

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](mailto: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 Number: 396-030**  
**Interviewee: William Mathers**  
**Interviewer: Bob Brown**  
**Date of Interview: July 7, 2005**  
**Project: Bob Brown Oral History Collection**

Bob Brown: We're interviewing former Senate President Bill Mathers, long time legislator from the Miles City area at his home here on the Miles City, Montana, on the seventh of July 2005. Bill, what in your background or what experience caused you to become interested in politics?

William Mathers: We had a local Republican club and I belonged to that. I got involved in the school board. Then in 1959, I believe it was, the legislature had a graduated land tax. I thought that was outrageous. I thought, "Well if I'm going to complain, I better do something."

BB: What was the graduated land tax?

WM: The more land that you owned, a higher tax. I can't remember who introduced it in the House. It was introduced.

BB: Probably in the '59 session?

WM: Yes.

BB: Now how did it come that you joined the local Republican club?

WM: Jim Lucas and a group of us that were my friends were kind of the organizers of it. I just got involved in the Republican Party then.

BB: What caused you to gravitate toward the Republican Party? What was it about the Republican Party?

WM: I think that the thing was that they thought like I did. They were more conservative and didn't believe in just spending everything in the world that you could get a hold of for welfare programs and programs that I thought were unnecessary. I just got involved in it and thought, "Well if you're going to sit around and complain, do something about it."

BB: Was there a Republican leader or somebody that might have been an inspiration to you in your boyhood or at that time?

WM: Oh no, see, I grew up in the South. So I grew up under Democrats. My father and grandfather were all Democrats. When I moved to Montana, well even before that, I had felt a closer relationship to the Republican stance on political issues than on the Democratic stance. Then when I got up here, Jim had just come back from school. There were a group of us that

were young Republicans. We just formed this club and got started in the political arena. Lucas was one of the pushers. Andy Elting, I don't know if you remember Andy. Andy was involved in it. Bowman was part of it. There were quite a group. Tim was here for a while—

BB: Tim Babcock.

WM: Yes. He wasn't involved so much in that. He moved to Billings before we got really wound up in that. He lived right down the street when I first came here.

BB: Now Governor Aronson was governor at the time. You were aware of him, I imagine, and certainly President Eisenhower.

WM: Yes.

BB: They were both popular public figures.

WM: No question about it. Hugo was quite the man. I never did really know him well. He came to the Senate a couple of times when I was first in the Senate. Nutter had become governor by then. Aronson was there. I can remember the introduction. This was a couple of years after I got into the Senate and after I had served two terms in the House. Aronson came and was recognized. I can remember his speaking to us down on the Senate floor. He was quite a man. He was an unusual man.

BB: Big and rough.

WM: Yes he really was.

BB: So 1960, the election year of 1960, Eisenhower left office. Aronson has left office so it's kind of the beginning of a new time in the politics in our state and our country. Were you approached by someone that said, "Bill why don't you run for the legislature?"

WM: You know, I don't remember that part of it. I just got involved and thought that I'd just give it a shot. Lucas and my friends here kind of supported me in the idea. Tim was running for county attorney and so I ran for the House. Ted Nelstad was the other candidate.

BB: Let's see. I think I served with his son. I think he was elected later from Billings.

WM: That's correct, just one term I believe.

BB: Was there an incumbent that you had to run against?

WM: No. I ran against two Democrats.

BB: You and Ted were the Republicans

WM: We were the two Republicans. Lucas was running for county attorney. Nutter was running for governor. Babcock was the lieutenant governor candidate. Bill Grieve was running for the Senate. All of us were elected that year.

BB: Then you replaced Bill Grieve in the Senate then a couple of years later.

WM: Yes Bill decided not to run for a second term so I just moved up to the Senate and ran for the Senate in '63.

BB: So Bill you were in the...you were from Texas. You lived in Montana for eight or ten years before you ran?

WM: Yes I came to Montana in 1951, so nine years.

BB: So the political scene in Helena would have probably been a little unusual to you. I would presume that you've probably been to Helena a few times.

WM: Just once before I ran for office. You know, you stop and think, the Democratic Party in Texas was more Republican than it was Democrat at that particular time. It made a difference too. Their philosophy was so much like the Republican philosophy was up here. You have to remember, the Democrats were controlled in that time by the Farmers Union and the labor unions. Mostly those two organizations really had a club over everybody's head in that particular time.

BB: In fact, in the 1959 legislative session, the Farmers Union and the labor unions had a fair amount of clout and influence.

WM: Yes and that's why the Republicans got started so well because they just went overboard on things. That was one of the reasons I got involved was because of the actions they had taken. I was interested enough to keep posted on what was happening in Helena. That's one of the reasons I got involved.

BB: What about the Farmers Union philosophy, as you understand it and the AFL-CIO philosophy would be different than what true Republicans thought then and what Texas Democrats thought then?

WM: I think taxation was probably the big thing. The Farmers Union still don't tax their dividends. They were expanding quite rapidly. Whether it was good or bad, I don't know. Maybe time will tell. As you go along a little further now even, I think the Farmers Union has done a fairly decent job in the last few years of protecting the interests of the farmers. I don't

believe their interest is as good as the Farm Bureau, but I do think they've done a fairly decent job.

BB: I think we've probably both noticed that there's been a change in the Farmers Union.

WM: Oh no question about that.

BB: I think there's more of a militant populace kind of an organization than how it was in the '80s.

WM: Yes, very much. They were very outspoken and the people that you could tell who were from Farmers Union country when you were there with their arguments about the different taxation programs and everything and government support too.

BB: The graduated concept in terms of property tax has been something they would have supported.

WM: Yes, and I can't remember what two legislators introduced that. I can't remember who it was.

BB: You know, in that same session, the '59 session, there was an effort made to establish what would be called Public Utility Districts, PUDs that might have been born out of the same kind of a philosophy.

WM: I think so too. I felt that at the time, that was part of their program too. Of course, it was opposed very strongly to Montana Power. In general, most people, if they stopped and thought very long and gave real consideration to what was taking place would have opposed it too. I think that's one of the reasons the Democrats lost so strongly in the 1960 election when Nutter was elected and the Republicans took control of the House. They didn't have Senate. They did have the House. Clyde Hawks was made Speaker of the House. Jerry Anderson was the Majority Floor Leader.

BB: Any recollections of Clyde Hawks or Jerry Anderson?

WM: Yes. Jerry was a very good, I thought, floor leader. Clyde was a good speaker too. He was fair and didn't try to run over the Democrats, I didn't think. I thought he was a good Speaker of the House. Jerry did a heck of a job. Alex Blewett was there too. Alex along with Jerry and Jim Haughey, they were good leaders of the House for the Republican Party.

