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Bob Brown: This is Bob Brown and I'm interviewing Steve Doherty. It's August 30, 2019, and we're at the Mansfield Library archives in Missoula, Montana, at the University of Montana. Steve Doherty was a lawyer in Montana and longtime Montana state legislator and state senator and state Senate leader.

Steve, when and where were you born?

Stephen Doherty: I was born in Great Falls in May of 1952.

BB: What years did you serve in the Montana Senate?

SD: I was in the Senate from 2001—from 1991 to 2003. Twelve years, three terms.

BB: Then you were term-limited out, is what it amounts to, right?

SD: Yes, yeah.

BB: What caused you to run for the state Senate?

SD: I had been interested in politics for most of my life and I had been involved in student government in high school. I went door-to-door for people when I was in college. I had practiced law in Oregon for a few years before I came back to Montana. I came back to Montana, and like a lot of kids, when I grew up in Great Falls and graduated from Great Falls Central High School, all I could think of was getting out of Montana. And I went to school on the East Coast.

BB: Where did you go?

SD: The University of Pennsylvania in Philadelphia. It was a place that when I got off the plane for the first time and saw Philadelphia for the first time, I knew I had gone stark, raving crazy. It was a big city. I hadn't lived in a big city before. I hadn't been there before. It was one of my first airplane rides, but I lived through it and immediately upon graduation returned to Montana and swore I'd never leave. I ended up going to law school in Oregon at Lewis and Clark [College] and practiced for a large firm, which has since gone multinational.

BB: What was your undergraduate major?

SD: My undergraduate major was biology and I was thinking about being a research biologist—doing fieldwork—and that fell by the wayside. I was—

BB: What caused you to become interested in being a lawyer?

SD: Well, I had had experiences before I went into—before I went to law school—of working at the Montana legislature. I worked for a citizens' organization called the Northern Plains Resource Council, which was made up of landowners and landowners' kids and environmentalists and tribal members and I'd learned in attending very many hearings that I knew something was up when certain people testified and I watched their words very carefully. I could tell that something was amiss, but I didn't have the skill set and I didn't really understand what was going on. So if there was something that made me curious or thoughtful or even angry, I'd go find a lawyer and I'd say, "Well, this is the situation and here's what they said and here's what I thought was going on, but I didn't really know what was going on."

The lawyer would go, "Oh yeah, no, that's no big deal. Who cares about that?" Or they'd say, "Actually, that's a very good point. You're going to have to deal with it. And here's a way to do it." I got kind of tired of trying to track down people to explain to me what in the heck was going on. So, I went to law school.

BB: You must have had some interest in the environmental movement.

SD: Yes, absolutely.

BB: What triggered that?

SD: I think what triggered that was a combination of being a kid who loved the out of doors—loved hunting, loved fishing, loved hiking—in Glacier, on the Rocky Mountain Front. Elk hunting in the Little Belts [mountains]. I think partially that, but I think also I was a Catholic school kid. The nuns and the priests, when I was growing up, I think had a commitment to social justice, and that triggered many, many things in my life. Not just an interest in natural resources but an interest in how people were treated, how they managed their lives, how they organized themselves in government. But I think it was a combination. First of all, just an absolute love of Montana, but also tempered by, arising out of a religious tradition—a search for social justice.

BB: Was there a particular priest?

SD: Well, there was. He later became a monsignor, but yeah, Father Martin Warner in Great Falls. Father Warner was one of the first chaplains at D-Day, crossed the beach at Normandy, and was in Europe as a military chaplain. But he was also a fellow who kept a German shorthair at the parish and loved to go pheasant hunting. I learned how the pheasant hunt from a priest. We would often go—my dad and I and Father Warner—out to my dad's uncle's place at Stanford [Montana]. He was a farmer-rancher.

BB: What was his name?

SD: Elvin Bailey. And—

BB: My family roots are in that country; just wondered if I had heard the name.

SD: My uncle Elvin had been a sheriff in Judith Basin County. He was a big guy. He was about 6’3” and 225 [pounds], and even in his older age, he would—he was quite capable of taking care of himself. But the greatest part of maybe pheasant hunting at Uncle Elvin’s, in addition to seeing a dog work and being part of that whole scene, was listening to Uncle Elvin, who disavowed any interest in religion, and Father Warner sitting around the stove talking about the great moral issues of our time.

BB: Uncle Elvin must not have been any dumbbell. I mean, if he was—

SD: Well, no, he wasn't.

BB: He was a well-read person, I imagine.

SD: He was a very well-read person, but he had grown up in Judith Basin County and taken over the family farm and ranch and was just a joy to be around.

BB: So he was somewhat of an influence too?

SD: I think he was, yeah, now that I think about it.

BB: Do you know what his politics were?

SD: Yes, I do. He was on the Montana Democratic State Central Committee. He was, at different times, on the executive board of the Montana Farmers Union, and he was one of those old-time Farmer-Labor Democrats.

BB: My guess is that had something to do with shaping your roots politically early on. Were your parents political at all?

SD: They were somewhat political. They were busy. There were five kids in my family, but at different times they helped out with different campaigns. The campaigns they helped out on were, one, was for Congressman Jim Battin who was—

BB: A Republican.

SD: —a Republican icon. But Congressman Battin was—my dad thought he was a very fair man, and that's what did it for him. My mom ended up doing a bunch of his typing on his campaigns. When Congressman Battin would come to town, I got to tag along when my dad drove him around. The other—

BB: Did you have an impression of him?

SD: I thought he was the smartest guy in the world. I really did. He was thoughtful and he was kind to this 10-year-old kid, who—

BB: Well, you and I are about the same age and I didn't really know him, Steve, but I remember being to a Republican convention somewhere along the line and he was probably the keynote speaker. I remember him as a larger-than-life figure. He was quite tall and kind of broad and kind of handsome in an imposing way, and very smooth.

SD: Yes, I would agree totally. I would agree totally. Plus, the kindness and generosity in sharing his time and his thoughts. I was on the high school debate team eventually and I loved that because I had five minutes to ask the congressman from Eastern Montana questions about what he thought about that year's debate topic.

BB: Oh, wow!

SD: Yeah.

BB: [laughs] Oh, that's great.

Okay. Is there any other mentor figure?

SD: I think one of my uncles took me hunting a lot and I think he drilled into me the ethics of hunting. I think from that start, the ethics of hunting, the ethics of being in the natural world, that that led naturally to some of those thoughts about social justice and about how do we keep what we have in Montana.

BB: The fair chase concept?

SD: The fair chase from Jim Posewitz's book [*Beyond Fair Chase: The Ethic and Tradition of Hunting*, 1994]—the ethical treatment of animals, the ethical hunting. That involves an appreciation and understanding of the animals and of the environment.

BB: Conserving the resources or at least using them wisely so we'll have them in perpetuity.

SD: Yes, that's it. That's it.

BB: So you ran for the state Senate in, when did you tell me, 1990?

SD: 1990.

BB: Tell me about your first campaign.

