

Maureen and Mike

# Mansfield Library

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**Oral History Number: 396-079**  
**Interviewee: Rick Hill**  
**Interviewer: Bob Brown**  
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Bob Brown: Yep, we are running.

Rick Hill: Okay.

BB: Okay. This is Bob Brown, and I'm interviewing Congressman Rick Hill, who served Montana in the U.S. House of Representatives, I believe from 1996 to 2000?

RH: Actually, '97 to 2001. [laughs]

BB: Ninety-seven to 2001, and we're conducting the interview at the Mansfield Library Archives in Missoula on September 19, 2017. Rick, when and where were you born?

RH: I was born in Grand Rapids, Minnesota, and as a matter of fact that is, if you go to Wikipedia it will say I was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. [laughs] Because a reporter whom you will remember, Bob Anez [from the Associated Press] put that in a story when I first decided to run for office, and I've never been able to get it corrected.

BB: And describe a little bit your childhood and your family.

RH: So, I was raised in a town about 50 miles from there called Aitkin. Aitkin, Minnesota, a little town of about 1,500, 2,000 people. My dad had a tire repair shop there. Moved there right after the war. In fact, my mom was seven months pregnant with me when they moved from Arizona, where my father was stationed in World War II, to Aitkin. Actually, to Grand Rapids and on to Aitkin. So, I was raised in a small town. My folks were hard-working, kind of small-business entrepreneurs. They owned a little bit of real estate and tire shop and a little restaurant, and various things like that. I got polio when I was four years-old, but in fact I was completely paralyzed by polio for about a ten-day period. Thanks to the mercy of the nuns there, they treated me with hot packs and cold packs, and I recovered from it.

BB: Were you in one of those iron lung contraptions?

RH: No, I had the different kind. There are three kinds of polio. I had the kind that attacks your spine, and that's why you get kind of a total paralysis from that. There's another one that affects your other functions. It's kind of interesting what happened. Of course, it was going around everywhere in 1950 era, and our doctor, actually, the doctor's office was across the alley from the apartment that my folks rented. He came over, and I had a high fever and pain, and he said, "You know, I think that, I think he's got polio." So my folks that night loaded me up

in the back of the car, and drove me to the Sister Kenny Institute in Minneapolis. And they started giving me the treatments, the hot and cold pack treatments, and they tested me for the polio, they test your spinal fluid. The first two tests were negative, but they continued to treat me, and the third test turned out to be positive. It's probably because they initiated those treatments before they had a full diagnostic...diagnosis, that that kept me from suffering some of the consequences that a lot of the kids that I grew up with had.

BB: Was that the same kind of polio that FDR had?

RH: Yes, it was. Yep. It atrophies your muscles, and it happens quickly. So, I grew up with kids that had maybe a deformed hand or a shoulder or a leg, or something like that, because of the atrophy of the muscle that occurs, you know, when you're suffering the severity of the virus. Fortunately for me, I didn't have those consequences.

BB: Brothers or sisters?

RH: Three older sisters. Twins, my oldest sisters were twins. My parents had another son that was older than me, about three years older than me that died two weeks after he was being born. He's actually buried in Mesa, Arizona. My father was stationed in Arizona during the war, and my sisters were all born there.

BB: I see, I see, wow. So, you grew up in Minnesota, and did you, do you remember, did you ever have an experience or a person in your life, in your formative years, that may have interested you in becoming involved in politics and public service?

RH: That's kind of an interesting question. My family on both my father's side and my mother's side have some political history. My mother's, mother's maiden name is Taylor, which, of the Zachary Taylor range.

BB: Oh, really?

RH: But also, her brother, my grandmother's brother, was Charlie "Red Flag" Taylor.

BB: Oh, really?

RH: Yes. And so, and as you know—

BB: That's in northeastern Montana, the Red Corner.

RH: Yes, that's absolutely correct. And Charlie served two years as a Republican in the legislature, and three terms as a Communist.

BB: Yes. [laughs]

RH: And he published a Communist, Trotskyite publication, and actually—

BB: Right. *The Producers News*, I think.

RH: Is that what it was called?

BB: I think it was called that, yes.

RH: And then he went on, he moved on to Spokane, and lived all his life...Actually, he died the, my senior year in high school, back in Aitkin, Minnesota. He had moved back to Minnesota at that point in time. So, and actually, another brother ran for governor in Minnesota in the late 1890s, early 1900, as a Progressive. They were part of the Progressive movement in the Progressive Era. You know, and so there were a lot of, as you know, progressive Republicans, and there are a lot of conservative Republicans.

BB: Well, you'll get a kick out of this. One of the most conservative guys either one of us ever knew in the state legislature, Jack Galt—we dearly love him—but his father was a Progressive member of the Minnesota legislature. He ran in 1912 as a Progressive along with Theodore Roosevelt.

RH: Sure, there...Well, I mean as you know—

BB: In fact, I think the Galts had a big picture of TR.

RH: You know, it's kind of interesting you go back to that era, because Wilson ran as, in 1912 as a progressive Democrat, and Teddy Roosevelt ran as a progressive Republican, his own party. And Taft was running for reelection, ran as a conservative. Yet, if you look at Wilson, for example, who was progressive in a lot of areas, was a racist. I mean...And actually set back a lot of progress that had been made in race, particularly in Washington, D.C., in that area during his tenure as president of the United States. So, it's kind of interesting how the realignment occurred in that period probably from 1900 to 1930s or so.

BB: There were a lot of moving parts in that period between parties.

RH: Yes. And I think that we're kind of seeing some of that again today. I look back in the history of the Republican Party, and the things that I that make me want to be a Republican, which were the Abraham Lincoln end of the party, which was the notion of equal protection law and equal rights and all of that sort of thing. Which, today, neither the active progressives nor the active right-wing conservatives seem to embrace those principles, I don't think.

BB: Do you remember when and why you became a Republican?

RH: Well, I mentioned my mother. Now, even though she came from this family of progressives, my mother was just instinctively really conservative. She grew up in a very, very poor family in a little town called Swatara, Minnesota. And so, she was just conservative by her nature. My father was kind of more of a libertarian. Had really strong kind of libertarian instincts. Neither of them were active in politics, but we had kind of interesting conversations around the household, and I'm...I don't know for sure, because, you know, we never really talked about it, but I'm sure, pretty sure, that my parents pretty predictably probably were voting for Republicans. I was an avid newspaper reader, and I'd get up, when I was ten years old, had to get up in the morning, those days it was the *Minneapolis Tribune* would come, and I'd...We had a big coal furnace with a big grate, and I'd lay the newspaper on the grate, and I'd read the paper for I'd go to school. So, I always had a kind of an interest in public affairs. I went to college, I studied economics and political science. My intention at the time was to go on to get a law degree. It didn't work out at that time, but later got a law degree. But I've always had kind of an interest in that. And I've always had this combination of kind of a conservative orientation and a libertarian orientation, just, I think, from my parents.

BB: So, you don't remember a specific person, but you just kind of modeled your behavior after what you thought your parents kind of thought? And so, being like my great old friend Jean Turnage once said, "Well, things just kind of fit together in my life, and being a Republican just came kind of natural." So... [laughs]

RH: I, I think that that's true. I really do kind of believe in free market economics. It just makes sense to me that your market is a better allocator of resources, and I studied economics. When I studied economics at St. Cloud State University, there wasn't a conser...There wasn't a Libertarian in the Economics Department. So, I had carved that out on my own, and in fact, the Political Science Department had one quite liberal, and then probably what we would call a kind of mainstream Republican. Being a conservative and kind of having a libertarian economic view was pretty unique. And coming out of that era, the '60s, during the, that period, the anti-war protest period, there just wasn't a lot of room for that. I was active in government, student government, and I kind of led the conservative wing of the student government. But we were in the minority. Distinctly in the minority, but we probably had 40 percent of the student council, and the...I had fraternity brothers who was a leader on the other side.

BB: [laughs] Well, not every kid read the newspaper when they were ten years old. And not every kid led the Republican Party, or its conservative equivalent of, when he was in college. So, there was something there, Rick, that made you a little, a little unusual for typical college kids, especially during that period when if a kid was an activist, he was demonstrating against the Vietnam War.

RH: You know, I was a freshman in college, and I was in the dorm, and I was elected as a freshman at college, president the College Republicans. In the dorm room next door to me was a young man who was elected president of the Young Democrats. And he went on to serve 30, 35 years in the Minnesota Legislature as a Democrat, although conservative. The irony of all

that is, is that in 2000 he came out in favor of George Bush, and converted to the Republican Party after all those years [laughs], and ended up getting an appointment from the Bush administration in the farm. Anyway, we've maintained, his name is Steve Wenzel, and we've maintained contact and a relationship all these years.

BB: Well, that's good, that's neat. When and why did you come to Montana?

RH: So, I worked for an insurance company out of college. I graduated college and I was still 20.

BB: In economics?

RH: Economics and political science, two majors. And I went to work for an insurance company in Saint Paul called St. Paul Fire and Marine Insurance Company, and I went to work in their bond department. That's not investment-type bonds, it's surety bonds, guaranteed performance and fidelity of people. So, I trained in the home office, and then they transferred me after training to St. Paul service office. Anyway, the long short of it is, there was an opening in Montana to set up a new field office, and so I love to hunt, I love the outdoors, my father's father had lived in Montana. My father had always been a great outdoorsman. So, when that opportunity presented itself, I went after the job pretty hard and I got it. And so, when I was 22, almost 23 years old, they transferred me out here to manage my own department.

BB: [laughs] And that was in Great Falls, I remember?

RH: In Great Falls, yep.

BB: So, how did you first become involved in Montana politics? Was there an issue or a person, or...because we know, you're kind of a latent politician here. Maybe you didn't realize it yourself, but you probably did. I mean, you had more than a normal interest in politics.

RH: Yes, I had a strong interest in politics, and by then I pretty well knew where my orientation was. I was really attracted to Ronald Reagan and others. So I came to Montana in 1971, and if you recall, I think that's about the time the Constitutional Convention was the hot issue, and other things. And in the '70s, for most of the '70s, the Montana Legislature was dominated by—

BB: Democrats.

RH: By the left, I think, the Democrats. And so—and we had Democratic governors. And so, in any event, I had an interest in politics, but at that point I had a young family and I was trying to build a business, and you know, get on my feet that way. So, I mean that just took my attention.

Well, we got into the '80s. I started to get more interested and more involved with politicians, individual political campaigns. The first time I really took a big step at anything was Betti and I, my wife, of course, has been actually more involved in Montana Republican politics than I have.

But we chaired the Lewis and Clark team for Conrad Burns' campaign in 1988. And so, that got us kind of involved. From there I got involved as the finance chairman of the party, and then I ran for chairman of the Republican Party. And that's kind of where I broke out in terms of getting involved.

BB: Well, tell me about that, Rick, because my memory is not very clear about that. But I do know that you ran for Republican state chairman. And so, who was your opponent, what was the strategy that you used to be successful? Tell that story.

RH: Well, it's kind of interesting. The Stephens people, Stan Stephens was governor. And I had a pretty good working relationship with a number of them, and I'd expressed some in—I'd been finance chairman, so I had been raising money for the party. And so, some of them suggested, "Why don't you run for chairman?" Denny Rehberg, who was lieutenant governor at the time, encouraged me. My wife was, of course, chief of staff for Denny Rehberg. And so, I ran against Joe Briggs.

BB: Oh, Joe Briggs, from Great Falls.

RH: From Great Falls. And Joe was kind of, I think, expected to win. He'd done an extraordinary job of building the party in Great Falls. He had built quite a reputation. Now, I came in with kind of a different attitude about being chairman of the party. At that time, you might recall, Stan was getting beat up pretty badly in the media, and Democrats, I think, had kind of personally attacked him. And I thought the role of the party should be to defend our office holders, and kind of defend our principles and our values. Anyway, I ran and I won. I think won actually about two-to-one vote. But we kind of ran that kind of a campaign. Kind of a better communication, and that's kind of what we did. If you will recall, in the '90 election, Republicans got whacked pretty bad. We lost, I think, 20-some seats in that election, the '90 election, in the legislature. I think we came out with 39 House members and 18 or 19 Senate—

[laughs] You were there, so you know the number better than I. So, we put together a political plan to recruit candidates that was based on candidates that reflected the district. We weren't trying to find ideological alignments. We were just trying to pick people that were respected in the community.

