1950s he served as a Republican County chairman in Flathead County. Senator Himsl, maybe I'll just begin by asking you to kind of recap the early stages of your career and we'll kind of take it from there.

Matt Himsl: Thank you Bob, for asking me to share some experiences and observation of the 60 years of community service in Kalispell. When I came to Kalispell in 1945, Kalispell was a small town. The businesses were all privately-owned with the exception of the Missoula Merc [Mercantile Company], which was controlled from Missoula. There were just three banks in town, six doctors. Now they have about 173 and more coming. There were six soda fountains and the drug store. No big grocery stores.

There were about six lawyers and no CPAs. One radio station and about seven car dealers. In the 15 years that the county went through 10 years of depression and the four years of war changed the structure somewhat, speaking now of the political organization. Those years produced Democrat representatives in the state and in the county officers.

The old guards from the Republicans were quite active all right, but they were in the minority. I recall in particular that the leadership at that time was in the Gurney Moss of Whitefish; Ory Armstrong of Kalispell; and Pink Miller, Charlie Jellison, Hal Johnson, and Cap Landstrom, along with Harry Keith, who was a representative really of the Missoula Mercantile.

BB: All these men were Kalispell men, is that right Matt?

MH: Yes, these were Kalispell people.

BB: Except Gurney Moss, who was from Whitefish.

MH: Now, then in 1945 after the war, there was an entirely different movement in the community. The younger people came back and the really kind of young Turks in the political process. There was Jim Murphy, Bob Sykes, Merit Warden, Fred Broeder, Marshall Murray, Conrad Lundgren, Sterling Rygg, Roger Baldwin, Clyde Smith, Tom Jones, and Vic Morgan were mostly the new tribe that came in here. The county at that time had some Republican representation in Glenn Milhouse, Cliff Haines, Don Buckingham, and later, of course, Gipe and Dupont—

BB: Now Howard Gipe and Jim Dupont, and those other names you mentioned, were all men who served in county public office in Flathead County in the courthouse.

MH: Yes, they represented the goal to switch from the Democrat control to the Republicans. It was led largely by Vic Morgan, who was a young fellow that came to town and purchased the [*Daily*] *Inter Lake* and was an aggressive Republican. Largely through the efforts of all these—

BB: *Inter Lake* is a Kalispell newspaper.

MH: Yes. The tide kind of turned and started in so that the Republicans got representation. Among the—I'm sure I've forgotten some of them, but also the women played an important part in their effective organizations. They were a club, not all of them were organized, but those that I recall particularly were: Marion Abbott, Dorothy Stenseth, Floss McLelland, Jane Laub (?), Jean Nye, Joan Jellison and Ramona Jellison, and Polly Nicholaisen, and Jean Amsberry; that they brought in a new force into the political picture. Then, of course, following them were some new kids that came to town including Bob Brown and John Harp, Jerry O'Neil, Bill Boharski, Dick Nelson, Roger Somerville, Rod Bitney, and I'm sure there were others.

That gives you a change in the political complexion of the county and the support which changed from Democrat to the Republican. It began about 1964, when the change really started to come about. If you remember, there was quite a bit of interest in the John Birch Society, and also it made quite a difference in the state's representation, which was divided for the [Barry] Goldwater supporters in the contest with Nelson Rockefeller and Miles [George] Romney and Governor [William] Scranton for the national persons to campaign. From that time on, the tide seemed to develop in favor of the Republican philosophy. Part of this was brought about by several changes in the development in the community.

The state had extensive development in the watershed, and Fort Peck came into being, which was largely credited to Senator Wheeler. Hungry Horse came in in 1953 to the credit primarily of Senator Murray. Also at the time, nationally, there had been this movement for the Tennessee Valley Authority. There was some concern here with the development of the water resources and the exciting thing at the time was the power from the Hungry Horse development was moved from—well they had a [power] line through the valley.

Well, all of a sudden they developed in a new line on the Hi-Line from the mountain tops from around here with the fear at the same time that the lake was going to be raised—going to dam Flathead Lake so it would be 25 feet higher than the dam, I think. It was part of the county. So there was kind of a ghost floating around that there might be a plan for the Columbia Valley Authority and that—the people had enough of that; had gone through the period of the Depression where we had all kinds of government activities, programs, WPA [Works Progress Administration], PWA [Public Works Administration], and CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps], and the whole effort that was made. They didn't know where this might stop. It seemed to be quite

a possibility that we ought to take a different look at it, and that gave the Republicans a chance to get back into control.

BB: Matt, let me just kind of summarize that and see if I understand that clearly. The Democrats were the party then that developed the big project—the big public power irrigation project, the Tennessee Valley Authority. So they would be associated with that kind of a project. There was some concern or suspicion that through a similar kind of project involving the Flathead River drainage and Flathead Lake, they might dam up the Flathead River south of Flathead Lake so that Flathead Lake would expand north clear up into the Flathead Valley, including the areas occupied by Kalispell and Columbia Falls and Bigfork.

Part of the reason people believed that, was because some power wires, which could easily have been strung down in the valley floor, were up on the hillsides. It made people wonder, “Well, why would the government have gone to the extra trouble and expense to do that if they may have not had some idea in mind of flooding the valley before?” Since people kind of suspected that the Democrats might be interested in a project like that because they’d already been involved with the Tennessee Valley Authority, it was fairly easy to spread that suspicion. I think that was where Vic Morgan came in. Vic Morgan was instrumental in spreading the idea that that it could be the case?

MH: Yes. And that’s right. I should mention also that the whole Columbia River was being dammed. We had the dam here in the South Fork [Flathead River], Middle Fork [Flathead River], and there was also the possibility of damming in the North Fork [Flathead River]. So people were quite disturbed about that. It was an element that wasn’t very popular. They didn’t want any more of those kinds of developments for fear that it would just take over the whole valley.