BB: Do you remember Ted Schwinden?

WM: Very well.

BB: Of course he was a member of the House at that time too.

WM: I've always thought that Ted was a very intelligent man. I mean, he was just very capable. I admired Ted quite a lot. I didn't know him that well in the House. He didn't stand out like some of the others did. I can't really remember, but the guys from Butte were the ones that were the big supporters of the Democratic Party. I can remember one time there was a barber from Butte. He and his sidekick started a filibuster in the House, reading from the newspaper and all of that. I can't remember their names, but they finally got it shut off.

BB: I hadn't heard that story before. They filibustered you for a while?

WM: I wish I could remember their names.

BB: There was a guy named [Jack] Sugrue, there was a guy named Tracy [Dennis Casey].

WM: I knew them too, but this was before they were there. I can remember where they sat. They sat on the far side of the House on the Democrat side. Those two seats on the far side and the two of them started this filibuster. I don't even remember what the filibuster was about. I can remember that quite well.

BB: So there you were a new legislator. Maybe you've seen the legislature in Texas?

WM: No, I never have.

BB: So when you arrived there as a member, it was probably about the first time that you'd ever seen a legislative body in your life.

WM: That's right. I never had seen one function. So it was really interesting to me. I worked hard and studied hard on the whole thing. I enjoyed it. I had a good time. That's why I kept running I guess. It made wonderful friends.

BB: That first election in 1960, you were running with Don Nutter. Do you have any impressions of him?

WM: Oh yes. I was on the Appropriations Committee in the House. I can remember so well: I had the appropriation for the Highway Patrol. The state at that time was, I think it was just 2 million dollars in the hole. Don was, boy, we were going to get out of that and we weren't going to increase taxes. He was a strong leader. He really was strong. I can remember that he called me to come down to the office because on the Highway Patrol, I had given the report that I had to give to the Appropriations Committee, I had gone along with their request for some additional money.

Nutter called me down and he let me know that we weren't going to make any additional money for the Highway Patrol or anybody else. I didn't say too much, because I was rather shy. The Highway Patrol, to get their gas, had to go to the Highway Departments within each town. They could save a little money and he wanted them to have retread tires. He really clamped down on it. We just couldn't quite see that. Rex Hibbs from Billings was the senator on that subcommittee. Rex and Nutter were good friends. So I came back and I told Rex what was happening. He said, "Well now don't worry about it. I'll go down and talk to Don tomorrow. We'll see if we can't get us money." As a result, the Highway Patrol didn't run on retread tires.

BB: That doesn't sound like a good idea.

WM: No but it was saving money.

BB: Yes, I suppose.

WM: Reed was the first budget director. I can't remember his first name, do you? [Edward Nelson was first budget director; he was from Reedpoint originally. He was appointed by Gov. Nutter.]

BB: No, I don't remember.

WM: I know he had an office down there just as you came into the capitol up the front steps and just to the left he had an office. He was very proud of the fact that he was very conservative. He didn't have file cabinets in his room. He got a bunch of apple boxes and used those for file cabinets. Everywhere, there was a penny to be saved. He went a little overboard.

BB: That impressed the governor, no doubt.

WM: Oh I'm sure, yes.

BB: Nutter was, from everything I've learned, read, and heard, a very strong fiscal conservative.

WM: Oh very.

BB: In fact, I think in that '61 session Bill, the legislature might even have cut back. Sometimes we've got the way of understanding the budget where there's the—I've forgotten the terminology now—but you consider the natural growth rate and you apply that statistic. So if the state was spending 100 million dollars when the economy grew five percent, then current spending would be something like 105 million dollars. You'd assume what would be appropriate. I think because the budget was out of balance, not only did that '61 session balance the budget, but it did so by actual reduction so that there was a real reduction in that session. It was real dollars from what had been appropriated in '59.

WM: That's right. There's no question about that. I can remember meeting with the Board of Examiners and they were pretty upset because we were cutting their budget too. Norris Nichols was chairman of the Appropriations Committee that year. I can't remember all who were members of the committee. My goodness, yes, we cut every budget. It didn't make any difference who it was, Republican or Democrat that was head of the committee. Their budgets were cut. We had 2 million dollars. I think it was, it may have been more. I know that we were in debt. We weren't going to raise taxes to take care of that. We cut the budgets. Of course then the growth of the economy all settle out of that. So we actually did more damage than good I think. We did cut her back.

BB: So then what happened in '63? Apparently maybe the—

WM: We kind of reversed ourselves in '63. We were a little more lenient. Don was killed and it was Tim's first session as governor. We were more lenient then and appropriated more for education and more for all the programs in the state. Of course the state was growing then. The economy was growing. We could afford to do those things. We didn't get carried away even then. Tim was a good leader too. You could visit with him. I knew him personally since he had come from Miles City originally. Then that was Lucas' first term. So we had a good working relationship with Tim. We got along quite well as far as the Appropriations Committee is concerned.

BB: Now Bill, there was probably quite a contrast in leadership styles between Don Nutter and Tim Babcock.

WM: Oh yes. Don would make you nervous when you went in there. Tim you could kind of sit down and kind of relax with. Boy, Don was rather hard nosed. Of course, I was such a freshman, you know, Rex Hibbs saved my life. He and Don were such good friends. He could talk to Don, but it's sure been in one of those subcommittees I had a heck of a time.

BB: You mentioned you had somewhat of a hometown connection with Tim. Tim was more relaxed.

WM: Oh yes. You could talk and visit with Tim. He would listen. He'd get his point and tell you how he thought things should be and why he felt that way. He would listen to you too. I got along quite well with Tim both terms.

BB: You mentioned Rex Hibbs. You've mentioned Jim Lucas, of course. We've mentioned Ted Schwinden. In the early period in the House of Representatives, are there any other representatives? We've mentioned Norris Nichols. Do any others stand out in your mind?

WM: Well of course Jerry Anderson. Jerry was a strong floor leader and did a good job. Alex Blewett was another one that I thought quite highly of. Then on the Democrat side, of course Francis was a hard worker.

BB: Francis Bardanouve.

WM: Yes, Francis Bardanouve. There's no question about that. Ted was there too, but I don't remember Ted being that strong of a leader. I'm trying to remember who the minority leader was for the Democrats, but I can't remember right now.

BB: I think Jerry Anderson was for the Republicans in '61 and Alex Blewett was for the Republicans in '63. Hawks was the Speaker in '61. Frank Hazelbaker was in '63. Jean Turnage first came to the House in '63.