BB: And would likely be able to win an election, were respected in the community. Was that the LCC, the Legislative Campaign Committee? That's about when that was born, I think.

RH: Well, it kind of was. So, what I said is, is that we need to do this as a team. So we brought the LCC right into the Republican headquarters. We gave him an office and a phone system. I'm trying to remember his name now, from Lewistown, that was head of that.

BB: Oh, Larry Grinde.

RH: Yes, Larry Grinde, thank you. And Larry and I traveled together around the state. We weren't going into a town telling people, "Well, this is who we ought to get." We went into town, in fact, my formula was, "Who in this town do you respect? Who in this town do you think would be a good legislator?" Then these people would give us five names, and then we'd call them up and say, "Have you ever thought about running for the legislature?"

They'd say, "Well, no I haven't."

We'd say, "Well, we have some people that think you'd make a good leg—." And so, we built an inventory of prospects that Larry and I put together, so that we could...Every year we had a group of people, you know how this tends to work. The Central Committee meets and say, "Well, who's going to run?" Somebody sitting on the Central Committee [would volunteer]. Well, we said, "Let's go outside that kind of apparatus." Anyway, the long and short of it is, is that that first election, using that mechanism, we won 14 House seats, two Senate seats. The next election, we won 14 more House seats, and 14 Senate seats.

BB: Wow.

RH: And so, in over that period of time—

BB: Oh, that was in '94, wasn't it?

RH: Yes, '94, and then '96. Well, '92 we took the House, and then in '94 we took the Senate.

BB: Big time.

RH: Big time. And so, we had two-thirds, almost too many.

BB: Gary Aklestad and Bruce Crippen, and I think Al Bishop, and Loren Jenkins and I, there were at least four of us, went around the state and knocked on doors in the districts where we thought that we could maybe make a difference.

RH: But I go back to...I mean, Larry is the one that implemented that recruiting thing after I was gone then as chairman. But the whole point of trying to find people that were respected in the community, I mean, it just gave you a leg up. But it also meant that you didn't have an ideologically pure legislature.

BB: Oh, yes.

RH: And so, that became a problem for some.



BB: Well, we probably couldn't get away with that, now. But I mean, it makes perfect sense. You know, you'd want to find the guy that's most respected in the community and very likely could win an election, and get him to run on your team.

RH: Absolutely. I mean, what I learned, I actually went to a candidate recruitment school that the national party put on, and what they basically said is, is that if you really want to know what kind of a candidate you need to recruit, look at who's sitting there now. Because there's a reason they got elected, and if they're in the other party, there's something about...more than likely there's something about them, as opposed to necessarily what they believe. I mean, the truth is, is that not very many legislative campaigns have been won or lost over an issue. Some, but not very many. You know, the people like them, or they don't like the people, and they trust them, or they don't trust them. And so, so that's how we built the party. For the rest of [Gov. Marc] Racicot's tenure, we had probably two-thirds majorities in both Houses, and then we—until the reapportionment occurred after the 2000 census, Republicans dominated the legislature.

BB: Describe your impressions of Stan Stephens, Governor Stan Stephens, and Governor Marc Racicot. And I know you were involved in the Racicot administration, too, but just maybe an anecdote, or something that would kind of typify who they were and how they approached public service?

RH: You know, Stan was...what's really interesting about Stan is I actually didn't back Stan in the primary. I was pretty good friends with Chase Hibbard, and Chase ran with Cal Winslow. And so, I supported Chase just out of that friendship. Wasn't anything about Stan, it's just that out of that friendship. Of course, as it turns out Stan won, and then I supported Stan in the general election. My wife, Betti, as I mentioned earlier had worked at the party from, I think 1980, somewhere around that period. So she actually got to know Stan much better than I got to know Stan. That's kind of, I think, why she became chief of staff for Denny Rehberg. You know, I find...Stan, before being governor, was a lot different than the Stan after being governor. And I think—

BB: Many, many people have made that observation, Rick.

RH: And I don't think it had to do so much with Stan as it had to do with some of the people that Stan picked to be in his administration. I'm not going to name names, because it doesn't do any good. But there were some folks that I think that were part of that group, and some of the really intimately involved in that group, that did a disservice to Stan. The pressure on Stan was intense. As you know, I mean, I think it was the special session in 1990, late in 1990, where you had that medical incident that ended up causing him not to [run for re-election]. I think maybe that was 1989, but in any event—

BB: I think it preceded, didn't it, the '92 election?

RH: Yes, it did. Yes, I'm sorry, you're right. So it would have been '91, right. I'm sorry, you kind of lose track of the dates. [laughs] But I mean, how Stan reacted emotionally to that set of events is not the Stan Stephens that I knew before then, and I think probably not you. You served with him.

BB: Yes, yes.

RH: But I've maintained contact with Stan over the years, and he's helped me immensely and in things I wanted to do politically. Both he and Ann are two of the nicest people you'd ever want to meet.

BB: Right. Marc Racicot.

RH: So, Marc, you know, so I was chairman of the party when Stan decided not to run. In fact, I was in Washington, D.C., at a Republican meeting, and I got a call from John Brennan, who was obviously part of the Stephens administration, telling me that Stan had made the decision, because of the health situation, not to run, and discussing what was going to happen. It was kind of interesting, because I was there, and there was a lot of conversation at the time about Ron Marlenee running. So I'm in Ron Marlenee's office, I'm there visiting with people, and I'm in Ron Marlenee's office. A reporter said, "Well, Congressman Marlenee, are you going to run for governor?" I anticipated he was going to say no, because he'd always said he had no interest in that. But that's not what his answer was. Of course, I'm chairman of the party, sitting next to him in his office when the subject comes up. In the meantime, behind the scenes, I'm working with, I think Denny Rehberg made an extraordinarily good decision to decide that he would defer to Marc Racicot and run with him as lieutenant governor, if Marc decided to run. And so, I was actually working behind the scenes to make sure—

BB: And Denny was the incumbent lieutenant governor at that point.

RH: Exactly. And so, the natural thing would have been for him to step forward and run. Of course, keep in mind, my wife was his chief of staff. So, I mean it was an interesting play of things going on there. Anyway, I always thought that Marc Racicot and Denny Rehberg was really a dream team. I thought it brought together different elements of our party, and of course, gave us a youthful look. There was a, there was a kind of an ideological edge with Denny Rehberg, and there there's no person I ever served with in public service who had a greater integrity than Marc Racicot. At that particular point in time, that was something that I think Montanans really wanted.

BB: Did you spend time with him personally? I mean, describe his personality. His integrity, I think, was something that most of us saw, but if you could...if you wanted to describe Marc Racicot in a few words, what would they be?

RH: Well, first of all, he was incredibly funny. You know, Marc loves Saturday Night Live. He and Glenn Marx, who was, you know, one of Marc Racicot's closest confidants, he managed his campaign and certain administration. Would spend...I mean, they would redo the Saturday Night Live skits on a flash, like that. But he had kind of a different...I mean, it was a subtle sense of humor. So during the campaign, so when he...I went into that campaign to raise money. I was actually not the finance director, but the finance chairman of the campaign. Actually, Betti went over to the campaign and organized a volunteer effort in the campaign. So I got to travel a fair amount with Marc. I remember one time we were...Marc was like me. I mean, if we traveled, we shared a hotel room. We just didn't waste money. So we're in Polson, I think. It was Polson. They're going to have a morning function for us. I think he's going to serve pancakes or something like that. So we get up and we decide to go, there's a McDonald's there. It's either across the street or down the street to the McDonald's. So, we go to McDonald's and Marc orders an Egg McMuffin, which is 99 cents, and gave him his credit card for the muffin. [laughs]

And I'll never forget that. And I said, "You don't have any money with you?"

He said, "No, I don't have any money with me." So, I mean, here we are in a week's trip out traveling, campaigning, and he didn't have any money in his pocket. That's kind of the way Marc was.

One time, one time, this is when he was...this is in '96, when I was running and he was running. Somehow or another we ended up flying up to Libby for a campaign event, and then flying back home. We got back, I'll never forget this, I mean there were 17 speeches that night. In fact, Earl Old Person who was representing the Blackfoot Nation gave two speeches—

BB: [laughs] Both of them long?

RH: Yes, they were both long. So, Racicot got up to give the keynote speech about 11:30 that night. I mean, people were leaving, there was...they were kind of...so, we didn't get home until one o'clock, late, it was late. So Betti had this cat. Sergeant Pepper was the name of the cat, who was dying of cancer. About the only thing this cat would eat was fried chicken. Betti decided that we were going to stop at Kentucky Fried Chicken on the way from the airport to the, to home, to get some fried chicken so that we could share it with her cat. So, Racicot, now he's Governor Racicot, right? And so, Betti had this little Honda Prelude, which is a hatchback. It has a backseat, but there's no room in the backseat. Marc said, Governor Racicot said, "Can I get a ride with you guys?"

We said, "Well, sure, but I mean, it's kind of cramped."

He said, "Well, I'll sit in the hatchback in the back." So he did. He crawled in the back and hunched over in the hatchback.

So we said, "Hope you don't mind, Governor, but we're going to stop and get some chicken for Betti's cat."

[laughs] And he said, "Well, I'd like some chicken, too." [laughs]

Again, he had no money with him, and so we bought at 1 o'clock or 12:30 in the morning, we bought Governor Racicot his chicken dinner, and let him off at...and actually, he went back to his office. He didn't go home at that late at night.

BB: Wow. I know—

RH: That's the kind of guy Marc was.

BB: Well, and I remember, too, visiting with him in his office. He'd have supper over at the governor's mansion when he was governor, and then he'd come back over to the office about 6:00 or 6:30, and he'd put in another two or three hours before he'd go home.

RH: Absolutely.

BB: He told me, too, he said it was important for him to do his homework. I don't know if this is true or not, but he said he was kind of a slow reader, but he managed to retain pretty much what he read. But during the daytime, he felt his responsibility was to people. Visiting with people in his government agencies, or people that came to Helena from out of town, or legislators or whatever. But the time he had to use for prep time was either real early in the morning, or after supper.

RH: Yes, you know, I worked for him during the first session, after he got elected governor. I was one of his two legislative liaison. Karen Fagg and I had those jobs. I did the economic issues and she did the land management-type issues. And so, if you got there at 7 o'clock in the morning, he'd been there, and he was already working. And if you left at 8 o'clock or 8:30 at night, he was still working away. And so, he did, he understood the is...he didn't rely upon...he relied on people's advice. I mean, he solicited advice and he took advice, but he wanted to understand the issue. He just didn't want somebody to say, "This is what you ought to do." He wanted to understand why you ought to do that, and would agree with that. I remember that session he had pledged to put tax reform in the form of sales tax on the ballot.

So my job was to get that on the ballot. You probably remember that because you and I worked together a lot on that issue. It got bogged down, and it was really Republicans in the House that bogged it down. There was a parallel measure which was a tax, income tax increase that had been agreed to by both parties. So late in the session when this kind of was in trouble, Governor Racicot said, publicly said, "If I don't get tax reform on the ballot, I'm going to veto the other, the alternative measure," to put pressure on the legislature to get it up there, let people vote on it. Of course, the people voted it down 3-to-1. But his job was to get something

that was bipartisan that people could have a chance to vote on. He felt that was his obligation, and it was, I think.

And so, I'll never forget that night. And so all of a sudden, of course, the pressure was on. I'll never forget, 28 Democrats in the House voted to reconsider that measure, to put it...because we were beyond the deadline. We needed a two-thirds vote in order to keep it going. Twenty-eight Democrats in the Senate, none of whom supported the measure, I think, in the end, or very few. But they did to keep that measure alive, because what he said. I'll never forget, anyway, we were...it was probably 10 o'clock or 11 o'clock that night, and we were sitting kind of commiserating about what do we do next. Because, I mean, the legislature responded quite favorably to the kind of the ultimatum he gave them. I'll never forget saying to him, I said, "You know, I think the important thing is that we don't overplay our hand here. I mean, let's just get this on the ballot, get whatever the bipartisan can be, and then let the voters of the state of Montana decide, and move on."

BB: But Dorothy Bradley had agreed with Marc Racicot, to make this happen. Don't I remember that, too?

RH: Yes, that's correct. Yes, she came forward and said that. And—

BB: She was his opponent in the—

RH: Absolutely.

BB: In the 1992 campaign.