BB: And they associated that kind of development with the Democratic Party?

MH: Yes, surely, that was the movement. All those dams were sponsored by Democrats. They did provide jobs—temporary jobs—in the construction period, but they didn’t know if that was just the end of it, or if it was going to go into a government program from the dams as they served the valleys. I think that was a period in which the switch really took place.

BB: That was actually kind of developing in the 1950s, wasn’t it?

MH: Yes, and well before that started, like Fort Peck, earlier than that.

BB: Okay, the 1930s.

MH: Over in the east—

BB: I think Morgan came to Kalispell in the early 1950s?

MH: Yes, at that time. The switch in the state office, I think, came about in the governorship in about that time after—that was when Governor [Hugo] Aronson came in.

BB: Aronson was the Republican who was elected governor in 1952?

MH: Yes.

BB: And he beat [John] Bonner. Do you remember anything about that campaign? You were the Republican County Chairman, I think, then.

MH: Bonner had some difficulty in his personal life, I think, that made that big of a difference. Aronson wouldn't talk about that. Aronson's force was for the oil and gas development. He was in favor of that. There was the young Olsen—

BB: Arnold Olsen.

MH: Arnold Olsen was a challenger in opposition to that idea. That gave Aronson the force to campaign and be elected.

BB: Olsen was the Democrat Attorney General at that time.

MH: Yes. Well, he served in the National Congress, several times, for a long time.

BB: Later on.

MH: Then of course, the Republicans had Nutter elected. It didn't last. He died in that plane crash.

BB: Yes, Governor [Donald] Nutter was elected in 1960 following Governor Aronson.

MH: Then that put [Tim] Babcock, who was Lieutenant Governor—put him into office.

BB: Matt, I want to ask you a couple of questions about—we talked about the big public projects, the hydro projects. Of course, Hungry Horse Dam was one that was completed. I think when Mike Mansfield was a U.S representative, a congressman from Montana, he came here to the Flathead Valley for the dedication ceremony at the same time that you were the Republican County Chairman of Flathead County. You and he, I think, he called at your office and you drove him up to the ceremony. I've always found that a good story because of course you were the Republican County Chairman and he was a Democrat congressman. What was your relationship with him? How did you meet Mansfield? How did you know him?

MH: Well, Mansfield was a professor at the University.

BB: At Missoula.

MH: In Missoula. I was in graduate school—I was never a pupil of his. But I was in graduate school when he started his campaign in the first place. As a matter of fact, I think was among the students, I contributed to that first campaign, which incidentally he lost the first time he tried.

BB: He lost the Democratic primary for Congress I think in 1940, or something like that.

MH: I knew him not so intimately, although, I didn't have him as an instructor. I knew him as a person, so when this dam ceremony came up, I don't know just how it happened, but anyway, I was assigned to pick him up and furnish transportation and take him to wherever he wanted to. He was the new kid on the block then. That dam was really the masterpiece claim of Murray's.

BB: So, that was Senator James Murray, who was a U.S. senator for Montana at the time.

MH: Mansfield was in support of it because he used his famous old remark when he was talking about service clubs and that you always end up wishing we had more power. Then the next thing you know, he'd say, "Well just tap 'er light." That was one of his expressions. I didn't at that time understand what it meant. I thought it had to do with cocktails from Butte. I didn't realize that it was really an expression that the powder monkeys used when they plugged in the dynamite or charges.

BB: In the Butte mines where he was an old-time miner.

MH: Yes. He was a frequent visitor here. Generally, he was kind of a silent campaigner. He did it by getting a room in the hotel and then using a telephone to call up his students that he knew. He kept in contact like that. He was a great one for—he must have had quite a clipping service because some of the important families he'd make a point to see that they got a card or some remembrance.

BB: If there was a wedding in the family, or a funeral, or a new baby, or something like that, then if he had any connection with them whatever, he'd have maybe people on his staff watch the newspapers and they'd send a card to that person which he would personally sign.

MH: Yes, he was a low-key operator. He remained that way even in the state when a group [at the University of Montana] wanted to start a Mansfield think tank or some sort of a retreat house. They were looking at it as an opportunity to get a land development. First it was going to be in Polson. Then they were going to move it up along the lake some place. They wanted Mansfield's support. He personally never did endorse that whole program. Of course, it eventually—I guess there was still some support for his operation of the state. I don't know what it is.

BB: I think you're referring to the Mansfield Center for Asian and Pacific Studies. That's headquartered at the Mike and Maureen Mansfield Library at the University of Montana. I remember as you do that there was some interest in getting some kind of a facility built somewhere down in the Flathead Lake area and that Mansfield himself was a little bit reluctant about that. He thought that might be a little bit ostentatious. He never was very wholeheartedly in support of it.

MH: Yes, that's right. I was in the legislature at the time when we appropriated one million dollars to go along with that. It looked like that program was going to go. Then when we found out it wasn't, I happened to be Chairman of the Finance Committee at that time. We asked for the money back and we got it back. There was a piece of property that I don't know what ever happened to it down there. They did have a small piece of land, which wasn't a very choice piece. I don't know whatever happened to it. I know the state got its money back.

BB: The important part of the reason for that was that Senator Mansfield wasn't remotely interested himself in raising money for the project. There needed to be some money matched with the state money and that sort of thing. So eventually the whole idea just collapsed.

MH: He's not the sort of fellow—he didn't want anybody to take his name and capitalize on it for their benefit. That's why I knew some relatives of his that said that he didn't want any part of it. I never talked to him about it.

BB: Now that modesty is a characteristic of Mansfield. I'm curious, you knew him when he was a professor at the University of Montana. Not well, but you knew him a little bit. You knew him also for years afterwards when you were the Republican County Chairman here in Flathead County and then later on when you were a state legislator. You had contact with him from time to time. Would you, in the early years, have guessed that he would become the majority leader of the United States Senate?