WM: One of the greatest debates on the floor of the House was Lucas and Turnage. I can't remember what the topic was, but I remember they were debating. Francis Bardanouve thought that was the greatest thing that ever happened.

BB: That's really interesting Bill. Of course they had both been county attorneys for about the same amount of time, for about ten years, before they entered the House of Representatives.

WM: They were both excellent speakers. They were both very intelligent.

BB: Oh gosh.

WM: It was a great day when they had that debate.

BB: That's interesting. I've not heard that from either one of them.

WM: They may not remember. Francis would remember because he made the comment, "That's the greatest debate."

BB: Those two smart men just going after each other.

WM: Melcher was there too. Melcher started in '61 also. He wasn't such a leader in the Democrat Party and surprisingly enough, Melcher voted with the Republicans quite a bit of the time too. In fact, they put him on the legislative council during the interim because he wasn't such an outspoken Democrat as some of them were.

BB: Then did you serve in the Senate with him as well?

WM: Yes. I never felt he had that much influence in the Senate, but of course, he was from the same area as Dave Manning and I've always thought Dave was one of the outstanding legislators of all time. He was a tremendous man. Melcher was there also. Then that's when he ran for Congress, after his second term.

BB: Nineteen sixty-eight or sixty-nine in the special session. So the 1960 period when you entered the House of Representatives was kind of the, maybe the beginning of the waning years of the old Anaconda Company.

WM: Oh yes. I can't remember them having all that...Of course, Lloyd Crippen represented the company. He didn't have that much, they really didn't have that much influence. The power company was the one that had the influence. George O'Connor had been Speaker of the House two sessions, probably a tremendous parliamentarian. He had a great working with him. They were quite influential, I felt, in the Republican Party during those sessions. They became quite strong.

BB: His working group was Republican legislators?

WM: Yes.

BB: Do you remember any?

WM: I think that Jim never went overboard, but he was working with them because of their philosophy and the things that they believed and that we did. I remember that I carried the bill to tax the co-ops. The power company gave me a lot of information that I used in the debate on the floor to place the Farmers Union under taxes. We were trying to tax their dividends. They still aren't taxed. We got it through the House. Of course it didn't last long enough to hardly get breathing room in the Senate. We carried the House. I had a big time trying to carry that piece of legislation. I worked closely with George. There was another member of that group that I can't remember. It was before [Everett] Shuey became a member.

BB: He was a lobbyist?

WM: Yes. Shuey was with the Wool Growers. I can't remember the other lobbyist for the power company that was with George O'Connor. His brother was president later.

BB: Joe McElwain?

WM: No. His brother was an attorney for the power company. Shucks, I can't remember.

BB: Oh, Corette.

WM: Yes Bob Corette.

BB: Jack Corette was president of the company. Bob was a lobbyist and lawyer.

WM: Yes he was the one that I got acquainted with them. I had a lot of fun. In fact, several years later Bob and George...No, Bob didn't go. It was Shuey and Lucas, me, George and his son.

We all took the company plane and flew to Texas and went quail hunting on my brother's ranch down there. We had a great time. They really enjoyed that. We took them to the WCTU. That's one of the few organizations that still existed. They've got a building and everything. Women's Christian Temperance Union...They had a big dinner there while they were there. It was a fundraising program. They thought that was great. They got to go, for that bunch of guys to go to WCTU for dinner.

BB: Is the WCTU associate with the temperance movement?

WM: Oh yes, prohibition.

BB: So you've got these hot quail hunters after a dusty day out in the sunshine hunting quails, that's about the best place you go for a cold beer.

WM: There wasn't even beer sold in the town.

BB: That was your hometown there.

WM: Yes. You know it's still in dry county.

BB: It's got to be one of the very few left in the country.

WM: Oh yes. I think it's the only WCTU building that's in existence and functioning. They actually run the library and do local things now. They don't have the big Christian Temperance programs that they had then. It was fun to go. Bob Corette and George O'Connor really thought that was great.

BB: So then you went back out to the Mathers ranch and had a little bourbon and branch water before you went to bed.

WM: Yes. Down at the motel, you know.

BB: Oh my. So your impression was that the Anaconda Company was still a presence.

WM: Oh yes. Lloyd did a fairly decent job. They weren't as influential. I don't believe they owned all those newspapers at that time.

BB: They sold them in '59.

WM: Yes. So they didn't have the political clout they had prior to my service in the legislature. Crippen did a good job of lobbying for their positions and all. There weren't any really strong issue as far as the company was concerned.

BB: The Anaconda Company had what was known in common parlance as a watering hole or a hospitality room.

WM: Yes, there were lots of them. They weren't the only one.

BB: They weren't the only ones. Did Montana Power have one?

WM: Yes.

BB: What are your recollections of those?

WM: I think that's probably one of the best things that they had. You would go there, Democrats and Republicans. You would associate. You got acquainted with one another, became friends with the Democrats as well as the Republicans. It was completely open. I know the power company always had a great big roast that you'd go in there and get a sandwich and free drinks, of course. You'd get hors d'oeuvres of all kinds. They never pressured you in those water holes. They had one. The power company had one. Later, Jerry Anderson representing the Green Stamps, I believe it was, had a room. The petroleum company, Basil Andrikopolous had one. The petroleum company had a big one. Actually, I think they were a good thing because everybody went there. I used to say that the guys from Butte, that's where they ate all their meals. They served good food and served lots of drinks. It was a good time.

BB: So after working up a big appetite from conducting a filibuster on the floor, the Butte delegation would head down to the watering hole.

WM: All of us would. It doesn't matter which one you wanted because they'd be scattered around all over. It didn't hurt anything.

BB: The legislators didn't make that much money then either.

WM: Ten bucks a day and no expenses either. We worked for 60 days. Then the money shut off. At the end of 60 days, you didn't get paid anything. I can remember that because Tim was lieutenant governor and we were all out for dinner and he said, "Well, I'll pay for dinner tonight." We didn't have a lobbyist. It was just a group of us. He was going to pay because he thought his money was...his salary is going too. His salary wasn't going either. He got stuck.

BB: He got stuck.

WM: We had a lot of fun later with Bill Mackay. Bill Mackay and Jack Brenner were two of a kind.

BB: Bill Mackay was a senator from Carbon County. Jack Renner was from Beaverhead County. They were both Republicans and prominent ranchers.

WM: That's right. The Mackay family made the donations to the museum, Charlie Russell memorabilia, the pictures and everything. Bill Mackay's father and Charlie Russell were personal friends. Bill told me about how Charlie Russell used to come back east where his father and Bill grew up. He would stay with them. They had an estate. I can't remember just where. It was a fairly good sized estate. He was telling me about the time that Charlie Russell and his dad were sitting in the den of their home back east. They heated their hot iron in the fireplace. Then Charlie Russell burned his initials on the piece of wood that was over that fireplace.