SD: My first campaign was against a Republican stalwart in Great Falls and in Cascade County, a guy by the name of Jesse O'Hara. Jesse and his brother were, at different times, had run for the Senate and the House. Jesse was a counsellor at C.M. Russell High School and quite conservative. He took after me that I was the god—or the devil's spawn liberal. But the problem with that was I was running on the west side of Great Falls where a lot of my relatives lived, where one of my grandparents lived. My aunts lived there and uncle and cousins and assorted, sundry folks. It was hard to paint me as an outsider because I had more depth than maybe the Berkeley Pit, at least on the west side of Great Falls. I remember that a few years ago my mom ran into Jesse O'Hara, and Jesse knew who my mom was. They were visiting, and Jesse in his later years became quite an outspoken moderate and just a staunch defender of education. Jesse said to my mom, "You know, next time you see Steve tell him he wasn't that far off the mark on a lot of things."

BB: Oh, that's a good story!

SD: Which I thought was, that was a damn good compliment.

BB: That's a great compliment. I see him once in a while. He's retired in Florida. But my wife and I took a trip through the Panama Canal and then drove home by driving up the East Coast and across the Midwest. We stayed with Jess and his wife Julie at their Florida retirement home for two days, I think.

SD: Yeah, well at one point, Jesse even was writing letters to the editor in the Great Falls Tribune in the last couple of sessions and he was right on the mark. But it was also interesting that his detractors were the members of his party and the poor Republican Party in Cascade County is as fractured as you could get. They took after Jesse for being an outsider and writing letters from Florida.

BB: [unintelligible].

SD: Yeah.

BB: And writing letters—because he'd retired in Florida by then.

SD: Right, right.

BB: Yeah, I know that's true. He's gone through some kind of a metamorphosis, I think. But anyway, we had a real good visit when I was down there.

Describe the political culture in Great Falls when you first started out.

SD: When I first started out, unions were very strong in Great Falls, and Great Falls, by and large, had very strong Democratic delegations and we had some great folks: Sheila Rice, Bill Strizich, and a guy by the name of Dick Manning, who was in the House and in the Senate and died, actually, during one of the sessions—his first session. When I campaigned the first time, the labor unions had divvied up some of the candidates in Great Falls. And when I went door-to-door I usually had a union person going with me, and it was great going door to door. A lot of folks don't like doing that. I absolutely loved it because I'm kind of nosy and you get to see people's gardens or get invited in for pie or a beer or whatever, and you just visit with them. I like visiting with people, and more often than not somebody knew my dad or my mom or one of my uncles or: ”Are you related to so-and-so,” or “Don't worry. Your aunt Dorothy already came by and talked to me, and oh yeah, we're voting for you.” So that was, ah.

BB: And they may have if you hadn't come there, but if they were kind of leaning toward you and you came to their door yourself, that nailed them down.

SD: That nailed it down. That absolutely nailed it down.

BB: People like to be asked.

SD: They do. They do. It took me a while, but I finally got it down that you should just, at the end of the conversation just say, “Look, I'd really appreciate your vote.”

BB: Once they say that, then it's hard to turn someone down, who they generally agreed with in the conversation and who made a nice impression. They don't want to tell you to jump in the lake. And once they tell you, most people feel somewhat honor bound, and they'll keep their word to you.

SD: I think so, and I think the thing is even these days in our fractured politics, that Montanans like to see their candidates up close and personal. As you say, if they make a commitment, they're usually going to stick with it even if they later find out you're a scoundrel.

BB: Prominent leaders in Great Falls as you were starting out, that you remember back in that period.

SD: Ok, sure. One was Ted James, who had been lieutenant governor, I think, with Tim Babcock. Ted was a friend of my dad's boss, but a great guy.

BB: What did your dad do by the way?

SD: He was an office manager for the Mutual of Omaha insurance company in Great Falls.

Ted James was, again, kind, generous with his time, and represented what I thought was a very reasonable position and a moderate—a true moderate—who would—it made no difference to him whether the positions were Democratic or Republican.

BB: Though he was a lieutenant governor as a Republican.

SD: As a Republican, yeah.

BB: And then lost the Republican primary for governor.

SD: Yes, and then he ran. I remember that we went door-to-door for Ted James and that was important. Another figure because he was—I knew his daughter, Jeanne. She was in my class at Central—was M.F. Keller. Doc Keller, who was just a staunch firebrand and really enjoyed bedeviling the Democrats quite a bit and had a great wit. I think I learned from him, thinking about this, that politics should be fun. It should be fun, and if you can't take a joke, you better get out of it.

BB: Well, Steve that awakens—I'll be brief here, but a story I have because when I first arrived in the legislature a little before you in 1971, Doc Keller was there. He sat right near me and he was kind of interested in this new young guy that no one knew very much about. So, he kind of took his time to mentor me a little bit, and you mentioned his liking to bedevil the Democrats. Well, there were, I think, maybe Big Jim Murry and I don't know who else maybe, Joe Crosswhite or something, but there were some fairly prominent labor leaders that would sit in the gallery of the balcony on the Republican side where the Democrats could see them but we couldn't see them. So, whether it was true or a myth, we knew they were giving hand signals to the Democrats on how to vote. You know, thumbs up or thumbs down and that sort of thing. We couldn't see them, but they sat up there where the Democrats could see them, so that's what we thought was going on. So, from time to time, on the labor bill, Doc Keller would stand up, and I don't think he could see them either because he was probably a little too close to the balcony, but he would excoriate the labor fakirs. And fakirs is F-A-K-I-R-S. I'm not quite sure what kind of a fakir [mendicant dervish] that is. But they were the labor fakirs, and he was funny but he was cutting too.

SD: Yeah, yeah.

BB: They didn't like him very well, but everybody had to give him credit for being pretty eloquent in his sarcasm. He had kind of a spirited wit.

One day, it was bitter cold—somewhere below zero—and we'd had a session until late in the evening. Pitch dark, and Keller and a guy named Tom Selstead, who was also a legislator from

Great Falls, and the three of us had rooms at the same motel where we stayed during the legislative session. I don't know what had happened that day, but Doc Keller was just—he'd had an inspiration. I remember we could see our breath real well and he rubbed his hands together in that cold night and he looked at Tom and I and he said, "Isn't politics fun, boys? Isn't politics fun?" [laughs]

SD: That is a classic. He had no problem calling people out or pointing out contradictions. He also had no problem kind of giving some Republicans hell too. I remember when Jack Ramirez ran for governor and there were some Republicans who didn't know him—didn't know who this, turns out polished eloquent, big-time lawyer was—but they didn't like him because he had—

BB: They didn't like Ramirez?

SD: Yeah. They didn't like the last name and Doc Keller gave them hell, at least in Great Falls.

BB: I remember that there was enough concern about his name that they started pronouncing it in Republican circles and trying to get other people to pronounce it as Ramirez [Ram – ir – ies].

SD: Oh, my!

BB: Ram – ir – ies, because it didn't sound quite as south of the border as Ram – ir – ez. There was that concern I know.

Pat McKittrick.

SD: Pat McKittrick, you know, as—Pat was Speaker of the House and a lawyer—a labor lawyer, actually—in Great Falls. He's still practicing with his brother Tim. When I was practicing in Great Falls, their office was on the 4th floor of the Strain Building and mine was on the 5th. But Pat was very calm. The thing I remember about Pat was—and he's still here, so I'm not—but he was calm. You couldn't ruffle that guy's feathers. I think that's just an incredible talent to have in the legislature and in life—to be thoughtful and kind of take everybody at their word and to be very fair about stuff. I think he was that way.

