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Interviewee: Gordon McOmber
Interviewer: Bob Brown
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Bob Brown: All right, we're running. I'm interviewing Gordon McOmber and Gordon has served in the House of Representatives in the 1950s. When did you start Gordon?

Gordon McOmber: In 1955, first session.

BB: First session in 1955 and then entered the Senate sometime in the middle 1960s and he was president of the state senate, I believe, in the '75—

GM: Seventy-four, '75, and '77.

BB: Three sessions and also served as lieutenant governor and was active in local politics in Farmers Union politics as a young man. So maybe the first question could be: Gordon, tell us a little bit about your early experiences with the Farmers Union. What caused the Farmers Union to be an important force in Montana politics, and just your observations on your early involvement with it?

GM: Well the genesis of the Farmers Union is with the Depression. Hard times and, you know, 10,000 farmers left Montana between World War I and World War II. Times were rough. It was dry and the prices weren't good. Farms were being foreclosed. So that's how the Farmers Union started. They were pretty successful. They supported weights and measures in states of government. They supported the Interstate Commerce Commission. Obviously, cooperatives, grain cooperatives, and retail cooperatives were supported. They were pretty powerful in politics.

BB: When we say Farmers Union, how was...The farm organizations would represent the viewpoint of farmers, but the Farm Bureau, is that a different concept than the Farmers Union?

GM: Traditionally the Farm Bureau, Bob you're a Republican and I'm a Democrat and we've been friends for a long while. We can talk about these things without getting unhappy. There are a lot of good people in the country that can do that, but some can't. Anyway, the Farm Bureau, traditionally, were Republicans. The Farmers Union were Democrats. The Farmers Union contends that the Farm Bureau was started by the Chamber of Commerce to counteract the political influence of the Farmers Union. Then it was the Grange of course who were pretty liberal and I guess still are on that side, but they got burned pretty badly with some of their first ventures. So they decided to maintain a neutral status.

BB: I see. Where I'm going with this is the concept of union, is there something in the way the Farmers Union is organized that makes it like a labor union? Could we understand it that way? Because a bureau sounds kind of bureaucratic, like the Farm Bureau, but they are both farmers' organizations. Was there anything in the approach that the Farmers Union had that would make it like a union? Or was it just a name?

GM: No, I think you're right there. When I first ran for office, the labor unions and the Farmers Union were the backbone of the Democratic Party. The other party that you belong to had corporations and the Farm Bureau, and the chamber of commerce. They represented more employers. They were higher income people. There's no question about that. Farmers Union had smaller farmers and lower income people. They were friends with labor unions and they adopted the tactics of the labor unions. There's a connection there.

BB: So the tactics of the labor unions would mean, what, that they withhold grain from the market?

GM: They got together. They were a Democratic organization that worked collectively to achieve these goals. One of those tactics was of course the formation of the cooperatives of working together. They really weren't in the position to withhold their services or their product from the people like the labor unions were. When I was a kid, during Roosevelt, they had the sit-down strikes. I guess the Supreme Court declared that they couldn't strike where they just sat down on the job. The farmers weren't in the position to do that.

BB: It would be difficult to organize, I suppose, to that extent then?

GM: Yes. They tried it. They tried it here once on potatoes. The fresh vegetables were grown locally. The farmers, potato farmers, weren't getting much of the potatoes. So they got together and they formed a group and they withheld potatoes from the market for a higher price. So what happened is, somebody come around and bought the president's entire production for a high price and he quit the organization and the others were sitting there. So they decided that they knew they had to do something on a bigger scale and have more clout and more teeth. My father got involved in the Farmers Union and worked for them. He lobbied for the Farmers Union.

BB: That would have been in 1930s?

GM: That was after he quit farming and he had a bad back and couldn't run the dairy anymore. He was a county chairman. Then he went to work for the president of the Farmers Union.

BB: The state president?

GM: Yes. He organized a few new locals. He solicited new members and he testified on a few bills for them.

BB: This would have been in what period?

GM: This was about the time I got into politics in the '50s.

BB: There was a fellow that was kind of an important president of the Farmers Union by the name of Ralph Cook.

GM: He was vice president, yes. He was a friend of my father's.

BB: Why did I think that, I've heard of his name for some reason. I just wondered—

GM: He was very prominent and very active.

BB: Were there other prominent active leaders in the Farmers Union that stand out in your mind?

GM: These names will come to me. They escape me right now. This has been 50 years ago.

BB: Or more, actually.

GM: Yes, but there were some. The president's name and the national president came here and visited and was a friend of my father's too. They were pretty powerful men.

BB: Gordon, you mentioned also that there's a relationship between cooperatives and the Farmers Union. I know you were involved in some important legislation, territorial integrity legislation. I think people who listen to this tape some years from now may not understand what that was. Maybe you could just kind of explain the need for the legislation and why you were a champion of it?

GM: Well, the farms weren't electrified until the government got into the act. The private companies, you know, for-profit companies, provided that service to the towns. The farmers were too far apart and they said that delivering electricity to farms just wasn't feasible. Roosevelt got in and was looking for something to do to stimulate the economy as well as help the farmers. He started this proposal. At first, the private sector was offered interest-free loans to electrify the country.

He turned it down. So Congress then decided to let the people themselves have these interest-free loans. The rural electric cooperatives were started. One of the provisions the Congress stipulated was that the farmers themselves had indicated an interest in it. So petitions were circulated and my father was one of the persons that circulated those petitions in Teton County. Incidentally, when it was put in, I dug post holes.

You worked your butt off to make three dollars a day. So I started right in the basement of that outfit. So then, after I'd been in—it was a political issue, after prosperity, after the war the farmers could pay for the electricity and the private outfits then realized that they missed the boat. So they developed a war over territory.

BB: The idea was that as it became profitable for the investor-owned utility companies to serve rural areas, they started extending their wires and their posts out into areas that were being served by the co-ops. The co-ops were starting to...

GM: Move into the towns.

BB: Oh, okay. They were moving into the towns too?

GM: Yes.

BB: Okay well keep going with your explanation.

GM: So it was a ridiculous situation. It was duplication and it was just bad business. But they both had their pride and they were going to win, you know. So there were several attempts made. Do you remember Bob Randall?

BB: Yes.

GM: He was quite a co-op man.

BB: He was a member of the legislature during the '60s, I think.

GM: Yes, and then he came from a little petroleum county with 800 people in the county.

BB: Winnett.

GM: Yes. Winnett. So anyway, he was quite an REA man. He tells that he got together with John Lahr and they decided—

BB: John Lahr was the lobbyist for the Montana Power Company.

GM: Right. He was from Conrad. He was in my district. So Bob tells me that they decided, "Hey, we've got to stop this monkey business." So a bill was drawn by the REAs and it was introduced by "Por" [G.W.] Deschamps. Do you remember him?

BB: Yes, from Missoula.

GM: Right.

BB: Republican senator from Missoula.

GM: Right. Incidentally, this wasn't necessarily strictly on party lines. So anyway, Por's bill didn't make it. So the next year, they drew up another one and Rod Hansen, who was manager of our local REA—he was quite a wheel in the state organization— and he brought it over and got me to introduce it. So that's how I got involved in that. That was an interesting thing. We talk about—who was the fellow that worked for the wool growers?

BB: Everett Shuey?

GM: Everett Shuey.

BB: He also then became a lobbyist for Montana Power.

GM: Yes, so I introduced this bill and before it was printed—you know how it is when you introduce a bill and it's printed before it goes to the committee. He came and asked me for a copy and I gave it to him. He took it right over the house and had it introduced as the exact period-for-period copy. That's when the shenanigans started.

BB: Was it Representative [J.O.] Boots Asbjornson?