BB: The mantelpiece?

WM: The mantelpiece, yes. They moved that when Bill moved to Montana. He still had that fireplace piece. I suppose it's still there at their ranch at Red Lodge. He's had some interesting stories, Bill Mackay did. He told us, "I was born with a silver spoon in my mouth." He was. They had had tremendous influence in the Northwest Airlines and his father was very heavily involved in the stock market at that time. It was an interesting life. He was an interesting person, Bill Mackay was.

BB: I remember him as a wonderful piano player.

WM: Oh yes. One time at the old Colonial, they had a piano and you could eat dinner there and order drinks. We went out there to dinner one evening. The fellow that was playing the piano quit for a little while, so Mackay went over and sat down and played the piano. He had a big time playing the piano. Some guest then came up and there was a little jar on the piano for the tips. They left Mackay a dollar tip. He thought that was the greatest thing ever.

BB: I'm sure that's the only time that happened to him, a multi-millionaire probably. He was a good piano player. He was also the Republican National Committee man.

WM: Yes, for a long time. He was a senior Republican in the Senate too, for a long time.

BB: Do you remember attending the Republican State Conventions?

WM: Yes. The one I remember most was when Reagan and Ford ran in the primary for the presidential nomination. Sonny and I supported Ford and Stephens and Kolstad—

BB: Tom Rolfe.

WM: There was a group that was supporting Reagan and we didn't get anything, Sonny and I didn't.

BB: I remember that vividly because I was with you and Sonny. That was in 1976 and it was a real close contest between Ronald Reagan and then President Ford. So every delegate counted in every state. We'd had a straw vote in the Republican primary. It wasn't binding on the convention. I think we had something like 18 delegates that we were qualified to send. So we worked out the math. The people had voted for Reagan, but the way it would have worked is Reagan would have gotten 11 delegates and Ford would have gotten seven. So do you remember that?

That was our strategy. I think it was something like 11 and 7 for unity or something like that. The Reagan guys had gotten the office in the way of Minnesota. The Minnesota state convention also had a straw vote. Ford had won it narrowly statewide. Every vote counted so the Ford people took all whatever they were. They took 45 votes or something from Minnesota. So the Reagan people in Montana felt they had to do the same thing. I don't remember any particular hard feelings about it. I can remember that Allen Kolstad said, "Bob, this is just the way it is. None of you guys are going. We all are."

WM: That's exactly right. We didn't get anything.

BB: They took every one of them. I can remember at the time thinking, "Well probably if the role had been reversed, we would have done the same thing under the circumstances." It was down to the point where at the national convention they felt that thing would turn on just a couple of dozen votes or something. So it was serious business at that point. I remember that one too. I remember Ronald Reagan was personally there. Do you remember that?

WM: Yes I do.

BB: There was a fellow by the name of Tom Kleppe who was the Secretary of Interior. I think he had been a congressman from North Dakota or something. He was there to represent Reagan. He was a good guy. He was a public speaker and that sort of thing. They had Ronald Reagan, this national celebrity. We had Tom Kleppe. (unintelligible) to our water pistol.

WM: It was quite a time.

BB: Do you remember the actor Festus?

WM: Yes.

BB: Tim Weaver [Ken Curtis] or something like that? He was a fairly well known television actor at the time on a television series *Gunsmoke*. He was there on behalf of Reagan. Another celebrity came in with Reagan so that people recognized him from television and that sort of thing.

WM: Years later, Reagan came to town. I can remember that. There was a lady from Lewistown who was chairman of the Republican Party.

BB: Florence Haegen.

WM: Florence Haegen. I know Reagan came in and I was the minority leader in the Senate when he came in. He flew in on a private jet of the True family. We met him at the airport.

BB: The True family from oil in Wyoming?

WM: Yes, Wyoming. They had their personal jet. I think that was the family that did it. Anyway, it was a Wyoming family that had the private jet that flew him in. He landed there and then came up. I don't remember him making a presentation to the legislature, but I'm sure he did. Anyway, he came in and Florence pushed everybody aside and kind of took over. Were you in the Senate when the Russians came?

BB: Oh maybe.

WM: You had to be because Schwinden was governor.

BB: I remember when one group of Russians was there. We didn't have any budget to entertain them. That seemed just ridiculous, but—

WM: We did entertain them. We took them to...I don't know whether it was the Colonial or something. I can remember—

BB: The Montana Club maybe?

WM: It could have been. I can remember going there and having dinner. They passed around vodka for us to have toasts with. Ted was lieutenant governor and Tom Judge didn't come. Ted came. So we were sitting there at the head of the Republican Party and entertaining the Russians. Then the next day, the leader of that particular group came up and spoke to the Senate through an interpreter. I thought that was a lot of fun.

BB: There was at least one other group of Russian legislators that came to Montana a few years after that. I think they were from the Siberian region of Russia. What I remember was that in the legislature, we didn't know how we wanted to take care of them one evening. So what we did was...State Senator Mignon Waterman and her husband had a lovely home near the capitol building. There were only about a half a dozen of these guys. So we got about twice that many legislators. I think we were all senators. We went over to Mignon's house and we had a very nice party and reception and dinner for them over there. It was just around her big dining room table. That's just how it worked out.

WM: We didn't take advantage of things we should have really.

BB: There was some kind of a funny budgeting problem and we just decided, "To heck with it." We just took care of it ourselves. It was fine. It worked out.

WM: I can't remember why Tom Judge didn't come to that party that we had. It was a rather large group of us. I know Schwinden was there. I can't remember why Tom Judge didn't come.

BB: That's maybe illustrative of the larger...what was going on then. I think Tom Judge was a little detached at that point in time. Ted Schwinden was very focused. Then that led, ultimately, to...Tom was out of state for an extended period of time late in that second term in office. That was when Ted Schwinden, his lieutenant governor, made his move.

WM: It was a good move.

BB: He beat him in the Democratic primary.

WM: I can remember, as president of the Senate, I would go down and talk with Ted because I got to the point where I couldn't trust Tom Judge at all. I had a thing happen. I can't remember the fellow's name from the University that [Bill] Groff and the Republican in the Senate hired to help establish how much money we had—actual money we had and where we stood financially in the state. I wish I could remember his name. Anyway, he was an economist from the University and was working for the legislature, particularly Groff. Groff was chairman of the Finance and Claims Committee.