RH: Right. The key was, as you remember, there was a measure, constitutional initiative 105, I recall. And what it basically—

BB: Yes, that was have a say in what you pay, or something like that?

RH: Well, what it said, what it basically said, is it froze local government taxes until tax reform was considered.

RH: And so, I mean, either people were going to accept a sales tax and the things that...and there were a lot of other things, reducing income taxes and reducing property tax, or there weren't. But the key was to say, "Okay, is this a viable alternative, or isn't it a viable alternative? And if it's not, then let's move on to what the other alternatives are." That was the philosophy at the time, and I think it was a good one. And in the end, you know, it wasn't something that either party could beat the other one up about. Because those Democrats had a lot of fingerprints on that bill.

BB: I want to intrude on our interview to pay you a compliment here, Rick. I remember when you became the liaison, Bruce Crippen, who I think was probably the minority leader, he and I shared an office. I think Fred Van Valkenburg was probably the Democrat leader. He was, if not officially, he was anyway. He was the strong, smart guy on the Democrat side, and a tough partisan.

RH: All that's true, yes.

BB: And he used to beat our brains out about every other day, so we were sitting in our office one morning probably about 7 o'clock, when you came in. You had a spring in your step and a smile on your face, and you had an idea that neither one of us had thought about. It was a kind of an out-of-the-box idea that it seemed to us might be a pretty good one, and probably worth the try. After you left, Crip shook his head, and he said, "Gosh, that guy, isn't he amazing?" We're down and we've been doing this for a long time, and we're supposed to know what we're doing, and Rick's the new guy on the block, and he kind of has this creative way of going after things, and he recognizes the importance of having a good positive mental attitude. We agreed that you were just a real tonic for us, as well as the Racicot administration. So, again, this idea that you hadn't had much experience in politics, but I think you're a natural at persuading people and getting people to do what you feel needs to be done.

RH: Yep. My interest in politics has always been the policy side. I kind of divide people in politics into kind of two categories, and I label them the wannabes and the want-to-dos. There are probably too many people in politics that want to be whatever it is. They want to be governor, or they want to be senator, or they want to be whatever. Then there are people that want to do good things. They want to do the job. As a consequence, and even in my business life, I built a reputation for thinking out of the box. I mean, what happens in life is that we kind of get blinders on, and we try to, we get tunnel vision. Whenever I negotiated in politics, whether it was in Congress or anybody else, I tried to understand what the other person needed. To say, is there some way that I can give them what they need? May not be the way they're asking for it, but can I accommodate the thing that they need, and still get done what I want to get done? And that's kind of how I approach that, and that's how I approached it in...I don't know whether that was a good result or was a bad result, but it was a bipartisan result that the people got a chance to vote on. And that was the whole point.

BB: So, describe the events leading up to your candidacy for Congress.

RH: Well, so after, so after the '93 session, I made a mistake one day campaigning with Marc Racicot, when he was running for governor. I said, "The workers' comp problem in Montana is not as complicated as everybody wants to make it out to be." And of course, I had a background in insurance, and I had a pretty good understanding of what was wrong with the state fund. If you recall back then we had a new fund and an old fund, the old fund was 500 million in the hole, the new fund was 100 million or so in the hole, it was losing money. We had the highest...I mean, it was a mess. At the end of the session, Marc said the legislature in '93,

John Harp had got a provision in to give the board of directors independent authority over the state fund.

BB: The board of directors of the state fund?

RH: Of the state fund. Racicot said, "I want you to take that over."

It was kind of like, I said, you know, "Please don't ask me to do this, Marc." [laughs] I mean, I have other things I'd like to do, and I and one of them...I had some ambition to run for office. He offered me a permanent position in his administration. I had no interest in that. I'd sold my business, and I had a lot of [unintelligible]. But anyway, he convinced me to do it. And so, I did. He appointed me the board, we replaced the whole board of directors with people that I pretty well hand chose them, that were business people from around different corners of the...men and women. Outstanding. Anyway, so we went in there, and in the first...In fact, I told him I wanted an office, and they cleared out a broom closet. Put a desk in it, that was my office. I said that's fine. I went there every day. It was an unpaid job.

BB: You should see the building that the workers' compensation has now.

RH: Oh, I know, I've been in it, I've been in it. Over the course of the next six months, all the executive team left. Voluntarily left, because they knew...The first thing I did is I asked the 280 people, or whoever they are, what was wrong. I said what do you think is wrong in this place? I had a survey. Wasn't a long survey, three-page survey. I read every one of those surveys. When I got done, there was, they knew what was wrong. They knew that we needed new people and a new vision. People who worked there wouldn't even tell people they worked there, they were so ashamed to be working there.

Anyway, so they left, and so I had to go out and hire a new CEO, and then we had to replace that whole management team, and we put together a business plan. Anyway, the long and the short of it is, I spent the next three-and-a-half years of my life essentially doing that as a volunteer. But it was a, one of the biggest turnarounds.

BB: And the public perception was that you were the guy that got that thing righted and back on the right track again, which I think was pretty accurate. But I know that that probably helped you, springboard you into the congressional race.

RH: Well first of all, I mean, the management team we put together, the people that executed it. But I helped the management team develop the strategy for what we were going to do. And getting control—

BB: And it happened under your leadership.

RH: Yes. I'm not trying to diminish my role. I think my role is important. But it wasn't the only thing that happened. I mean, a lot of people happened, put...devoted a lot to it. But anyway, we paid off all that debt, and we got it on a solid footing, we cut the rates by almost 50 percent. I mean, those were good things. And that, so that drew attention to me, there's no doubt about it. When Governor Racicot ran for re-election in 1996, it was the first thing that he told me he told people.

I mean, he was pretty proud of it, too. He said, "You know, the biggest problem in the state was this, and here's all we accomplished." And it was a lot. And that was a springboard obviously, for me, and I decided to run for Congress in '96, and I used that and...As you know, as part of the springboard. I mean, at the time, the federal government was deep in debt. We had huge deficits. You know, the sense was that there's nothing we can do about all this. And I would point back to that and said, look, people said we couldn't do anything about this, either. I'll never forget the political consultants, Eddie Mahe, which is probably one of the top political consultants in the country, advised me not to do that. He said this is a deathbed for you. I mean if you take on this problem, there's no way you can solve it. He says there's no way you can turn this into a political advantage. Don't do it if you have political ambition. But I did.

BB: Yes. Well, and I think that's why it was noted by the people in the state, generally, it is a notable accomplishment. And so, that kind of helped to get you oriented toward running for Congress, and you'd mentioned that you've been kind of interested in running for public office before. And I remember, too, I think because of your reputation as a problem solver, Rick, that John Mercer, the speaker of the House at the time, said Rick Hill is exactly the kind of guy who should be in Congress. But you had a primary opponent, as I remember—

RH: Two.

BB: Maybe more than one, yes.

RH: Yes, it was a tough primary. Dwight MacKay, of course, who was—

BB: That's who I remember.

RH: Right, who was Senator Burns' state director. And then Alan Mikkelsen from the Flathead, who, he had built a kind of a base of followers in the natural resource industry. So it was a difficult primary because Alan ran very far to the right. As you know, in Republican primaries the more conservative people tend to prevail. He got so far over to the right that I wasn't...I'm pretty conservative, but I wasn't going to go over and compete with him on that side.

BB: You know, there's a little bit of an irony about that, too, because I don't think Mikkelsen is not as involved as he once was, but he's kind of got the reputation as a Republican in name only now.



RH: [laughs] He does now.

BB: Yes, he does now. [laughs]

RH: Yes, in fact, some of that came from his strong backing of Ryan Zinke, I think.

BB: Yes.

RH: Of course, now he's Ryan's right-hand person there in the Department of Interior. [Appointed by Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke as deputy commissioner of the Bureau of Reclamation.] Then there was Dwight MacKay, and Dwight had the entire Burns apparatus backing him. Despite the fact that I had a close relationship with Conrad, and we had been actively involved in his election in 1988, obviously he backed Dwight. They'd served together as county commissioner and...but, he ran ads in favor of him, but not only that, the whole Senate team came out and campaigned for him. And so, we were...I mean, it didn't turn exactly the way that I had thought when I decided to run, but we were in a tough three-way...and I never led in a poll. I mean, I never led in a poll in the primary. But we ended up winning it 44 to 36 over Dwight and Alan got, I think, 20, 21 [percentage] points.

BB: Yes. Don't I remember that Dwight had some kind of an idea of kind of an early strategy where he spent his resources early on in television advertising? I think the idea was to establish himself as the Republican candidate, and then make you have to challenge him.

RH: Yes, which was—

BB: But it was too early, I think. At least, that was the impression a lot of us had.

RH: Yes, so, as a matter of fact Eddie Mahe was Conrad Burns' political consultant as well, and so Eddie, I don't know exactly what Eddie was doing, but we had a good relationship with Eddie Mahe [unintelligible]. And I remember going to dinner with him in January. The primary was in June. And Eddie pitched this notion, he said, "You know, I think the person that's going to win this primary is the one that's going to get out ahead early." My guess is, I'm pretty certain, he must have had the same dinner conversation with Dwight. [laughs]

But Dwight took the advice. Dwight came out with a heavy advertising campaign in, I think, probably middle, late February, and expended all that. Well, we had made the decision that we were going to spend back from the election day, and we were going to spend all of our resources at the end, and we were going to make a full-bore effort at it. So Dwight spent his resources, and so ten days out from the campaign, I still had a fair amount of money in the bank, and we spent it, and I'm sure that made a difference. I think what was interesting about that is that obviously we drew some contrasts with Dwight. As a county commissioner, Dwight had...didn't have a sterling conservative record. I mean, it, he'd been kind of a tax-and-spend county commissioner, and taxing—

BB: In Yellowstone County, in Billings?

RH: In Yellowstone County. Tax—but he was a likable guy, obviously. But we drew some contrasts with that. And Dwight's response was to attack the tax reform package that I had helped put on the ballot.

BB: The sales tax?

RH: The sales tax, yes. And of course, Denny Rehberg was running for the Senate, and Marc Racicot was running for re-election as governor, and we turned that on him by saying, your attack—I mean, you're so desperate now, you're attacking a popular governor and a popular lieutenant governor. And he never really dug himself out of that hole. It kind of backfired on him.

BB: Yes. Wow. And so, that took you into the general election.

RH: Right. Bill Yellowtail. [laughs] Actually, Bill Yellowtail and two others. There was a four-way—

BB: Oh, a Libertarian and a Green?

RH: No, there was a Natural Law Party, or whatever they called it. A candidate. And I think a Libertarian. A Libertarian candidate. That was really quite interesting. So, by August we were down like 12, 13 points. Yes, I mean Bill...typically in Montana, in August, a Republican is going to trail, because Democrats coalesce around their candidate, and Republicans kind of were slow going. And even though they had a really divided primary, too, they had a tough primary. Bill had had his set of issues. They coalesced around him. My name I.D. was still low. In fact, one point I think, he was probably near 50, like 48, 49, and we were still stuck in the middle 30s. But once we started to run the campaign, you know, those two compressed. And somewhere about, oh probably the first week in October, we crossed over around 40, 41, 42, and we took the lead. And then from there we just pulled away.

You know, I think the debates did me a lot of good over Bill. And I think a lot of people didn't expect that. You know, because you remember Bill was this robust, big voice, big guy. And—

BB: Friendly smile.

RH: Friendly guy. And a likable guy. But I ran an issue-oriented campaign, and I just kept pecking away at him on the issues. In fact, I remember in the debate in Great Falls, it was...I mean, they filled a room, and it was televised. The Natural Law Party guy was a shorter guy like me, similar stature. So they had Bill in the middle, who was a great big tall guy. Big guy, and then he and I on the two sides, and I kept thinking, I wonder how this looks visually, on the TV cameras?

So, at the conclusion of the debate, I had the...I get, I was the last one to give the closing remarks. So, I and I just thought this up of the [unintelligible], which is dangerous. But I'll never forget I said, so I said, "I can only imagine how this looks visually, to the people out there that are observing this campaign." So, I put my hand on his shoulder, but I said, "Let me explain it this way." I said, "Big taxes and big government, small taxes and smaller government." That's the difference in the campaign. [laughs] Bill came uncorked.

BB: Oh, did he?

RH: Oh, man. He just could not handle that. The crowd, of course, went into a roar, because they are all thinking the same thing I'd been thinking. And that was the turning point in the campaign. Bill never got his—

BB: He didn't laugh it off?