MH: No, I wouldn't have, because he wasn't an aggressive person. He didn't campaign aggressively. Even when he switched from the House to the Senate he wasn't aggressive in that area. Circumstances seemed to break just right for him and he was a modest leader in the Senate. Of course, those were Democrat years and he had seniority that grew up to a point where he inherited those positions largely than having achieved them. He survived to get them, is probably the way to put it.

BB: Now you were the Republican County Chairman in Flathead County during the entire period that J. Hugo Aronson was governor. We talked a little bit about the fact that when Aronson was first elected governor, the fellow that he defeated, Governor John Bonner, had been involved in an embarrassing incident at the National Governor's Convention down in Mississippi or Louisiana I think. That probably was helpful in Aronson as being elected in 1952. So did you ever meet Governor Aronson? What were your impressions?

MH: Oh yes, I knew him real well. That period of time when I served in that capacity and when he was governor, there was a time when the central committees in the counties had quite a bit of influence because he was concerned about—realizing that no officer is any better than his appointment would probably make him. In fact, he leaned very heavily on the support that he had from the—what was the brother's name, his advisor's?

BB: Wesley Castles?

MH: Wesley Castles, and there was a newspaper man—

BB: Fred Martin.

MH: Fred Martin. Those two were really the steering men for him.

BB: They were very important and influential members of his administration.

MH: Yes. Well at that time, you see, the local people had something to say about the liquor vendors, and also the post office appointees. So we had a stronger organization in the counties then than now.

BB: Because the county—

MH: Precinct committee men and women were more active because they had something to say about it.

BB: They had something to say about people who might get some decent jobs.

MH: That's right. Governor Aronson did something else. When his crew provided the county central committees with the names of the vacancies that were coming up in appointments, he asked to have you suggest people for them. Fortunately, I did a lot for him. We had good appointments in pretty near all of them. We had representation on the Board of Regents, the Highway Commission, the Fish and Game, and the Medical Boards, the Dental Boards.

BB: You were able to recommend good qualified people and in every case they were appointed.

MH: He told me, he said, "Any time you can make a recommendation, I know it's a good one." So I had a special relationship with him. It was rather interesting, I think. It just gives you some idea of how he operated. When he retired, he went up to the soldiers' home up at Columbia Falls. I'd go up there and visit with him. It was rather an interesting thing to sit down with him. There were patients everywhere always with certain visitors and they'd come up. He'd just raise his hand and he'd say, "This gentleman's my guest. Please leave." I always thought that was kind of an interesting thing because he didn't want to share his time with somebody else



like that. So he was quite a Governor, I think, in spirit. He was wise enough to know that he had limitations. He got the best people he could get to steer the ship for him.

BB: Matt, you mentioned in a previous conversation we had about Vic Morgan when you were the Republican County Chairman, and he was the very Republican and new editor of the *Daily Inter Lake*, doing what he could to help Republican candidates. I think you mentioned a time when he called you late at night and had you come down to his newspaper office?

MH: Yes. Oh, he was very generous with his time and with the paper's space. I'd complain about it and say, "We can't pay this." He'd say, "Don't worry about it. Let's get another page." That's the way he would go. He was a colorful one. That time, Truman came into this area and had a visit. That was kind of—

BB: President Harry Truman.

MH: Yes, and there wasn't much of a parade, but he had the story in there that nothing stopped. There was nothing in town that stopped, not even the dog that crossed the path ahead of his entourage that was here. Oh, he was a colorful fellow. It was kind of a stirring time. Most of the young Turks that came in here—most all of us were for Eisenhower. The old guard was for Taft. We had quite a time when it came to selecting delegates and the Taft people didn't want anybody else, of course. So we negotiated and had quite a time. Finally, we wanted one [delegate]. So I think we ended up at that time, there were three for Taft and one for Eisenhower. Of course, Eisenhower won that nomination anyway.

BB: I don't know this for sure, but I think Wellington D. Rankin was active in the Taft campaign in Montana. Is that your recollection?

MH: I'm sure he was a traditional one. He had a way of operating all his own. When he ran for office I had an experience with him—he came up and called me in. He wanted me to come to the hotel to see him, which I did. He wanted to know how he was going to run in this county. I said that I had no idea and that I couldn't tell. Was he was going to win by 800 votes? I said that I didn't know. Where would he get 400? I said that I didn't know: "All they are saying is that the treasury wouldn't be safe if you got there." He said, well, he understood, but—

BB: Because people questioned his personal honesty?

MH: Yes, because he was hiring employees from the prisoner trustees to do some work on his ranches. He was doing, he thought, as a gesture of good will. People looked at it in a different light. He was rather an interesting one. I was with him one time visiting when Pink Miller, who was also an old Republican stalwart, but kind of an independent one and he wanted to know that Rankin was getting some money from him. He had a roll of bills, I don't know how many. He came up and kind of slipped them over to Rankin. He was standing there. Rankin turned his head and said, "Now, is this corporation money?"

No, no that was his.

That was typical, I thought, of the old type of politics where people were trying to buy some influence because Rankin—I mean, Pink Miller, thought that Rankin was going to make it. He was never that much of a supporter in the party.

As a matter of fact, I got Don Buckingham, who was an employee of Miller's in the lumberyard, to run for County Commissioner. And he did and won. After that was done, I met him [Miller] one time and he said, "How come you didn't ask me about Bob [Don] Buckingham?" I said, "I didn't think we had to." That gives you some idea that he wanted to have some control in those appointments or he—

BB: He wanted to have some influence? Pink Miller was a prominent lumber man in this area. He liked to be asked for his opinion. He liked to give a big contribution to someone and made sure that he knew it.

MH: That's old-fashioned politics. That was going on there too—probably still is.