I can remember him coming in and telling me that, "We made a mistake." I may have been minority leader then. I can't remember. Anyway, I was in a leadership position. He said, "I've found where we made a 6 million-dollar mistake. We have less money than we thought we had by 6 million dollars." I could hardly wait until I got to tell Groff. I made quite an impact. We finally got it resolved and got everything worked out. We worked together to do it. We didn't make too much political issue out of it. Then later on when I was president of the Senate, I can remember a very similar thing happening when Jim Felt coming up...maybe we better wait until that thing gets by. Now she's on the other side of the House. Anyway, Jim was probably...He was minority leader in the House when Lucas was Speaker. Jim was the author of the House bill 333 of the sales tax.

BB: Jim Felt?

WM: Jim Felt. He was a tremendous tax attorney. He came up in the '79 session to work with the Republicans. He could find more money and where money was going in the state better than anybody that ever served in the legislature. He was really quite talented that way. He found a substantial mistake in some of the projections in revenue. I called Tom Judge. I told him, "Tom this has happened. I'm not going to make a political issue out of it if you won't." He

said, “No, we won’t. We’ll just solve the problem and go on.” The next morning on the news, here I was sitting at breakfast with Bill Lowe and here was Tom Judge on the radio telling about this big mistake he had found in the budget. I never went back to his office after that. I always dealt through Schwinden. I never will forgive him for doing that to me.

BB: It was like had—

WM: Like he had done it all. I wasn’t going to make a political deal out of it because we were having enough trouble as it was. Tom just wasn’t very honest; that’s why we got going to Schwinden and visiting with him. If we had something to get done, we’d get it through his office. You could talk to Ted and he was honest. He dealt with you fairly.

BB: He also had influence with Democrat legislators to get things done.

WM: Yes very much.

BB: Even as lieutenant governor.

WM: I admired Ted. He was a fine person.

BB: You were brand new when Nutter was governor. You knew Tim Babcock and served with him for a fair amount of time.

WM: Yes, all his term.

BB: All his term in office, and had a good working relationship with him. Of course he was governor at the time of the first big sales tax controversy in 1967. That was the bill that Jim Felt carried. It was House Bill 333.

WM: No, House Bill 333 was...Oh yes, I guess it was. It was 333. Jim [Lucas] was the author of it. I carried it in the Senate.

BB: Now Republicans generally opposed taxes. Republicans, generally speaking, are the party of the private sector. Democrats are more of the party of the public sector. They are more willing to raise taxes and spend money to help people solve their problems. Why did the Republican Party get associated with this new tax, the sales tax? It seems out of character for Republicans to support a new tax and for Democrats to oppose one.

WM: We were short of money. We had to raise some money.

BB: You didn’t follow the same policy that Nutter followed when there was a need to raise money. Nutter just decided to cut.

WM: No, we realized that we had to get more money, particularly for education because we were probably having problems with the university system. We were having problems with the K-12 programs. We needed more money just for the operation of the state. The state's no different than any other business, inflation. In fact, the state got just as much as it does anybody else. We realized that we had to have some more money because we just didn't have enough money to balance the budget. So the Republicans came forward with a sales tax and the Democrats were going to increase the income tax. That's when we had the impasse and couldn't get things through. Lucas was the carrier of the sales tax. I can't remember whether Groff or Gene Mahoney was the principal proponent of the increase in the income tax. The Republicans got involved in it for that reason, not that we wanted to increase taxes. We felt that it would broaden the tax base for the whole state. Everybody had to pay sales tax and it wouldn't make any difference. We had exemptions. It was a well-written bill. It still is.

BB: The exemptions were for things like medicine, groceries.

WM: Yes, that type of thing. If I remember right, there were even provisions for people who rented property so that they got some relief as well as the property owners. It carried well in the House. It came to the Senate. Dave Manning was chairman of the Senate Taxation Committee. I was fairly good friends with Dave. I carried the bill in the Senate. I don't remember whether you remember that or not. I remember Jim came over and sat with me when I was carrying the bill in the Senate. We presented it in the Senate Taxation Committee and of course it was killed in the Taxation Committee. I made my pitch on the floor of the Senate to bring it out onto the floor of the Senate. They were very courteous too, Dave Manning was in particular. He let me make my presentation. Jim had fixed up billboards and we had the whole thing all choreographed so that we could make a pretty good presentation. I got to make my presentation. When I sat down, they called for a vote and that was it. Nobody else got to say a word on either for or against it.

BB: They didn't want a debate.

WM: No, they just shut her off right there. They called for the vote and that was the end of it.

BB: It was almost party line I think.

WM: Oh it was straight party line, yes. I know we didn't lose a single Republican in that particular vote. That was the first time it was in the Senate.

BB: So that was in '67?

WM: Yes, I believe it was.

BB: So the income tax was increased before that session ended?

WM: No. Then we had deadlock because the Republicans controlled the House and the Senate was controlled by the Democrats. They deadlocked. Then we had a special session in June. We came back to Helena, a committee...I can't remember the size of the committee. It doesn't make any difference. Groff was the head of the Democrats on that particular committee. Lucas was the chairman of the Republican group. We met there for darn near a month in June trying to thrash out some way to resolve it. It finally did end up deciding that we'd have a vote of the people.

BB: I think that might have been '71.

WM: Was it?

BB: Yes the sales tax surfaced in '67.

WM: Oh, that's right. Then we tried again in '71.

BB: My first session was '71. My first session was this big impasse on the sales tax. There were three Republicans in the House of Representatives that wouldn't support it, Ed Smith, Lou Perry and Harry Barns(?).

WM: That's right.

BB: We had a heck of a time getting it out of the House. We finally got it over to you somehow or another. I can't remember, but maybe Dan Yardley and Dorothy Bradley are what I remember.

WM: I can't remember who supported it in the House.

BB: A couple of Democrats never did get those through to Republicans. They got it over to you in the Senate and they killed her in the Senate. It was dead on arrival over there.

WM: Yes, practically.

BB: They couldn't get their income tax increased through the House. We couldn't get our sales tax through the Senate. That's when we put it on the ballot to let the people settle it.

WM: Yes that's right.

BB: The people voted for, as I recall, a 35 [40] percent increase in the income tax instead of a 2 percent sales tax.

WM: That's right. They were going to tax the rich.

BB: The idea was that the income tax taxes the rich.

WM: That's exactly right. I forgot. That was the second- Johnny Lyon carried in the Senate because I was Minority Floor Leader in '71. That was—

BB: Johnny Lyon was a Republican senator from Shelby. He was a (unintelligible) owner right?

WM: Yes. He carried the bill in the Senate. Yes, that was quite a time.