GM: I can't remember who that, who was involved in that.

BB: Would that have been the 1971 session?

GM: Yes, that's right.

BB: I think Representative Boots Asbjornson was the guy that had that bill.

GM: And I'm sure that there some other names on my bill. Anyway, as you know, once a bill has been finally killed in one house, they no longer have to accept a similar bill from the other house. So their plan was to kill that bill, which would have taken care of my bill in the Senate.

BB: And they felt they had the votes to kill that bill in the House and that would have had the effect, then, of killing your bill because it was the same bill.

GM: They fouled up. They put it on the table. John Lahr thought it was dead. But as you know, you can get a bill off the table with a two-thirds vote. So he came over and told me, "Now Gordon, next year we'll get together with a good bill."

I said, "This one isn't dead."

“Oh sure it is,” he said.

I said, “No, it’s just on the table.” That’s the fastest I’ve ever seen John Lahr move. Anyway, then Ed Smith got in on the act. He was a Republican.

BB: Ed Smith was a Republican representative from up in the northeastern part of the state.

GM: Yes, Dagmar I think. He was an REA supporter, as I recall. So anyway, we were maneuvering back and forth and we were concerned about Jim Lucas, who was Speaker of the House. He was considering running for governor, I believe, at that time. At any rate, Ed got him. He talked to him and finally one day, we got up in a little committee room behind on the north side of the gallery of the House and got together and cut a deal. I remember Ed Smith saying, “If anybody changes one period on this, it’s dead.” I know the other side didn’t like it but we got it through anyway.

BB: Okay.

GM: You were a freshman.

BB: I was a freshman when that happened.

GM: You know, I asked Rod the other day how it would work. He said, “Good.” Once we got over the hostility and we decided we had to get along together, they did. They laid out their territory and there was some controversy over the size of the capacity of a line. For an example, I have a sprinkler on my farm out west here. It’s on the Montana Power line that goes to Augusta. It’s up against that line so I have one sprinkler on the Montana Power line. That’s their territory. The other one is on the REA line. That’s their territory.

BB: You know, Gordon, my recollection of that legislation in the House was that there was one really close vote on the House floor on an amendment that Ed Smith made on the floor of the House in the 1971 session. There was some dramatic telephone—a picture taken of the voting board? Do you remember anything about that?

GM: I know that—I think the statutes and maybe the constitution didn’t allow for recording a vote on second reading.

BB: Yes, and some folks thought it would be pretty informative for the people to see who voted for and against that particular amendment. It was an amendment of Ed Smith’s on the bill we’re talking about. It prevailed, as I recall, by one vote. So someone took a picture of the voting board and managed to escape from the capitol building. The result of that the photograph was published. Those were exciting times in the history of Montana and of course, the Montana Power Company was a pretty major player in state politics. Do you remember lobbyists from the Montana Power Company?

GM: Yes.

BB: Do you have any thoughts or impressions of how they operate?

GM: They used to talk about the old copper collar and the least you'd say they were the Democrats and the Republicans and the Montana Power Company. And if the Montana Power Company could control a few swing votes, they could get things done their way. They were a pretty powerful lobby. They go back to the war of the copper kings, you know. It's my understanding that the Anaconda Company made the Montana Power Company to provide electricity for the Anaconda.

BB: Yes, I believe that's correct. So you generally associated, then, with each other in politics in the state. Is that right?

GM: Yes. I remember Ted Schwinden once making a speech about a cowboy hat on the whole capital dome up there, the copper dome of the capitol. They were very powerful, very influential.

BB: Did they pursue a particular strategy?

GM: I think they also owned most of the daily newspapers in the state, didn't they?

BB: The Anaconda Company did, yes.

GM: All but Great Falls I think, maybe.

BB: In the legislature, do you remember a fellow by the name of Denny Shea or Billy Ray?

GM: No, I remember in the Senate there was a Shea from Butte who was mayor. He used to give me...

BB: Jimmy.

GM: Jimmy Shea. He was a different Shea. This one must have been before my time.

BB: Al Wilkinson?

GM: No, he was before my time, too.

BB: Lloyd Crippen?

GM: Crippen I remember, yes. Then there were the two Corette brothers. Weren't there two of them?

BB: Bob and Jack Corette, yes.

GM: Then they hired Shuey and then John Lahr, who had been a good Farmers Union member before he hired them. He was a good cooperative man anyway. His father-in-law was Congressman LeRoy Anderson.

BB: Did you know LeRoy Anderson?

GM: Yes, we served together in the senate. At one of these reapportionment schemes, we ended up with four counties and two senators at-large. So yes, we served together.

BB: What do you remember about him? He of course was a congressman and a general as I recall during World War II.

GM: He was a general in the Reserve or the Guard. I don't know much about these things so it could have been. I knew him well. We campaigned well together. I visited his house and he'd come to my own. He got involved in a process up there to make something out of barley. He was a chemical engineer. I think he got—it didn't work out. It was too bad. He was a really good fellow. He was quite outspoken.

BB: The Montana Power Company and the Anaconda Company, one of the things that preceded me in the legislature, but I know was part of a process when you were there in the '50s and '60s, were hospitality suites. I understand the Anaconda Company had one and there may have been several at different times. Trading Stamps apparently had one. The Railroad Association may have had one. The petroleum people may have had one at one time or another. The one, I think, that was best known was the Anaconda Company hospitality suite or watering hole—

GM: The Placer Hotel.

BB: Yes, at the Placer Hotel, any thoughts or recollections about that?

GM: Oh, yes, they had birthday parties every night. They transferred people's birthday up to the month during the session. Of course the Democrats pretty much stayed away from that. One night some of us decided to go up just for the heck of it. I got up there and there were a bunch of Republicans from Teton County up there and went back home.

It got mentioned in the next election. It was quite a place. They had a hindquarter of beef up there, and hams, and all the booze you wanted. In those days, we got ten dollars a day in expenses and salary. There were some people that would have gone hungry, I think, if it hadn't have been for those places, especially if they drank.

A cheap motel room was six dollars. That left you four dollars a day left to live on there and pay the rent back home. They were good at it. When I went there, they came up and shook my hand, "How are you?" My wife had a birthday—they'd come around and remind me. But they never bothered me. I got into it. They faced off against me once on my position on...You remember the silicosis issue?

BB: Yes, a little bit.

GM: Silicosis is an industrial disease caused by silica dust and it gets in the lungs, you know. It was such an issue that they built that long hospital at Galen to take care of those people and TB patients.

BB: There was some controversy, wasn't there, about whether the Anaconda Company should have taken more of a responsibility for paying for those silicotic benefits?

GM: Right. They used those air drills and they called them widow-makers. The state took care of them when they could no longer work and buried them when they died. So anyway, about the time I came along, they got this bill to make them responsible for it. One of the lobbyists came in and said, "You farmers have got just as much trouble out there with the elevators."

He insisted to be fair that we put elevators in there, which was baloney. Anyway, it was one of those things you do to get it through. It passed. Then the Montana Power Company came up to Choteau and put on a big show. They said, "Your representative McOmber has forced this on you farmers." I was armed with a list of the cost per county for that disease. Teton County and Sheridan, some of them the government put this list together of all the counties. There wasn't a one in Teton County and of course nobody had silicosis from—

BB: So what you're saying is that people in the state of Montana had to pay for these, but there was no silicotic...there was no guy with silicosis in Teton County. So you were able to point out to your constituents here that in fairness, somebody else should be paying for this burden, perhaps the company.

GM: They did. They put in wet grills and air conditioning. It worked.

BB: It made a difference I'm sure.

GM: Of course the underground mines were on their way out anyway. It worked. Just one thing you mentioned these Trading Stamps. I got more letters on that damn Trading Stamp mill. Those women were either for it or against it and they all knew why. They inundated the capitol with letters.