BB: Now, so you had quite a good relationship with Governor Aronson. He was a big, good-natured, Swedish immigrant who spoke with an accent. Then he was replaced after he retired from office. A few years later he ended up at the veterans' home in Columbia Falls. He was replaced by Governor Don Nutter. Nutter, as you mentioned, was killed in a plane crash. Just tell us—

MH: Nutter...Babcock was before Nutter.

BB: No.

MH: Babcock—

BB: That's right. Nutter was governor from 1960 to 1962. Then he was killed in a plane crash and was followed by Babcock.

MH: Yes.

BB: So your impressions—you were still Republican County Chairman at the time that Nutter was governor. This was before you had entered the legislature. Share with us your impression of him.

MH: I only had one contact with Nutter. I don't remember what the case was, but it wasn't in his office. I would kind of like to dismiss the whole thing, but I wasn't impressed because I never felt comfortable with all the profane language and talk of that kind. That was just a stream of profanity and I left that session with him. That's the only impression I had. It's a bit unfair to think of him like that, I'm sure. He probably was a good person. I didn't like that approach.

BB: He had the reputation for being kind of bold, kind of outspoken, that sort of thing. Is that your impression of him too?

MH: Well, it was worse than that. It was a vulgar type of thing. That's what turned me off. I could understand somebody having strong feelings, but I didn't think that was a way to express them.

BB: I understand. He was killed in a plane crash and he was replaced by Governor Tim Babcock. I think at about that time, you became a member of the State House of Representatives? Or soon after he was killed.

MH: Yes.

BB: So you probably had a fair amount of dealings with Governor Babcock because you were a member of the legislature most of the time he was governor. What are your recollections of him?

MH: Well, I think he was trying and I think—I didn't agree with his method of appointments. Instead of having a notice of what the vacancies were and if we had someone to fill them, his office and his people who were guiding him would send a name of somebody and ask if you approved or disapproved. I didn't go along with that. I didn't think that if that's what he wanted, that was his—it wasn't for us to make the appointment. I thought that was a weakness on his part with the group that he was working with.

BB: Who were his key people? Do you remember?

MH: No, I don't remember who they were entirely.

BB: You do remember Fred Martin and Wes Castles, and obviously you had a good working relationship with them during the Aronson administration.

MH: I didn't have that with the Babcock administration. I think Babcock had the right idea and was forceful enough. He was the first one that really came out for the sales tax. Of course, he lost to Governor Anderson on that slogan that, what was that now?

BB: "Pay more, what for?"

MH: Yes. "Pay more, what for?"

BB: Now Montanans have traditionally been opposed to a sales tax. Maybe you could share your thoughts a little bit about the sales tax and what the Republicans are trying to accomplish. I know you were a supporter of the sales tax idea.

MH: Yes. Well see, about this time, the state really didn't need that kind of resource. We had mines working, the mills were working. Copper mines were working. Oil and gas were being developed. There was—we had an economy that could generate enough money because we didn't need that sort of thing. The budget that we had on the state level were so small compared to about the first time they had a couple million dollar budgets, it was nothing like it is now.

In fact, with all the federal funds, and with the general funds and the state—what do you call it?—earmarked money. And then the federal money, they could get along without, it really wasn't that imperative. Like all the other states had to go that way. We thought that was the right way to go. I still think that it's more important even now that the tax revenues be generated from the general economic progress or development, or business in the state. Not to try to penalize the homeowner or the retired people or rob some trust fund that's for current operations. It shouldn't be that way. The state's expenditures should be on the level with what the economy of the state is.

Even with that, with 900,000 people paying, even if we broaden the tax base, it still isn't going to be enough without having the natural resources that we have. If we can't develop those, if they can't be produced, where is it going to come from? It's got to come from the property owners and from income. With 900,000 people, we aren't going to be able to do that and have a budget that meets what your neighbors have, when your neighbors have a different economy and a different population base on which to generate that. So we've got ourselves into a serious situation as far as the state is concerned.

BB: But your feeling, in terms of a sales tax then—back in the 1960s and now if I'm understanding you—is that in order to adequately and fairly provide for the legitimate needs of state government and the services that the people in the state require if we no longer have an expanding natural resources base, that we're going to have a very narrow and perhaps unfair tax system if it only focuses on people who own property and pay property taxes, or people who have income. We might be able to broaden our approach to taxation with the sales tax, maybe make our tax system a little bit more equitable and fair. At the same time, we can make it better able to pay for the services that the people in the state need. Is that a fair...?

MH: Yes. What we're doing now, as I see the legislature, we're taxing for big money. We're baiting for federal funds. That's what's got us into trouble. We have—generally there's about four budgets: a general fund, the state's special revenue that's earmarked, or appropriated funds—

BB: That would be like gasoline tax money, would be an example of that?

MH: Yes, those things that are statutory. Then there's federal funds that come in and most all of those are on a match basis. Then we have proprietary funds like generated from the state prison farm, and that type of thing.

BB: So when you use the term baiting, how I understand that, is that we try in some way or other to come up with enough money to meet the federal matching requirement, and to some extent then, the federal government's priorities become our own.

MH: Yes, and the danger of that is, of course, when the feds back off from that. Their characteristic in some of those programs, they start the program and then all of a sudden, the program expires, yet your program in the state is operating. They're left without resources. Now, I understand that in about something over 40 percent of the total budgets are federal money. The one I'm familiar [with] that we had about two billion dollars, is what the budget was. Now it's up to seven billion dollars.

BB: You were Chairman of the Senate Finance Committee back in 1980s, two or three times I think when—

MH: Yes. I was always on the Finance Committee. My sympathies go with those that are trying to make this thing operate.

BB: Matt, Tim Babcock was defeated in 1968 by Forrest Anderson. So that pretty much, even though the sales tax issue hasn't died, that was the first serious blow to it. I mean, I think Babcock's defeat was an indication that the people were opposed to a sales tax, and now, as we conduct this interview, 35 or 40 years later, that still seems to be the case. It seems as though Montana probably isn't any closer to a sales tax than we've ever been in any kind of broad-based tax reform.