I think one other—although I can't say he was as—I was as close to him—but my dad and Mike Mansfield's brother [John Mansfield] were friends and Mansfield's parents lived across the street from our local parish, Our Lady of Lourdes. Father Warner, again, he would say the 6:30 a.m. mass, and if you were an altar boy, that meant getting up pretty early and riding your bike down to Our Lady of Lourdes. But Father Warner would take the Mansfield parents communion, and Senator Mansfield also had a soft spot in his heart for Great Falls Central, because his nieces and nephews went to Central [and St. Thomas grade school]. There are

Mansfields lined up on the grade scale with the Dohertys and the Mansfields, so we all knew a Mansfield kid and all spent time—

BB: What was his brother's name?

SD: John. John.

BB: John, ok. And these would have been John's kids or his grandkids?

SD: John's kids. Yeah. In my later years and the last time I saw Senator Mansfield was in Washington D.C. at his office, and he was still making coffee, making the instant coffee. Had his very famous short-quipped answers in kind of a clipped voice. He kept kind of drilling into me, and it's not that he was my mentor particularly, but drilling into me the necessity of respecting other viewpoints. Now, sometimes that didn't work very well, but—

BB: No, but I think it did better in his time, obviously, then it is working now. There are the stories about how he was a close, personal friend of Senator Dirksen's [Everett Dirksen], which I believe were pretty true. But like you, I was fortunate to have more than one visit with Mansfield—a couple brief ones while he was the Senate Majority Leader and then a couple later on in his office in Washington, D.C. He would make coffee and give me a cookie. I think he did both times. I had fairly extended conversations with him each time and it was just like talking to your granddad or your uncle or something. He was as unpretentious as any former majority leader and ambassador to Japan could ever possibly be. It was just two old Montana boys, Bob Brown and Mike Mansfield, and we were just talking stuff over. He didn't monopolize the conversation, but he'd tell me things that he knew I'd be interested in. Sometimes he'd have the classic Mike Mansfield: "Yup. Nope," or something like that too. But I grew to really like him. And my Republican family, I'm sure, never voted for him, but I genuinely liked him.

One quick story I'll tell for someone who may be listening later on because I don't know how well-known this is, but he had an office building downtown in Washington, D.C., and I think it was either directly for Goldman Sachs, the investing firm, or it was some subsidiary of theirs.

SD: Yes.

BB: Mansfield lived in a suburb two or three miles from there, maybe. Not close, not a great distance, and he'd walk to work. Of course, you know, he was very lean. He was tall and lanky and didn't have much fat on him. Well, there was a terrible blizzard that took place in Washington, D.C., and I guess there were literally two feet of snow. It was a horrible blizzard. Mike figured he'd have to start an hour early and he got there and he usually stayed until about 4 in the afternoon and he did. Of course, Mike, I think, was conscious too of how you can make a legend for yourself so that might have had something to do with this. But he supposedly said when asked about that that he grew up in a world where if you got paid for the shift, you pulled the shift. They were paying him, he wasn't going to forgo a day's pay by staying home, so he, by

god, showed up—the only person in that whole big building. He stuck her out ’til he usually did and then walked home again through the snow.

SD: I have no doubt.

BB: Those of us who kind of know him wouldn't have any doubt about that.

SD: Yeah, absolutely.

BB: That was kind of who he was. He was the genuine article that's for sure.

I want to jump back for a minute, but sometimes when I interview people who are former legislators, this is kind of a fun question to ask them. You were how old when you were first elected to the Senate, state Senate?

SD: Oh gosh. ’52…38. In my 40s. I think 40—

BB: Well if you were born in ’50, and you were first elected in ’90?

SD: Yeah.

BB: That’d be right about 40, right?

SD: Yeah, right. Or, 38 actually, because I was born in ’52. So 38.

BB: Okay, so pretty young, and you had not held public office before.

SD: No.

BB: But you'd been around the legislature a little bit before.

SD: Yes.

BB: But there you are. You're seated on the floor of the Montana State Senate. You're about to be sworn in or you've just been sworn in, and it's an imposing chamber. There are people around you whose names you’ve read in the newspaper and that sort of thing. What were your thoughts?

SD: I was awestruck and dumbstruck and then I realized that the tradition was is that the new people kind of introduce themselves to their new colleagues and I thought, ‘Oh, my god, what do I say? How do I say this?’ because I've got all my brothers and sisters and their respective spouses and kids [in the gallery]. My mom and dad were there, my aunt Dorothy that I mentioned about campaigning for me on the west side of Great Falls and a couple of my

cousins. I just kept sitting there thinking and going, you know, Mom's mom was a single mom during the Depression. She lived across the street from the railroad yards. My mom likes to tell the story that during the Depression: she and her sister were sent with their little red wagon to scrounge the railroad yards for coal to buy. On my dad's side, my Grandpa George had been an immigrant from Ireland and Canada and homesteaded north of Square Butte by Geraldine and had been a union guy his—

BB: On the railroad.

SD: On the railroad, yes. Yes. He was a boilermaker and a staunch Democrat. But I kept thinking, you know, my grandparents, I really wish they were here to see this. Because they didn't—

BB: Their origins were humble enough that something like what you just achieved wasn't even remotely on their radar.

SD: It wasn't on their radar screen and it frankly wasn't on anybody's radar screen. I remember thinking mostly about my grandparents. And it was, it was inspiring to be there and to look around and see some giants—people that I got to know better later but people that I knew were important, key players in the Montana State Senate.

BB: Were there any that you'd care to mention that particularly stand out in your memory?

SD: Well, you. Although I don't know about a giant, but—

BB: [laughs] Ed Smith.

SD: Ed Smith definitely.

BB: He was a giant.

SD: He was. He really was. Dennis Nathe, who I had known prior to the legislature—was a rancher from up in northeastern Montana—was just a jewel of a person. Then we had—Fred Van Valkenburg was a mentor and gave me a lot of good advice.

BB: One tough debater.

SD: One tough debater, yeah, and—

BB: Pretty wily tactician too.

SD: Yes, he was—a very wily tactician. And Greg Jergeson, Mike Halligan. Dorothy Eck was just amazing. I also think of my first session the Democrats were in the majority, and Stan Stephens was the governor. Fred and Stan knocked heads more than once—

BB: Oh, boy.

SD: —and you could hear the sparks and the explosions on occasion. But I also think about the folks like Cecil Weeding, who was from Jordan, and the Republicans—this should have been a Republican seat, and now it is. But they ran everybody against Cecil and they couldn't beat him.

BB: Well, he was such a genuine good old salt of the earth cowboy.

SD: Yes, he was.

BB: He was the genuine article.

SD: And one of the funniest guy you know that you're ever going to run across. But then, yeah, Jergeson from the Hi-Line. Linda Nelson who was the whip when I was the minority leader in the Senate. Bill Yellowtail was a very good friend. Still is to this day. He was also one who wasn't afraid to mix it up, but not dumbly.

