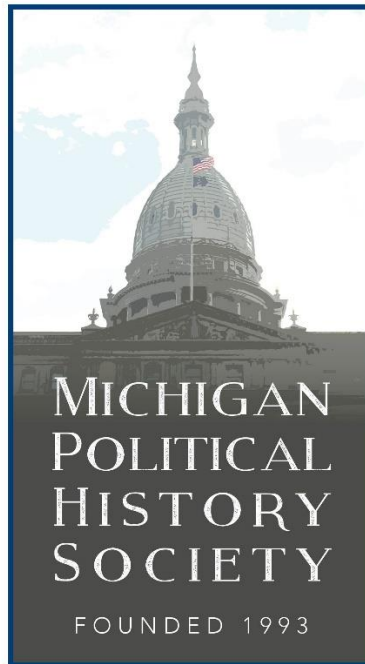


L. Brooks Patterson

Interviewed by
Bill Ballenger
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Bill Ballenger: This interview is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History.

Bill Ballenger: We're here today with Oakland County Executive and former prosecutor L. Brooks Patterson. Mr. Patterson, thanks for being the guest of Michigan Political History Society.

L. Brooks Patte: Pleasure, Bill, pleasure.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask you, you were born when?

L. Brooks Patte: Four of 1939 in the city of Detroit.

Bill Ballenger: And how did you go up through grade school, high school, what have you?

L. Brooks Patte: Well, I was living in Detroit, went to grade school at a public school called Cook School, Puritan and Greenville I think it was. And after that I left the public system and went on down to the U of D High School, a Jesuit Institution. Left that in '57 and went to college at U of D. I graduated from U of D in '61. I taught school for a year at Catholic Central with the goal in mind of having my summers free so I could write the great American novel. And so that's why I really wanted time off. When I finished that first year of teaching I realized that even going in the Army would be easier than trying to teach sophomores how to conjugate the verb to be. So I left to join the Army for a couple years. Then came home, there's a long story about how I ended up going to law school but it's a good story. Graduated from law school in '67 and the rest is history. I went to work at the Oakland County Prosecutor's office.

Bill Ballenger: What about your family life growing up, your father, mother>

L. Brooks Patte: Mom and Dad had both immigrated from a small town in Indiana called Loogootee. Came up here and they raised three children here, my twin brother and my sister who's older and myself. Both Mom and Dad are now deceased, and I lost my twin brother back in '07, so it's my sister and I who are carrying on the family traditions.

Bill Ballenger: 1967, you're an assistant county prosecutor. Tom Plunckett, a Democrat, is in the office. He was elected prosecutor the next year. How do you remember that particular time and what happened then?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, I had left law school and went to join a small firm. I told Mom and Dad, "I'm getting out of Detroit. Too much traffic." So I went to a small town and I looked for a small town environment, and I joined a small firm on a two-lane street called Big Beaver in Troy. So much for my small town atmosphere. Those guys in the firm had been in the prosecutor's office so they facilitated me an appointment with Tom Plunckett who was the chief assistant in those days. And

I went to work for Tom, then he moved up to the elected position in the next election.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so he was elected in '68.

L. Brooks Patte: That'd be right.

Bill Ballenger: And so you were on staff there and then what, did Tom get a little nervous that you might-

L. Brooks Patte: I think so. I was promoted very quickly through the ranks. I never lost a case when I was a prosecutor. I became the first senior trial lawyer in that office, which meant I was cherry picking the best cases, the high profile cases. And I was starting to make a name for myself and I think Tom got a little nervous. He's a Democrat, I'm Republican.

Bill Ballenger: Were you active as a Republican at that time?

L. Brooks Patte: No, not really. I think I was a volunteer. I wasn't even a precinct delegate, but my Republican leanings were known in the office. In fact, there was only two of us, me and another guy named Alex McGary. So I think at some point in time Tom got a little spooked and brought me in. Again, never lost a trial for him. And he said, "I'm gonna let you go." And I said, "For what? Obviously it's not my performance." And he said, "No, you criticized a judge," which I did, Judge Beer. "And that violates policy." So I said, "Show me the policy?" Well, there wasn't one of course. "I'm not gonna show you. Sign here." I said no, so he fired me.

Bill Ballenger: At that point, were you inspired to run against him or had you already made up your mind that you were maybe gonna do it?

L. Brooks Patte: I told him on the way out after he fired me, I said, "Well, you can fire me, I'm an at-will appointee. But I'm gonna call a news conference tomorrow announcing I'm running against you." And I did and some intervening things happened which took my name ID from nowhere. Now, Tom's an elected official with a grand jury and he's handing out indictments politically and timing it, I'm down here. But I had a case that took me into the front page of the paper and on television with Cronkite.

Bill Ballenger: And that was busing?

L. Brooks Patte: That was the busing case.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. Well tell us a little more about the busing case.

L. Brooks Patte: When I was a prosecutor, a woman came in, she had what I considered to be an obscene magazine. In those days we didn't have a warrants division, so anybody could come in, sort of shop, go down the hall. And she'd been told no, no, no.

She came to my office and I said, "Hell yeah that's obscene." And so I wrote the warrant charging the sale of an obscene magazine to a minor, this lady's daughter was 14 or 15 at the time. And went to trial and got a conviction. Well, when I was fired, that lady looked me up because she appreciated the fact that I helped her out. That lady's name was Irene McCabe. And when she came to meet me, I don't remember Irene from that situation, but she came to me and she said, "I'd like to have you represent my homeowners group." Homeowners? Well, they have accidents, they fall down stairs, they get divorced, they get hit by trains, this is great. I got built in clientele because I was now out on my own.

L. Brooks Patte: So we met, and the homeowners group turned out to be the North Side Action Group, which was the north side of Pontiac, who was fighting the intra-city busing order of Damon Keith. And about six months later, the judge, I think it was Stephen Roth, decided it was such a good thing for Pontiac, let's do the tri-county area. And that's when it hit the fan and everybody was upset for a lot of valid reasons and I was the only lawyer out there who take that first case. So that's when the name ID started spiking up and Tom couldn't control it.

Bill Ballenger: Irene McCabe, Irish name, but she was Greek wasn't she?

L. Brooks Patte: Oh, she was Greek yeah.

Bill Ballenger: And was she a real true grassroots activist?

L. Brooks Patte: Yes, she was. On this issue.

Bill Ballenger: She didn't really have a partisan ax to grind.