BB: Now a governor we haven't spoken about who had a pretty significant role in the period in which you were a member of the legislature was Governor Forrest Anderson, who was governor from 1968 to 1972. He was governor during the period of executive reorganization.

WM: Yes, he was real strongly in favor of that.

BB: Do you remember much about that?

WM: Yes I do. I remember that he was a strong supporter of it. I can't remember who it was that was opposing it so much. It doesn't make any difference I suppose. He was a really strong supporter. That was a pretty good move. One of the few things that I thought Forrest did that was good for the state. I was never an admirer of Forrest. I never felt he was honest. You heard all kinds of stories about him. Whether or not they were true, I don't know. I know a lot of things that he did that I thought were uncalled for. I just didn't care for him. I can remember as minority leader in the Senate, I would take the senators down. He would invite us to a lunch once a week. We'd go down to the big room just off the governor's office where we had our meetings. Forrest would have lunch brought in for us. I would pick a different group of senators each time. Jim would bring members from the House and do the same thing. I usually got there ahead of Jim because I didn't have the obligation that Jim did as far as running the House. I'd get there ahead of him. Forrest and I could get along pretty good, but the minute Lucas came in, the battle started. It was always your time just to be there for lunch. It happened every week.

BB: I suppose Anderson saw Lucas as a potential rival.

WM: Oh yes, no question about it. He knew that Jim was going to run for governor. He really took it out. They were good. They were very knowledgeable people then.

BB: They were both smart men.

WM: Yes. It was fun to be there.

BB: You think about the physical contrast. Jim Lucas was 6'3" or four, something like that. He was a big, elegant, graceful, tall man. Forrest was maybe 5'5". He was probably six feet at the most. He was a little peppery bandy rooster.

WM: Oh yes, he was. That was the time that Tom Judge was lieutenant governor then. That's what I was thinking.

BB: Then of course he was governor for a long time, for eight years. You were, I think, probably minority leader and president of the Senate at that time.

WM: Yes, under Tom Judge.

BB: So you probably worked with him on a number of things.

WM: Yes. We started in the House together. Tom was elected from Helena into the House. That was the year I was elected here to the House. So we really started our legislative and political careers together at that time.

BB: Now there was a controversy, if I remember correctly, involving whether Tom Judge legitimately lived...Was he a resident of Montana long enough?

WM: I don't remember that, Bob.

BB: What I'm remembering about that was when he was first elected, he had moved back to Montana and had gone out of state—had a job somewhere out of state. He returned to Montana and was elected to the legislature. There was a question of whether he had met the residency requirement.

WM: That's right. I remember that. There was a debate in the House when he was elected to the House.

BB: The Republicans had the majority in the House. There was a question about whether he should legally be seated in the House. At the same time, I think maybe the Democrats came up with this...They found that an old senator, who wasn't old at the time, Jim Shaw.

WM: Jim Shaw had the same problem.

BB: He was from Wibaux County but his house could have been 25 feet into Custer County or Dawson County. They were going to have to survey it and that sort of thing. The Democrats' position in the Senate was that, "We won't seat Shaw if the Republicans don't seat Judge." So the obvious deal was worked out where they just seated them both.

WM: I can remember that now. It was quite the deal.

BB: So you've known Tom Judge from the time you started out when you were both freshman in the House of Representatives. Still you felt he kind of misused you on the—

WM: Oh, there's no question that he did. I never will forgive him for that. I was trying to do what was best for the state and what I thought should be done. It wasn't an issue that needed to be made political. He made it and I kept my mouth shut. So it didn't hurt anything. We got that all straightened out. I've never forgiven him for doing that to me.

BB: Now at the same time when you served in the Senate, you served for an extensive period of time with Stan Stephens who later became governor. I believe it was Stan who appointed you to the Board of Regents?

WM: No, Schwinden appointed me to the Board of Regents in '88. I had just gotten off the...No, I was still on the Federal Reserve Board. I can't remember if I was off or on. Schwinden called me and I was vacationing in Arizona and he called me. He asked me if I would serve on the Board of Regents. The fellow that ran the airport there in Helena had been a member of the Board of Regents. He did something that wasn't quite kosher. So rather than embarrassing him, he just resigned. Schwinden called me and asked me. He was a Republican. He had to balance the board. Schwinden called me and asked me if I would serve. I told him that I would serve for one year at least. Then I went ahead and served for quite a long time and worked with Ted on the Board of Regents too.

BB: Typically governors don't attend regents' meetings. I don't know, did Schwinden?

WM: Schwinden only came one time. Stephens, I don't believe Stan ever came more than once or twice. Marc Racicot attended every meeting when I was chairman of the Board of Regents. He never missed anything. He had input into the meeting of the Board of Regents too. Schwinden, I visited with Schwinden a lot. I did with Stan too. I'd go up and tell him what we were doing and why we were doing it. I worked closely with him. Stan only attended one time when we thought were regressing too much. He came in and talked to the Board about our position. I don't remember the outcome, but Schwinden, if he came once, I don't remember when it was. When Marc Racicot was elected governor, he came to every meeting.

BB: Bill, do you remember any issues or anything that came before the Board of Regents when you were there that were especially memorable?

WM: The election of the president. We elected George Dennison as president of the University of Montana. Mike Malone was elected president of MSU. I can't remember the man's name, Norther- and later the president of School of Mines. Those were big issues. The big issue we had at the time was trying to get enough money to support and not have to raise tuition. We did have to raise tuition finally. That was the big thing.

The money situation and trying to make the thing work and trying to save some of the programs at the university were big issues. In particular, I can remember the School of Pharmacy. It looked like they were going to shut it down. I thought that was a terrible mistake. We were able to save that school. We had a physical therapy department, too. It went by the wayside eventually. Money problems were the big problems. One time there was a move to take Montana and the University of Montana and Bozeman and change their classifications so they went into the same classes as the North Dakota schools as far as the football teams were concerned. That was a pretty strong issue too.

Surprisingly, Marc Racicot was in favor of doing that. I didn't want to do that. I thought that was a mistake and too much travel. I thought we were doing all right as we were. We weren't losing that much money. The Board supported my position. Marc wasn't overly upset about it. He felt that was one way we could probably cut down on the cost of operating the university.

BB: By traveling to North Dakota and playing those schools instead of traveling down to Nevada and Arizona, was that it?

WM: Yes.

BB: They would have been in a different conference.

WM: Yes. I think three different grades, same class as the University of North Dakota and North Dakota State. I can't remember. I just remember those two...and South Dakota. Those were the schools that would have been in the conference we would have been in, Class B or whatever it was called. It wouldn't have made a whole lot of difference, but that was the class. I thought it was a mistake. I didn't support that.