BB: You know, Steve, Bruce Crippen and, let's see, John Harp, and myself, Joe Mazurek, Bill Yellowtail—four or five of us—Halligan was part of that group sometimes too, we'd go out together. We'd go over to a place that served chicken near the Capitol building, as I recall. It was a kind of a common place for us to go. Yellowtail, one time I remember we told him this, we said, "We love you like a brother and we've had more good times with you than most other people here in either political party, but we can't remember"—this is Crippen and I—"if we ever got one vote out of you." [laughs]

That was Bill. You know, once in a while you'd get something from Halligan or Mazurek or something like that on something where we were sure we were right. But boy, Bill was a straight arrow partisan, that's for sure. But he was a likable guy.

Just a few more names I'm going to mention—some of them in the state Senate, I think, not all of them here. I mentioned Bruce Crippen. Any recollections?

SD: Yeah. I really like Bruce and I liked him when we were serving together. I thought he was a straight shooter, and I thoroughly enjoyed, because as good as Fred Van Valkenburg gave, Bruce Crippen gave back and just bedeviled—and he would chuckle about it. He really enjoyed it. He really enjoyed it.

BB: They were like two old herd bulls, weren't they?

SD: Yeah.

BB: And they were something alike. They were both lawyers. They were both competitive. They were both tough. They both liked to get something on the other one, but they weren't

particularly vicious or vindictive. So they were almost glorified practical jokers, I think. But they grew to like each other.

SD: They did.

BB: As time went on, they grew to genuinely like each other. Were Matt Himsl and Francis Bardanouve still in the legislature when you arrived there?

SD: [pauses] I don’t know about Matt. I think he might have been there in ‘91. I'm not sure. But Francis was, and Francis was also just a beacon to me—so much to learn from that guy. Who, nothing about getting a formal education, but he was one of the best read, most thoughtful, most far-seeing individual that I got to know. That was one of the joys, actually, of serving in the Senate, those days. I don't know that I'd run again these days, but getting to know people who knew the budget inside and out—could calculate the numbers in their heads before the people with the computers figured it out—and people who thought about the future, people who were concerned about where we were going or how we were treating people—

BB: Back before term limitations, it was a deep labor of love to some of those guys that were there for 20 years. People voted in term limitations because I think they thought there were old guys who'd been there too long and were stuck in a rut and who were gaming the system and somehow or other getting rich and so on. Truth be told, the ones that had been there the longest were the ones that were most deeply dedicated. If you were just doing it for an ego trip or something like that, heck, after you'd been there for two or three sessions, you wouldn't particularly feel the need to go back again. But if you really had the best interests of Montana and public policy at heart, and you had built up a wealth of knowledge and you knew it was important that you be back because other people didn't have that. Honestly, I think that was the motivation for quite a number of the guys who remained in the legislature session after session because you and I know it didn't pay anything. Was disruptive your personal life.

SD: Oh, god, yes.

BB: So it was probably a little bit of an ego trip. I'm sure it was, but I don't think that was the motivation that kept people coming back more than 15 years, more than 20 years, something like that.

SD: Well, I don't either, and the other part of that whole rap about term limits, which I think is one of the top worst ideas in Montana legislative history, but you got to know people and if you get to know people, you're going to trust them more. If you trust them more, you're going to work together better. Now, for example, Chuck Swysgood—tough as nails. A partisan guy. He wasn't going to give an inch on anything, but he was also fair. You knew that. You knew where he was coming from, so it wasn't a surprise or it wasn't—I mean, and there was no reason to be a jerk to Chuck Swysgood. One, you’d probably end up losing, and two, you knew him, he knew you, and that was one of the great joys. Actually, you mentioned your gang of folks who used to

go out, and maybe tip one and have some of that Suds Hut chicken. I don't know that those things happen anymore. I hope they do. It would be really good for us if they did.

BB: I think they'd like it to happen too. I've talked to people in the legislature today who kind of yearn for those days and wish they could be a part of that and wish they knew how to influence the culture of the legislature so it would be more that way. But with term limitations, for one thing, it's difficult to make those old, long-term friendships. Like you, many, many, many of the people I served in the legislature within the 26 years that I was there—most of it before term limitations—I visited them in their homes, I knew their wives, I knew their kids, I knew their grandkids. I'm not saying well, but I was introduced to them when I was there and maybe came back a second or even a third time. I knew their dog, you know.

SD: Yeah.

BB: So if you had that kind of a relationship with someone, even if it's your nature to be an SOB, it's hard to be one when you actually know the guy, and he's more than just a political associate, he's actually a friend. So, that really that was the grease between the gears, I think, that made the system work better then than it does now.

SD: I think—it's really offensive to me as a former legislator—but even if I—it wouldn't matter as a former legislator—but to hear people say it that Montana legislators are getting rich or they're a career politician. Ain’t no career. No way. Even before the term limits—

BB: They paid us the same as an entry-level prison guard.

SD: Yeah.

BB: And it’s probably not much different than that now. You worked for 90 days every other year at that wage, and then you went to a few interim committee meetings and that sort of thing and they paid their expenses. But I mean, you couldn't possibly support yourself, let alone get rich if that’s the only income you had.

SD: No. Well, I love to tell this story because I was trying to recruit good folks to run for the legislature as Democrats, and we had a guy who was a police officer in Great Falls and he was absolutely solid. He was getting ready. His wife was ok with it, his kids were ok with it, and he said, “So how much does it pay?” And I told him what it paid. He said, “Well, I need to check,” because there were some instances with some teachers could pick up their salaries—

BB: Teachers.

SD: Yeah. But it didn't apply to police officers. He talked to me and said, “I'd love to do it. Can't. Can't support my family.” It was extremely disruptive to my law practice and fortunately I had partners that thought it was important.

BB: [unintelligible]

SD: Yeah.

BB: Well, you know Steve, I'm not sure this is true but it’s part of Montana folklore and you probably heard it too, that it's always unpopular for legislators to raise their own pay even if it doesn't apply to them, even if it's in the future. There's this myth that they make more money than they actually do and so on. Anyway, I remember the story that the old economic powers that be in Montana—the corporate interests, Montana Power Company and the other utility companies, and the Anaconda Company—tried to kind of keep the salary low because that way they had what they called the watering holes where they’d have the big baron of beef, I guess, and a couple of turkeys, and all kinds of warm, good food and unlimited drinks until 8 o'clock in the evening or something like that. So the legislators would come over there at 5 or 6 in the evening, get a little drunk, have a big meal, hang out with the lobbyists, and that sort of thing, and other legislators, and that's part of how they supported themselves during the legislative session. If they'd had better salaries, they might not have felt they needed to be on the dole of the corporations. I don't know how completely true that is, but that's part of what you hear that the Montana Legislature was so poorly paid for so long, because the word would get around, ‘Well, you know what he did in the last session? He introduced a bill to raise those guys’ salaries. Aren't they paid enough?’ Nobody knows what they're paid, but that's a rhetorical question [unintelligible] paid too much. Or he voted for it and that sort of thing. So, for a long time I know the legislature paid $10 a day, $10 a day. I think that was clear up into the ’60s.