L. Brooks Patte: I think she might have had some other issues like she was fighting pornography that kind of stuff with the daughter. But this one took her basically to headline status. We were starting to fade so I came up with this idea, "Irene, I think it's time you walk to Washington." It was about a 47-day walk. And I walked from here to Pontiac down to Square Lake and then when the cameras left I left and flew into Washington 45 days later and joined her as she came over the Washington Bridge. But, she was a gamer. She worked hard and she was a good spokesman and she really kept the pot stirred. Because we were trying to get a constitutional amendment through Congress. And we had to file a discharge petition. And I think the leader of the House at the time, a congressman named Gerry Ford who signed it. So we were getting momentum. Then eventually it all got caught up in court decisions. And after I had left and after the movement had been in court for a number of years, the anti-busing forces prevailed.

Bill Ballenger: When you ran in '72 against Plunckett for prosecutor, Richard Nixon was on top of the ballot running for re-election as president against George McGovern. Was that as big or bigger a factor in your knocking off Plunckett or do you think you probably would have beaten him anyway based on all the busing stuff?

L. Brooks Patte: Well, busing was a huge factor. It made my name not a household word but certainly identified me. You're right, Nixon I think swept 49 states that election. If you remember November 2nd back in 1972, it rained all day. It's a blessing for Republican candidates. And still in those days it was a Republican county. So I'm running as a Republican in a Republican county with a strong ticket at the top, rain kept a lot of people home, and I had a good case that the people got to know me. All those factors allowed me to beat the incumbent by about 10,000 votes. It was 51-49.

Bill Ballenger: The busing thing, did that play out into your prosecutorial reign but you were kind of not concerned with that anymore because as you say it was all caught up in the courts?

L. Brooks Patte: That's right, it was in the courts and after I got elected prosecutor, I wasn't going to represent, nor could I represent, the North Side, then it had become the national action group. So we parted friends. But there was never any reason for me to get back involved with the busing movement. It sort of, like I say, wound its way through the courts.

Bill Ballenger: A lot of people thought Irene McCabe might have a political future but I don't think she ever ran for anything, did she?

L. Brooks Patte: You know, I think she ran, I think, for county commissioner in the Pontiac area. And I think she was defeated because she was running as a Republican in Pontiac and it was a tough race.

Bill Ballenger: Once you became prosecutor, what were some of your biggest cases?

L. Brooks Patte: Well, the biggest ones that I tried or the biggest ones that were in the County are two different ones. I tried and convicted the two young men that kidnapped Bob Stimple's boy, a couple of young kids from Ypsilanti, eastern Michigan I believe. They didn't have a misdemeanor. On a lark they grab Tim Stimple, held him in a trunk for three days, and it worked out all right. We gave the \$50,000. Interesting thing, Bill, it was in Bloomfield Township. I went down to the police station, I was prosecutor. There were more security officers from GM than there were police officers. They have an army. And we said, "We need \$50,000 for the ransom." Boom, within two hours there's \$50,000 marked bills with the dye on them. And it was just incredible what goes on behind the scenes of these big corporations. But anyway, it turned out they got the money, they released him, we caught them the next day. That was a good case to try.

L. Brooks Patte: The ones that still sort of bother me was on my watch, Jim Hoffa was kidnapped in Oakland County at their at the Red Fox in I think it was Bloomfield. And then of course in the mid-'70s, '76, '77, with the four children in Oakland County who were kidnapped and killed.

Bill Ballenger: The blue AMC Gremlin, child killer.

L. Brooks Patte: Well, I always thought that was a red herring. But the four kids were kidnapped and murdered. But they weren't murdered, they were alive for a week or 10 days. Somehow this kidnapper had a way to stash them and then kill them after he had his with them. That was a terrorizing era in Oakland County. Every mother walked their child to school and was there to pick them up. It was sort of a mental and physical lockdown in this county. And that crime was never solved.

Bill Ballenger: It was never solved. Do you have any theories about what could have happened?

L. Brooks Patte: I've got a lot of theories but nothing that's worth what you paid for them. I think whoever was doing it could have been some young man that the parents said, "All right, rather than report him to the police, let's put him in an institution. The public's protected and yet he's gonna get better care." Maybe he was killed in another incident, maybe locked up in another state. We checked out all those theories. That blue Gremlin you mentioned, some woman recalled seeing a blue Gremlin in a parking lot near the drugstore where Timmy King was kidnapped. So we spent months chasing blue Gremlins, and I think it was a red herring.

Bill Ballenger: What about no plea bargains? Was that part of your campaign?

L. Brooks Patte: Yes it was.

Bill Ballenger: In '72 and onward through the '70s?

L. Brooks Patte: Yep. I ran against Plunckett. And Tom was a fairly liberal Democrat who did not like the penalties associated with possession of drugs. If you're in possession of drugs or if you sold drugs, that's even worse, you have a 20-year minimum. Well, I checked two departments, the Pontiac police department and the narcotic enforcement team, and I checked 300 arrests for sale of drugs. Every one got a deal, plea bargain, because Tom didn't want to invoke the penalty. So that was the theme of my campaign. Elect me as prosecutor, I'll be tough, I won't plea bargain with drug pushers. I got elected, plea bargain ended with drug pushers. It worked. People said, "Oh, you're gonna back up the courts." It didn't. In fact it actually accelerated because people knew there was no plea coming so we dealt with it on the first court date.

L. Brooks Patte: So then I went to armed robberies. Then I went to B and Es because people are defenseless in their home. And then we added people on probation of parole because they already had a bite of the apple. So we continued every year to expand the no pleas as far as I thought was reasonable. I'm guessing now 60, 70% of the criminal cases were in what we call a no plea policy.

Bill Ballenger: So you were reelected in '76. Do you remember anything about that campaign?

L. Brooks Patte: In '76, the guy who was a friend of Tom Plunckett's who had endorsed me for the job, he was so upset that I beat his friend that he ran against me. That was Tim Dylum. And Tim was a friend of mine and ...

Bill Ballenger: But you won that one fairly easily.

L. Brooks Patte: Fairly easily, and then I've led the ticket ever since.

Bill Ballenger: Now, '78 comes along and you decide you're gonna run for United States Senate.

L. Brooks Patte: That's when Griffin gave it up.

Bill Ballenger: Very curious situation where Bob Griffin in '77 said, "I quit. I'm not gonna run again."

L. Brooks Patte: "I can no longer be effective. It's time for a younger man." He just kept stabbing himself.

Bill Ballenger: Right. And all these other people said, "Okay, we'll run to take his place," including you. But the others all backed out. But you said, "To heck with it."

L. Brooks Patte: Well, what happened after about nine or 11 months, whatever it was, that's a little foggy now, Griffin got back in.

Bill Ballenger: I know.