BB: Anything else that you can think of that comes to mind as a member of the Board of Regents?

WM: No, it was a very difficult position to be in because you were always looking for money. Every time you turned around, everything just kept going up, the prices of everything. I can remember going to Bozeman. I tried to visit the universities. I was in Bozeman and we were- (?) was president then. The gas line out behind the student union ruptured while I was there. Fortunately, they were able to shut it off. What a catastrophe that could have been if someone had thrown a cigarette in that thing.

No doubt it would have blown up. We were able to convince the legislature because of that, that we needed to do something about those old utility structures. That's when they redid the center of Bozeman and redid those old heating units and those things. They were able to improve the structure some. That was another problem we had trying to just maintain the buildings and all. I was with a group of regents that I thought worked well together. The governor was very supportive of us.

BB: During the '80s and '90s, Montana was broke. So you had a difficult period there. The university system, of course, requires a fair amount of resources to function. It was really difficult to come up with any revenue to support us. Then as I remember it too, Schwinden's attitude toward tax increases was maybe not greatly different than Nutter's.

WM: No, it wasn't. It really wasn't. Now of course right at the first when Schwinden was still governor, I was just fairly new to the board. Lind from Missoula was chairman.

BB: Dennis Lind, the lawyer from Missoula.

WM: Yes Dennis. Schwinden didn't run. That was when Marc Racicot was elected.

BB: Stephens came in after.

WM: Oh, that's right. I forgot Stephens came in.

BB: Stephens of course held the line on spending and taxes too.

WM: Stan was a good friend of mine. Stan really never fully understood government, I never thought. When we were in the Senate, you were there. You know that Turnage and I and a few others kind of were the leaders of the Senate. Stan was a leader, but he never was real strong. When he was the floor leader, you were there and you remember all of those problems we had. He was floor leader and Allen Kolstad was president pro-tem. Turnage and I really were the strong leaders, not that I'm so darn smart. I think that we were the leaders of the Senate.

BB: I remember Stan as being a beautifully good public speaker. Apparently he had owned a radio station, maybe still did. He gave radio commentaries that were...that got a lot of praise because he was able to, in just a two or three minute commentary, to say a lot. He said it really well. I can remember Stan standing up on the floor and he'd sometimes stand up on the floor of the Senate and he'd step around behind his chair. He'd push his chair up under his desk. Then he'd stand there. He wasn't a very large man. He'd stand there with his hands on the back of his chair. He'd stand just as straight as a ramrod and look straight forward at the presiding officer. He'd deliver this beautiful little three minute, just really nicely done, eloquent, and very well said. That was kind of it. In terms of having to master the overall operation of details and stuff, he could give it a little bit of time for preparation. He could put our case beautifully into words in a real nifty little commentary. That was his great strength. That's what I remember his great strength was. I don't remember him ever carrying a big horrible 30-page bill, two hours of debate. I don't remember that.

WM: No, he wasn't very active in the financial portion. He never served on taxation or the Finance and Claims Committee. He was on the finance and claims. I was thinking of the taxation. He was not on the Senate Finance Committee. He was on the interim committee. He

was a fine person. I liked Stan. We became very close friends. I didn't think he was as well qualified and well understanding of government as he possibly could have been. He learned. He worked at it.

BB: He had a tough time as governor. The state's economy was in the (unintelligible).

WM: Yes, he had a hell of a time.

BB: That was with the press and had difficulty getting started. He told me one time, he had a number of people to help him with state government. Of course the Republicans had no governor for 20 years. So the whole state bureaucracy was people who had been appointed to come and work for Democratic administration. So Stan might have been able to promote some of those people and keep some of them on and that sort of thing. He felt that since his was the first Republican administration in 20 years, people had voted for a change.

They were entitled to what they voted for. So he wanted to replace all the 20 top department directors with Republicans. He had in mind having private sector people from around the state and come in to put the Republican philosophy to work in state government. Those jobs aren't particularly prestigious. They don't pay that well. You've got some bright young fellow from Billings who could be a wonderful director of some department or other. He would be making twice as much money. Billings would have to uproot himself and move to Helena for maybe four years for a job that wouldn't be a particularly impressive thing on his resume.

Stan told me he had gotten his third, and in some cases, fourth choices on some of those important jobs. Then you remember too in the first six months of his administration there were some outrageous things in the news about things that surfaced in the background of two or three of the people he appointed. There were embarrassing resignations. He got off to a terrible stumbling start.

WM: I can't remember who it was he appointed to first budget director.

BB: Ray Shackelford.

WM: I told him I thought, "Stan you're making a mistake." We visited a while. I said, "Just get Dave Lewis back. Dave Lewis knows the business and everything. He'd help you by far." I don't remember but right after Ray, he appointed someone else. He did eventually appoint Dave Lewis as budget director. I always felt that maybe I helped a little bit over there.

BB: I think you might have. I tried to help him too. It didn't work out particularly well. I don't know if it would have. I told him, I met with him. Do you remember he took a vacation? It was right after the election. He was bone tired and he took two or three weeks off and just left the state and got some rest and recuperation. He came back from that and he was in the little transition office there in the capitol building. I think he was feeling kind of overwhelmed and

trying to make a whole bunch of decisions that maybe he'd postponed for a week or two and shouldn't have.

So I went in and dropped in on him. I always felt close to him personally. He was really kind to me when I was a young legislator. He was our floor leader and president of the Senate and that sort of thing. I wasn't always on the reservation. He was kind and patient with me. Anyway, I went in and said, "You know I think we're in a position of power now because you're the first Republican governor in 20 years. You have a good working relationship. You always have with the Democrats in the legislature." As I remember it, we had the majority in the Senate I think. John Vincent, I think, was the speaker of the House.

The Democrats had a narrow majority there. John was kind of a Democrat that you could talk to. He wasn't an inflexible Democrat. I suggested to Stan that right there, when the iron was hot, right after a victory when we had some power and some momentum, he should maybe request a meeting with John Vincent and just try to preliminarily at least find out what were the most important priorities to John and share with John what the most important priorities with us would be. That could be so that we might be able to avoid some big battle down the line.

You might be able to just get a couple of important things settled right to begin with. He said he was reluctant to do that because Vincent was a liberal. He said he just didn't want to have to work with those guys. He said he thought he could develop and improve on a good working relationship that he'd always had with the Butte Democrats. He said he thought he could kind of pry them loose from the regular Democrats and form a solid working majority with the Butte Democrats and the Republicans. I guess I thought at the time, "Well, usually the Butte Democrats exact a price for their cooperation."