RH: No, he didn't. And he never got back that laughable, likable demeanor. From there on he was just mean. In fact, he went after me in the last debate in Great Falls for being short. [laughs] I thought, I got it, if that's what he thinks the most important issue in the campaign was.

BB: Well, I didn't remember those details at all. That's interesting. So, now. You're elected to Congress, and certainly you've been in Washington, D.C., before, and somewhat familiar with the Capitol building and so on. But I vividly remember when I first went into the Capitol as a member of the state legislature. Just my impressions. So, what were yours? What's it like to [think], wow, I'm a member of Congress, and some of your first impressions as you entered the building, and maybe found your office and became acquainted with staff people and so on?

RH: Well, there's a whole host of different things about that. The thing I'll never forget is driving up Constitutional Avenue from, essentially from the airport to the Capitol at night with the Capitol dome lit up.

I mean, first of all, that's a moving sight anyway. I mean, to me it is, anyway. I mean, it was, I mean, it was probably the most humbling thing I ever experienced in my life. I don't know, I think in they keep track of how many members of Congress, I think there had been like 10,912 or something, members of Congress that have preceded me. But when you think about over, you know, the 200th year, in those days, 210 years, I guess, life of the Republic, that's not a lot of people. That's a small fraternity of people. I don't know that that was the first time I really thought about that amount of responsibility. First of all, you're [the] only member of the House in [from] Montana.

Biggest constituency in the country, second biggest geographic constituency in the country. I'd made an effort to learn the issues, but they're a lot more complex than than you talk about on

a campaign trail. I'll never forget that moment, I mean that moment sticks in my mind forever. Then you just get caught up in a whirlwind. There's an orientation program that you go through that's just so that you know how the clocks work and the bells work, and all that kind of stuff. A lottery for your room. I was the third last [in the] lottery for the room.

[laughs] So I got this small room and you get eight staff people in 400-square-feet of, square...I don't even know if it's that much. You know, putting that all together. You have to do that. You don't have a lot of time to just figure out what you going to do. And you inherit, so I inherited all Pat Williams' furniture and his computers and all that kind of stuff—

BB: Okay. But not in his office? You had to move into—

RH: No, no, no, no he was a senior member. He had this big luxurious office. In fact, he invited me up to visit with me before. Very gracious. Very, very, very gracious. We visited, but his private office was bigger than my whole office, my whole staff office. But that's what happens with seniority, and so, and I had no seniority, I'd never served in the legislature. I mean, those things carry with you as seniority.

I didn't have any of that. So, I didn't get to move up at all, and so you just go in a lottery, and you draw a number, and there were three offices left. I mean, the last office, which was Gibson, wasn't even one office. There were two offices at the opposite ends of the hall. That was that office.

BB: That poor guy. [laughs] And was this in the Longworth Building?

RH: Yes. We were in the Longworth Building. The only nice thing about—

BB: Which is the oldest.

RH: —it was—is that we were on like the second floor. So traditionally the freshmen members are either in Canon or Longworth, and they're in the upper floors. So you're up in what they called North 5th floor, 6th floor. The big deal with that is when you have to vote. I mean, when you got a vote, you got to get from your office, you know, either to the tunnel or at least the ground floor, get over to the Capitol, up the steps, and back to the floor, so, it did make it a little more convenient because we were on that floor.

BB: Yes. Wow, pretty exciting. I think you told me one time that there was a reception or a dinner or something in the Capitol Rotunda that was candlelit?

RH: Absolutely, that's right.

BB: And you said that was really a moving experience—

RH: Yes.

BB: And I think that happened shortly after you got there, too.

RH: But that was during this orientation period.

BB: For the freshman members, yes.

RH: Yes, I'll never forget that. Actually, John Boehner, who was chairman of the conference at that time, we sat at his dinner with—at his table, Betti and I—with he and his wife. I'll never forget, you know, John is from Ohio, and he later became Speaker, of course, but he's from Ohio. Betti, of course, who was very interested in all this, started asking about his field house. How many field houses do you have, how many people do you have in them, where are they located? And his answer was, I don't know. [laughs] Betti said, "How is that you don't know?" Well, truth is, he came from a safe district in Ohio, and he never went home. I mean, he didn't have to go home. Which is way different than it was for me in Montana. I came over every weekend. Where those offices were obviously mattered to the people of Montana.

BB: Did you have a...describe him.

RH: John?

BB: Yes.

RH: John is a very charming guy, and I was a big supporter of John. John was later beat by Watts for the chairmanship. From Oklahoma.

BB: Oh, J.C. Watts?

RH: J.C. Watts, yes. And I actually backed John in that re-election campaign, and—

BB: He wasn't defeated for his seat in Congress?

RH: No, he was defeated in leadership. So, he was bumped out of leadership.

BB: Oh, he was a whip, or a—

RH: He was chairman of the conference, so that's—

BB: Oh, chairman of the conference.

RH: Which is third in command. So, I mean the first is the Speaker—

BB: Yes.

RH: Well, actually third, fourth in command. First is the Speaker if you're...then the majority leader, then the majority whip, and then the conference chairman. So, he ran the conference caucuses, we call them conferences there. He ran the meetings. A real personable guy. Heavy smoker and liked to...he imbibed frequently. [laughs] So, he enjoyed, he enjoyed himself. He's a good guy, though, really good guy.

BB: I'm just really interested in several of these people and your impressions of them. Newt Gingrich.

RH: So, Newt and I kind of became friends, which you wouldn't expect. I'm not sure exactly why that happened, but part of it was is that Newt's real love in life was paleontology. Of course, so he came to Montana to dig dinosaur bones. In fact, Newt came out to campaign for me in the 2000, or the 1998 re-election campaign. And I had told Newt a long time, I said, "You know, you were the first celebrity Speaker the House." I mean, most people haven't a clue who the Speaker of the House is, unless you're interested in politics or policy. But Newt had a personality bigger than that. I said, "You ought to take advantage of that." And so, when he came out to do a fundraising event for me, we also did a fundraising event for the Museum the Rockies. And he debated Jack Horner on whether or not T-Rex was a predator or a scavenger. They had this one-hour debate in the auditorium at MSU [Montana State University].

BB: And Newt knew enough about it to—

RH: Well, his love was paleontology. And they had fun. I mean, they just, it was a fun debate. And I don't remember who took which side, but they charged people, I don't know, 100 bucks apiece or something to go to it. I mean, it raised a fair amount of money for the museum. I said, "You ought to do this everywhere. Wherever you go for a political event, you also ought to do this side event," because he had a delightful personality and he was smart. I mean, Newt is one of the smartest people in the world. So he actually took that advice. We got really embroiled in the...in this buyout of the New World Mine, that ultimately ended up getting the coal tracks for us at Otter Creek, which was the one thing that I probably achieved in the four years I was in Congress, was getting that accomplished. But one thing that people don't know about, so, the people, the woman, the person who owned the gold at Cooke City [Montana] was a woman by the name of Margaret Reeb. She was elderly woman, I'm going to guess 80 at the time. We had never, I don't think she'd ever married. If she had, she was a widow, no children. So, no direct heirs, I think her closest heir was probably a niece or nephew [nephews]. Anyway, she owned that gold—

BB: Did she live up there in that country?

RH: No, she lived in Livingston.

BB: Oh, okay.

RH: But she had lived, she'd been raised up there. So when the when the company wanted to sell the gold, they didn't offer to sell it the federal government. Margaret didn't want it sold, she wanted it mined. So I had met with her, and I was trying to get Montana compensated for the transaction. And we got two things. We got some money to rebuild the Beartooth Highway, and we also got the Otter Creek coal tracks transferred from the federal government of the state of Montana. So, Margaret said, "You know, I don't know that I really want to do this deal, but I want to meet Newt Gingrich."

So I said okay. So, Newt was in town, so I...same time we were doing this debate, so I arranged for Newt and her, Margaret, to have a half-hour meeting in a hotel in Livingston. And so, she agreed to the sell out with a provision. There's a provision in the contract yet, that if the U.S. Treasury ever needs that gold, they can go up there and buy back all the gold, to satisfy the need of the United States of America.

BB: Well good.

RH: Yes. She's since, of course, passed on, and the money ended up going to her niece or someone. [Sold by her nephews for 8 million dollars.]

BB: And that was the controversy, was because it was right next to Yellowstone Park, wasn't that the issue?

RH: Well, Cooke City is not far. I mean, if you go through, you know you come out of Cooke City, but that was kind of a contrived thing, my view.

BB: I see, yes.

RH: Keep in mind, this is an old mining district, and most of the mining plan was to mine mine tailings. And there was an acid runoff problem on the existing mine tailings. And so, the mining plan was to recover all that, eliminate the acid runoff, to better manage that whole resource. That was a big part of the mining plan. But it was really mining tailings. The stream didn't flow into the park, and it wasn't visible. I mean, keep in mind this was a historic mining district that she...These were mining claims that she'd acquired during her lifetime.

BB: Well, my recollection of it was that we that we...that was going to be developed, and the Park Service complained about it. So our position as Montanans was that we could develop this gold to our great benefit, to the benefit of our people and jobs and taxpayers and so on, and if you guys won't let us develop the gold, you've got to compensate us in some way. And that's what you got done, right?

RH: Well, that was kind of my thinking out-of-the-box arrangement. So, what happened is, is that John Casey cut a deal with the Clinton administration to fund this buyout, and never even consulted with me about it. And so, it shows up in the budget, and it shows up in the appropriation bill. He had taken a position, actually, he'd come out and campaigned for me. He said, "You know, I think we should buy out that mine." But what really happened behind the scenes there, is the Clinton administration went to the mining company and said, you are never going to have the permission to mine this mine. So, I mean, you have a choice. We will bankrupt you, by...because you're never going to get the permits, or you sell us the, you sell us the gold. And so, the mining company had no choice. McCray, [Jim McClure] I think is his name, former senator from Idaho was their lobbyist. Came in to see me a lot of times about this thing. I said, "So I can live with all of that, except how does Montana get compensated?" I mean, we have tax revenues that are lost and lots of jobs that we're going to lose. "So how do we get compensated?" We went to the BLM [Bureau of Land Management] and said, BLM, what do you have in gold or oil and gas, or what do you have out there?

They said, well, we got these coal tracks at Otter Creek."

What's interesting about them is that under an order of the Clinton administration, those had been withdrawn from ever, from development, by executive order. So, by transferring them to the state of Montana, that executive order foreclosing the opportunity for them to ever be developed was lifted. So that's what I said. I said, "Okay, I want these Otter Creek coal tracks for Montana." And it was, I can't remember now, five billion tons of coal or something, huge amount of coal. Anyway. They valued it at like one or two cents a ton. In any event, so we went around and around about this, and so, at the time, Conrad had not really bought into this. Senator Burns. And so, I met with Conrad, and I said, look, this is a good thing for Montana, and it's a good thing for this coal, and some of the coal companies weren't exactly excited about having new deposits of coal opened up for development.

The people that were opposed to the Tongue River Railroad were also kind of opposed to it because the Tongue River Railroad would probably become a reality. So anyway, over time Conrad came on board. And so, the bill ended up in conference, and Conrad was a conferee. I had never been, I never had attended a full conference committee meeting in Congress, but I did this one. I was there every day.

BB: I guess they're rare now. I guess there aren't many conference meetings?

RH: There aren't anymore. They don't even do the appropriation bills anymore. It's just down to a continuing resolution. But anyway, Conrad held his gun. They tried to buy us off with money, they tried to buy us off. Actually what the provision said is that Racicot could take ten million dollars worth of coal. You know, was his option. What happened was, with that is, is that so the Clinton administration, he vetoed it. Clinton vetoed that provision. We had passed the statutory line-item veto, which was later declared unconstitutional. So, went all through all that as well.



BB: And that was the test case?

RH: No, it wasn't, actually. I tried to get it to be the test case, but Marc Racicot, Governor Racicot, didn't want it to be. So anyway, so the Clinton administration, Babbitt [Bruce Babbitt], I think, was secretary of interior at the time, thinking that they could delay this beyond Racicot's term, and hoping that they would elect a Democrat governor, that the Democrat governor would take ten million dollars instead of the coal. Then, obviously to everybody's surprise, of course, we won. Judy Martz was elected governor, and Judy said, "No, no, we're taking the coal." And we got the coal.