When you—I guess prior to then, Governor Babcock was elected in 1964. Governor Nutter had been killed in a plane crash in 1962. So Babcock, who was Lieutenant Governor, became governor, and then ran in his own right and was elected in 1964 in an election that was actually—that particular election was kind of a bad one for Republicans nationwide and in Montana. The Republican nominee was Senator Barry Goldwater from Arizona.

Earlier in our conversation, you'd mentioned the John Birch Society, and maybe you could kind of comment on the John Birch Society in the context of Goldwater's campaign. Also, I want to ask you about the fact that you then were a statewide leader of Goldwater's primary opponent for the Republican nomination that year. You headed up the statewide campaign for Governor Nelson Rockefeller of New York. How did you happen to get that job?

MH: Well that wasn't—

BB: That was in 1968 when you were—

MH: Going back to the Goldwater, I mean the John Birch organization was an ultra-conservative organization, which kind of took over on the Republicans. It got to be a wing of the Republican Party just like in some cases now, I understand we've got some split party with some new name about...I don't know what they call themselves—

BB: I think it's called the Republican Assembly or something? I think it's similar.

MH: Yes, that's the type of thing. It will run its course as this other one did too.

BB: So the John Birchers were people who steered the Republicans as far to the right as they could politically?

MH: That was in the direction of Goldwater. Then I got involved with Goldwater—I mean, the Rockefellers. That was subsequently when Nixon was a candidate.

BB: Okay, so then Goldwater was the Republican nominee in '64. He was defeated and then in 1968, I think, is when you took on the leadership of the Rockefeller campaign. When Nixon, and I think Ronald Reagan, and some of the others were all running in 1968. Maybe Romney and Scranton—maybe they were in '64.

MH: I've got timing a little bit mixed up there. I thought it was later than that when the challenge was the re-election of Nixon and Goldwater—and [I mean] Rockefeller.

BB: That should have been in '68 I think.

MH: Whenever that was, those were the two ones. I got connected with that. There was a fellow by the name of Leonard Hall, who was a National Chairman.

BB: He was a Republican National Chairman.

MH: And a personal friend of Rockefeller's. This Hall used to come out here and visit a party that he knew out here, at Echo Lake.

BB: He knew some people here locally at Echo Lake near Kalispell.

MH: And when he came out, I would be invited out there to visit with him. That was my contact, came up with him and with Hall. Hall was—somehow there were several interested in the state of getting on Rockefeller's bandwagon. Hall didn't want them. He didn't go with that. So he asked me if I would do it. I kind of admired the Rockefeller operation afterward, being elected governor of New York three times. He obviously was a person of some stature to do that. Montana's delegation at that time was headed by Babcock, Governor Babcock. I knew there was going to be a Nixon delegation.

BB: That was because Babcock had endorsed Nixon.

MH: Yes. So I talked to Babcock to see if we could get—the delegates go uncommitted even though they all knew what they were going to do. My experience with those national conventions is you didn't want to go committed. If you went committed, you were just set aside. They didn't pay any attention to you. They were more interesting if they weren't. He agreed to do that. It was quite a courtesy thing. I felt personally that they wouldn't commit publicly that they were for Nixon, although we knew they were. Rockefeller wanted me to go to Florida, where they were having that national convention. I told him there wasn't any point to going. I could tell you what was going to happen as far as our delegates were concerned. But that was the best I could do.

BB: Did you meet Rockefeller personally?

MH: Yes. He made a quick stop through the state in Helena for a very short time. I had a little problem with that. I told him when he came in here for—not to start talking about gun control. That was the first thing he started on. The press got on him on that one, of course.

BB: So he was in favor of some kind of control of guns, firearms?

MH: Yes.

BB: Which of course would be an unpopular issue in Montana.

MH: Oh yes, I asked him if—suggested that he stay away from that one. But he didn't. Of course the press was after him. That didn't make any difference. As it turned out, it turned out he would have been—I still think he would have been the better one the way that it turned out for Nixon.

BB: Goldwater was defeated disastrously in '64 when Rockefeller was a contender for the Presidential nomination. Then in '68 Nixon won, and turned out to have a terrible experience as President.

MH: Yes, that is right. It's been an interesting experience in the organization and working with people. The party, though, doesn't have the organizational strength that they used to have. There's no question about that. The direct primary has broken that down. Now there's a movement to get people to register by party in the state. The way we have had it has not been—they didn't have to register by party. I don't know how that will play out.

BB: Traditionally there's been a lot of opposition to party registration in Montana I think.

MH: Yes, there has been.

BB: Now Matt, you were Republican County Chairman of Flathead County in the 1950s. I know during that period of time, up into the sixties and perhaps into the seventies, the Anaconda Company—most historians agree—has had a significant amount of influence in the state's economy and the state's politics, that sort of thing. I've heard it mentioned that the Anaconda Company people circulated around Montana somewhat. They perhaps talked to legislators, County Chairmen, that sort of thing. They kept tabs on what was going on in communities. They were interested in who was elected to the legislature. They had a big hospitality room over in Helena in the Placer Hotel during the period of time when you were legislator. Any experiences with Anaconda Company people, or any thoughts about their involvement and their influence?

MH: I've never had any contact with them at all except with the lobbyist during the sessions over there. I had no contact with them.

BB: When you were Republican County Chairman, you don't recall the Anaconda Company guy checking in with you and talking with you a little bit?

MH: No.

BB: Now representative Ory Armstrong, perhaps was, might have been a local contact person, would you think so?

MH: He was Speaker of the House at one time. He was a real estate and insurance man here. He had an uncanny contact—I don't know how he had it, seemed to have it—with the railroads. He had it with all powers that be. So whatever influence, I—it was never raised with them, never even talked about. I'm sure that Armstrong was aware of it. My only interest in it was a pleasant experience with their hospitality room.