SD: Yeah. Thank goodness for the new constitution, and the creation of the Legislative Services Division so that people didn't—the legislature finally had its own lawyers that they could talk to who were nonpartisan, who would give you this great scoop about what this meant or what that meant. Then the finances—that's the reason we're there is to determine a budget and figure out the taxes and figure out the budget and make them balance. It just amazes me as you say, the people who grumble and say, ‘They’re paid too much anyway.’

BB: I think a lot of people—now, the legislators didn't come home and repeat these stories about the watering holes and that sort of thing. And another story—it wasn't going on at least as far as I know when I was there, but the Legislative Council had been established by the time I was there. So, the legislature had its own lawyers to draft the bills and that sort of thing. That's always the case when both you and I were there. But before I was there, not even that long, I think it was in the bar at the Placer Hotel, there would usually be four or five or six attorneys, as I understand it, they were corporate attorneys. They were the guy that was a railroad lobbyist or a friend of his from their stable of lawyers or whatever that had some talent in terms of bill drafting, and the same thing, there would be a Montana Power Company guy or two there, and a couple of Anaconda Company guys, and maybe some guy from the Stockgrowers Association or something or other. But they were all kind of a reliable part of the internal business network

in Montana. It was commonly known among legislators that if you got there, you had a good idea for a bill and needed to get it drafted, there were guys over there that would sit down with you that were helpful and kind and considerate and that sort of thing and even maybe buy you a cocktail and they'd draft your bill on whatever it was. They knew the form in which it needed to be drafted in because they drafted all the other bills for the last five decades. So anyway, I think that did go on too.

SD: Yeah I. I heard enough from, well, Francis told me about it. Then another infamous, famous guy that we know and loved was J.D. Lynch. And J.D. could tell a story, but J.D. knew where the bodies were buried and how to get things done, especially for Butte.

BB: You mentioned Chuck Swysgood and it triggered a thought in my mind that Chuck was a guy that didn't—you know he was a pretty straight-arrow, loyal Republican, and he was a masterful guy as an appropriator on the Finance and Labor Committee and that sort of thing. But I remember, in fact they both told me this at different times—Swysgood and J.D. Lynch—that they'd usually make a deal of some kind early in the session and when it might be perfectly astounding to all the conservative Republicans or especially to poor Francis Bardanouve, who was liberal philosophically but was pretty conservative with the money. And there they'd be in the last week of the legislative session, and J.D. would have some pork barrel project for Butte, and if everybody voted the way they were supposed to and had all legislative session, it was a goner and Swysgood would be there for J.D. Apparently, that happened more than once, and they both laughed in telling me about that. [laughs]

SD: Yeah. [laughs] Well, for the graduate student 50 years from now who's stuck in the alcoves at the Mansfield Library, you may not believe this or you may think this is the discussion of the fantasies of a couple of geezer legislators, but that's the way it was.

BB: Yes, that's the way it was. And it was probably more good than bad, but it was by no means all good, that's for sure.

Briefly, you served with several governors and I think you knew more governors than you served with, so I'm going to mention their names and perhaps just share your thoughts about these governors: Tom Judge.

SD: Tom Judge was a far-sighted and very ambitious, but also very thoughtful, governor. He, I think, helped usher in the modern era of the legislature and of governors and the executive branch. I got to know him better when I was in the legislature—

BB: After he was no longer governor.

SD: After he was no longer governor.

BB: How did that happen?

SD: His son—

BB: Patrick.

SD: —Patrick, was a lobbyist, and I ran into Patrick and Tom on a few occasions in Helena, and we'd bunch up together and have supper or lunch and Tom would tell his stories. He was still very interesting, still very aware of what was going on, and I think a far-sighted guy is how I would describe him.

BB: I wish I'd known him better. I knew him a little bit. But I don't—that squares with how I know him to. I thought he was—because he was young and good looking and he was a snappy dresser that he may have gotten the reputation for being sort of a flashy sort of the guy and probably not as deep as he actually was.

Ted Schwinden.

SD: Ted Schwinden in my first campaign did a couple of ads for me, and I had known Ted back in the days when he was the State Lands Commissioner and I was working for Northern Plains and we clashed on a couple—more than a couple—of occasions. But Ted was as straight an arrow and absolute gold standard. I mean, if Ted told you to go to hell, you better get your ticket. But if he said, "I'm with you on this," he was absolutely with you. He was a very practical guy, and he had no problem telling Democrats where to get off. I mean when he came up with the idea to lower the coal tax, there was absolute revolt in the ranks. Ted thought it was the right thing to do, and that was all it took with Ted. If he thought it was the right thing to do, then he'd go after it.

Now one of the things in one of my first campaigns, somebody took after somebody in my family and Ted heard about it and he was livid that somebody had done that, because he wanted to get more young people to run. But who wants to run if it's slimy and dirty? That made him livid, and he then said, "Ok, by god, I'm going to—let's put together a letter and send it to everybody in the district." And so we did. I had more than one person at the doors when I was knocking on the doors, say, "Ted Schwinden sent me a letter."

BB: Wow! Well, he wasn't a shrinking violet. I mean—

SD: Oh, god, no.

BB: He put his dukes up, and if he believed in it, as you say, I believe too, he wouldn't care whether he was offending, or who he was offending. I admired about him also that—well, this wouldn't have happened during a legislative session. He'd dress with a tie and jacket and so on, and looked the part of the governor. But I visited with him in his office because he was governor for eight years. So more than once when I'd be in Helena for an interim committee

meeting or for whatever reason, I'd drop up and see if I could talk to him, you know, about something substantive. We didn't really have a just-shoot-the-bull kind of a relationship, but he'd be sitting there in a regular long-sleeved sort of chambray, farmer's-looking shirt with jeans, and as I remember, usually some kind of low-cut working-kind of shoes, just like a guy working behind the desk of a governor's office is, of course, imposing and so is his desk. Anyway, you could talk to about things, and he wouldn't have to call up the guy over at the highway department. He wouldn't have to call up somebody and say, "Will you come over here? I'm having a conversation with Senator Brown, and I'm not quite sure." Heck, he knew the budgets. He knew the personnel. He knew the problems in the departments as well as the department directors did. He was amazing that way. He was on top of it. I don't know he's a micromanager or not, but boy, he had the knowledge of a micromanager. He'd tell you something. I mean if you asked him a question about 'what do you think about this?' he'd tell you right between the eyes. If you asked him for something, oh well, he might say, "Well, I'll get back to you tomorrow. I'm not sure about it," but most of the time, he'd just say, "Well, let me think. I think their budget is thus and such, and I think we can't do that. But why don't you try doing it this way." He was probably—I don't think probably—I think he was hands down the most knowledgeable guy in state government during his administration.

SD: I would agree with that, totally. Totally. And he knew the intricacies of the strip mine reclamation act and would sit down and talk to you about it and point out the fallacies of the environmental folks and point out the fallacies of the industry folks. He was a smart, capable—

BB: Common sense thinker.

SD: Yeah. Yeah.

BB: Stan Stephens.

SD: Stan Stephens I didn't know well. I think—he impresses me as a guy, or impressed me as a guy who wanted to do the right things, who wanted to move things ahead. Now, when I was there there were discussions about whether that was the right goal to go for, or should we try something else first. But I thought he was a genuinely thoughtful and considerate guy.