BB: Now explain what Trading Stamps were.

GM: This first guy was pretty smart. He comes to town and he sets up a Trading Stamp program at the grocery store. He sells them the stamps and he provides them with the stamps. People that bought there got stamps, which they could cash in for premiums.

BB: So you buy ten dollars worth of groceries and you get a certain number of stamps for the amount of groceries you buy?

GM: Right.

BB: Then you pasted them in a little book and when you get a book full, that entitles you to what? A credit on your next grocery bill?

GM: Right. The problem was, Green Stamps did it first. He got all the business in town. Here comes along Gold Stamps and gets his competitor. So they are both paying it. They are still dividing up the business in town. So the merchants themselves, they had to do it to compete. They got the bill in there to eliminate it.

BB: Merchants themselves didn't like the trading stamps?

GM: No. As long as only one town had them it was fine. When they all had to do it, it was just a rip off.

BB: I see.

GM: The women would come in there madder than hell. "That's the only money I've got that belongs to me. My husband won't give me any more. Leave them like they are."

BB: They wanted the trading stamps?

GM: Yes, some of them did.

BB: Because they could have a little nest egg at those trading stamps that had some value that they themselves controlled.

GM: Boy, I did get the letters on that, both sides.

BB: What eventually happened?

GM: Oh, I took care of it to where it died out. The merchants just got together.

BB: They don't exist anymore. I remember them when I was a kid. They don't exist anymore that I know.

GM: That was one of those fun things.

BB: Now is there a particular legislator or legislators, maybe, that kind of stand out in your mind, maybe two or three? Gosh, you served in the House and Senate probably a couple of decades or more total.

GM: Twenty-one or two years. There were some pretty good people. There were a lot of good people. Even in Montana in these rural counties, you're only one person away from everybody in the county. Everybody knows somebody that knows you, see. You can't get away with much out here if you want to. The rural counties especially, I think we're pretty good and sending responsible people over there. Of course, we had our political positions. But hell, out of a thousand bills, you had 10 or 15 of those. The rest you just got together and worked for the state of Montana. Leo Graybill Sr. was Speaker of the House on my first term.

BB: That would have been in '55.

GM: Yes. He was really an outstanding man. Of course of Bill Groff and—

BB: Senator Bill Groff from Ravalli County, a Democrat.

GM: And Senator Manning.

BB: Senator Dave Manning from Treasure County, also a Democrat. He was there for many, many years of course.

GM: Yes, he was. He got so old he could hardly, you know, but they liked him over there and of course there's Francis. Of course everyone knows Francis.

BB: Representative Francis Bardanoue from Harlem, who was a Democrat member of the Chairman of the House Appropriations Committee.

GM: He was a man that understood government. Most of us went over there a little timid and shy to learn the ropes. In two weeks old Francis knew what he was telling them and everything. He knew how the system worked and he was working it.

BB: Now Francis Bardanoue had a speech impediment.

GM: Yes, he did. He had...What do you call it?

BB: A cleft palette?

GM: Yes. I remember when he first came, they stared at him. He got up to give a speech and they quit staring at him. They started listening. He was a very brilliant. He just had a very

wonderful mind. He was a little spoiled, as a matter of fact. He threw temper tantrums. He liked to get his way. He was very persuasive and he had...Did you meet his wife ever?

BB: Venice or maybe Venus?

GM: Yes, and she was great for little kids and the downtrodden and that old Francis was pretty liberal. He knew how to use the power of government. I'd been Vice Chairman of Appropriations until Wayrynen, I think it was. I'd been Vice Chairman under Lloyd. Anyway, Wayrynen was a Speaker.

BB: Ray Wayrynen was a representative from Butte. He was Speaker of the House of Representatives in 1965.

GM: He appointed Francis chairman of Appropriations. Francis decides we've got to visit all the institutions and universities. So he goes and commandeers a state Guard plane, two of them, DC3s. They flew all over the state. We got snowed in at Miles City. Anyway, they used to do that but then the federal government put a stop to that. They said that wasn't Air Guard business. We used to fly around in those planes. Francis took us to all the universities and all the institutions. We used to go with the Highway Patrol and we still went in state planes after that.

BB: Now Bardanouve's first session, I think, was 1959.

GM: He was two after me, yes.

BB: Were you there in '59?

GM: Yes, I was there two ahead of [him] '55, '57 and '59.

BB: Do you remember that there was a particularly controversial piece of legislation that was introduced by a fellow up in my part of the state that Representative Dale McGarvey told me about it in an interview that I conducted last week. It was introduced by a representative by the name of Cy Tonner.

GM: Cy Tonner?

BB: It had to do with some kind of a public utility district?

GM: PUD.

BB: Tell us about that because I think that was a major political issue wasn't it?

GM: It was. You see PUDs are like our—in Washington, I believe, public utility districts and the cities formed their own cooperatives and they called them public utility districts. They're like

our cooperatives. They just got started with that. So yes, he Cy was a fellow with one eye. Boy he had an opinion. He started that. It was just as controversial as the REAs. This would have allowed the cities and towns to form a—and I'm not sure, but I think it might even put them in the position to buy out the private outfit. Those PUDs are still working over there in some of those large cities.

BB: In Washington state?

GM: Yes.

BB: So the legislation was introduced by Tonner and apparently was defeated in the house?

GM: I don't remember Bob. It probably was. It never passed. We don't have that law.

BB: Yes, but then it was an issue in the 1960 election, according to Dale McGarvey. He said it was a pretty hot issue in the 1960 election. At least it was in the Flathead.

GM: It could have been. Did Dale happen to mention to you Paradise Dam?

BB: Nope.

GM: Do you remember Paradise Dam?

BB: No, I don't.

GM: It was a hell of a big deal up there. It was going to be a dam on the Paradise River and I was chairman of the irrigation Committee and we had a speaker named Gene Mahoney from up in Sanders County?

BB: Gene Mahoney was a representative and a senator from Sanders County.

GM: Yes. He was Speaker of the House once.

BB: That must have been about '57? [It was 1957.]

GM: One back in those. Anyway, they had this hearing and the railroad was against it because it would move the railroad. Boy it got hot. The Farmers Union was in it and the private utilities and the railroad. They hired these buses and hauled people down there. They said it was the biggest crowd that had ever been in the house chambers. Someone hired Wellington D. Rankin. I remember when he came in and everything quieted down. We'll get back to his lobbying, he did that. He was good anyway, something happened.

BB: So he spoke persuasively, Rankin did?

GM: Oh yes. The son of a gun, what he did, he had a list of people he represented and they were two labor unions. I thought, "What's going on here?"

So after the hearing was over and had adjourned, he came up and he gave me a piece of paper and he said, "Say, I made a mistake. I don't represent these two unions." It had already been in the paper. The unions were madder than hell at him and they sent in a rebuttal but nobody read that. So anyway, Libby Dam was coming into the field. They were thinking about it then. So I had this bill in the committee. I've still got it. It just died there. It used to do that where it would just die in committee. Rankin was quite a lobbyist. And Glenn...somebody else from the Montana Power Company was around there.

BB: Glenn Carney?

GM: No, this was a big guy. He was a very professional lobbyist, but he wasn't too well loved. I think Leo Graybill Sr. kicked him out of his office when he was president of the constitution revision. He was a very effective and—another legislator—

BB: Who was he a lobbyist for?

GM: He was a freelance lobbyist. He actually lobbied for the dairymen sometimes. Of course the governors, I—

BB: You said another legislator crossed your mind?

GM: I guess those were the outstanding ones. Jean Turnage was a...he was president of the Senate like we were. He was really an outstanding legislator.