L. Brooks Patte: I'm sure at the insistence of Milliken. Got back in and so the other candidates were all good guys, George Roche and some of the other fellows around town, they dropped out. And I said, "This is crap. I'm not getting out of this race." And so it was me against Griffin. Well, he's a former Senate majority leader, what were my chances? But that was more I think on stubbornness on my part because I wasn't gonna be that easily pushed around by the powers behind closed doors.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, now I think, if I'm not mistaken, that Bob polished you off pretty easily in the primary.

L. Brooks Patte: Well, not so bad. It was like 60-40. I think it should have been a whole lot worse than that. I'm an upstart prosecutor going statewide against a former Senate majority leader and he can only beat me by 20 points, I thought it was respectable.

Bill Ballenger: But a lot of what you said against him was actually used by Carl Levin in the fall.

L. Brooks Patte: Exactly. I ran around and I had 50 people go around the state to the 50 biggest cities, and we'd sit on the corner and say, "If you can tell me what the number

211 stands for we'll give you \$211." Well, I think it was a Carl Levin aide who knew. Other than that nobody knew the answer. 211 was the number of roll call votes that Bob Griffin missed when he said he no longer was gonna be involved, could be effective. He hated that.

- Bill Ballenger: Well now, did you really want to be a US Senator? Were you getting a little bored with being prosecutor at that time? You'd been prosecutor six years.
- L. Brooks Patte: I always thought I had the talent to do something on a bigger stage. I still have that feeling but I'm not going to try anymore. I told the audience, I was born in '39 so what does that make me, 46.
- Bill Ballenger: Well, you ran three times for statewide office in the space of four years and you've never run since.
- L. Brooks Patte: Well, but the third one you can't count that one.
- Bill Ballenger: Well, that was attorney general. They persuaded you.
- L. Brooks Patte: Oh yeah, Dick Headlee came to me.
- Bill Ballenger: We'll get to that in a minute. We'll get to that in a minute. But in '80, Reagan is running against Carter and you're running for a third term as prosecutor, so what happened then?
- L. Brooks Patte: I won and Reagan won.
- Bill Ballenger: Right. It's 1982, Governor Milliken is not running again after 14 years. And you are running for governor. You had three major opponents, two really big ones, Jim Brickley, Lieutenant Governor, and Dick Headlee.
- L. Brooks Patte: Dick Headlee.
- Bill Ballenger: And Jack Welbourne, the state senator from Kalamazoo. So what happened in that race from your perspective?
- L. Brooks Patte: I did very well in the tri-county area where they knew me.
- Bill Ballenger: Absolutely. You won the big three counties. You won Wayne, Oakland, Macomb.
- L. Brooks Patte: The more you went out-state, the less my name ID was a factor, was the benefit for me. I remember getting a call from I think I believe it was the Rotary up in Traverse City. And that's a big club as you know. I think they've got 700 members, they hit oil, they're into philanthropy, it's a big club. And they called me and said, "Do you wanna come up and speak?" I was like, "Oh heck yes." That's the biggest club in Michigan. So I jumped in a motor home with two or three of my aides, supporters actually. And we drove up to Traverse City. And in

the old days, back in '81, '82, I think there was only one hotel in town, that was the Holiday Inn. So we drove into town and we're coming around the curve and there's the marquee, and it says, "Welcome, L. Brick Peterson." I turned to the guys in the motor home, I says, "We're gonna have a problem up here." Needless to say, we didn't carry Traverse county. But where I was known, I did fine.

Bill Ballenger: Well not only that, statewide vote, it was a cliffhanger, right up to the end. You were really close, neck and neck all three, it was almost the closest three-way race.

L. Brooks Patte: What Headlee had that I didn't have, he was present of the JC. There's a JC chapter in every city. He was a member of the Mormon Church, there's a lot of Mormon churches throughout the state. He was involved with Amway, and there's an Amway dealer in every town. So he already had a network around the state that he could call on. I didn't have that. And he beat me fair and square, I never had a problem with that.

Bill Ballenger: Well, Jim Brickley probably cut into you a little bit down in this area because he was a Detroit city councilman in the past and so forth. So then, after the election, there's a state convention, and Jim Blanchard is nominated by the Democrats, same primary that nominated Headlee. And the party poobahs come to you and say, "Hey Brooks, you gotta take one for the team here. You gotta run.

L. Brooks Patte: That's exactly what it was. My twin brother had a place up in Michaway at the time, and I went up there just to heal my wounds. I was tired, I was physically exhausted, it's a big state, broke, from campaign sense. I never have worn a three-piece suit since that race, never have. I've got this aversion to a vest. And I'm up there in my brother's place, just sort of cooling, and Tom Brennan, I don't know how he found me in the woods, and he wouldn't say no. And he came back the next day, and finally, like you said.

Bill Ballenger: Because Tom Brennan was the Lieutenant Governor nominee with Headlee.

L. Brooks Patte: With Headlee.

Bill Ballenger: Former Supreme Court-

L. Brooks Patte: We need you to take on Frank Kelly. You're the perfect guy for that because you're a prosecutor. Now, Kelly had been in office I think by that time 112 years. There was no way in hell I was gonna beat him, and I had no money. So they draft me in September and the race is in November, so I've got 60 days to take on Kelly.

Bill Ballenger: It was almost impossible.

L. Brooks Patte: So I never count that as a loss.

Bill Ballenger: No, you shouldn't, absolutely not. The greatest race you had was the gubernatorial Republican primary, and that was so close, just a few percentage points difference. What about capital punishment?

L. Brooks Patte: I was prosecutor during the '70s, '72 to '88. I think the first riots started around '69, we're going back in history, around '76, and we were shooting for the '78 election. And the reason I even got into it, even though I still believe that it's an appropriate punishment for certain crimes, a young woman was kidnapped by two guys, I think her name was Monica Hockey, kidnapped by two guys, Kyle Johnson and Jeff Coyle. I can't believe I remember their names. And we brought them in for interrogation, and my chief assistant was Dick Thompson. And Dick, after going through all the advisement and rights and so forth, he said they admitted to the killing, "Well, why'd you kill her?" And their response was, "We'd never seen anybody die before, wanted to see what it felt like." I thought, "You know, when we get to that point in our society where we enjoy killing, whatever you want to call it, but kill people just for the fun of it, for the thrill of it, we ought to have a punishment that responds to the depravity of that crime." So that was my first petition drive for capital punishment. We fell short on votes, on signatures, so we never made it to the ballot. I started all over again, shooting in for the '82 ballot. And we got there. You remember?

Bill Ballenger: I remember, yeah.

L. Brooks Patte: You know what happened. They filed a utility challenge. And they were gonna block pass-throughs, remember that whole issue?

Bill Ballenger: Right.