WM: You bet, always.

BB: You know that. So I thought, "You might just be able...just kind of a summit conference you know, with Vincent. It would be just man-to-man and come to an agreement that you wouldn't have to trade any horses for down the line." He said that he was uncomfortable doing that and he was going to work with the Butte delegation. Again, I'm not claiming any superior wisdom or anything. I think he might have been better off.

WM: Oh, I know he would have been. He was dead-set in some of his ideas. You couldn't sway him either from those positions. I got along with him well and I worked as close as I could as chairman of the Board of Regents with him. He got upset with us a time or two over the spending positions. There was a time when I always felt, as the regents, we always needed to represent the university system. That was our prime position. We had to support the universities and give to the legislature our opinions of what money and why we needed those additional dollars in order to run the university system.

I always felt that it took precedent over whether I was a Republican or a Democrat. That was my need at the time to represent them. I tried to do that as best I could. I was criticized some, but not too much. Most people supported that position. I can remember Stan and I both were in Bozeman when we raised the tuition on the students to support the university. I believe it was maybe the first time it had been raised in quite some time. Anyway, we raised it and they had a big meeting in the gym there at Bozeman.

Oh my goodness, I remember one boy came up to the podium and took off his shirt and said, "Just take it too." Some lady who was—and I felt so sorry for her. She was a single parent and was having trouble. She's going to school trying to improve her position in life, so to speak, and she made her presentation. She was a very cheerful type of thing. It made it a little tough. We stood our ground and raised the tuition. Of course it's been raised several times since then. The students support it more than the state. I think that was too bad because you eliminate a lot of students that could go to school and maybe help themselves through life.

BB: And we don't have that strong of a community college system to take up the slack. If we had a junior or community college system, those kids could kind of melt in. We don't really have that either.

WM: We just have three junior colleges. They just don't represent enough people. For some reason, there's a stigma attached to the fact that you're going to a junior college when you shouldn't be. A lot of the students are better off going to the junior college and getting their feet kind of in the fire, so to speak, so that they can accomplish something once they get into the four year schools. It was quite an issue and then the fact that so many students were not able to get out in four years, too.

Some of it was because we didn't have enough instructors and some of it was because they were just too much...They had to support themselves. They couldn't take the classes necessary to finish in four years. That was expensive. That one more year for those additional students was quite a problem. They're still rifling with that. We were lucky, I think, not that I was so smart. I thought we got some real good presidents in and kind of changed the structure and combined the system to where we now have the University of Billings [Montana State University-Billings] and they're all under one head, all of that. I think that was a good move.

That happened just after I went off the board. It was one of the reasons that I resigned from the board was that I felt that was a strong issue. It should be addressed. My term was going to end in mid-year. In that summer, I went to Racicot and told him I was going to resign and told him I was going to do it so he could appoint someone that could be there when that transition took place and could understand it. Then they would be able to make their presentation to the legislature if they had to. That was the year that [Pat] Davison, was that his name, from Billings?

BB: Yes.

WM: They appointed him.

BB: Bill, a couple more questions. We're running close to the end of our tape here. Any thoughts on coal and energy and that sort of thing?

WM: Oh yes, I served on the Coal [Tax Oversight] Committee that established a tax with Tom Towe. Dave Manning was chairman. Walter Amor (?) [Sen. Larry Aber was chairman.]- I believe Walter was vice chairman. Dan Kemmis, myself, Tom Towe, and the lady from Kalispell—

BB: Ora Halverson?

WM: Yes.

BB: She was a representative from Kalispell.

WM: That's right. She served in that. She was on that committee too. We did draft that legislation. Roger Tippy, who worked for the legislative council—

BB: As an attorney.

WM: He drafted the legislation that increased the coal tax and established a coal tax, not Tom Towe. Roger Tippy did it under the direction of this committee. We formed that committee and we approved that increase in the taxation on coal. We put in two bills. Ora carried it in the House and Tom Towe carried it in the Senate. When we had a meeting of the Taxation Committee, they both passed the House and the Senate. Then we had a joint conference to see which bills were going to be rescinded. In order to determine which member—I was chairman of the Taxation Committee—would present the bill, we flipped a coin. Tom Towe was able to present it in the Senate. I always thought that's the biggest mistake I've made in the legislature. I could have very easily turned it over to Ora. Since it started in the House and brought it right up through the House, but—

BB: Now when was that, '81?

WM: No.

BB: Was it '79?

WM: Yes it was. It had to be. It was '77 maybe.

BB: So what was the level of the coal tax then, was that the 30 percent coal tax?

WM: Yes. It was 30 percent. I wrote the minority a report on it because I thought it was too much. I voted against it in the committee and wrote them a minority report. The representative, Puerto Rico, from Great Falls—

BB: Jay Fabrega.

WM: Fabrega and I turned in a minority report because we felt it was too high and not competitive to Wyoming. Anyway, we didn't get anywhere. It was passed and came to the Senate and to the House like I said. It was passed at 30 percent?

BB: I think the initial tax was 30 percent. Why did I think that might have...You were chairman of the Taxation Committee. So it had to have been in '77. We didn't have the majority in '75. Okay so Tom Towe, of course, would want to be remembered as the father of the coal tax.

WM: Oh yes, no question about it.

BB: Looking back, then when Schwinden became governor, it was reduced to 15 percent. That was the so-called "window of opportunity." He said that if more coal is produced, it can be produced at this lower rate. The idea was to provide an inducement or an incentive for coal companies to develop more coal.

WM: Do you remember, I was president of the Senate and I introduced some bills relating to the coal tax situation. One of them was a reduction in the tax on coal. We passed it in the Senate, but it never got out of the House. In fact, that was in '79. The talk that I was possibly going to run for governor, I didn't get a piece of legislation passed in the House in that whole year.

BB: Really? They just stalled them all in the House?

WM: There wasn't any question about it. If my name was on it, it came off.

BB: That would have been in '79.

WM: That was when Jim Felt was up there helping me. Gosh, we had everything set up.

BB: Let's see, who would have been the Speaker in '79?

WM: [Harold] Gerke.

BB: Oh he was.

WM: Yes Hal Gerke.

BB: He was two different times wasn't he?

WM: Yes.

BB: Bill, we're coming to the end of our tape. Do you have anything you'd like to say in conclusion?

WM: No, I thought the big issues that occurred while I was there, of course, were the sales tax and the coal tax. Those were the two things that I remember the most. The most interesting two challenges were these to present to the legislature and to the people.

BB: I appreciate your good service and your willingness to cooperate on this project.

WM: I enjoyed it.

BB: Thank you Bill.

[End of Interview]