BB: [laughs] Great story. Nancy Pelosi. You ever meet her, know her?

RH: You know, Nancy wasn't a key player while I was there. Dick Gephardt was the Democrat leader.

BB: Majority floor leader, right?

RH: Minority.

BB: Oh, minority, yes.

RH: Right, because we were in the majority in the time I was there.

BB: Yes, yes. Oh sure, right.

RH: And so, I just don't have any...I have no recollection whatsoever of Nancy.

BB: Tom DeLay.

RH: Well, Tom and I became fairly good friends, too, as well. Tom came out to Montana a number of times to help me in events, including—

BB: He was a Texas congressman who was the whip, wasn't he?

RH: Yep, he was the whip. And he had the nickname "the hammer." And his description of his job would be called "growing the vote" [laughs] There are a few times I did not vote. And so, I got on the other side of Tom DeLay. But I never had 100 percent voting record with anybody. I mean, I really voted my conscience issue-by-issue, and I read my bills and I—to the chagrin of some, and not of others. I mean, I had Newt cuss at me, four-letter words on the floor once, because I didn't...I voted, it wasn't an issue of real substance, it was a political matter. But Tom...so, things are going on behind the scenes, a couple of things. Number one, as you know, I'm an active Christian. So I attended a Bible study that...There are lots of little rotundas outside the main rotunda, and we met weekly, noon, on Tuesdays as I remember.

BB: A prayer group or something?

RH: Yes, it was kind of a Bible study group. And it was a, these were all Republicans—

BB: Were there several of those, or was yours pretty much—

RH: This is the only one I knew about. But there was a kind of a libertarian Republican by the name of Tom Campbell, from California—was quite a libertarian—was there.

BB: I think he's still in Congress.

RH: Yes, I think he left. He ran for governor or Senate, then he went back and ran...good guy, though. I served on some committees with him. But anyway, Tom led that group. I got to know him because of that. A lot of people don't know, he and his wife, I don't know, I think they've raised maybe half a dozen foster children. Really strong-hearted person. I don't know if we'll get a chance to talk about the impeachment of Clinton, but the person...A lot of people thought that Newt Gingrich wanted to impeach Clinton. Newt Gingrich never wanted to impeach Clinton. The guy that drove the impeachment of Clinton was Tom DeLay.

I mean, he pushed it and pushed it and pushed it and pushed it, and that's...Of course, at that time, Newt's position had kind of been weakened, and of course, [this] was after the election, right after that election that he ended up stepping aside as Speaker. And—

BB: Well, I want to go about the Clinton impeachment, but I also want to know about, but Gingrich stepping aside, and there was a fella named Bob Livingston, I think, who was temporarily Speaker, and then was that one Hastert [Dennis Hastert] came into the picture?

RH: That's all correct, yes.

BB: And because that's kind of confusing how that all fit together, but you were there.

RH: It was confusing to everybody that was there. [laughs] Yes, so just some interesting side developments, so when you get elected to Congress you...each class elects leaders. So I got elected to the leadership of the freshman class and the sophomore class of Republicans, and so did John Thune and so did Roy Blunt. Roy immediately stepped in as the, as a whip. And so, the whip was, the whip himself was Tom DeLay, the deputy, who was Denny Hastert, and the next in line was Roy Blunt, as a freshman.

BB: As a freshman.

RH: As a freshman.

BB: And now, just to make sure people who may listen to this know, Roy Blunt is now a U.S. senator from Missouri.

RH: That's correct.

BB: And John Thune is now a U.S. senator from South Dakota.

RH: That is correct, too. Yes, those are both correct, and they're both still friends of mine. I was elected the representative of the class to the policy committee, the powerful policy committee. Thune was elected representative of the class to the leadership team, and Blunt was represented as...to the whip team. So, that was kind of the our...In any event, so in the fall campaign of 2008, or 1998, I'm sorry, 1998, we were getting beat up pretty badly. I mean, we had a 20-seat majority, 15-, 20-seat majority. We ended up coming out of the election with a five-seat majority. I remembered Newt...In fact we were talking earlier about the conversations about Margaret Reeb, and all that, and the event down there at MSU. I remember Newt talking to me about impeachment. He said, "I really don't want to impeach Clinton, because"—remember that impeachment actually occurred after the election. He was trying to feel things out. What we didn't know at that time, I didn't know, some people knew, that Newt had been...had had a relationship with a staff member. An inappropriate relationship, I guess we put it, with a staff member. There were people, obviously, on the leadership team that knew that. So, when we got back, they used the fact that we didn't have a successful election, his resistance to the impeachment, as a reason to put pressure on him. Truth is, he didn't have the votes. He had, easily had a majority of the votes of the members of the conference, but they wouldn't vote for him for Speaker on the floor. He would not have gotten, with a five-seat majority, he would not have gotten enough votes to be Speaker and he realized that, and so he stepped aside. So, the hand-picked successor was Bob Livingston, who was chairman of Appropriations Committee. Real popular guy from Louisiana, a likable guy, and as appropriations chairman, he'd done a lot of favors for a lot of people. [laughs]

He was a natural. And he was moderately conservative, so he satisfied the conservatives and the moderates, and the conservatives were willing to live with him. Well, it turns out Bob had his set of issues in the same area, and that comes to light before he's even nominated officially for Speaker, so he steps aside. So, now things are in deep disarray. I remember Tom DeLay calling me, and talking with me about it, and saying, "We're going to advance Hastert, and Blunt will move up then—"

BB: To floor leader?

RH: No, to my deputy. And he said—

BB: Oh, okay.

RH: And he said, and he said of himself, Tom told me he said, he said, "I'm radioactive. I mean, there's no way I can be Speaker of the House." And so, I understand that...and I'll take that back, no, because DeLay moved up the majority leader, and Roy Blunt moved up to whip. That was the plan. And I didn't really know Denny Hastert. I mean, he was—

BB: What had Hastert been before?

RH: Well, he had been the deputy whip. So, he was DeLay's deputy.

BB: So it was a big jump for him.

RH: A huge jump.

BB: All the way up to Speaker.

RH: Yes, and I don't think that he was perceived as being, you know, an ideological giant, and I think most people saw Hastert becoming Speaker, really becoming a puppet of who was going to be the majority leader, which was going to be Tom DeLay. I think that that's how people perceived it, and I think it largely worked out that way. So, DeLay was really calling the shots, and he was in the majority leader role, and he essentially...I mean, Denny was, they had a great working relationship.

BB: DeLay dropped out of the picture here some...do you remember what happened?

RH: Well, if you remember, DeLay was charged with some improprieties with regard to raising money, as I recall, in Texas for the reapportionment. Not a big issue in Montana, but in Texas, the legislature reapportions the congressional district, and DeLay had raised a lot of money, spent a lot of money getting what he wanted done.

There were...the prosecutor there brought charges against him, I think charges he ended up winning over, but it put him in a pretty tough position. [DeLay was convicted in 2010 of money laundering and conspiracy related to illegal campaign finance activities. The conviction was overturned on appeal.] I'm not sure exactly what Tom is doing now. I mean, I think he's involved—

BB: But he dropped out of Congress?

RH: Oh, yes, he did. He dropped out of Congress. Well, of course, we ended up losing that—we ended up losing the majority, and when that happened I think he was gone.

BB: Yes. Anybody else that impressed you as a member of Congress, one way or the other? Somebody that you thought was...Well, I don't know to put this exactly, but made a good impression on you, or a bad impression on you, that's memorable?

RH: Well, when I when I got elected, I mean everybody kind of knew I had a mind of my own. I wasn't going to be...I mean, I read the bills, I studied the issues. I didn't read every appropriation bill and understand every appropriation bill, but I relied on people who did. And so, it was startling to me how many even senior members of Congress, where the staff really makes the decision.

BB: Yes, probably particularly senior members.

RH: Yes. Some of them, I'm not going to name names, but...Some of them evolved into pretty serious positions. So you know that about them just because having worked with them. If somebody came up to me on the...and it commonly happens on the floor, somebody will come up with a bill, say, "Will you sign onto my bill?"

"What's the bill?" And you read the bill, and "Yes, I'll do that," or, "I won't do that," or, "I'll think about it."

Many said, well, I got to ask my chief of staff before I sign it. [laughs] My chief of staff, I never consulted with him about those things.

BB: Yes, but I know staff people are important, and they're important influencers even in the state legislature.

RH: That's really true. You know, one of the people that obviously was an effective member is Max Baucus as a senator. Max really relied heavily on his staff. I mean, Max's staff had a lot of influence. But he also picked really competent staff members.

BB: Didn't he also have a reputation for putting in a lot of hours?

RH: Yes.

BB: I've heard that Baucus had a reputation for being in his office a lot and working hard and long hours.

RH: I don't have an impression one way or the other of that. We met, when I was there, Conrad Burns and Max Baucus and I met weekly, we had lunch together and discussed issues. Some of those interests, some of the—[laughs] I won't comment.

But on the coal tax, I mean, Max fought us every inch of the way. I mean, he fought that every inch of the way to try to keep us from getting that coal.

BB: The Otter Creek?

RH: Yes.

BB: Oh, I see. He didn't care about the money, but he didn't want to mine the coal.

RH: Well, the environmental community was against us, because they knew that was going up [for mining] coal, and all the things that go with that. He was on the other side of that. Fought us tooth and nail.

BB: So, you were re-elected.

RH: Yes, I was.

BB: And let's see—

RH: I beat [Robert] Dusty Deschamps. Again, it was a three-way race, again.

BB: Dusty was the second time—

RH: Right.

BB: Was your re-election campaign.

RH: Right.

BB: And he's an attorney from here in Missoula who had been county attorney, I think for a long time—

RH: Forever. I think he'd been like 28 years county attorney. One of the interesting things about that reelection is that we won the district the University of Montana sits in. We won this precinct. And I always attributed it to the fact that Dusty had probably threatened to prosecute [unintelligible]. So anyway, but Dusty was an interesting opponent.

BB: And that was not real close, was it?

RH: Well, it wasn't. You know how it is in Montana politics. Republicans come home late, and Democrats rally early. So, there was one point where the polling showed us up two or three points, but I end up winning, I think, by about nine.

BB: Yes.

RH: In both instances I got over 50 in a three- and a four-way race, so that's pretty hard to do.

BB: Yes, no that's great. So, you didn't file for reelection to a third term.

RH: I didn't.

BB: Why?

RH: Well, I had some health issues, as you know, and I'd had eye surgery, and I'd had really serious complications with it. In fact, I mean I was literally, I mean, blinded by it. I have the scar tissue over my corneas. I remember one occasion, I mean I couldn't read and I couldn't drive. My wife and my staff had to get me around. And I remember one night we were in session until like 4 o'clock in the morning. Of course, so my staff would hang around until we get out of session, so they can figure out how I was going to get home. I did live just across the Potomac, so it was about seven miles, only part way. This is between surgeries, it was probably only about a six-month period of time where I had...the condition was that bad. But in any event, so I said, guys, go home. You know, I'll figure out how to get home. I know the way, even though I don't see very well. And so, 4 o'clock in the morning, I get in my car—

BB: Oh, no.

RH: Go out my office building, get on the freeway, and they're repaving the freeway. So I can't take...I mean, I know when I got home, because it was only a ten-minute drive. But I couldn't go that way, across the whatever it is, the 14th Street Bridge, whatever it is the one the airplane crashed into. We were just across that bridge. So, they took me back over to the Teddy Roosevelt Bridge, which went over into Arlington, not into where we were. I made a wrong turn on the on the Washington Parkway, or whatever they called it, and up Maryland. [laughs]

BB: [laughs] But you couldn't see well enough to even read the sign.

RH: No, so I'd have to pull over my car and I get out and read the sign. Of course, you didn't have GPS in those days. So, about 6 o'clock in the morning I finally made my way back to home. And fortunately there's no traffic on the roads, but—

BB: Oh, man. But and I—

RH: That was last time that happened.

BB: Don't I remember, too, that when the plane would gain altitude, it would put pressure on your eyes?

RH: [coughs] So, the streak (?) in my cornea, having 13 times operated on my eye, and they'd carved the cornea away. And so, the flying would...the change in pressure would change the shape of my cornea. I used to carry, I remember one time I was sitting next in the airplane to Conrad Burns, with my briefcase, my ten cases of glasses. And he said, "Why do you carry ten glasses?" I said, "When I land, one of these are going to work—"

BB: Oh, man alive.