L. Brooks Patte: And so the utility put a question on the ballot. We weren't part of it. And the Supreme Court came down and said, "Frank Kelly's old ruling that you had four years to collect signatures was invalid, it really is six months. And Patterson by the way, you took more than six months to get your signatures, you're off the ballot." We weren't even in court. And so they threw us off the ballot. And I tell you what, you gotta raise several hundred thousand dollars, you've gotta give the minimum of 750 speeches. And it takes a lot out of you.

Bill Ballenger: It sure does. So at that point you decided, "I've given it two good shots and it should've been on the ballot the second time. To hell with it. I'm going on to other things."

L. Brooks Patte: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: So you ran again in '84 and were re-elected to your fourth and final term.

L. Brooks Patte: Right.

Bill Ballenger: Do you remember that race at all? That was Reagan running for reelection. Do you remember your opponent then?

L. Brooks Patte: Am I missing something?

Bill Ballenger: It's okay. No, no, it's all right. It shows you your earliest opponents were the ones you remember.

L. Brooks Patte: Are the only ones you remember.

Bill Ballenger: It's okay.

L. Brooks Patte: I can't remember.

Bill Ballenger: So you're elected big and then you serve out a fourth and final term. And in '88 you decide, "I've had enough."

L. Brooks Patte: Well, you know, you can only try so many cop killings, only try so many murders or child abuse cases. And I used to pick the cases where I wanted to make my mark. I always tried every case I could where a parolee had gotten out and come back and killed somebody because I wanted to show how corrupt and mismanaged the parole system was in the state. I did all that, and I had the pleasure of arguing in the United States Supreme Court way back in 1974, so what I was doing after the 16 years, I was climbing the same mountains.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

L. Brooks Patte: And I thought, "Well, it may be time to step out and see what's out there." And I left the office in '88, eventually started my own firm, myself and two lawyers I'd been practicing with, and then Murphy retired from county executive in '92, and I knew then, you either come back now or you're gonna be out forever because there will be a replacement.

Bill Ballenger: Did you have it in your mind while you were prosecutor that you would perhaps like to be executive some day?

L. Brooks Patte: The last couple years. Because I knew Murphy, who was my predecessor, was going to retire at some point, then he had a couple strokes. I knew he was clearly gonna be out of here in '92. So I went out, made a living, I was practicing law, biding my time, then Murphy helped out Daniel T. Murphy, and then I threw my hat in the ring, and I was unopposed in the Republican primary. I went on to defeat the Democrat challenger, who I do remember was Betty Howell, who was the former labor secretary for the state of Michigan, labor director.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right. Dan Murphy was the only executive, wasn't he, before you?

L. Brooks Patte: He was the first in the state.

Bill Ballenger: He was the first.

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah.

Bill Ballenger: So you're still the second.

L. Brooks Patte: I'm the second.

Bill Ballenger: So you guys have covered a lot of territory here, right?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, he covered I think around 18 years. I'm in my 19th so I have, if it means anything, a longer serving record. I'm running next year.

Bill Ballenger: Right. You were known as the quintessential pro law and order, capital punishment, no plea bargaining prosecutor. All of a sudden, you find yourself county executive. Did you inherit responsibilities and challenges in that job that came with the job itself? Or did you feel something within yourself about the issues that you had to deal with as county executive that you now finally found yourself in charge of?

L. Brooks Patte: Prosecuting attorney is a pretty narrow field. You wear the white hat and you lock up the bad guys, and you do that year after year after year. I knew, when you asked me why I ran for senate and/or for the governor, I knew I had a lot to offer beyond just being a good prosecutor. I felt I had other talents. I think I have an ample vision for where I think I can take a county or a state. I was trying to branch out where I had more room to really strut my stuff and show people that I was creative and innovative and so forth. When this came along in '92, it released me from those years of being stuck in a pigeon hole. I think the public is satisfied that I had a lot of talent, a lot to offer. And the county, as you now know, is, with the team I have in place, I don't take all the bows, is a very well-managed county.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think that the job of executive, and maybe it's a lot different now than it was when you began back in 1993, '94, '95, is a lot different than it was when Dan Murphy was head of it? Did Dan Murphy look at being executive, you think, differently than you do?

L. Brooks Patte: He came to the exec's office. I should point out he was the first in the state, then I think Bill Lucas came in in Wayne County. He was on the board of auditors. He was basically a very honest guy and he was, by trade, a bean counter. Our books were always balanced and so forth. I don't know that he was given to start these different programs, which I take as really sort of marks my days in office with the Automation Allies, the Emerging Sectors, the Count Your Steps, The Brooksie Way. We can name a lot of programs, but I think I've added quality of life issues, the Hearts, Beats, and Eats, Fire and Ice. We do that because I think I've got the opportunity to expand the role of what account exec traditionally does.

L. Brooks Patte: And when I first got here, I knew that I wanted to run a tight ship and hopefully leave office at some point in time from the public's perspective, he worked hard, he was an honest guy. It wasn't right away that I was finding myself down the kind of development. I was sort of wandering the halls, checking on all the departments. But more and more, it was like this clarion call. I was taken back to the economic development department because there I eventually settled in and said, "This is where I can have some real value added. I can go out and market Oakland County. I can create programs that market Oakland County, whether its Hearts, Beats, and Eats, whether we have the Medical Main Street." So that's really where my niche is. I'm a marketer. I'm an ambassador for Oakland County. The rest of the department, I obviously spend time with the Office of Management Budget. Again, we've done things there that are unique. The three year budget, no other county has it. But you ask me where I spend most of my time, it's probably down in the Department of Economic Development.

Bill Ballenger: So you seem to really love the job.

L. Brooks Patte: I do.

Bill Ballenger: And even though you probably still have the same feelings about you'd like to perform on a bigger stage like statewide, nationally, or whatever, do you just have the feeling that timing just wasn't right, and you've passed the moment when you could ever do that again? Or have you really reached the point where you've decided, you know, this is really where I belong, this is what I've been tremendously successful at, and I'm happy?

L. Brooks Patte: I think I jumped in too early in my career for that race for governor. I'd only been prosecutor for ten years. If I had to do it over, I probably would have seasoned myself a little more. And I always knew that I had talent that was not being called upon. No, I'm very satisfied where I am. I'm not unfulfilled. If I die tomorrow, I won't die longing for a wider job. I like what I do. I'm good at it. I'm one of those rare guys that looks forward to Monday morning and coming to work. Could I have performed on a larger stage? Yeah. Has that train left the station? I think so.

Bill Ballenger: You were succeeded by Richard Thompson, and after him, David Gorcyca. How do you look at those two men as your successors?