BB: What do you remember about Turnage?

GM: He was very well respected. He and—

BB: A Republican from Lake County and later Chief Justice of the State Supreme Court.

GM: Yes, and president of the senate. He was floor leader during, a Republican floor leader during one of my sessions. He was very well respected and thought of. He was very persuasive. He was very articulate. He and Bill Groff—things were dragging over there, you know. So they just went to Hawaii for a week during the session. Do you remember that?

BB: Yes, yes, I do.

GM: They got away with it.

BB: It was kind of a funny story. The way I think Turnage explained it to me was that they had thought that the session would be over at about when they made reservations to go to Hawaii. So they got to the point where they couldn't cancel the reservations and it became clearer and clearer that it looked like the session was going to last a little longer than they had planned. So they just thought, "What the heck? We're going to go anyway." So they did and Turnage told me a funny story too.

He said that Bill Groff and his wife and Jean Turnage and his wife were both in Hawaii and the news story got out. Of course Jean is spelled, it's the French spelling of Gene. It's not like Eugene—G-E-N-E. It's J-E-A-N, like Jean, you know, the French spelling of Gene. So anyway, the story was in the newspaper and apparently Groff got an angry letter from one of his constituents saying that it was bad enough that you went to Hawaii before the legislative session ended, but it was just such a distress, horribly dishonorable thing to go traipsing off with that awful Jean Turnage, when he was supposedly happily married.

GM: Were you ever on Appropriations?

BB: No.

GM: That Groff and you know, and Nichols—

BB: Representative Norris Nichols also from Ravalli County and a Republican.

GM: Yes, you know that Norris finally told me that it was Groff's dad that got him to run and gave him the money to get in there. Anyway, Groff was...

BB: They were from the same county and Groff was a Democrat. Nichols was a Republican.

GM: Groff was chairman of Ways and means in the senate, which is Appropriation in the house. Nichols was in the house. Ravalli County ran the...

BB: They called them the "Gold Dust Twins." Now Gordon, you mentioned you had a friendship with Jean Turnage and great respect for him. We discussed how there was this friendship, this bond between Norris Nichols and Bill Groff. It sounds as though, perhaps, in a lot of your experience in state politics, there wasn't as great a gulf between Democrats and Republicans perhaps as there is now. Maybe it was greater in the '50s and less in the '70s, or do you have any thoughts or observations about that?

GM: Yes, I do. This goes back to the Farmers Union. The Farmers Union was a dominant force in Teton County politics. They could win in the primary. Some of the people didn't like the Farmers Union so they would defeat their candidate in the general election. That's how I got involved. As I said, the party faithful got together and decided they were going to have to get the younger generation involved.

They kind of bypassed those old hardliners and got some more middle-of-the-roaders. They realized they had to reach out and get somebody that had something else going for them. So I got the Farmers Union vote, obviously, my father was at that time a lobbyist for them. But I got these other votes that the other candidates hadn't managed to get. Because I had been a veteran and most other things.

BB: A World War II veteran?

GM: Yes. So after a while, I was defeated. It came to me—

BB: When were you defeated?

GM: Oh, I had three sessions and I think I was defeated in the fourth.

BB: 1960?

GM: '61 maybe.

BB: Yes, the election of 1960.

GM: Yes. So it became very clear to me that I could represent the people of Teton County and get elected or represent the Farmers Union and stay home. So I made a decision. I still had most of them, really about the only opposition I had were the extremists on both ends of the spectrum. So I got along very good. I got along with Norris.

I'll tell you, I was having lunch with Norris once and here come my constituents from up north. We sit down there and visit and had lunch. They came up to visit at the capitol after lunch. He came over to me and he said, "Say, what's that Nichols doing sitting over there on the Republican side?" I got along. I had a working relationship.

BB: I remember that distinctly about you. My first session in the senate, you were the president of the senate. In fact you were—what did you say? From '72 to '76, is that right?

GM: No '74 that's the first special session after. We had one annual session after the constitution.

BB: So '74?

GM: Yes.

BB: I didn't arrive there until after the '75 session. You were president of the Senate '75 and then again in '77 right?

GM: Yes, right.

BB: So you've probably served as president of the Senate longer than anybody ever has.

GM: I think I'm the only one that made three.

BB: Yes, made three.

GM: Now with these restrictions on that...

BB: With term limitations, that's the record that's never going to be equaled until that's removed.

GM: I made up my mind, I'm going to be neutral, no friends and no enemies. It doesn't make any difference between Democrats and Republicans. It worked out.

BB: Yes that was your reputation. There is no question about that.

GM: When I first started, you remember Pat Gilfeather?

BB: Yes, a senator from Great Falls, a Democrat.

GM: He was a Farmers Union guy.

BB: Also an attorney, wasn't he?

GM: Yes, so he was going to help me out a little about the first week. I called time on him he said, "I'm not done yet."

I said, "You're done."

BB: He was pretty assertive wasn't he?

GM: Yes, he was really well thought of in the Farmers Union. He was quite a wheel over there. The next thing that happened to him—he was Margaret Warden. She was very strong in the library business and her husband was publisher of the *Tribune*.

BB: The *Great Falls Tribune*, Senator Margaret Warden, a Democrat from Great Falls.

GM: She just died here recently.

BB: Oh did she?

GM: Yes. Anyway, he was giving a spiel there and I called time on her. She wanted a little more time. I said, "No, sorry." She started to cry.

Jimmy Shea got up and said, "Mr. President, you made her cry. Aren't you ashamed of yourself?" Then there was a young attorney from Billings that got up and took me on, Earl Moritz was a Republican—

BB: Republican senator from Lewistown.

GM: We served on the appropriation Committee on institutions for years together. He got up and told that young woman what was what. After that, I never had any trouble with anyone.

BB: I remember a funny story about you. Senator Neil Lynch, a Democrat from Butte was the Majority Floor Leader one of the sessions that you were president of the Senate. He was interested in something. I believe it was called transcendental meditation. It was a wonderful thing for him, good therapy for him and that sort of thing. So there was some fellow that knew a lot about this that was in Helena and was going to put on some kind of a public demonstration and explain to people who were interested in it all about it that evening at the Colonial.

So Neil stood up on the floor when you were in the rostrum and he explained, you know, about this and how it had been a wonderful thing for him and how it had just rejuvenated him mentally and how he hoped other people might be interested in taking advantage of it too. He said something to the effect of, "What you do is you just get everything out of your mind. You just concentrate on nothing and if you do that with a clear mind, it is the most wonderfully restful thing that can happen to you."

There was a little silence after he said that and you were up in the rostrum and you said, "Well, Neil, on the farm we call that a nap." Do you remember that?

GM: No.

BB: Everybody chuckled.

GM: You know I did that. Those things come out of me. Did you know Senator Hafferman, did we talk about him?

BB: Bill Hafferman, a Democrat from Libby.

GM: He would talk like a preacher. He would get up there and wave his arms and carry on and...

BB: He had that black suit coat and that black bowtie and he used great, big four letter words and waved his arms.

GM: He was going on up there one day and I sat in the row in front of him and he paused a bit. I said, "Amen." And it was out of order, you know. They kind of enjoyed hearing that. First I thought he was going to be mad at me and then he decided, no, it was all right. It got him a big frenzy laugh off.

BB: Do you remember Senator Ben Stein?

GM: Yes, I remember Ben Stein.

BB: Anything about him?

GM: He was kind of a soft, slow talking. Let's see...oh, he was the guy that took on the Highway Department? Yes, I remember him.

BB: I think he was elected because of some highway dispute down in Park County and he came in as a Democrat. Then he switched parties and was a Republican. He was kind of getting mad at the Republicans and thinking about becoming an Independent about the time that he left. I remember him as a very independent-minded—

GM: He spent that ranch fighting the Highway Department.