RH: “—I don’t know which ones are going to work, but you know, I’ll find...one of these are going to work.”

BB: [laughs] Oh, gosh.

RH: Anyway, I decided that I needed to focus on getting that stabilized. I missed like 50 votes that year because of health, because of this issue. And so, I just decided wasn't fair to Montana.

BB: Well, I’ll bet that was a difficult decision to make.

RH: You know, interesting that you asked me about that, because at the time I made the decision, it didn't seem difficult. But then when it got to the point that I was not going to be congressman anymore, it really was. I mean, it was a really difficult emotional time, and I didn't...it kind of crept up on me and caught me off guard.

BB: Well, that’s too bad. And then Rehberg replaced you.

RH: Denny.

BB: Didn't you recruit him?

RH: Well, I encouraged him to run.

BB: Yes.

RH: There's no doubt about that. Again I had a good relationship with Denny because my wife had been his chief of staff, and we had...our political careers kind of evolved at the same time.

BB: Now, I know Denny to be kind of cynical, with a sense of humor, but sometimes with a little bit of a twist in it. I guess I never really got to know him real well, but—

RH: Well, Denny’s a different kind of guy, there's no doubt about that. I mean, we all bring talents and we all have our shortcomings, and most of the time we don't recognize our shortcomings and we overvalue our talents. I think that's true of all of us. You know, but Denny did a good job of working his way into a really quite a powerful position. He was chairman of the most important Appropriations Committee there is in Congress. So, when he decided run for Senate, in fact, in my view, I wish he hadn't decided run for Senate, I wish he’d have stayed there in that slot, and I don't know whether he feels that way or not.

BB: Well, in that position he probably had as much power as a freshman senator would have.



RH: Oh, more.

BB: Yes, probably, yes.

RH: In the in the U.S. House, the 13 appropriations subcommittee chairmen are called cardinals. And there's a reason they have that name. [laughs] People tend to kiss their ring to get what they want to get done.

BB: So, Denny was one of the cardinals?

RH: He was one of the car...and he was the second-biggest cardinal. I mean, the chairman of the appropriations committee would be the biggest, and then there...he had the health and education committee. I mean, that was, that—

BB: All the money for the health and—

RH: Big, huge amount.

BB: Huge amount.

RH: Huge amounts of money. It really matters where programs fit in the committee. I advocated pretty strongly for the tribal colleges in Montana, and interestingly, that falls into the interior bill, not into the education bill. And a guy by the name of Castle [Michael Castle], a congressman from Delaware—a guy I became friends with—came to me one day, and he was chairman of the Education Committee. He said, “Why don't we move this over?” And he said, “That's a rounding error.” The amount of money that you're getting is a rounding error in the education bill, and you have to fight for the small amount of appropriations they get there. But the tribe just had no interest in it. They wanted to be in interior.

BB: Huh, funny.

RH: Yes.

BB: Well, I guess it's probably a tradition to them, that they understood or thought they did. Anything else you want to talk about, in terms of your time in Congress?

RH: Well, you know, it's a love-hate job. I'll never forget when I visited with Pat Williams, I was talking about Pat, and he described for me...he ended up having real problems with the travel, because, I mean, it's back and forth to the district every weekend, virtually. I remember him saying, “I get in the back of an airplane, and all of a sudden it looks like a tunnel to me.” You spend that much time...my schedule for the week would...so, took Sundays off. I spent Sunday, I'd go to church on Sunday, and that was my time for my family. I did not allow my staff to

schedule me to do anything else on Sunday. Then on early Monday morning, 6:30 in the morning, I'd get up and get on an airplane, from Montana in Helena, and I'd fly Delta, so I'd fly from Helena to Salt Lake, Salt Lake to Cincinnati, Cincinnati to Reagan. In fact, one time, we got to Cincinnati...in fact, John Boehner was on that flight. We hit a flock of birds and almost crashed the airplane.

BB: Holy smoke.

RH: I mean, we barely got back to the runway. Anyway, and then on Thursday when we'd be done with session, usually early afternoon, I'd get on an airplane and then I would fly from Reagan to Atlanta, Atlanta to Salt Lake, and then Salt Lake to wherever I was going in Montana. Wouldn't necessarily go on to Helena. You know, whatever I had scheduled for those next three days. With the time difference, I mean, it would get...invariably, my staffs would have me giving a 7:30 in the morning breakfast speech somewhere. Then on Saturday night I'd be giving a banquet speech somewhere, so I'd get home about midnight. Not thinking about what the difference in time was.

BB: You may know Tom Esch.

RH: Yes.

BB: Attorney from Kalispell who was county attorney there for a while.

RH: Yes.

BB: And his dad, Marvin Esch, was a congressman from Michigan.

RH: Oh, really?

BB: Yes, and in fact, I remember Tom showed me his campaign button. He was a professor at the University of Michigan, and he represent the university district. It was kind of considered the private property of the Democrats. But he was a very popular member of the faculty, and his campaign button the word Esch is kind of a...so it was big, blaring, red letters kind of like you would say it, and it said Esch [makes guttural sound]. [laughs]

RH: [laughs] And that worked.

BB: It worked, and one things he said he said he'd...Tom told me his dad did too...was he footnoted everything. So, if he had a campaign, piece of campaign material that went out, the academic types kind of were interested in the fact that Marv would footnote every single thing that he sent out during his campaign. He remained in Congress for about ten years, I think. But he then ran for the U.S. Senate and was defeated. But the only reason I bring him up, was that Tom said that my dad was going back and forth...this may have been when he was running for

the Senate and still a member of Congress, probably was...just all the time. He said he was so tired, and he said he, one time, he said, Tom told me he said, my dad told me that "I didn't know when I was on the plane whether I was going to Washington, D.C., or Michigan." He said he literally didn't know whether he was coming or going.

RH: Yes, I figured that, that I probably spent...it was a busiest job I ever had. I worked hard in business, and I worked hard at everything I ever did, and I worked hard at that. But this was busier, and the tough part about it was [that it was] busy, but it wasn't necessarily getting things done. I mean, there was a lot of activity giving speeches, and doing this, and attending that, and, but in the end when you kind of total things up, it was...I mean, there weren't a lot of things that you could check off [as] an accomplishment. In some respects, there's an advantage of being a single-district congressman. Because everything that I...the Mansfield funding. One year, somehow it got goofed up in the Senate, and we had to bail them out from the House to make sure we got an appropriation bill. So—

BB: Here for the Mansfield Library?

RH: Yes. And so, they came to us, because they always relied on Max to do it, and I don't know what happened, but something happened that fell through the cracks, and if it's not in one appropriation bill or the other, it's not in. One of the rules of appropriations is they don't add new things in the appropriation process. So either the subject is in or it's not in. But we have a lot of government, so we had, we have seven Indian reservations, and what is it, 11 tribes or 12—

BB: Yes, two national parks.

RH: Right, two national parks. Federal Reserve Bank, we have a major military installation, we have the Bureau of Reclamation, huge agricultural programs, the BLM and all the programs that go with that. I mean, it goes on and on and on. We have just a big...At that time I was there, we still had two VA hospitals in Montana.

BB: I know the comments been made a lot over the years, I don't know what the numbers are, but that Montana is a state that receives more than it sends out in taxes. The taxes we send from our taxpayers to Washington, D.C., don't amount to as much as the support that comes in for all the—

RH: You know, and I'm sure that that is true. There are two reasons that that's true. Obviously, on a per capita basis, we probably have more highway than anybody else in the country, and so if you're going to support...we got more support than we sent in gas taxes, but we had more miles to spread that over. I got in an argument with the chairman of that committee who was a guy from Pennsylvania.

BB: Bud Shuster?

RH: Yes. Because I voted against his bill. Because he cut Montana's allocation. He made that point, and I said, "But my point is, Bud, is that I have more miles of freeway in Montana than you have in Pennsylvania. Give me Pennsylvania's budget, and I'll be happy." I mean, it this is an interstate system, then you got to support it mile-to-mile, not based on how many people are there. And of course, he didn't like that argument. But so you have all that, and so you have that responsibility. I mean, you have the responsibility to make sure those things are accommodated in the process, and that Montana interests are represented. Which was difficult. I mean, I'm a fiscal conservative, so my view always was, I'm going to vote for the smallest amount of appropriation that we can get passed, and then I'm going to fight as hard as I can to make sure Montana gets a fair share of it. [laughs]

BB: [laughs] Well, that's good.

RH: That's how I saw my job.

BB: You wouldn't have any disagreement with anybody from Montana.

RH: So, there are some people who disagree with that, but nobody from Montana did.

BB: Yes, that's for sure. So, you're not in Congress anymore, and you've got this eye problem. And you've managed over the course of the, I don't know, a few years, to get that under control?

RH: Yes, so the doctor that I used is a guy by the name of, he's now retired, his name is Walter Stark. And Dr. Stark is at the Wilmer Eye Clinic at Johns Hopkins University, and he's considered the number one cornea specialist in the world. In fact, when I would go in there for treatments, you'd have a lineup of these interns. He'd have them examine my eye, and he'd ask them questions about it, and all that sort of thing. So, we got it stabilized. I don't have great vision, but I got it stabilized. And now I'm having some of the issues that you get when you get older, with cataracts, some of that, and some of the issues that I had earlier are complicating those.

BB: And operating on your eyes for cataracts could be a more chancy thing than [for] other people.

RH: Exactly, and that's why I haven't done it.

BB: Yes, wow.

RH: But, we're going to have...I have no choice, I'm going to have to do it here.

BB: But you, did you go back, you went to law school.

RH: Then I went to law school, yes, yes. One of the problems that always troubled me about Montana, public policy in Montana, was our...the fact that we could just never seem to come up with a solution to the problem. We're talking about workers' compensation. It's still a problem today. But some of the issues with regard to environment and regulation and tax policy, there's a whole host of things that...and as a, trying to be a lawmaker in Washington, it just seemed to me like we were spinning our wheels trying to solve problems that we couldn't seem to get solved, and that the problem seemed to be us...well, it seemed to be the courts. That really jumps out at me in Montana. Outsiders rate our legal system as pretty unfavorable for business and development, and I think a lot of people would assign responsibility to that to the fact that we have an activist, what you'd call, an activist court.

So, I decided I needed understand that better, so I went to law school. And I did real well, I graduated with honors. It was a California-based law school. [Concord School of Law]. I took the California Bar and passed it, which is considered the toughest bar exam in the country. But I didn't take the Montana bar, because I never intended to practice law. I just wanted to understand better what was the problem in Montana, and that's what really led me to run for governor, is that Montana doesn't work very well. I mean, the reason that we trail in per capita income, and we just don't have as much prosperity as we ought to have, in my opinion, is because we just can't get things working well. The permitting process just takes too long, it's too expensive, it's too unpredictable, and it has to do with the balance of power. I mean, legislature is supposed to be the policymaking arm, the executive branch's job is to implement that policy, and the court's job is to interpret it. But what's happened in Montana is, is that every significant issue ends up being decided by the courts. In my view, they have exercised almost no deference to the other branches of government. That's a problem for the legislative branch, but even more so for the executive branch. Because you could put together whatever implement, whatever rules you want to put together to implement the law, and then people go through all that process, and they get to the end, and then of course, oh, you know, you should have done it this way. That's not a workable proposition to get people to invest in the kind of way that you want to invest to grow the tax base and grow the economy.

BB: Sometimes, though, you hear the legislature and probably the executive, too, criticized for throwing the hot potato to the courts. That they prefer not to make a tough decision. And Congress is sometimes criticized for that, too.

RH: There's no doubt anymore, it's difficult to get...one of the things I observed in Washington is that often laws were vaguely drafted to get majority support, and just let somebody else figure out what it really means. That's not a good way to set policy. To be honest with you, I would attribute some of this to our Constitution. I mean, the new Constitution is criticized by conservatives for being a progressive Constitution, and it is, in the sense that most constitutions are intended to limit government. The U.S. Constitution essentially says, this is what government can do, and it can't do more than that. States are free to set their own constitutions. Montana set a Constitution that almost compels government. If you could go back to the 1930s and '40s, the Roosevelts came out with part of the New Deal, was this whole

new notion of rights. One of the rights was the right against want. You had a right to not want. That's part of the progressive view of the world, is that government grants privileges, and we call them rights. Most conservatives have a different view of the world. They say government grants, or constitutions grant government limited powers, and the rest of it we don't want them to do, right? And so, in any event, the reinterpretation of this constitution in the modern environment without any grounding and precedent, have allowed for an expansive view of the role of government in our daily lives. That's my view.