L. Brooks Patte: Bill, that's a good question. I guess I did for them what Dan Murphy did for me. When Dan left the office, never once called and said, "Brooks, this is what I would have done." Or, "I would have done it differently." I respected that. He let me make my own success or let me fail on my own. In fact, he moved from Oakland County over here to the Muskegon side of the state. So when I left prosecutor, I was loathe to give advice to Dick Thompson, and certainly Dave Gorcyca and I are friends, but it wasn't my role to tell these guys how to run their office. So I think they developed their own. Both of them maintained a no plea bargain policy because it was a good policy. But Dick when off on some

other tangents that I never explored. And Dave managed his office differently than I would have. And I'm not saying it's wrong or right, but I had a good run.

Bill Ballenger: Richard Thompson kind of got off into some social cultural issues, didn't he?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, he did. Dick was there when Kevorkian started his romp through Oakland County. I think he ultimately took the lives of 12 or 13 people before he was done. And he was taunting Dick. And unfortunately Dick took the taunt. He was running around, "Lock me up. I dare you, lock me up." Of course, the day he was arrested, "Hey, I want out of here." And that was the only advice I ever gave Dick was let your chief assistant handle this one.

L. Brooks Patte: When I got elected back in '72, Dick and I took a vacation, went down to, I think it was Acapulco, just because it was a hard race taking on the incumbent. We sat around, and we organized the office and planned the office. And Dick being a military guy said, "We should model ourselves after the military. You, you're the CO, so you bring the good news. I'm the XO, I'll bring the bad news." I said, "Okay." So I understood what he was talking about. Well, when Dick started getting bad ink, I said, "Hey, you're the CO. Let the XO take this case." He wouldn't listen to me.

Bill Ballenger: How about Gorcyca? How did he do in your opinion?

L. Brooks Patte: Did fine. He had a good staff, good prosecutors. He won the major cases. He had a different theory. He had this what I call silos. He had division for auto theft, division for child abuse, division for this, and I never liked that. I liked to mix them up so the lawyers are trying all kinds of cases, but that was his call.

Bill Ballenger: Now you've come full circle, and you've got a Democratic prosecutor again, back to the days of Jerome Bronson, and Tom Plunkett. Jessica Cooper, who was a Court of Appeals judge, pretty darn rare for somebody to step off the appellate bench to run for prosecutor. How do you think she's done as a Democratic prosecutor here in Oakland County?

L. Brooks Patte: Decent. You say, "Why would a judge leave the bench and run for prosecutor?" Well, her salary's about \$127, as prosecutor, it's probably around \$95, as a judge. So she's making over \$200,000, so a little bit of that in there. The only problem I have with Jessica is when we did re-apportionment, she was one of the members of the reapportionment committee. She's a Democrat, and the new treasurer's a Democrat, and the Democratic chairman is a Democrat. So they got three, we got two. So they redrew the lines. And if you're on the losing end of that you call it gerrymandering. If you're on the winning side, you call it realignment.

Bill Ballenger: So you think the map has been rigged for the next decade in favor of the Democrats?

L. Brooks Patte: Oh, absolutely. Right now, the county board of commissioners, which is our legislature is 15-10. After the election next year, probably 14-1, against me. Population didn't change that much, it's who drew the lines that changed. And I think it was Jocelyn Benson screaming about what they did up in Lansing, this was terrible. I said to Jocelyn, "Come to Oakland County. You don't have to travel all the way over to Lansing. We can show you right here some salamander districts that go all around."

Bill Ballenger: Well, haven't they filed suit against it?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, it's in court right now.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think there's a chance it might be overturned?

L. Brooks Patte: 50-50. But assume that it's overturned, we go right back to the same group. So it's a Pyrrhic victory at best.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. When we talk about economic development here in the county, all the things you mention, Automation Alley, how did you come up with that term?

L. Brooks Patte: It was a factor of going to lunches, and I speak almost every day now, in fact I did back then. And I'd be having lunch with some businessman or businesswoman and they'd say, "Hey, Brooks, we're having a tough time getting our positions filled. People don't see this region as high tech. They go to east coast, Boston. They go to the west coast, Silicon Valley. And they may go to Seattle. But nobody comes here, and my positions are going vacant and they're high tech, high paid positions." And I heard that refrain so often, I said, "Well, how do I respond to that?"

L. Brooks Patte: So I formed this association to literally brand southeast Michigan as high tech. And I did that after Pat Anderson did the research. Pat Anderson Economic Group out in Lansing. And he searched the country, and as you would expect, number one in America for high tech employment was Silicon Valley over 300,000. Boston's Route 128 came in over 200,000. And that's, Route 128, is where MIT and so forth are located, so it's a powerhouse. Number three was Oakland County, 167,500. And nobody knew that until we did the research. But once we had the research to back it up, the empirical data that I needed, then I went out and marketed it.

L. Brooks Patte: And the first 43 companies who were our charter companies, we all agreed that we should brand this region, southeast Michigan, for what it really is, a high tech area. So Automation Alley was launched in that very, I think, humble 43 companies, now we're about 1,020 companies in eight counties.

Bill Ballenger: Life sciences, how important is that?

L. Brooks Patte: Huge, that's the future, I think, in many respects, of Oakland County. I was driving around the last few years as I want to do. I'm going back and forth, and I saw the Providence Hospital out in Novi, a couple hundred million dollars in investment, a couple thousand jobs. My travels took me up to West Bloomfield Ford Hospital, close to \$300 million and about 2,500 jobs. Up where I live, Clarkston, in Independence Township, McLaren is coming down from Genesee, \$600 million investment for a new hospital and campus there on Sashabaw. Over in Rochester you have the Oakland University William Beaumont School of Medicine about to be launched. The economic impact of a fully staffed medical school \$3.2 billion. Go down to the city of Royal Oak, they had the hospital. I'm sorry, in the city of Royal Oak Beaumont had got the CON to put in a proton beam therapy accelerator. All this was going on at one time. I'm saying, "We got something really good going here. You can sense it. It's in your vibes. All that medical development."

L. Brooks Patte: So I again, called Pat Anderson. I said, "Pat, quantify it for me." He came out with a report now which is about 2 and a half years old. He said, "This is what you've got. You've got 93,000 people in healthcare in Oakland County." Defining healthcare as medical device manufacturers, R and D, hospitals, clinics. We have 93,000. We've got over 4,000 free standing addresses where, it's the most in the state, where these people perform their various businesses. Pat said, "You're going to add 45,000 more in the next five years." So it was a huge opportunity.

L. Brooks Patte: Of my ten merging sectors that we researched, healthcare and life science is the fastest growing. It's expanding, and these are the kind of high quality, high paying jobs that I can build a lasting economy around. So I formed Medical Main Street as a direct result of those numbers, and we're now trying to brand Oakland County as a destination for excellence in healthcare, which I don't think is out of reach at all. I've talked to the CEOs and they're on my board from Ford and Providence and Trinity and Saint Joe, and right now, those hospitals that I just named get patients coming in for surgical procedures from 50 states. That's called medical tourism. So it's already happening. All I want to do is build it and then leverage it. So Medical Main Street is the mechanism for me to brand this area as a center for excellence in healthcare.