BB: Tell me about that.

MH: Well they were just festive rooms of food. And they were friendly, kind people. They were doing a good job. At that time the Anaconda didn't have the horses that they once ran. I think that's the way to put it.

BB: This would have been in the 1960s, about when you were there.

MH: Yes, all the time I was there—

BB: You didn't have the impression that they were a controlling influence?

MH: No, no not at all.



BB: So how would you describe the hospitality room?

MH: Well they were just what they were. They were attractive meeting places where people, legislators, met. As you know, you don't have much time to spend in those places. It's kind of touch and go.

BB: But it was an opportunity, maybe, to just sit down and casually visit with other legislators and that sort of thing?

MH: Yes.

BB: It was in a pleasant environment and relaxed atmosphere and so on?

MH: Yes, that was quite a center in Helena in those days when they used the old hotel. Later when that broke up, I don't know, they used to have some hospitality rooms in a few places but it was never like they did at first.

BB: Do you have any impressions of the Montana Power Company during that same period of time?

MH: No. I never—maybe I'm not sensitive to those. Maybe they thought it was no point in talking to me about it. I never had any comment at all or any pressure.

BB: Did you know Lloyd Crippen or Everett Shuey?

MH: Yes.

BB: As lobbyists. So you'd had, maybe visits with them from time to time?

MH: Not very much. I wouldn't say that I was really personally acquainted much with them. They were in a different crowd than I seemed to be.

BB: Matt, do you remember in your experience in legislature any lobbyists of any type of any kind that stands out in your memory?

MH: No, I don't think I can—

BB: How about a legislator? Are there particular legislators that are prominent in your recollection?

MH: Oh, a lot of them. I didn't know special characters—well, there were some characters, of course, like Elmer Schye. He'd get upset about something and pile his books on his desk and go

get his hat and coat. He was leaving—well, at first he kind of excited people. Then after he did that about two or three times, they just forgot about him.

BB: He was going to say, “To heck with that place,” and go back to White Sulphur Springs?

MH: He had difficulty with Bardanouve for some reason.

BB: Representative Francis Bardanouve.

MH: Yes, for some reason they clashed about everything. They’d shout at one another. Both of them would get kind of excited. Francis Bardanouve never threatened to get up and leave, but Elmer Schye—he packed up a couple of times. But he was always back the next day.

BB: What’s your recollection of Jim Felt? He was Speaker of the House in 1967.

MH: Felt? Well, he was pretty—I think he did a good job. He was pretty formal. I knew his family. I knew his father better than I knew him. His father was a judge in eastern Montana down in Fallon County. He was a real fine fellow. Felt was—I didn’t have any particular—I thought he ran a good ship.

BB: Jim Lucas, Speaker of the House after Felt?

MH: Yes, I think he was effective. I think he—I thought he would stay with that and become more of a political figure. He was a capable, good one.

BB: Now both Felt and Lucas were Republican leaders in the House of Representatives at the time that the sales tax was a prominent issue, and both were closely associated along with Babcock with the sales tax. That’s your recollection too?

MH: Yes, and it was a tough time for them because we went there in ’66. I think we had a 24 majority in the House—Republican majority. The next two years we had 12. The next two years we had six. The trouble with the six is that there were three of them that wouldn’t go along with it. That was Big Ed Smith and Gary Marbut and a fellow by the name of Lou Perry. They were the ones that wouldn’t go along, so—

BB: With the sales tax?

MH: With the sales tax. Of course we didn’t control the Senate anyway. We couldn’t get it out of the House.

BB: Now you served with Big Ed Smith of course. You just mentioned him. He later ran for Governor. Any impressions of him?

MH: Well, I think he was out of his league very much. He was a very conscientious fellow and a bold fellow.

BB: Bold?

MH: Bold, yes. He was a guy who was a seatmate the first year I was in there. He was a rare one to be elected in that part of the state, really, as a Republican.

BB: Republicans hadn't had much success in elections up in his part of the state until his election.

MH: So he felt like he was kind of anointed, and he was pretty strong in his convictions. He and Marbut and Perry were the ones that we had difficulty with. We used to have a caucus at that time. We used to have the caucus in the old highway building. It got so that they were so spooked about whether or not there was a leak from there that they were checking to see whether there was any electronic devices that were being picked up. I don't think there ever was and it wasn't that important but I know that there was a time when they didn't want those three [Perry, Smith, and Marbut] in there.

BB: In the caucus?

MH: Yes, in the caucus.

BB: That was the time when—that was in 1971 when we were still functioning under the 1889 constitution and when the legislature only met 60 days. But if my memory serves, the legislature met something like 107 days during that session because of the deadlock on the sales tax, and the inability to get a sales tax out of the House to balance the budget.

MH: I don't remember anything that long. I remember one time I was there when they put a—they hung a drape over the clock. I think we were only there a couple of days after, not any great length of time.

BB: Don't you remember when Governor Anderson called us back again?

MH: Yes, I remember.

BB: I think we met off and on until June that year.

MH: Yes, we had a lot of special sessions.

BB: Yes, that's what I was thinking of.

MH: In fact, all through the years I was there, there seemed to be a special session about every time.

BB: Now, you served also under Governor Forrest Anderson. Any thoughts or impressions about him?

MH: No, no. My only impression was that he was strong. I believe his convictions were pretty genuine. No, I had no adverse—in fact, I admired him. We had some research being done on some tax thing. I believe it was—what was his name? There was a big tax study that was made.

BB: Doctor Bill Diehl?

MH: Diehl, yes, Diehl's study. Somehow one time in one of the meetings that came up. They were going to pick it apart. He put a stop to it right there. There was nothing wrong with that study. I don't remember what the issue was anyway. He wouldn't entertain criticism coming in—taking that apart.