BB: Is that right?

GM: He came out here as a young guy to work. He was working on this ranch as a hired hand and the boss was trying to sell the place. He had this potential buyer there talking. They were arguing. Ben said, "Would you really take that what's for?"

The guy said, "Yes."

Ben said, "I'll take it." He came from a wealthy family.

BB: Yes, he came from a wealthy family back east. He was also an author.

GM: I've got his book.

BB: You do? *Tough Trip Through Paradise* or something like that with Andrew Garcia?

GM: Yes.

BB: I've got that too. It's a really interesting read. I think he found some old papers some place. He was able to kind of put them into the front of the book. He was well educated from some Ivy League school. He was kind of an interesting guy. Do you remember any other Butte legislators that stand out in your mind? We've talked about Wayrynen and Lynch and so on. They're an interesting part of Montana.

GM: Were you there when we used to have the bomb threats?

BB: I don't remember that.

GM: After about three of them, oh, I got together with attorney generals and leadership on both sides and we decided that we just couldn't shut the Senate down because it would clear the whole damn capitol and the city police would come in and go through everything. Then we'd come back into session and I had to call down to Jorgenson's to get those Butte guys to come back up so we'd have enough people to do business.

BB: Because the minute there was a bomb threat, they'd all race down to the bar. Then they didn't want to come back again. Was there any suspicion that they might have anything to do with the whole thing?

GM: You knew Tom Towe, Tommy Towe.

BB: Representative and Senator Tom Towe, a Democrat from Billings.

GM: Yes, he operated like a congressman. He was more paper than—the girls used to come up and complain to me that he's on his third or fourth order of paper. Anyway, I'm sitting up there once and, you know, during the vote, during second reading the president goes back to his seat on the aisle. So I'm sitting back there. The votes are coming out on second reading and I looked. The whole damn front row is empty, but we're getting more votes than we've got people. Those guys were down there and they had one fellow back and running up and down that row of seats voting for everybody.

BB: Voting for everybody else. Boy, they could have been in big trouble for that.

GM: One guy had his son voting for him.

BB: I remember that, I think. He had a little boy sitting on his lap?

GM: Yes.

BB: Maybe he went out into the cloak room and he just had his six year old son sitting there.

GM: Yes. Luke McKeon was a very effective speaker, persuasive speaker.

BB: Public speaker. Luke McKeon was a Democrat senator and a lawyer from Anaconda.

GM: Didn't he get in some kind of trouble with that workman's comp?

BB: Yes, I think so. How was he, you say he was persuasive as a public speaker?

GM: He'd stand up there and lean on that desk and he could, he'd just sway the vote. He was a very, very persuasive speaker. He was good.

BB: Do you remember, you served with several governors and one of them you served in the senate with, Stan Stephens who later went on and became governor?

GM: Yes.

BB: Then of course you started out in legislative service under Governor Aronson.

GM: Yes.

BB: And you served under Governor Nutter I believe, maybe not. Maybe you missed him because you were out that one '61 session.

GM: I served with Nutter.

BB: You served with Nutter in the legislature?

GM: Yes, we were on the same Appropriations Committee together.

BB: Then also with Governor Babcock and then you were president of the Senate under Governor Judge and then you were Lieutenant Governor under Governor Schwinden. So you've got some wonderful perspective about governors. Maybe you could comment a little bit about the governors that you knew and served with.

GM: Hugo, I liked him. They called him the galloping Swede. He was a great, big, good natured guy. The joke he told on himself was when he'd come in, he was a roustabout for the oil rigs, you know. They had 16-foot planks that were soaking wet. He was working up a good sweat moving these planks and somebody said to him, "Take five, Hugo."

He said, "I can hardly lift one." His little daughter Tricia, was that her name?

BB: Rica.

GM: Rica, she ran around there. She was a cute little gal. I got along with him all right. We used to take the school kids up there. He gave me some good advice once to the kids. He said, "A governor, any executive can't do it himself. He's judged. His success depends upon his ability to appoint the right people in administrative positions." That was good. He was kind of a rough guy and I think some of those polished fellows thought they could have done a little better. He was all right. Then who came next?

BB: Then Aronson was followed by Nutter.

GM: Nutter and he was killed in that plane crash out here.

BB: You said you served with him?

GM: Yes. I liked the governor that's governor, that's boss. Nutter was. I didn't agree with his political philosophy of course, but at least he was in control there. He straightened out the Highway Department a little and he was getting into the Fish and Game. I had to be on appropriation Committee when he was governor.

BB: Did he exhibit a strong personality when he was in Appropriations Committee with you?

GM: Yes.

BB: He was decisive apparently?

GM: I thought so. I had another little connection with him. My school friend—I went to high school with Johnny McInerney and he was his co-pilot. They flew together and Johnny got on another plane. One plane ran into another and three of them went down. So anyway, his family here is good friends with the Nutters.

BB: This was during World War II that this happened?

GM: Yes.

BB: Okay I see. So Nutter was a flier during...

GM: Yes, he was a B-24 pilot. He had a story once he told me about over there, they practiced shooting shotguns a lot. The gunners did. They accidentally hit an Arab woman.

BB: Hit an Arab woman?

GM: Or a native woman, yes, I guess it was an Arab. And so to make things right, the commanding officer went up to give her some money and the next day there were a half a dozen guys down there with their wives.

BB: All claiming that they had some buckshot in them?

GM: Yes and let's see—Babcock, yes I served with Babcock in the house.

BB: You would have served with Babcock in the house?

GM: Yes, he got the job after Nutter didn't he?

BB: Yes.

GM: I don't remember too much about him.

BB: You served in the legislature with him and then you also served in the Senate, I think, when he was governor, didn't you?

GM: I think I was still in the house, maybe, when he was...

BB: You were—when were you in the house? You were in the house in '55, '57 and '59. Then you were out '61. When did you come back into the house?

GM: Just out one session.

BB: So you came back in the house in '63 and '65? Then when did you go into the senate, '67?

GM: I think so, yes. I used to fly and when we—I went on a few trips with him in a state plane and he'd fly sometimes. I'd fly the plane sometimes. I never landed it. I remember him and Betty was a fine lady. I always liked her.

BB: How would you describe, you mentioned that your political philosophy was different than Nutter and I assume probably different than Babcock? How would you describe that difference?

GM: Just get out the party platforms, Bob. Look at both of them. You know, there was this thing about cooperatives, taxing cooperatives and regulation and that sort of thing. Some people think a certain amount of regulation is necessary and some of them don't want to have it at all. I served with those people and we, one of the political vote came up and we'd both go back and vote on it. Then we'd go back in a room to our business and finish it off. It's kind of hard for some newcomers to understand that honest politicians can actually do that. Some people think that there are gods on one side and the devil on the other and there are no in between.

BB: Maybe a sort of a god and a devil issue when you were there in the 1960s, it surfaced and it's flickered on and off again for most of the Montana history that I've been in politics for, the sales tax.

GM: Oh yes. That was a basic difference.

BB: Explain that. Explain how that's a basic difference.

GM: It's very simple. The sales tax was on the lower income people and the income tax and the corporation tax were on the upper income people. Money is a big issue, you know. Some of these moral issues are just used to justify their position. That was the big one always.

BB: You know, it's interesting though, Gordon, because I think that Montana's political history on that particular issue has been different than most other states. As I understand it, most of the sales taxes went into effect during the '30s, during the Depression when the governments of the states were really, really stressed. In many cases, maybe even in all cases, they were enacted by Democrat legislators and Democrat governors.