I don't think I articulated this particularly well in the campaign, probably why I didn't win, or maybe people didn't agree with it, but in any event, is how do we, knowing that that's what we have, how do we make things work? I mean, how do we organize this in such a way, how do we read the laws in such a way, how do we put some boundaries around the court so that we have a more predictable proposition, so that the executive branch can have confidence that they're doing it right, that they're doing what the legislature wants and the courts are going to back it up?

BB: Did you have a primary opponent?

RH: I had seven or six of them. [laughs] Yes.

BB: But you won that handily, didn't you?

RH: I did, about 2-to-1 over the closest, next-closest. But it was a brutal primary, and we ended up spending a lot of money to win, and it put us behind the curve. We never caught up with them.

BB: Oh, I see, going into the—

RH: Kind of what happened to you, when you ran.

BB: Yes, yes.

RH: You know, you had a tough primary, and you spent all your resources, and your opponent had built a big war chest—

BB: [laughs] That's right.

RH: And closing that gap is not easy.

BB: After the primary election, in my case, it runs in my mind that my opponent had two million bucks, and I didn't have...I had just as much money as Marc Racicot had.

RH: [laughs] That's right.

BB: [laughs] Yes. Because I had to spend it all in the primary. So anyway, you faced Steve Bullock.

RH: I did.

BB: In the general election, and he was the attorney general.

RH: Yes.

BB: And issues, strategy?

RH: Well, I had decided not to run for governor in 2000, partly because I didn't feel I had an agenda for Montana, particularly coming on the heels of the Racicot administration. You know, Marc is a good friend, but there's some things that Marc didn't do that I would have liked him to do, and one of them was maybe constraining government a little more than it could, than he did. But I didn't feel comfortable running against Marc. I mean, he was a good friend, and somebody I respected a great deal. So, I didn't have a place to go, and I really didn't think I was ever going to run for office again, I never intended to. But some people came to me and said, would you consider it? My wife was against it, and so then they wined and dined her and convinced her that it was a good thing. Anyway, and the long-short of it is I decided to run. Then I did have an agenda. I had an agenda about...but, you know, running in a crowded Republican primary with Tea Party activists, it's not necessarily the most positive messages in the world that I want to make government work better, right? But that was really what the message that I...is that we've got to get...we don't have to—

BB: And being that was contrary to the folks that had preferred not to have government do a bunch of stuff for them at all.

RH: They wanted it blown up.

BB: Yes.

RH: And thrown out.

BB: Yes.

RH: And so they wanted somebody that was...or, a lot of them did. So it was a difficult, it was a difficult primary to run for that reason. Anyway, I won the primary, I think, based on [what] I'd built, particularly in rural Montana, [what] I had done. I'd worked really hard on agricultural issues, and I'd really learned...In fact, when I ran for re-election in 1998, both the Farm Bureau and Farm Union endorsed me for re-election. It's a remarkable thing. Because I'd worked so hard on their issues.

So anyway, but we were behind the curve, trailing in the polls, obviously. I mean, my name ID had eroded a lot in 12 years of absence, and Steve was a likeable guy, popular, real popular. And so, it was a tough race. It was a neck-and-neck race. In fact, P&P polling, which is a Democrat polling company, did a poll two nights before the election, and they said it had never happened before in all their polling, it came out an exact tie. I mean, 321 to 321. I mean, it was an exact...and that's kind of how it played out.

BB: Well, Rick, I didn't see much of the campaign. I think I gave you some money, but I did see a debate. And I thought you did really well.

RH: Well, thank you.

BB: I thought you were a superb debater. Governor Bullock had been the attorney general, he'd gone to an Ivy League law school, and that sort of thing, and you'd think he'd be a pretty skilled debater, but boy, I thought you froze his bathwater in the debate.

RH: Well, I think that that's probably what kept us in the race, was the fact that I think I did win all the debates pretty handily. But we were outspent by a huge margin, I mean we...In the end, I mean, that really makes a difference. The Democrats now have this strategy of recruiting college kids. I mean, they were voting at midnight on election day in Missoula and Bozeman, and about 10,000 votes that were cast.

BB: After the polls were closed?

RH: They voted until midnight.

BB: But the kids were in line? Was that the idea?

RH: Yes.

BB: You couldn't send them home?

RH: Right.

BB: So, you remained, you and your wife Betti, in politics to some extent. You were active in Republican Party affairs after your race for governor. Of course, you had been before.

RH: Yes. Betti was national committeewoman for 12 years, and she just stepped down the last, actually in 2016.

BB: Well, there's been some controversy connected with the, I guess the modern Republican Party, if you can call it that. The Republican Party of the last ten years, maybe, have changed a



little bit, or has changed a little bit. Your involvement spans that. You were involved before that happened, and while it was happening, and I guess it's still happening, probably. Any thoughts on that?

RH: I mean, you asked me earlier how did I decide to be a Republican. The things I believe in, I mean, I do believe in smaller government, limited government, lower taxes. I also believe in free markets and competition. I don't believe in cronyism, I abhor corruption, I hate racism. I mean, so I mean, I was really kind of solidly planted in what has long been considered what a Republican is, from our beginning. I mean, I really believed in the Republican cause from the Lincoln era on race and on equal opportunity, and going to law school really opened my eyes about a lot of that. What does due process really mean? What does equal rights really mean? I mean, when Lincoln gave the Gettysburg Address, I mean, he was talking about the promise of the Declaration of Independence that had been unfulfilled in the Constitution. And he was right. The whole notion of civil rights and all of that. But also, there's some other sides of that. There protection against unreasonable search and seizure, there's right to counsel, the Miranda decision, Twenty-five years ago I would have said the Miranda caution was the wrong thing. I don't think that today anymore. But in any event—

BB: But I think, as I remember my reading about Lincoln, too, he was, at least in his day, was a civil libertarian and probably a social liberal, but he was definitely a capitalist.

RH: Absolutely, sure.

BB: Ad that's kind of what the Republican Party was for most of our lifetimes.

RH: Absolutely correct. Now, I'm a social conservative, but I'm not an authoritarian social conservative. I'm pro-life, because that's a fundamental issue. But in the other areas, I just don't think the government has a role to be playing. If your church promotes a certain lifestyle then, use your church as the mechanism to promote that lifestyle. Don't try to use the government for that. You know, that's kind of where I draw the line. There's a difference in the issue of life, because I think life is one of those fundamental things. But pretty firmly planted in what Republicanism has been all about. But over the last ten years, a lot of that has changed. You know, I'm not an isolationist, I'm not a protectionist, I mean, I studied economics, and I still study economics. I subscribe to economic publications, and I spent a lot of time thinking about economic issues. In fact, I kind of come from the point of view that an awful lot of political issues are really economic issues. So protectionism and isolationism, withdrawing from the world, is not a way to make us more prosperous, and it certainly isn't a way to make the world more prosperous. I don't believe in the zero-sum game kind of view of the world, which our current president kind of does [Donald Trump]. Is that if somebody else's economy is prospering, they're doing it at the expense of our economy. I'll never forget when Stan Stephens ran for governor, he used to talk about we'd slice the pie. And he said the solution to this is grow a bigger pie. Bake a bigger pie.

BB: Which was the old Republican philosophy to a T.

RH: Absolutely. Well, that's me, that's what I believe in. But there are parts of the party that don't believe that anymore. There are parts of the party that don't believe in the notion of equal protection. There are parts of the party that don't believe in due process. And so, I have, I—

BB: And those parts have come to dominate the party, in my opinion.

RH: Maybe. I mean, it may be true. It's hard, in my view, it's hard to embody that all in Trump. Because I think Trump is a totally unique situation. Trump is really good at one thing, and that is sucking all the oxygen out of the room. I mean, he...and he does. And in politics, that's not a bad trait if you want win.

BB: And yet, he's the leader of the Republican Party, and polls show Republicans tend to support him. And, if I remember correctly, he was a registered Democrat as recently as 2009.

RH: Well, and he ran as a Reform Party candidate in 2000.

BB: Yes, in between being a Democrat and deciding that he was a Republican, and that's why, I know, it makes me a little grumpy when I get accused of being a Republican in the name only, when I've got a pedigree as long as my arm. I'm not saying I've always been the most conservative guy in the Republican Party, but I've been a blood loyal Republican. I know you have, too, and now sometimes some of these people who seem to have discovered politics at the time of the rise of the Tea Party look down their noses at us as though we're not the real true believers, because we haven't adapted our lifelong philosophy to suit their philosophy.

RH: Well, I use my Facebook page as kind of a blog. I don't know if you follow it or not, but a lot of people do. And I speak out on a lot of these things, and so, I'm not going to change my philosophy. I'm always going to believe in small government. There is a difference between libertarianism and conservatism. I mean, there are some overlaps, but they're not the same thing.

BB: Absolutely.

RH: I remind my libertarian friends, and who I have a number them, is that I am a conservative before I'm a libertarian. I have some libertarian instincts, particularly in economics, I have a pretty strong libertarian instinct. But I'm also a social conservative, and so there's some a little bit authoritarian, particularly when it comes to abortion, some other issues there. [laughs] But that was always where the Republican Party was, so I never, you know the people that would kind of complain about one wing or the other of the Republican Party, I had a little trouble understanding that, because I was always pretty firmly planted right in the middle of it.

BB: But you're an independent thinker who enjoys thinking for yourself and doing your own research, so it's pretty difficult for you to just march in lockstep with any kind of a hard philosophy.

RH: Oh, that's for sure. I also believe in problem-solving. I mean, if you have a problem, then you got to tackle it. And in politics, you rarely get everything you want. If you take a position in politics that it's all or nothing, you end up with nothing.

BB: That's right.

RH: I mean, again and again and again and again. That's my complaint about...there's some people I have some considerable admiration for. I like Rand Paul, and I actually was pretty good friends with Ron. I didn't agree with him on everything, but I got along with him fine and—

BB: Ron Paul was his father.

RH: His father, and he and I co-sponsored some bills. In fact, one of the bills that we co-sponsored would have reigned in the GSA's Fannie Mae and Freddie Mac before the big crisis that came. We saw that coming. And we didn't pass it, but we saw it coming. But the all-or-none, that just doesn't work. I mean, in politics you got to, I mean, it's an old-fashioned thing, take half a loaf. Well, a lot of libertarians can't accept that notion, and my view is always that. And our competition, which is the other side of the aisle, they're really good at—

BB: They're the world's leading experts at that. [laughs]

RH: OH, absolutely they're so good at it. [laughs] And they're winning because of it.

BB: Yes. Well, with all the checks and balances in our strange Constitution compared to the governments of the parliamentary democracies and so on, and the rest of the world, ours just forces compromise.

RH: And that's not a bad thing.

BB: No, I don't think so.

RH: Yes, I—

BB: If you kind of understand that that's how it works.

RH: There are many appropriations bills in the House that I voted for, because we had a five-vote majority, and we had to move it over to the conference. And in many instances, I voted against the conference bill. But I had to keep the process going.

BB: Sure, yes, yes.

RH: I mean, part of your responsibility when you're in government is to function.

BB: Right.

RH: That was the arrangement I had with leadership, is that I would not, I wouldn't cast a no vote to kill one of our appropriation bills even if I didn't like a lot of stuff that was in it.

BB: And you wouldn't have been an effective congressman if you had, because the party leadership wouldn't be very...they wouldn't look on you very favorably if you did that.

RH: Sure. Takes 218 votes in the United States House to get something done. If you're really trying to get something done, then you'd better be there to vote for it.

BB: Well, I remember in my years in the legislature, I was in a conversation with another legislator one time, and he said, "Would you be the vote that would cost your side the victory on the floor?"

I said, "No, I wouldn't do that. But it might be really difficult, but I wouldn't do that." Now I'm not so sure, because the party's changed so much, I just don't...I think I—

RH: Well, you don't know what the victory would be.

BB: Yes, that's right. But when I was there, you know, I was a free spirit sometimes on some things, and...but I don't think, I wouldn't have been the vote in—

RH: Well, there are a couple of occasions I was the vote, but they didn't matter. And I voted—

BB: On a small issue?

RH: I cast the quote, unquote, "deciding vote" to kill the National Endowment of the Arts once. It was like a 215 to 214 vote to cut their funding out of the interior bill. And I voted to cut their funding.