Bill Ballenger: Emerging Sectors Initiative, what is that?

L. Brooks Patte: I saw a headline, I think it was Detroit News, back in 2003. And it said 200,000 jobs flee Michigan. I had a sense that these jobs weren't just cyclical things we've seen in automotive, these people were moving out to get jobs, to get employment. And so I called my staff together and said, "Look, let's research where the new jobs are going to be coming from. In what sectors will have new employment, and we can expect growth? And I want that growth to be in companies that will be here. I want some sustainability. I want some longevity. I want high paying, high quality, and jobs that will be here."

L. Brooks Patte: So my staff went out. This was '03. Came back in '04, and they said, "Okay, here's the sectors we think there's a growth opportunity for Oakland County."

We called those sectors emerging sectors. And things you would expect, alternative energy, nanotechnology, advanced manufacturing, aerospace, IT, healthcare and life sciences, one of the ten, is now dominant. It's really moving away from the others as far as dollars invested. And we track those on a monthly basis, and I can almost quote you the numbers exactly. I saw the report a couple of days ago. It would be for October. So every month I get a full report.

L. Brooks Patte: Under just the umbrella of emerging sectors, I mean, other companies are coming in like BorgWarner. I didn't count them because they're automotive. We brought in 198 companies that have invested \$1.8 billion since we kicked off. Created about 28,000 jobs, retained 10,000, paid over \$4 billion in taxes, I think that's the number. And the taxes, that's federal, state, and local, and we get out of that about \$4 million dollars, so the program pays for itself.

L. Brooks Patte: So Emerging Sectors, I think, is going to be a legacy program of my administration. It's going to continue. We're going to continue to track numbers. And it's basically what you know it to be. It's an effort to diversify the economic base of Oakland County. Because we had all our eggs in the automotive basket, and we got hit hard. In '09, we lost 60,000 jobs. I say we, Oakland County. In 2010, we had 10,000 foreclosures, why? Everybody was caught up in the industry that imploded. So clearly my job was to diversify the economic base of Oakland County as fast as I could. Emerging Sectors was the vehicle. It's working. I think it's going to take total maybe 25, 30 years. We got seven into it, so we're about a fourth of the way through. The point is, when it's done, we will have a diversified economic base. I will concede to you that we will not be recession proof, but we will be recession resistant. I think that's the most I can accomplish.

Bill Ballenger: How important is it for the county to be digitally advanced?

L. Brooks Patte: Translating the phrase "digitally advanced," because that's what the Center for Digital Government talks about. They consider us, Oakland County, to be the most digitally advanced county in America, really what that means is technology. Have we embraced technology? Have we inculcated the advantages of technology into our work process? The answer's yes. And they use the phrase, "You're the most digitally advanced county," that means that we have finally brought technology into daily use by my employees. We're trained in it. You don't come here unless you got certain skill sets, and the county is not an employer of last resort. We really do get good people applying. And that same Center for Digital Government just awarded us the distinction of having the second best government website in America. So we're proud of our commitment to and investment in technology.

Bill Ballenger: Quality of life programs here in Oakland County.

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, I have a lot of those. I spent the first probably 10, 12 years, I don't know if I can exactly say when it was, working on economic development. But then I realized there was more than just having a good, high paying job. You want to

have quality of life, a place where a family's gonna want to stay, raise a family, invest here, and so forth. So I started looking at quality of life events that it would make it a fun place. Hey, live in Oakland County, look at all the neat things they have. I think my first quality of life venture was Arts, Beats, and Eats. Back in '99, I sort of saw what was happening in Chicago, Food Fair, whatever it was called over there. So we took the idea and expanded it. We're going to have Arts, Beats, and Eats. Arts, we have about 140 artisans from around the country who are juried art. Beats, we had over 250 bands. And eats, about 60 premier restaurants. Wrapped them all together in a Labor Day festival, attracts about 500,000 people. It's immensely successful, that was our first one we did.

L. Brooks Patte: The next one, I think was Quake on the Lake. We have a hydroplane racing out on Pontiac Lake. That draws about 40,000. World records are set there during the competition. Then we did Fire and Ice. Nothing goes on in February, but we created an event which draws about 40,000 people in the Rochester area, it's Fire and Ice. Kids get to ride dog sleds. We build toboggan runs. There's tents for competition for kids. We have, obviously, music. And then at night we have fireworks, which is really pretty spectacular when you see the fireworks coming through the snowflakes. It's just give them a reason, a feeling about enjoying a cold winter night in February.

Bill Ballenger: There is a Brooksie Way.

L. Brooks Patte: I didn't get to that one. That one, on February of '07, February 7th of '07, I gave my State of the County address. And I announced that I wanted to add yet another quality of life event. This was going to be a half marathon and a 5K. Three days later, my son was killed in a snowmobile accident. And when the committee met to put together to help me advance this, I knew nothing about running a half marathon. I thought you got 3,000 of your closest friends, you got in a field, you shot a gun off, and everybody ran like hell. It's a lot more technical than that. And so the group decided to name the half marathon after my son, Brooksie. And the phrase itself comes from the eulogy my son-in-law gave. He said to a lot of kids that were in the audience, Brooksie was 28, a lot of young men were in the audience of the church. And he said, "If you're going to live life, live it the Brooksie way. Go for the deepest snow. Go for the fastest waterway, if you're kayaking, and so forth." So the phrase was, "The Brooksie Way." And that's how the committee named it.

L. Brooks Patte: So we had our fourth annual Brooksie Way in October of this year, that would be 2011. Our fifth annual comes up next year. We had 5,200 runners this year. And anything we do with the proceeds, because we do achieve a net proceed in this process, we set up a Brooksie Way mini-grant program M-I-N-I. And any organization in Oakland County which has as its main focus in existence to elevate the health of its membership, we'll help fund your programs. It could be a swim class for challenged kids. It could be therapeutic horseback riding for kids. It could be a senior dance club, getting people older moving around. Blessings in a Backpack, which is a nutrition program for school kids. Any program that has the effort, the support, the improvement in health of its

membership, we'll take the money from a healthy, quality of life event, and help fund it. So that's the Brooksie way.

Bill Ballenger: Oak Green Challenge.