BB: His heart was in the right place. He had some bad luck.

SD: Yeah, he did.

BB: He had some bad luck.

Marc Racicot.

SD: Marc Racicot is a total enigma to me. I think when Marc Racicot was first elected, Democrats—that was the, that was the campaign between Dorothy Bradley and Marc Racicot,

which Dorothy barely lost in, I think, the last week or two of the campaign—but Marc Racicot we thought—we Democrats thought—well, we can work with this guy. I think in his first couple of years we did, and there was no problem with it. I don't know why Marc Racicot got on board the deregulation bandwagon. I think he was a smarter guy than that. I would really—this is my historical wish—I would like to get Marc Racicot and Bob Gannon, who was chairman of the Montana Power Company at that time, together, lock them in a room, and not let them out until they tell me the story of deregulation, because [it was] also one of the two worst ideas in Montana's history. But I didn't think, I just couldn't understand how he just jumped on that bandwagon and was so strong.

BB: It had been so secretively handled, too. That was after I was out of the legislature. I think it was the 1997 session.

SD: Yes, it was.

BB: Anyway, I understand they worked on it over at the Colonial [Hotel]. Some of the Power Company lawyers and some of the legislators who were key involvers, their being involved in the thing. Then it was right near the transmittal deadline for tax bills, and they brought it into the session and just gunned it through. So there was a lot about it to be kind of suspicious of, that’s for sure, and I think it ruined Racicot’s reputation. I think if people look back, they'll think of the, ‘Well, Marc Racicot was an uplifting speaker, and he was kind of Jack Armstrong, the all-American boy—by his photograph and by the way he conducted himself.’ But then there is this haunting memory about how he seemed to be in the background of electrical deregulation and how he, perhaps, wasn't as forthcoming as he might have had it appear in terms of having his fingerprints on it and that sort of thing.

Then he went to work for a law firm that was close to Enron, which was one of the big beneficiaries of this, as I understand it, I don’t remember the details real well. Racicot’s been very reclusive—

SD: Since then, yeah.

BB: Even when he was governor, he had a very small circle of friends, and those of us who knew him well didn't know him very well. Since then, he's retired back here in Montana. But he's pretty difficult to get ahold of, and he doesn't venture out among the public very often or anything like that.

SD: Yeah, and—

BB: So, he's always been kind of a mystery.

SD: —when I was in law school one summer, I clerked for, or worked for, Attorney General Mike Greely, and Marc Racicot was the prosecutor that counties would call in and he was a brilliant lawyer. Very good with juries.

BB: Won some phenomenal percentage of his cases, something like 97 percent or something of all the cases he ever tried.

SD: Yeah.

BB: These criminal cases.

SD: Yes. So, I got to know him a little bit then and then when he was attorney general, I knew him a little bit more. I was of the opinion, well, this guy he's a Republican, but he is a thinking guy and he's got some talent. He was Jack Armstrong, the all-American guy.

BB: One of the funny raps on him, you know how he'd sometimes talk at length about things, and he liked to use good words.

SD: Big words.

BB: Big words. He was eloquent and flowery and elegant in his speech, but you sometimes would scratch your head and think, 'well, I almost feel like a better person for just listening to that, but I'm not really entirely sure what the heck he said.'

SD: Well, I recall Chet Blaylock, who was another mentor of mine, but Chet told me the story of going to a debate between Marc Racicot and Dorothy Bradley when they were running for governor. Chet said he was walking out—it was at Eastern Montana College or something—and he said he was walking out, and he was walking out behind two ladies who had gone to the debate and they were good friends. He could tell that. He said they were arguing because one lady said that she was sure that Marc Racicot was pro-life. And the other lady said, "Oh no, he isn't. He is pro-choice." They were arguing about what Marc Racicot had said. As you know, the issue is one that you cannot straddle. You've got to be straightforward about it, whatever it is that you're doing. But Chet just loved it. He thought it was hilarious that these two ladies who were good friends, one thought absolutely to the right, one thought absolutely to the left. That may have been—

BB: And Marc charmed them so much.

SD: So much.

BB: That they both wanted to be where he was, and since they were strongly one way or the other, they assumed he had to be with them.

SD: Absolutely.

BB: Well, that's the way he was. That's the way he was, and I think to this day, many of us don't know that we ever knew him very well. That's the bottom line of it—even those of us who knew him personally didn't really know him very well.

You mentioned Dorothy Bradley. You want to tell us more about her?

SD: Dorothy Bradley, to me was of an age, and she's a little bit older than I am, but was just one of those pioneering people to me that started raising the issues on natural resources and was very committed to them. But she wasn't an absolutist—

BB: But wouldn't you agree she was a visionary?

SD: Yes.

BB: She thought in a forward way.

SD: And what it would mean down the road and could envision things were happening or could happen, or if Montana didn't take a stand this way right now what it might mean as far as water use is concerned, as far as air is concerned, as far as reclamation. I don't know—were you there when the 30 percent coal severance tax passed?

BB: I was. I was.

SD: I think about that often today because I don't think it would pass. I don't think it would.

BB: I was one of the diehards when Ted Schwinden saw the window of opportunity and wanted to open it from 30 percent down to 15 percent. I was one of the ones that voted against doing that. I remember thinking, 'Schwinden thinks these things through carefully.' But the whole idea was would we begin—would the companies begin to start new mines in Montana when they'd already started them down in Wyoming, which was closer to the market so they had the advantage that way. There was less overburden, or less dirt on top of the coal in Wyoming. But their tax was lower also, so if we lowered our tax to be competitive with theirs or even lowered it lower than theirs to be competitive with them because of these other considerations, then would companies want to begin all over again with their mines in Montana when they'd already established them in Wyoming? So, I wasn't sure it would bring us any new business, and I don't know what the verdict was on that completely.

SD: As I recall the Democrats had the majority after that had happened and had the majority in '91 in both the House and the Senate. There was a lot of discussion about bumping it back up because there had been—they had to reach a production goal, which then triggered the reduction, and they did. They got in there after Ted got that legislation through, and they

upped their production and met the goal, which triggered some kind of insurance that it would remain low. Well, when the Democrats got in and had the majority, there was a huge amount of pressure, and I was on this side of saying no. Because one of the other things that happened is, they increased production but laid off workers. So the theory was, we'll get more tax revenue, we'll get more mining, we'll get more jobs. Well we ended up getting less tax revenue and the fewer jobs.

BB: Lost the income. Yeah.

SD: We ended up, I remember the Taxation Committee at that point which had—were you on tax? Yeah, I think you were.

BB: Yeah.

SD: I remember [John] Harp definitely, but that was—we Democrats ended up killing the bill that would have bumped it back up.

BB: It would've taken it back up again.

SD: Yeah.

BB: [laughs] Well it's hard to know. It’s hard to know, but I think things—as we discussed before—I think the battle lines are more sharply drawn now than they were then. And things like people voting for the 15 percent and against the 30 percent and vice versa and so on over a period of about 10 years was a lot more unpredictable then because it was more freethinking then.

SD: Well, I think so. I think so.