Somehow or other in Montana, they were interested basically in sustaining government, you know, getting a greater source of government, source of revenue to fund government programs. I think that's the reason sales taxes went into effect in the other states. In Montana, that history wasn't followed. Here, the feeling was that the sales tax was a tax on the poor people to help the rich people. Do you have any thoughts on that? You've already articulated...

GM: Do you read Joseph Kinsey Howard?

BB: Yes.

GM: Have you ever heard about a Russian Jew named Levine?

BB: Yes. He was a professor at the University of Montana.

GM: Yes, the chancellor of...

BB: Lewis Levine.

GM: Yes, and the chancellor over there was concerned—you don't have a chancellor anymore, do you? He was concerned about the falling income for the University system.

BB: This was the late 19-teens or late 1920s, something like that.

GM: Around the Depression time there anyway. So Levine was a professor there, I believe. So the chancellor asked Levine to do a study on the taxation on mines. He did it and then the mud

hit the fan. So the chancellor fired him. Then they put the pressure on him, he had to hire him back.

BB: The reason Levine was—the reason that was controversial is because his study showed that the mining companies weren't paying taxes.

GM: Yes, he had a heck of a problem.

BB: I think it was something like the farmers in Montana, if I remember the story, accounted for a high percentage of the population, but a combined rather small percentage of the earned income, whereas the mines accounted for a greater percentage of the income, but they paid a lot less of the tax than the farmers did. It was something like that. Wasn't that the...

GM: Yes, who was this last writer, Toole, the writer Toole...

BB: K. Ross Toole?

GM: Yes.

BB: Another historian.

GM: Yes, he quotes Howard and I just happen—I'm so fresh on this, I just looked at it last night. He had this chart you were talking about. They also had—they gerrymandered the towns on taking property that was going to be taxed out of the city, you know. All these things were put together. I think it goes back to those bitter-old labor fights with the company and labor where they saw they were going to be taxed.

BB: So what you're saying is that there was—that tax equity was a greater issue in Montana, historically, than it may have been in some of these other states where they just looked there at a sales tax as another way of getting revenue? In our state, when we talked about a tax, because of the Levine experience and the fact that we had mining companies that perhaps weren't paying their fair share of taxes, the thought came up, whenever we talked about taxes, about the fairness of taxes. At least maybe that was a bigger issue in Montana. Is that what you're saying?

GM: I don't know. Bob, I don't know about those other states. But I know that it's always been perceived as an income tax is a tax on the little guy and I think if they had correspondingly increased the corporation tax—we used to call it a corporation license tax. Do they still call it that?

BB: Yes, a corporate income tax.

GM: Yes, it was a license in effect to do business in Montana. I think the Democrats regard those companies not as benevolent organizations putting money into Montana, but as private profit organizations who are here to take the money out for eastern investors.

BB: So a Republican might look at a big corporation as a source of jobs in the state, you said putting money in. And a Democrat, to help us understand the difference here, might look at a big corporation as something primarily interested in making money for itself and perhaps even taking it out of the state.

GM: Right and the money they spent here and the taxes they spent obviously cut down on the profits, so that was kind of incidental. Their main object was to make money. That's all right. They're not regarded by the Democrats as benevolent organizations. They're extractive industries. Another thing, when I first got in there and the teachers weren't getting a damn thing, so the Democrats got their pay up there. Somebody said, "We're going to raise their pay until they switch parties and become Republicans." Which they did. You know, they turned their back on poor or Blaylock and he was the best friend education ever had.

BB: That was when Chet Blaylock ran for governor, I think, in 1992. You also knew Governor Judge?

GM: Yes, I was in the House with him too. We were together in the House. He was a good governor. He was a Kennedy kid. You know, in my opinion, he was a man of the times. He came in when that big change swept the nation and hired a bunch of young guys and women—my wife was his executive secretary.

BB: Jean Handel.

GM: Yes, and she was executive secretary with Forrest Anderson too.

BB: Oh I'd forgotten to ask you about him. Go ahead and keep talking about Governor Judge.

GM: I liked him. He was a good one.

BB: You also served in the legislature with him. Do you have any recollections of him as a legislator?

GM: Yes, he was quite—he talked well. He made a good presentation. A little side story on that, he was a lobbyist before he was in the legislature. I think it was a Hamilton family or one of those families that have the concessions in Yellowstone Park. He worked for them and got bills through for them and so when I was president of the Senate, President Ford came back in Montana. He'd been a ranger at Yellowstone.

So this is in the summertime and Governor Judge went out to see him. He wanted somebody to go along that had a little title, I guess. So I was president so he invited me along. We went out and met Ford. We went to West Yellowstone and he cleared me with the Secret Service to go up to the plane and meet Ford. But they wouldn't let me go. So Ford comes back then. They shook hands with all the people around there.

Anyway, then we went out to Old Faithful and I saw him out there again. So I was kind of in a hotspot on that, you see. It was Governor Judge that appointed me to run the Department of Agriculture. I resigned from the Senate to run when he appointed me to run the Department of Agriculture. George Lackman had retired.

BB: Okay I think I do remember that. That was about 1977?

GM: Yes, it was after, yes I think so. So my wife was his executive secretary, Judge's. Schwinden was Lieutenant Governor. So Schwinden and I had been together in the house. We used to kid him and say, "When you run for governor, I'll vote for you." So he runs against Judge.

BB: And here Judge had appointed you Secretary of Agriculture. It was nice working for him, but you'd already told Schwinden, probably seriously too.

GM: Oh, I did, yeah. So things got a little hairy around there.

BB: What happened? Did you stick with your commitment to Schwinden?

GM: Oh, as soon as Schwinden announced, I called up and got an appointment with Tom and told him and said, "Hey, this is the way it is. I'll resign."

"No, I can't have you do that." He couldn't because it would have looked bad.

I said, "I'll finish out the term and during the primary I won't get involved in anything." That's the way it was.

BB: How did he—was he angry or was he disappointed?

GM: No. The interesting thing is that Jean, my wife, got a commitment from him to reappoint me even if Schwinden lost. It was kind of nebulous there for a while. It came out all right. Jean was such a friend of his that we saw a lot of each other afterwards.

BB: Governor Judge?

GM: Yes. Of course, Schwinden was a very decisive man. I liked his style.

BB: Did you continue as the director of the Department of Agriculture under Schwinden then?

GM: No, let's see...oh, yes. He reappointed me, yes. Leo Barry and I are the only two he reappointed of the whole cabinet.

BB: And Dave Lewis, didn't he, wasn't he also...?

GM: He had worked for Judge, but I don't think he had that position.

BB: No, at the cabinet level.

GM: No he didn't—Schwinden never reappointed anyone but Leo Barry.

BB: I know Dave was both in the Judge administration and the Schwinden administration.

GM: Yes, he was, a smart guy, a brilliant guy.

BB: So then, but you remember Schwinden from being in the legislature with you?

GM: Oh, yes.

BB: Well, describe him as a legislator.

GM: From the first, it was apparent that he was a comer. He was smart. He intelligence and he got along with people. It just stuck out all over him that he was an up and coming guy. I think from the beginning, I felt that about him. Then he was appointed by Forrest Anderson to run state lands. I worked with him on that a little. Then Senator Bohlinger got up a bill to study saline seep...

BB: Senator Gordon Bohlinger was from Glasgow and he was a Democrat.

GM: Yes. Statewide organization was formed that—pretty well financed—to study saline seep. We didn't know where to put it. All these things have got to be under somebody. So Schwinden called me one day and he said, "Why don't you give it to me?" So we gave it to him. I was appointed chairman of that statewide organization.

BB: That would have been in about the '59 session or something?

GM: No, it was after I was in the senate that this came up.

BB: Oh, Schwinden was the director of the Department of State Lands?