L. Brooks Patte: Oak Green Challenge was basically a quality of life. We live in a great county. We got I think over 1,400 lakes head waters, five rivers. Environment is something we're very conscious of, and Oak Green was for us to reduce our dependence on traditional kinds of energy, looking for alternatives. And we asked the communities to do the same. We set a goal I think of 10% by a certain date, I think by 2012, we achieved that the first year. So we raised our goal up to 15%. But just how we do the lighting at night is an example. I come down Telegraph, and I see the whole courthouse lit up like the shiny city on a hill. I said, "Why do we got every floor lit up? It doesn't have to be." And then our sprinkler system will come on during the rain. So it was obvious things you could change. The lighting, the sprinkling system, but we saved millions of dollars in the first several years of the Oak Green Challenge, so then we turned it to the community and said, "Okay, guys. At the local level, you can do the same." And it's starting to pick up. People, I think, understand you can be environmentally friendly without being crazy about it.

Bill Ballenger: What the significance of three-year budgeting?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, that goes back to an internal operation. We were on a two-year budget, and it gives basically a two-year budget, and it gives you your current fiscal year and then the next year. And so I said to my director of management and budget a couple of years ago, I said, "We can do two years, why can't we do three?" Everybody thought he's getting older and crazier. But we looked at it and said, "We can do it." It's line item detail, so as we speak right now, I'm in balance for the current fiscal year, 2012. We're balance for '13, line item detail. We're in balance for '14, and we're now working on 2015. And we see challenges there for more than three years out. We do see some challenges in 2015, still property related. We think the values are tending to decline not as precipitously before but it's still going up, so we make adjustments now for what we think we'll be a problem in 2015, a hiring freeze as an example, and it works. It's an award-winning program. Moody's and Standard & Poor's have given us a AAA and they cite the three-year budget as a reason. We're the only county in America that does it. We don't know why others don't follow us because it is a great program.

Bill Ballenger: What about state and federal government?

L. Brooks Patte: Oh my God, yes. I think Snyder is taking the state to a two-year budget. I think you got it you know crawl before you run but that would be a vast improvement. The way revenue estimating conferences go, they come in February, and we've already eaten up four months of the fiscal year, and then you decided how much money you have, and then you had eight months left to rectify. That was a terrible program.

Bill Ballenger: Who are some of your political heroes going back to the 18th century, 19th?

L. Brooks Patte: Okay.

Bill Ballenger: Maybe 20th too.

L. Brooks Patte: Some of the Founding Fathers were unique, but I finished McCullough's book on John Adams, really a very, very neat guy and I think a visionary leader in those days, but let's come forward a little bit. I got to meet and watch Ronald Reagan up close and personal. I really did design on my approach to how I govern here in this county after his technique. He's now much revered. At the time they thought he was sort of disengaged. But what he did, and what I think I'm doing I'm hiring the best people in their fields. I am painting the broad picture, "This is where I want my county to be." And then I get back and step out of their way. Let them manage it. I mean I'm going to tell Bob Daddow how to work budget?

Bill Ballenger: Delegation.

L. Brooks Patte: Exactly. And then I break the tie vote. If I don't think it's getting done or not done fast enough I'll step in and do a little nudge, but my idea is to paint the broad picture, and then let the guys who are experts who I've hired to do it. There are a lot of guys that we know, I don't mean to pick on anybody but you probably know them as well as I do, bright individuals, but all of a sudden they become the micro-manager. Everything has to come across their desk and ultimately becomes a bottleneck.

Bill Ballenger: What about the Levin brothers, Sander and Carl? Both of them are Oakland County guys.

L. Brooks Patte: Well, I've known Carl for how many years? Actually, I got to know Carl back in the day when he was running against, so we've been friends, I don't know that we agree on a whole lot but there's mutual respect there. The same with Sander.

L. Brooks Patte: Politics is a funny profession almost like the trial practice. I always considered myself to be a litigator. You'd go to court and you can beat each other up in a court process. At five o'clock, in this case with me and the defense counsel we'd go to the bar, and have a beer, and talk about the case. My clients would ask, "where are you going?" I said, "I'm going to have a beer with the prosecutor."

L. Brooks Patte: But the same thing in politics. Carl and I, and Sandy, and other Democrats, I was just with Mark Brewer a couple days ago. We fight from nine to five. After 5:01, I think we have mutual respect for the fact that we're all in the same business trying to do the best we can.

Bill Ballenger: A lot of modern Republican leadership appears to be so hard-nosed right wing, they don't seem to like collegiality after five o'clock. What do you think about that?

L. Brooks Patte: People think, they say, "Boy, you're cut right in the mold of Milliken. I say, "No, no." When I came in the party I was considered Attila the Hun. I was so far right people would take their kids away, so they couldn't see me. I'm basically where I am. I'm still pro-capital.

Bill Ballenger: You think you're the same guy?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, the party has outflanked me. Some of the tea party folks, some of the ... What do you want to call it? The religious folks. I remember you assessed my role as chairman of the Republican party for two years. Well, that was the worst two years of my life 'cause all I did was fight with the-

Bill Ballenger: Why did you do that?

L. Brooks Patte: I thought maybe I could.

Bill Ballenger: Make a difference?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, get the party back. And I'm conservative. I make no apologies for it. I think frankly most of America is right of center, but I'm not out here in the extremes, and I have taken positions which have offended the extreme. When this kid Matthew Shepard was beaten to death out in Wyoming, he was a gay kid, taken out of a bar, strapped to a fence post basically and stomped to death. That's when I came out in favor of adding sexual orientation to a hate crime. It made perfect sense to me because we start killing people because they're Jewish because they're black or because they're gay, they're in line for some protection. Oh my God, this wing just went berserk. I thought my position was fair.

Bill Ballenger: What about governors in the past? Starting with Romney and that was really before you got into politics.

L. Brooks Patte: Oh no, I knew George. In fact, he used to come up to my office when I was a prosecutor, and wanted me to get involved. At that time I think his was volunteerism and he was up to talk about that. And so, he'd come to my Farmers Market over here. He'd be going through the crowd with man on a mission. I didn't know him, this was after he retired, like I didn't know him when he was Governor, I knew him but I didn't know him personally as the governor. The first governor I really got to know was Bill Milliken, and then John Engler and I became friends.

Bill Ballenger: Well, what was your impression of Milliken as you look back on him because he was viewed at the time by a lot of the party as way out in left field compared to..

L. Brooks Patte: I think he's still out there. We're not bosom buddies, but Governor Milliken did a respectable job as governor. Do I agree with all his decisions? No. I thought some of his policies were pretty liberal and costly in the long run. But I favored more the rule of a guy like John Engler.

Bill Ballenger: What about Jim Blanchard, he was an Oakland County guy?