BB: Ted Schwinden would be a perfect example of that. He was governor, but he called them like he saw them and lots of people did then. But the party line is more sharply drawn now, I think, than it's ever been in my lifetime.

Just a couple more quick names. Pat Williams?

SD: Yeah, definitely. Pat has been a mentor, and a, I think, oftentimes heroic figure, especially with pushing on natural resource issues and especially trying to get wilderness through, which President Reagan vetoed and led to Conrad Burns’ first election [victory] against Doc Melcher [John Melcher]. It takes some kind of heroic thing, to me, for a labor guy—dyed-in-the-wool labor guy, dyed in the wool supporter of people who work with their hands—and Pat was a teacher, but he grew up in Butte. He knew those folks. They were part of his life. To sit them down and explain to them why this was a good idea, or probably the biggest thing in his first term was the Libby Dam, re-reg dam, which would have covered up Kootenai Falls on the river.

Pat supported not building the re-reg dam because of what it would do to Kootenai Falls, what it would do to the spiritual sites for the Salish-Kootenai people, for what it would do to the natural resource—the fish resource—and at the end of the day how much it was going to cost and what the benefits were. Finding out that the Army Corps of Engineers had jiggered the books to make it appear that it was going to be a heck of a good deal.

BB: I didn't know that part of the story, but I've always thought Pat was really courageous, in that regard because it was a big multi-, multi-million-dollar project in his district, and he pretty much put the boots to it.

SD: He did. He did, and that was courageous. Actually, I forget why I was there, but I was actually at the Libby Chamber of Commerce meeting when Pat announced his position, which—

BB: Oh, he announced it there?

SD: Yeah, he did. Yeah. He also announced in Great Falls, a little closer to home, he announced at one point, he said, "You know, you people in Great Falls have got a—you've got a pretty good deal here with Malmstrom Air Force Base. What's going to happen when there's no more Malmstrom? You ought to get together on this." Oh, my god! The Chamber of Commerce people are just furious. Pat was against Malmstrom. Well, he wasn't against Malmstrom. He was against not thinking. So…

BB: Well, that's typical of him. I got to know him pretty well because I worked over at the university [University of Montana], as I think you know, for six and a half years, I think. Several of those were over at the Center for the Rocky Mountain West, and Pat Williams and I were both senior fellows there so we did some teaching and researching and that sort of thing. Pat and I spent a little bit of time b.s.-ing, and we're both mostly Irish, so we laugh at the same things. We'd just send each other into hilarics, if that's a word. [laughs] So, I've got a real soft spot in my heart for him, but he, again, is kind of like Bill Yellowtail. We loved Bill dearly, and I guess I could say that about Pat but I don't think I would've ever gotten a vote out of him.

SD: [laughs] Yeah.

BB: Couple more. Denny Rehberg.

SD: Denny was—I had an initial problem with Denny because he ran against another friend of mine who was a Republican, Harrison G. Fagg, in Billings. Harrison wrote the hard rock mining reclamation act and put up with an enormous amount of personal danger.

BB: That was in the Legislature.

SD: That was in the Legislature, yeah.

BB: They didn't run against each other for Congress, but Harrison was a sitting Republican legislator—

SD: Majority Leader of the House.

BB: House Majority Leader from Billings, and Denny Rehberg—kind of a young upstart with a lot of self-confidence—beat Harrison in the primary.

SD: Beat him in the primary.

BB: And you knew Harrison real well, because Harrison—

SD: And I knew Harrison real well.

BB: —was a real, genuine environmentalist in a Republican [unintelligible].

SD: Yeah, yeah. He was a champion. But then I got to know Denny and his sidekick Leo Giacometto, and those two boys, especially during Senator Burns' terms, they shaped the Republican Party. And it was a pugilistic approach, where I think it hadn't been before, because Denny and Leo, who I both enjoy, as you said, I enjoy the heck out of them, but I don't think I'd ever get a vote out of them. Those boys, they were tough. They were tough.

BB: I think both of them kind of prided themselves as being tough guys.

SD: Yeah.

BB: I think you'd probably not pay them a compliment if you told them you thought they were cerebral and intellectual and thoughtful.

SD: Oh my God!

BB: [laughs] They wouldn't take too well to that.

SD: Leo would pretend he didn't know what those words meant, but he'd know.

BB: He'd know.

Big Jim Murry.

SD: Big Jim Murry is—

BB: AFL-CIO leader.

SD: AFL-CIO leader for a number of years and a deep believer in social justice and that unions—he believes strongly in unions—in the idea of unions and in the idea of unions being able to help lift working people up. A guy who was also a visionary. I think one of the reasons Jim Murry got all kinds of hell at different points from some members—the building trades workers—because they thought Jim was too green. There was a fracture in the labor movement between some of the other unions and Jim Murry, and some of the building trades people. But I always saw that, and I thought, 'Well, there's a reason Jim Murry is kind of maybe being a little bit green, because if the companies are all focused on beating back these environmental folks, they're not beating up on the labor folks.' So there was a practical reason, but also he really believed—as I think most Montanans believe—that if we're going to do this we better do it right, and if we do it right, it's going to be good for everybody. That's a vision that I think is sorely lacking these days.

BB: I had a conversation with him one time on an airliner flying back to Washington, D.C. We just happened to be seated next to each other and he mentioned something to me that's stuck with me because I don't think I've ever had a major thinker—and I'd consider Jim Murry to be one—articulate this before. Jefferson said something about the best government is the government closest to the people, and he's the great saint of the Democratic Party. But the Republicans think a lot of him too for statements like that. Keep government small, keep it close to the people. I remember Murry saying on the airliner that that had its place and that was probably indefensible thing, but that powerful special interests could control smaller entities of government easier than they could big entities of government. He said that's why you have some states with, in his opinion, horrible and unprogressive laws, but that the national government seemed better able to kind of protect itself from that sort of thing and was harder to influence by money. Now, that may not be the case anymore with the political action committees [PACs]. Because the conversation I had with him was 30 or so years ago and that was before this campaign financing business and that a corporation is a person for political purposes and stuff. That wasn't going on then, and he felt that the national government was a step further away from being controlled by money and that they could make decisions more in the overall public interest. Isn't that kind of an interesting thought?

SD: Yeah, it is.

BB: I'd never heard anybody explain it like that.

SD: Yeah, yeah, it is. But thinking about it just briefly, I mean, you've got—if you don't have some kind of power to balance out the power that money automatically gives you—now, whether that's an active NGO movement or an active small parties or large parties or large unions, if you don't have some kind of balance, it's going to be out of balance. The Citizens United stuff, one of the all-time worst decisions from the U.S. Supreme Court—it's beyond the pale to me. Reading that decision and reading some of the, frankly, foolish misguided thoughts that those Supreme Court justices had was shocking to me.

BB: And it wasn't just a bone-headed decision. It’s a long-term dagger at the throat of our democracy.

SD: Yeah, it is. It is. And that's sad, very sad.

BB: Couple more. Jim Messina.

SD: Jim Messina was—

BB: And for the benefit of people since he never held public office—

SD: Right.

BB: You go ahead. Tell them.

SD: Sure. Jim Messina is a bright kid who has just turned 50. I was at his 50th birthday party over the weekend in beautiful Clyde Park, Montana.