GM: Yes, he was State Lands then. That's right.

BB: He had served a couple of terms in the House of Representatives from up in the northeastern part of the state, the late '50s, I think. Then Governor Anderson appointed him to his cabinet as the director of Department of State Lands.

GM: That's how it was.

BB: What are your impressions of Anderson?

GM: He was a good governor. Boy, he was the boss. There was no monkey business about him. I'll tell you, I heard a couple of stories about him and I don't know. Anyway, he had gotten Tom Judge to run with him as Lieutenant Governor. The story goes that after the election he said, "Now Tom, goodbye. I don't want to see you no more." He was the governor. I know my predecessor, George Lackman, was appointed. He was a director of agriculture. Forrest had the Indian sign on him.

George told me once and it was a really important decision to make. It was kind of political. So he thought he better talk to the governor. So he goes up to see Forrest and told him about it. Forrest said, "I hired you to make that decision. You make the right one or I'll fire you."

BB: But he didn't tell him what he thought the right one was?

GM: No, he was—I was on a fun study once under him, I guess. I got to meet him a little bit. He was the governor, there's no question about it. He never backed down from anyone. He was a good man.

BB: He was small in stature and so was Governor Nutter.

GM: I never noticed that about Nutter.

BB: Weren't they both relatively small?

GM: Heould have been. He projected his attitude.

BB: They were both pretty decisive and pretty much in charge. Do you characterize Schwinden the same way?

GM: Oh yes. Anderson was Schwinden's role model, he'd tell you that.

BB: Then of course, Anderson hired Schwinden to be a member of his cabinet as the director of the Department of State Lands. So Schwinden had an opportunity to watch him up close. You haven't described Babcock or Judge in the same way. You haven't described them as—was their leadership style different? Aronson you didn't really describe that well either.

GM: He had Leslie Castles. Do you remember Leslie?

BB: Wesley Castles.

GM: Wesley. He ended up on the court, I think. He had a great deal of influence on Hugo.

BB: So Wes Castles was Governor Aronson's, one of his top men?

GM: We'd go up to talk to him and he'd say, "See Wes." Hugo was a good PR man and they liked him, the galloping Swede, and he was like people wanted their people to be.

BB: You mentioned that he said that it was important to surround yourself with confident people?

GM: Yes.

BB: That kind of advice might not have come out of Nutter or Anderson or Schwinden. Maybe they believed in surrounding themselves with good people, but they would have maybe placed a greater emphasis on being in charge themselves?

GM: I wouldn't say that. I hadn't thought about that, Bob. They were strong men. They didn't need...Well, Tom, for an example, he was—

BB: Tom Judge.

GM: To study things and thinking about it, and Schwinden already had the answer. He had a very high IQ. Did you know he was in a unit in the military? They came out and they picked out these very smart people and put them in this unit all together that was kind of an experiment to see how they'd react.

BB: This is Governor Schwinden right during World War II?

GM: Yes.

BB: I didn't know that.

GM: He said afterwards they decided it was a bad idea because they got them all together in that one spot and somebody might have killed off the whole batch.

BB: That's interesting. Boy, my impression of him too was that he was highly intelligent. In my meetings with him in his office, and I can remember two or three, I don't remember that other advisors were present. Heck he could talk in detail and in depth about the Highway Department

or the Department of Institutions or the Commerce Department or agricultural policy, or whatever. He was confident in being able to do so with you by himself.

GM: He could.

BB: That's how I remember my conversations with him. He'd tell you what he thought, too, very directly.

GM: He could do it too. They're all pretty good people. I didn't have any personal animosity towards any of them. I liked Schwinden because being a Lieutenant Governor there because the constitution provides a Lieutenant Governor doesn't have a damn thing to do unless legislature gives him something to do or the governor gives him something to do, or the governor dies. Then he's got something to say but the rest of the time he's sitting there like a spare tire. I wouldn't want that job for four years.

BB: Now what happened? Was George Turman, who had been Schwinden's running mate and had been his Lieutenant Governor was appointed, I think, to the Northwest Power Council? So to fill out the remainder of that term in office until Schwinden left office, he appointed you as Lieutenant Governor. So you were Lieutenant Governor for a couple of years?

GM: One.

BB: Just one year, the last year of the Schwinden administration.

GM: George was a gentleman and a scholar.

BB: George Turman?

GM: Yes. I believe he had ambitions to be governor. He wasn't an aggressive, pushing type of fellow. He had a hard time selling himself. He wanted them to just look at him and observe him.

BB: He was a tall, kind of reserved intellectual.

GM: Yes, he was an intellectual. So another thing that could have impacted it is that Schwinden decided not to run again. He decided not to recommend anyone. So everybody was on their own then, you see. I think that was a factor in him appointing me was that he knew damn well I didn't want to be Lieutenant Governor.

BB: Or governor, either.

GM: I mean governor, yes.

BB: So that was his way of kind of showing that he wasn't designating an heir apparent.

GM: Of course he was kind of proud of his appointments. I don't think he made very many bad ones. I don't think he was too worried that was going to ruin his reputation.

BB: Did it ever occur to you to run for governor?

GM: No. Well, you know once you get your name in the paper a few times and your friends think, "Boy, you'd make a good congressman or a good governor," but early in my life I decided that I didn't—it wasn't my game. I didn't want to. I had an opportunity to run for Lieutenant Governor under Judge. Anyway, I was approached by a couple of people who said that they were feeling me out for it. I'll tell you who it was, it was Elmer Flynn—

BB: Senator Elmer Flynn, a Democrat from Missoula.

GM: Yes old Elmer had emphysema or something so bad because he smoked so many cigarettes I thought he was going to succumb right there on the floor, he'd lose his breath. Anyway, I said, "No, no thanks. I'm not interested." So we got Joe Roberts. I've got a book here that Joe gave me.

BB: Oh, on Western State's Legislative Forestry Task Force, you bet. I served in both the House and Senate with Joe. He was a Representative and a Senator from Lincoln County, a Democrat.

GM: I could have hung him. He was party whip on my side of the aisle. He gets up and makes a motion to adjourn sine die.

BB: Do you remember what the issue was?

GM: He just wanted to go home. It was the last night of the last session.

BB: Oh and he wanted to beat the majority leader to the motion? Generally the majority leader person makes that motion. You weren't quite ready for it?

GM: No. Well Paul Boylan had made a motion too that night, that last night of that last—

BB: Paul Boylan was a very, very independent-minded Democrat senator from Bozeman.

GM: Boy, he wanted to be president.

BB: President of the Senate?

GM: He kept asking me, "Are you going to run, are you going to run?" I'm playing it cool.

I said, “I’ve got to think. I’ve got to think.” So he finally decided that I told him that I wasn’t going to run again. You know when we were evenly divided that time, 25 on each side, and—

BB: That was 1977.

GM: Was that it?

BB: Yes.

GM: The last one, he offered to switch sides and vote on the Republican side. Matt Himsl said if he did, he’d go on our side. That took care of that. You’ve just visited with Matt have you?

BB: I had a great visit with Matt, a great interview with him.

GM: He’s a fine man. I always respected him. He was a good man. Is he still holding up all right?

BB: He’s nearly 90 years old. and he’s in mint condition. His speech is affected a little bit because his teeth don’t fit very well. His hearing is, you’ve got to speak up to him a little bit. But there’s nothing wrong with his mind and he reads a lot. He remembers well and he’s a pretty remarkable guy.

GM: He was. I always respected him. He was a good man. I was going through some things last week and I came across some court letters, a folder. In there was several pages of propositions—first the Democrats. We had that tie, you know. The Democrats would proposition the Republicans and they’d come back with the Republicans. So we finally got together on and Bill Mathers and I issued a press release. We didn’t write it. Anyway, there’s that whole matter—

BB: Bill Mathers was the Republican leader for the Senate in the 1977 session.