BB: So he could take charge. He was sort of a take-charge guy?

MH: Yes, he was.

BB: Then you also served with Governor Tom Judge both in the legislature and as governor.

MH: Yes. I got along fine with him. He was pretty proud of being governor. He'd dress like the governor and he was—

BB: He looked sharp.

MH: Yes, he commanded attention. I think he made a good front to it. At that time, if you remember, there was a lot of federal money that came into being. So we got along and it made the legislature look pretty good at that time. I did have some contact with him. At that time, I introduced a Laetrile bill—that cancer bill—that Laetrile was this sort of a pit process—

BB: Kind of a derivative of apricot pits or something?

MH: Yes. I didn't know whether it was any good or not. But it seemed that there was some real active interest in it. Of course, there were lots of stories about how wonderful it was. The medical group didn't like it. But my argument was that if they exhausted all other means, I didn't see why anyone should be denied the help even if it were just psychological. I got it through and got it—I had a little bit of a problem in the House. I didn't know whether it was going to go. It went through and one of them came over and said, "You've got too many friends over here."

So it went through. It went to the governor. He called me about it. I told him, "I don't know whether it's any good or not." My arguments were just that. If they'd exhausted every other means they knew, and if it gave any kind of help—physical or psychological—I was for it. He said, "Well"—he had a brother I think who was a doctor in Spokane at that time. He said he talked to his brother about it and he didn't seem to be very upset about it. So he said, well, he'd sign it. So that's how that got on the books. Do you know it wasn't very long when the woman that's cooking for us here has relatives that are still taking that?

BB: They are taking Laetrile?

MH: Yes, that's good. They are doing well with that. There's no scientific reason for it, I guess.

BB: Well maybe sometimes things are hard to understand and explain.

MH: Yes, I was dumbfounded when I heard that her relatives were using that drug.

BB: Matt you knew, of course, Governor Ted Schwinden.

MH: Yes.

BB: In fact you were Chairman of the Finance Committee for a fair amount of the time when he was governor.

MH: Well, in my opinion, I think he was one of the best of the group—of all of them that I served with. Maybe it was because he always seemed to be good to me too. For instance, there was an appropriation given to—they set it aside for the governor that Judge had for doing something. I don't know how it was set aside for him to decide. He was going to—he offered it to the Kalispell beach group—park group. It was a matching deal of around 400,000 dollars. The city couldn't match it. So it was still on the books when Schwinden came in and somehow I knew about it. So I asked him if we couldn't transfer that up to—at that time they were concerned about the development up here of the Lone Pine.

BB: Yes, Lone Pine State Park.

MH: People who were living up there didn't want it to be a roughhouse park. They were running cars up and down—the motorcycles and stuff—up the hills. They didn't like that. They wanted something different. So I asked him if we couldn't transfer that. He said, "Sure." So that got transferred to that project up there. That's how that came to be. This was with Schwinden.

Then I liked his approach with employees. He was pretty liberal as a legislator. When he was governor, he drew the line pretty tight. He had the notion that there were certain limits and we couldn't go beyond that. The threats that were made for state employees or the hospital employees, you know, that type of thing, that usually is periodic in the legislature. They're

always going to strike. The University bunch were begging him on that. He held the line on that and I thought he should.

BB: He held the line on the budget pretty well?

MH: Yes. He said, "That's as far as we can go." And that was it. I think he was one of the best, I think. He was one of the smoothest too in his departments. He was very modest. He didn't have to have a driver or a car. He didn't have to have a protector with him. He had a telephone at the house, at the governor's [house]. He was just a good guy, I thought. My experience was good with him.

BB: How about Governor Stan Stephens? You served in the legislature with him extensively, and also served in the legislature while he was governor.

MH: Yes, I think he had got a tough break, I think. He had plenty of support to start with, but they had the misfortune of getting persons in those positions are no better than someone else makes them, usually staff people. Someone else makes them. He seemed to have difficulty making appointments. They turned out to be an embarrassment to him even to the point where the Lieutenant Governor resigned.

BB: Allen Kolstad.

MH: Allen Kolstad, which was kind of an unheard of thing. So Stan, I think he suffered a lot of difficulty that really wasn't his fault, but the chips just didn't fall right for him at all.

BB: Did you know him personally?

MH: Yes.

BB: I imagine quite well.

MH: Yes.

BB: Now Matt, you're a lifelong Republican and proud of it. Your father served in the State Senate before you did, I think, in the late 1920s and early 1930s? Maybe since we've just got a few minutes left, we can conclude a little bit with maybe you describing how you became interested in politics and what got you involved in public service, because your public service has extended really beyond the political realm. You've served on the National Board of Directors of the Red Cross. You've served, I believe, as the President of the Montana Auto Dealers Association. You've been active in the Chamber of Commerce, Kiwanis, your church, and many things. What in your background caused you to be such a public spirited person?

MH: I think it came partly from—I had an uncle that was a judge in Minnesota when I was going to school back there. He was a power in the Farmer Labor Party in Minnesota, which identified nationally as a Democrat party. In order to get Minnesota's Democrat vote, he was cornered by Farley. Do you remember—

BB: Yes, James Farley was Postmaster General of the FDR [Franklin Delano Roosevelt] administration?

MH: Yes, he was kind of the point man. He was supposed to be picking up—I saw letters from him in his green ink inviting him to come to Washington. They were thinking about an ambassador to Austria. That was his native land.

BB: That was your uncle's native land?

MH: Yes. So I was in school when that thing was going on. I made some trips with him. I thought there was a possibility that he was going to go there. I was interested in the Foreign Service—

BB: That your uncle might even have been the ambassador to Austria. You were personally interested, perhaps, in going to the Foreign Service?