BB: Dorothy Bradley, incidentally, mentioned to me that you stayed in the same bunkhouse there that I stayed in.

SD: Yes, yes. There was a plaque there that “Bob Brown slept here.” Kind of like George Washington.

BB: Yes. No doubt.

SD: No doubt. But Jim is a bright kid from Boise, Idaho, came to the University of Montana on a track scholarship, and got connected and started working on political campaigns.

BB: Well, he got connected with Senator Baucus [Max Baucus], didn’t he? Wasn’t that—

SD: Well, Baucus didn't come until later.

BB: Oh, I see.

SD: He [Messina] started out with, I think, Dan Kemmis’ campaign for—

BB: State legislator and Speaker of the House from here in Missoula.

SD: Speaker of the House from here in Missoula, and then later mayor in Missoula. Then [Messina] started working on Democratic Party campaigns. He just would work 25 hours a day, eight days a week. He also was bright and aggressive and funny—incredibly witty kid. And I say, kid, although he just turned 50, and he would punch me out if he heard me say that.

BB: But we remember him as a kid.

SD: We remember him that way. But we also remember him as Barack Obama's campaign manager, which—

BB: Barack Obama's first campaign, Messina was his national campaign manager, is that right?

SD: Second campaign. Second campaign was the national manager and put together the new way of thinking about campaigns and trying to identify voters and trying to identify voters who might be reached by certain messages. It was pretty revolutionary. After the campaign, Jim did not go into government like he did after the first campaign, when he was the deputy chief of staff [in the White House] to Rahm Emanuel. But he started—

BB: And Rahm Emanuel was the chief of staff for Clinton, right?

SD: No, for Obama. In Obama's first term. I think, unless I'm…we'll have to check on that. [He was in Obama's White House.] He opened up his own political consulting firm, and now it's quite successful. I mean he consults all over the world. He consulted on the Brexit issue in Britain and has consulted on campaigns all over the world. And he's—

BB: But he maintains a ranch in Montana, where he at least spends time in the summer, right?

SD: Yes, well, and during the winters, he's trying to do more work from Montana.

BB: So from Montana, still kind of a quaint small town state, he's one of the guys that kind of made it in the big time.

SD: Yeah, and if you—the talk TV shows. He's been on all the talk TV shows on Sunday morning, and he's been on all the radio programs and—

BB: Giving analysis on—

SD: Giving pithy analysis about one thing or another.

BB: Eric Feaver.

SD: Eric is a guy who plays it very close to the vest, is consistently thinking.

BB: Now, he's the head of the teachers' union [MEA / MFT] and the public employees' union [MFPE] pretty much now in Montana. He's been around for a quarter of a century at least I know of in these positions of political responsibility, and he keeps on keeping on. He's been somewhat of an influence for a long time, and again kind of mysterious, I think, as I think you

were about to say, because people don't quite know where he fits in but he's always seems to be pretty much on the scene of where the power is. [Feaver retired from the MFPE in 2020.]

SD: Yes, and knowing where the power is and knowing who the candidates might be or not be. And being very dedicated to moving the teachers' union, at least, in the direction that he wants it to move. Now, most of the time it's very progressive, if we can use that word. But I also remember that when Chet Blaylock ran against Marc Racicot for—

BB: For governor.

SD: —for governor, Eric engineered the endorsement of Marc Racicot because it looked like Racicot was hands-down winner for the second term, and Chet Blaylock, who had been a loyal Billings education associate and a member of the union—

BB: Member the teachers' union forever.

SD: Forever.

BB: Reliable member of the legislature for teachers.

SD: You know, that guy bled teachers' union blood, there is no doubt about it. But the teachers' union ended up endorsing Racicot. So, Eric took care of his folks.

BB: Well, he and I are friends now, but there was a little friction between—I'm speaking of Eric Feaver, because the same thing happened to me. I was a teacher, a high school classroom teacher, a life member of Eric's union and helped him with some significant things during the legislature. But it wasn't 100 percent of the time, and I think that was what he was concerned about, because he used his influence to support my opponent for governor. They supported me in the primary, but not in the general election, which was kind of a strange wrinkle. Anyway, so that hurt my feelings, just like I know it did Chet Blaylock's. You think, 'Well, if I ever earned and deserved anything, certainly it was the endorsement of my fellow schoolteachers.' But anyway, that's not how it worked out, and Feaver, I think we'd agree, really is—

SD: A strategic chess master.

BB: He is for a fact. He is for a fact.

SD: He moves many moves down the board.

BB: I think that's absolutely true.

Looking back over a long and useful life and a political career and involvement and then you've been able to put some time between yourself and your political involvement to kind of understand these things. Do you have any concluding thoughts?

SD: To say that I have been disappointed in the current political atmosphere and I think Washington, D.C., is poisonous.

BB: We're talking the period of Trump.

SD: The period of Trump. It’s poisonous. It's evil. I think it's evil and a threat to our democracy. But what concerns me a lot, because I don't know that I—at one point I used to think, ‘Boy, I can influence stuff in national politics. People will come to me for advice.’ Well they don't. But I want to see the Montana Legislature be what it was when I was there, by and large. I think we were beginning to lose some of that, but there were still—well, yourself, John Harp. John Mercer—another person we haven't really talked about. But seeing some of the shenanigans that go on now, they wouldn't have happened. I think that's partly because of term limits. But I think it's also because there's this, almost a disdain for thinking, or a disdain for what has happened in the past. There may be real good reasons to change things, but there may be real good reasons because it was already tried and it failed spectacularly. And that's distressing that the goodness you get with a citizen legislature is that you get kind of that old notion of the stalwarts who are going to go out and plow their fields and come and do some laws and then go home.

BB: The citizen’s legislature.

SD: A citizen’s legislature. I think there is just a value to us as a sole society to have a citizen's legislature, and in order for that to work well, you have to think and some good faith and some decency. That's sorely distressing to me.

BB: What do you see looking ahead?

SD: I think, I think we're going to need almost a revolution in the way that we think about government. We need to stop—you know, the people who are in it for themselves are going to get weeded out. It's a small state. We all know each other. We know, because my cousin played Legion ball with your nephew or something. But we're going to have to have some revolutionary thought, that is revolutionary in the sense to go back and be decent to one another, because it hasn't been [that way recently]. Some of the shenanigans—and I haven't been—I never lobbied after I left the legislature. I don't want to. I didn't go up to the last legislative session to make a swan song or a drive-by wave. They're going to do their business. But I want them—I want them to think, more than anything. I want them to be visionary, and I am not seeing much vision, which is sorely distressing.

BB: It's hard to know too, because I agree with everything you've said, what it might take to cause that change.

SD: Yeah. And it's almost like a revolution to me. It's not a, ‘Oh, well, we need to do this, and we can do this.’ It’s going to be, ‘Ok. Quit screwing around here. Think about what we're doing. Think about what happens to people. Think about what happens to the environment. Think about what happens to our democracy, way more.’ We need to have some forward-thinking individuals.

BB: Shall we end it?

SD: Sure.

BB: Well, greatly appreciate your public service, Steve.

SD: Oh, thank you, Bob.

[End of Interview]