GM: No, he wasn’t there then. He was involved in it. He and Turnage and Hazelbaker were the senators—

BB: Frank Hazelbaker from Dillon.

GM: So anyway, Bill’s name is on this and Turnage’s name is on this.

BB: It was the agreement. There had to be some kind of a—

GM: Yes, how we’d divide the committee chairmanships. Some got a vice chairman and some got chairman. We sat down and worked it all out.

BB: You know, Gordon, that document had been revised a little bit I think. I think what you folks negotiated during that 1977 session in the Senate has been used as the model since then, both in the Senate and in the House when the legislature's been tied since then as it was I believe—the House was in 1985 and I think the Senate might have been maybe in '87 or something.

GM: The constitution, I believe, called for the—in case of a tie, the party of the governor would have the right to elect either the president or the speaker.

BB: But the question, I think beyond that was, whether that carried with it the entire organization of the body or just the presiding officer. What you guys negotiated was that it meant the presiding officer but then you split the loaf down the middle with the rest of it. The Republicans and Democrats chose which committees they'd have chairmanships of. It was done as fairly and as equally as possible.

GM: Do you know what I think? I think they were looking for a one-house legislature. They assumed that the speaker—in the House the speaker appoints all the officers. They were assuming that's the way it was going to work.

BB: You're talking about the Constitutional Convention delegates in the 1972 Constitution assumed that—because when that was ratified, the people had to vote whether or not to ratify the constitution in 1972. Then there were three side issues on the ballot. There was one dealing with capital punishment, one dealing with legalized gambling, and one dealing with a unicameral legislature. So what you're saying is that there was perhaps the feeling there that the unicameral legislature would pass and that the concept we're talking about would have made more sense then for—

GM: Yes, because the Senate has a committee on—

BB: A Committee on Committees—

GM: That appoints the committees. The president doesn't, like the speaker.

BB: The speaker of the house appoints all the committees.

GM: So he's all-powerful.

BB: All powerful. On the Senate side, the president of the Senate does not do that.

GM: No, it's entirely different. Anyway, we sat down and worked that out all right. It worked good. One state, it could have been Illinois, was still fighting over their tie when we were through and went home.

BB: I remember in fact too that, I was in the legislature twice when the body was tied. I don't remember those as being particularly bad sessions because they forced cooperation. There has to be some bipartisan—

GM: We knew if we bulled ahead, they still...It takes one more than the majority to pass a bill. The other side, regardless of which parties in the saddle is in control, they had a veto of power. So you may as well get together.

BB: That makes sense.

GM: Yes.

BB: Now you know we talked about the new constitution and you are one of the relatively few people who served both extensively before the 1972 constitution and then after the 1972 constitution. Do you have any thoughts on how the '72 constitution may have—what changes it may have brought in our legislature or in the politics of our state?

GM: Yes, I do. You know, I supported that because it was very apparent the procedures needed changing. For an example, that whole thing of reading the bills, we were there when we had four clerks reading the—

BB: Yes, the old 1889 constitution required that the bills be read at length three times. I think that was a throwback to the year when not everyone could read and write who was a legislator. So for everyone to understand, they'd read the bill at length, the entire bill from the rostrum and then assign it to a committee. So everyone got to hear the bill so if it sounded like it was an agricultural bill, it shouldn't have gone through the health committee. Everybody knew it because they all heard it read.

Then when it came back and was debated on the floor, what we call second reading, it was read from the rostrum at length again and then when it was voted on a final time, a third time was called third reading. It was read at length a third time. So what you and I both remember was that very early in my career and late in yours, we'd have two or three fellows standing up at the rostrum just chattering gibberish, reading as fast as they could. They were reading every third sentence or whatever they could as fast as they could to go through the fiction of pretending that they were reading these bills at length. So the 1972 constitution dispensed with that nonsense and made it—

GM: That's the sort of thing I was thinking about when the procedure needed changing. The other one was that 60-day limit. Were you there when we used to pull the plug on the clock and hang a towel over it and go through that farce of, and then we never got paid?

BB: The 1889 constitution required that the legislature can meet for 60 calendar days. That included Saturdays and Sundays and everything. So if the people's business didn't get done at

the end of 60 days and it frequently didn't, then we'd cover the clock in the House chamber and in the Senate chamber and we pretended like the last day might have lasted for a week, whatever it took for the business to get finished.

As you mentioned, the legislators didn't get paid during that period of time. So if you were a poor guy, that would put undo hardship on you. Some guys didn't care. They could stall forever for their point of view. But if a guy was in a bind financially, he about had to agree to something. So the unfairness of that was a pretty obvious thing. How did the '72 constitution help that?

GM: First they extended it to an annual session. I think now it can go to 90 days and if they want, with the approval of both houses, you can extend it.

BB: The stop-the-clock business has never occurred since then.

GM: No we stretched things a little on that last night on...Anyway, another thing that I didn't care for was this opening up the committee meetings or publishing the vote on second reading. The legislature is a deliberative body like the court. Under the old system, people came in and gave their opinion. You listened to the debate and everything. Then you shut the door and worked it over and came together to make a decision. Nobody bugged you. Now when they opened up second reading—

BB: You're talking really about the committee deliberations aren't you?

GM: Yes, and votes for the committee of the whole too. When they started recording, or opening up the committee hearings, the people from eastern Montana had gone home, but the lobbyists were still there. They could come in and guess or test who was doing what and on which side. They would go round up a batch of people to come in and lobby it some more. You used to have that—you took care of that. It was done with. You weren't subjected to all that pressure. I felt it didn't give everyone a fair chance when they got away from that—when they started to record the votes and open up those committee meetings.

BB: You don't think it was maybe fair—if the committee meetings were completely open?

GM: No, because the poor people, the working people had to go home and the other guys were hanging around there to pressure you some more. I was in there, and one bill I remember and I expressed a little opinion on it. What we used to do, after second reading, you wouldn't make a decision that day. You'd make a decision later on and hear your discussion later on. Well we're in this discussion late on, a couple of days later, and a lobbyist heard me make a remark.

When I got out, there were seven phone calls waiting for me. The other side didn't get that chance. We got that open meeting law and it's going to stay. I didn't like—I liked the Democratic process where it goes through both houses, all those hearings, and on each bill, the

final vote on each bill was on a separate bill. You know how that constitution works—it was like they went through a second reading on everything and then threw them all in the pot. You voted to take it all or leave it all.

BB: That's right. You know, another provision of the constitution that's not procedural in terms of the legislature is one that gives us the constitutional right in the state to a "clean and healthful environment." Any thoughts on that? I think that's unique. I don't think any other state in the nation has—

GM: Well, have they defined what it is? I see in the paper today, "The Supreme Court still hasn't decided what a quality education is." The legislature bucked it to the Supreme Court and this morning the Supreme Court in the papers bucked it back to the legislature. After 32 years they can't define one word. It's the same thing on that environment. I think if they had gone through their regular process and then there had been a period afterwards to really study that, maybe it would come out different.

BB: Gordon, we've just got a few minutes left on our tape here. So now might be an opportunity for you, if I haven't asked you a question that you wish I would have asked or if there's a point you want to emphasize a little more or something you want to say in closing or in summary, or anything, now would be the time to do it.

GM: I think we've pretty well covered—I'm not running for anything. So there's no point in campaigning anymore. I really enjoyed being a legislator. I think it's quite an honor. I met some really, really fine people. I think sometimes maybe I made a little impact on government. I met a lot of fine people, great people.

BB: It's been a pleasure having this visit with you. Thank you.

GM: Thank you Bob.

[End of Interview]