BB: Did you hear from Pat Williams?

RH: Oh, I heard from everybody. [laughs]

BB: [laughs] You know, you talk about town meetings. So, I came back home, had a town hall meeting in Helena, and filled the place. There were 200 people there, and they were going on and on about this, and I said, "You know, first of all, the National Endowment of the Arts money isn't the driving force behind the funding." I said, "I'll support funding them again. It wasn't that

I'm against funding of the arts. I am in favor of balancing the budget, and arts are not that important in the grand scheme of things when it comes to that." But I said, "They got to get their act together." You know, in those days, we were funding some of this weird stuff, and...but I went on to say, I'll never forget, but I said, "Personally," I said, "the Myrna Loy Center, I've never been there because I don't like the stuff they put on, but my name is on the back of a chair that I helped fund the construction of that new auditorium." I went on to list all the things in the arts that I had helped fund as a private citizen. So I said, "It's not as though I—and I'm not against the arts. But you know, we're going bankrupt as a country." Let me tell you, the biggest single disappointment I have in Republicans in the tenure that when I left, which would have included George H., or George W., and during Denny's tenure, was what they did to the budget. We balanced the budget when I was there. That was no easy thing, but we did. People said you couldn't, and we did. Cut taxes and balanced the budget. And now we're 20 trillion dollars in debt, and that doesn't count the unfunded liabilities of the Social Security and Medicare system that are...I mean, it's going to...It is generational theft. And it is the existential threat to this country, is this unmanaged debt.

BB: And the Republicans seem to kind of ignore it as much as the Democrats do.

RH: Because it's not popular to talk about.

BB: It's not popular to talk about, right. Probably even less popular to try to do something about it.

RH: Well, and all of that is true. I got invited once to the White House by Clinton, because I had expressed interest in trying to figure out some way to address the problems of Social Security. Then, because we still had time then, we're running out of time now. Clinton had stepped out and said, "Let's think outside the box." One thing about Clinton, he was an out-of-the-box thinking guy. So, he invited me to the White House, to this conference. I asked him a question at this meeting. And I said, "Mr. President," and I said, "why is it that private pensions have much higher rates of return than public pensions do?" Because one of the solutions to the pension problem is if we could get higher rates of return. And he never hesitated, he said, "Risk aversion. The truth is, is that public pensions are risk adverse, but in being risk adverse actually add more risk than the private pensions, which are less risk adverse in their investment, but the higher rates of return reduce the risk." He's right. He's absolutely right. We never got anywhere with that, but—

RH: Any other impressions of Clinton?

BB: The White House has a party every year. I think it's probably in July, where they invite members of Congress and all their staff to the White House, and they have all kinds of games and parties. It's quite a function, and I had, I'd never participate in those kinds of things. Betti and I went to it one summer. We were there, and Clinton came out the West Wing, and he came out onto the grounds, and the minute he stepped out of that room, he kind of planted

himself under a tree, there was a crowd around him. Including Betti. I didn't go out there. I can't remember why, but I didn't. Betti came back from that meeting saying, "That's the most charismatic person I've ever seen in my life."

BB: Yes, I've heard he was charming and charismatic, and I remember I've heard this description of him several times, that when you're visiting with him, even if there might be other people around, you have the impression that you're the most important person in the world to him.

RH: So, but when I didn't run for re-election, we stayed in session until into December in 2000, because we couldn't get a budget done. Of course, Clinton was leaving, and I was leaving. And so, that's the only time Betti and I ever went to the White House Christmas party with a thousand other people. [laughs] We were in the reception line to get our picture taken with President and Hillary Clinton. Of course, Marines are doing this line, and as a member of Congress you'd think you'd get at least a little attention. So anyway, as we're coming up to have our picture taken, I said to him, I said, "Mr. President," I said, "when are we going to get out of here?" [laughs]

He stepped off this platform, and he said, "It's not my party that's causing the problem, it's your party that got into" — he knew who I was, because I'd had some other dealings with him. He said, "You need to go talk to your leadership about it." So, he stepped off the platform, so these Marines who were shuttling people through to the picture, saying, "You're not allowed to talk to him." [laughs] I mean, we just disrupted the whole thing, so we engaged in this kind of this conversation, and they're trying to push him back onto the stage and pull Betti up onto the stage, and...but that's the kind of guy he was. And he loved that.

BB: He was spontaneous and engaging and —

RH: And knew what he believed in and wanted. I mean, he wanted that intellectual engagement. In fact, when we were arguing over Otter Creek coal was when I got invited up to the White House on the pension issue. One of the White House aides, I'm trying to think of her name now. She ran for the Senate in Pennsylvania last year. Her name escapes me. Anyway, she was quoted in the *Newsweek*, had discovered that Margaret Reeb absolutely had owned this coal, not the coal, or I mean, the gold. The gold mining company. They said, what are you going to do about that?

She said, "Well, there's more than one way to skin a cat."

So I went to the floor of the House every day when free speech is, and I said, "You know, in Washington they call it cat skinning, in Montana we call it claim-jumping." And I gave this speech about them trying to steal Margaret Reeb's coal. And so after about a week of giving this speech every night on the floor, the same speech, the White House called and said, okay, what do you want to do here?

I said, "Well, this is what I want to do."

"Well, I'm not sure we could do that." So anyway, so then I'm invited up to the White House, and so I'm standing in the reception line. The way it works, there are probably maybe ten members of Congress there. Vice President comes through, shakes hands, and so Vice President Gore came up to me, and I said, "Mr. Vice President, my name is Rick Hill, I represent Montana in Congress."

He said, "I know who you are," and just went on.

So a minute later along came President Clinton. Same thing. I said, "Mr. President," I stuck out my hand, "my name is Rick Hill; I represent Montana in the Congress."

He said, "I know who you are." [laughs]

RH: So, I thought to myself, well, I've made—

BB: [laughs] You're making some kind of an impression.

RH: Yes, I'm a freshman in Congress, and the president but United States knows who I am.

BB: Rick, just a couple more questions. We talked a little bit about the developments in the Republican Party. And of course, no one can predict the future, but if we could, based on what we know, or based on what you know and your long involvement, what do you see for the two political parties, the Republican Party and the Democratic Party, as you look into the future?

RH: So, my perspective of this is the advancement of populism on both sides. And there's no doubt that Bernie Sanders is the populist, and obviously Donald Trump is a populist. And they're both proud of the fact that they're populists. Incidentally, Montana is a populist state. I mean, they both won their primaries easily, and Montana is not so much conservative and liberal as it is populist. Populist politicians have a strong appeal in Montana. But the rise of populism is troubling to me, and the reason for that is, is that they tend to deflect the real issues. The populists on the left, I think, rely pretty heavily on class politics. And populism on the left can rely on race politics, and—

BB: Politics on the right.

RH: Yes, I mean on the right, yes. On race and ethnicity and religion. I'm not comfortable with either one of those. I'm not a populist. Probably why I didn't have success in running for governor, because I'm not a populist.

BB: But they say that people make up their minds more according to their gut than according to their brain.

RH: Yes, I think that—

BB: And that's why this modern advertising research, they find good words, buzz words and so on, to use in the television advertising and so on.

RH: Yes. I think that that's true.

BB: And that's a kind of a populist appeal.

RH: I mean, being a populist is not necessarily being popular. What populists, in my view, do is that they pick popular positions that play one against the other. It's that form of populism...So Trump is a nativist populist. And it's Christians against Muslims, it's us against them. You know, there's a racist divide. What I call the alt-right. It isn't just racist. I mean, it's based on ethnicity and religious background, and all that. I'm not interested in any part of that. I'm just not. I challenged my Christian friends who say, who worry about Muslims, and Muslims coming to the United States. I said, "So if your job as a Christian is to carry the gospel to the world, I mean, God loves those Muslims every much as much as he loves you. And so, if God is saying he's going to deliver 300,000 Muslims to your doorstep, and you're afraid to carry the gospel to them, what does that say about this?" Right? I just don't buy into that. So I'm troubled on both sides. I also don't buy into the class warfare. I mean, I don't think the...the redistribution...I don't think it's government's role to be redistributing wealth. The power to tax is the power to confiscate somebody's assets. We give that power with a limited expectation. Doing it just because you want to penalize somebody that's been successful, I think is wrong.

BB: One of the founders, John Adams, apparently was made familiar with the term "power to the people," and that's been used throughout all time. But anyway, he said, "The people, sir, is a great beast." Because mobocracy, once the mob gets going, it doesn't have much of a brain, but it can do some horrible and constructive, or destructive things.

RH: Well, one of the really popular things in conservative politics is let's drug test people for benefits, right? And three states have tried to do that. Florida, and I can't remember the other two, I think Kentucky and somebody else. Of course, it's been struck down with the courts because it's blatantly unconstitutional. [laughs] I mean, it violates the Fourth Amendment. Fundamental principles of the Fourth Amendment, right. And Fourth and Fifth Amendment, probably the Fourteenth as well. And there are those kind of populist kind of things that both sides...is appealing to significant numbers in both sides. And so, what that says to me is that there's a gaping middle. And I'm not, I'm pretty conservative. I was one of the more conservative members of the House. I have pretty conservative views. But there's a gaping hole there for people that want to come up with more practical way of looking at the world. I don't know, I think that there's more risk that we're going to end up with four political parties than



there is that we're going to end up...and maybe five or six. I don't know how, in our system, you know, our system is not a parliamentary system. I don't know in our system how that could possibly work.

BB: Well, I think it might...it might work out that way for a while, but I think eventually you'd be back to a center-right party and a center-left party. Or, you might end up with two very extreme parties, too.

RH: As Republicans, I mean, this happened to us really in 1992, when Ross Perot ran, and probably one of the most honorable people to ever be president of the United States, which was George H.W. Bush, a person I had great admiration for, lost because of the populism. I mean, Ross Perot ran as, obviously, a populist pulling from both sides. So, I mean certainly the evidence was there. I kind of figured that maybe it had diminished in the Republican Party with the problems Pat Buchanan had subsequently, particularly in 2000 when he ended up branching off. He ran as a Reform Party presidential candidate and so did Trump. But obviously there's a there's a big populist element, and it's going to have to work its way out. I mean, certainly being successful in politics is having some sort of a populist edge to you, but this is a divisive...and I think it's really unhealthy. It's really unhealthy.

BB: Rick, how do you hope to be remembered?

RH: [laughs] I don't know. I don't know that I will.

BB: This comes into the category of final thoughts, too, but—

RH: Sure. Well, I mean, I think that how I perceived myself as kind of a problem solver, and a thinking out-of-the-box problem solver. That, even in my personal life, if I counsel other people when people are having trouble, I urged them to think outside the box, think creatively. You know, try to change your perspective. I honestly believe that the political differences in this country, right and left, really are more consequence of perspective than they are with respect to what people want to see as outcomes. And I developed Democratic friends in the short period of time I served in Congress, and I had Democratic friends in the legislature and around Montana over the years. But we all come from a different place, and our view of the world, and who are the villains and who are the heroes, a lot of that has to do with where we came from. I tried to...I hope people see in me...I try to set that aside. I try to say, I have a prejudiced, biased perspective of the world. Much as I don't want to have that, I do. And I try to look at things, setting that aside.

You know, going back to the beginning of our conversation when we were with Marc Racicot, and the Democrats had 30 members of the Senate, I developed a trusting working relationship with guys like Halligan and others. Even Fred Van Valkenburg because I tried to understand their perspective. We got a lot done in that se...We passed a lot of legislation. We got a lot of workers' compensation reform. I mean, we got a lot of good things done in that session, in spite

of the fact that we were, that we had to deal with a huge majority of Democrats in the Senate. And so, that's kind of I...I hope people remember me that way, because that's kind of how I tried to do the job.

BB: As a bargainer of good faith and a problem solver.

RH: Yes. And trying to understand where other people were coming from, because what I hate about politics now is people attribute to motives, negative motives to people who are really acting in good faith. And that drives a wedge between people, and it's unfair to the process. Because it poisons the process in a way that makes it hard for people to get anything done.

BB: That's right. Well Rick, I considered you a valued friend, and you know that—

RH: Well, thank you.

BB: And a great and good public servant, and thank you—

RH: Thank you. Well, thank you for all you've done. And thank you for doing this. I know that you're dedicated to this, so thanks.

[End of Interview]