MH: Yes. He was invited down there once and then they invited him down there the second time. Then he thought—he couldn't figure out just what it was. I guess he went back the third time and then they told him, "Well, the situation in Europe was such that they were going to have to have career people in that job." Which I can understand at that time; that was true probably. So he didn't get anything out of that. Although I was a Republican, a different party than he was. Then my father served in the legislature and an aunt of mine was the County Treasurer. We'd been kind of interested in public affairs all the time.

BB: But Matt, what was it about the Republican Party philosophy that attracted you? Obviously your dad had influence. Your dad was a Republican.

MH: Well, I think the thing that—mainly Republicans, I always thought that the individual had a responsibility to do the best he could in whatever he was doing. If he was free to do it, win or lose—in other words, the responsibility, whether I succeed or fail, is my problem, not yours. That was the whole idea of being independent. I think that had a lot to do with me; independence and freedom. I was against this idea that somebody else was going to protect you or license you. You had to do something because of somebody else, this type of thing. I think it was the freedom idea that appealed to me even though it came up through the Depression, when it was popular that the government was going to take care of people and all this sort of thing. Well, they pretty near had to do something like that. But I didn't like that idea in the first place.

BB: So your philosophy has always been to try to keep the role of government reduced as much as possible?

MH: Yes, and the individual should be given every opportunity to express themselves, and to succeed or fail if that's the case.

BB: But of course you still recognize a role of government because we talked earlier in our interview about the idea that we need some kind of a tax system that's—

MH: There are certain, sure—there's developed in a civilized society that there's got to be some cooperation and protection; police protection deals I think are right. The health, moral safety, that type of thing; you have to have that. But I think primarily it's— we should be free more to operate. Of course, I realized in the government set up and in the corporate structure and in the educational system, everything has changed so that society seems to feel that these things have to be done, made available for you to survive.

The kind of old school believing, coming up through the Depression, I know what it's like to not have anything and starve. My folks lost everything in the banking business. So we saw some good times and we saw some of the tough times too with the Depression years, which strung out. Personally, I've had some real breaks. The opportunity that I found most rewarding when I went to college, went to a school in Minnesota, and had the first—my twin sister and I went back. I went to a private school and she went to a private school. That was in the first year.

Well, then the bank closed and we didn't have anything. Even her savings and my savings were tied up. We didn't have very much. The thought was, "Well, she could—I could get a job and see that she got through school. Then she could help me." That was what the plan was. So we got her back to school. Then I went over to the campus at St. John's and the first guy I met there was a dean, just happened to be. He wanted to know where I'd been. I said, well, I wasn't going to be able to make it. And he said, why not, and I told him. Oh, he said you did a good job here. Just call your folks and tell them you're staying. One more won't— we can take one more for sure. So I got a ride all the way through.

BB: Full-ride scholarship.

MH: Without, yes—the whole bit. Then when I got finished I went to the president and asked what I could do. He said, "You can sign a note and pay for it when you can."

Well of course that was only 400 dollars a year. I just signed a note for 1,200 dollars for three years—board and room and all. And so I did that. I got a job and started paying it off. They were collecting the wartime—trying to collect some money. They offered me a little discount. I don't remember what it was, if I could pay it. So I paid it all off at that time. Then, since then, I've given them—it must have been about—I gave them a whole bunch of stock that was worth about 25,000 dollars to help somebody like they helped me. And I keep doing that.



BB: So you've paid St. Johns College in Minnesota back many, many times for the wonderful generosity that they extended to you?

MH: Yes. It made a big difference for me. Gee, that was a—

BB: It made it possible for you to be a teacher and a coach and go on to graduate school at the University of Montana.

MH: I don't know what would ever have happened; it wouldn't have worked out because my sister stayed down there and she joined the convent. So she wasn't going to be helping—

BB: She joined the convent?

MH: Yes. She wasn't going to help me any.

BB: That's a wonderful story and a good story.

MH: Yes. I had some good breaks. On the other hand, you kind of make those breaks.

BB: You obviously had been a good student. I think you had been an outstanding athlete. And that's why they wanted you to come back.

MH: He was. He said, "You've done a good job here. We can take one more."

BB: Matt, we've just got a few minutes left on the tape but I remember once in a conversation we had some years ago, you mentioned that you were a baseball player in college and that one of your classmates also on the baseball team in college was later to become the United States Senator Eugene McCarthy from Minnesota.

MH: That was my brother [Verdie].

BB: Oh, your brother.

MH: He was a classmate of my brother's.

BB: Was it at the same school?

MH: Yes. McCarthy was a year behind me.

BB: You knew him in college though?

MH: Yes, sure. I knew him well.

BB: You've maintained some contact with him over the years, didn't you?

MH: No, I never did. When he was in Helena, weren't you with me when we stopped there to see him? He toured through.

BB: No, I think you're thinking of Russ Doty.

MH: I think you were there. We tried to get—

BB: Oh, maybe we tried to. We didn't see him, though.

MH: We tried to get to see him and they wouldn't let me in.

BB: Yes, I do remember that.

MH: I never had any contact with him. He turned out to be kind of an intellectual hermit, I guess you'd call it.

BB: Intellectual hermit (laughs).

MH: He was a good student, though.

BB: I'll bet he was.

MH: He was a good ball player and hockey player. That was my brother. I never played baseball.

BB: We've just got about a minute left. Anything you want to say in conclusion?

MH: Oh...just that this country has been good to me. The people here have been good to me too. I've enjoyed working, having lots of opportunity to serve, and it's been a pleasant and rewarding experience. I've been in the auto business, the banking business, the radio business, and they were never too profitable in and of themselves. But I'm very fortunate in the way things turned out and developed for me.

BB: You've certainly made an important contribution, and it's certainly been my great pleasure to know you. In fact, I probably consider you one of two or three real mentor figures in my life now. I certainly appreciate your helping us with this interview.

MH: Thank you.

[End of Interview]