L. Brooks Patte: I forgot about him. Jim and I are good pals today. When I was organizing yet another trade mission and wanted to go to Canada, who did I tap? I asked Jim Blanchard, "Will you come 'cause you used to be the former Ambassador?" He opened a lot of doors. Now some of my Republican friends were aghast that I would ask a former Democratic governor to go, but think about the advantages of having a guy who was an ambassador there for a number of years, and it worked well like we wanted it to. We got in a lot of doors. Jim, I think left himself vulnerable. That's how Engler beat him. Some of his programs were way too modest. We were wearing a nickel in those days showing that there was a net gain of his tax cut was going to a nickel, and it wasn't enough.

Bill Ballenger: What about your relationship with John Engler? Of course, there was the famous pothole picture.

L. Brooks Patte: You know I was having fun. That wasn't so much at Engler, although it was in his administration. His director of transportation back in that day, I think that was back what? In the '80s, was it?

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

L. Brooks Patte: Everybody was complaining about the potholes and they were erupting like the surface of the moon.

Bill Ballenger: It was really the '90s.

L. Brooks Patte: Was it the '90s? Okay. Surface of the moon. His director of transportation said, "The potholes this year aren't any worse than any other year." So I called the road commission, I got down in a manhole. It wasn't even a pothole, it was a manhole. About this much. I'm holding up a sign, "Governor, what about this pothole?" I thought he'd get the humor. Oh, my God. I never got invited back to the mansion the rest of his term.

Bill Ballenger: Well, I think that was toward the end of his tenure, so maybe you got a lot of trips early on, but you got along with Engler most of the time.

L. Brooks Patte: I still do, sure. John's in town, and we get together at different functions, and I consider myself a good friend of his and he's certainly a good friend of mine.

Bill Ballenger: What about Jennifer Granholm?

L. Brooks Patte: Initially, got along well with Jennifer, did a trade mission to Germany. I thought she was going to be able to get some things done, but I watched her closely because of the impact on my county her decisions. The lady just could not make a decision. The longer she sat there and dallied the worse the situation became certainly in business, certainly her position on taxes was not my position. She raised taxes. The biggest tax increase in the history of the state. Then she said, "I'll never do it again." I got the headline in my office. And then of course, a year later she wants to raise taxes again. So we eventually split company. I think the final nail in the coffin was when I reviewed her book.

Bill Ballenger: How have you gotten along with the County Board of Commissioners over the years?

L. Brooks Patte: Initially, understand Bill, when I came in here in '92, Murphy the predecessor had been gone for basically two years because of his throat. He wasn't coming to the office. Well you know the rule of physics, where there's a void, somebody is going to fill it. The Board sort of began to move into responsibilities that probably should have been Dan Murphy's, but he wasn't here to protect his turf, so I came in January 1, 1993. And I'm thinking, "Well no, this is my responsibility, and I will do it Brooks." No, you won't. So we had some real tug of wars in the beginning.

L. Brooks Patte: I remember calling up my friend Ed McNamara about six, eight months into my first year. I said, "Ed, what are your relationships like with the Board of Commissioners? I'm having trouble with mine." He said, "Brooks, I was Wayne County exec for two years before I realized the God damn Commissioner wasn't listening to one word."

Bill Ballenger: What did you think of Ed McNamara altogether?

L. Brooks Patte: I liked him. Our friendship was like, I don't know, some of these anomalies you see that the cat sitting on the dog's head. We got along great. And he was, I'm not going to say mentor that would be too strong, but remember we had our old Brooks and Ed Show where he called it the Ed and Brooks Show. We enjoyed each other's humor. But I called him on a couple of times and said, "How would you have handled it?" Early on. But Wayne County as we know is different than Oakland County, so eventually I had to start making my own path.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think Macomb County took too long to come up with the office of County Executive?

- L. Brooks Patte: They could have been there a couple years before. As could Kent County. I mean an executive form of government if you would have asked me, what are the advantages over being run by a County Board of Commissioners? Is clearly somebody is in charge. Somebody takes the heat. Somebody's got to say, "Hey, this is the way it's going to be." When you're drifting, you got government by committee, that ain't real efficient.
- Bill Ballenger: Well of course you have county departments, you got treasurer, clerk, prosecutor. They're running facets of the executive branch in the county. And of course most of our county is what? Is 79 counties don't have a county executive, right? Bay has one, plus the three down here.
- L. Brooks Patte: Yeah. I don't know that they even run as well. I mean we get calls all the time about, how we do our budgeting? How do we do this? So they're watching. I think we can do those things 'cause we have an executive form that supports that kind of innovation.
- Bill Ballenger: Pontiac, once the city most prominently identified with Oakland County, now has a real economic and jobs problem here in the heart of the county. Haven't they actually asked you to take them over? What do you do about Pontiac?
- L. Brooks Patte: Well that was emergency fund financial manager once removed. We now have a new financial manager there, and he knows we're not going to take over Pontiac. I can't legally and Constitutionally absorb a city, and I don't want to. I mean we're the county that has paid off our legacy costs for healthcare. We don't owe a dime. It's fully funded in an irrevocable trust. Again, we're the first county, and the only county in America to do that.
- L. Brooks Patte: If we went into Pontiac it would be something like \$300 million in legacy costs. I'm not going to put my taxpayers back into the very situation we got out of, and ask them to fund the city of Pontiac's bad management. I think the financial manager is necessary there. He's in there right now, Lou Schimmel, really doing what he has to do. Pontiac doesn't have a police department anymore. It's the Sheriff's Department. Pontiac doesn't have a fire department anymore. It's the Waterford Township, they're working on a deal. They don't have a Clerk's Office. [inaudible 00:11:28]. He's willing to size and cost the government down because it is, it's the hole in the donut, and that's unfortunate.
- L. Brooks Patte: Go back about late 1950s, early 1960s, I think when Bloomfield Township was getting organized and they divided a subdivision up here by Pine Lake to join their school system. The subdivision was an affluent community by Pine Lake. "Oh no, we'll stay in Pontiac." So there was the day when Pontiac was a desirable community, great schools, great downtown shopping, and it was a thriving city. And then you know what happened to Pontiac is the same thing that happened to the county. They had all their eggs in General Motors basket. And as General Motors began to move some of their investment away like they did in Flint, and I'm not being critical of GM, they have the right to run their company, but that began to hurt these cities that had so much investment.

Bill Ballenger: What about the Silverdome?

L. Brooks Patte: What about it? You want to buy it?

Bill Ballenger: Well, I mean I feel bad because that was a big deal.

L. Brooks Patte: It was built in '74 for I think under \$60 million. It was a bargain. 80,000 seats plus. Too big. They were getting television rights 'cause you couldn't fill it up. I think The Lions might have stayed there had the negotiations been handled a little differently. The mayor of Pontiac at the time was Walter Moore, and as I understand it he got up and left the meeting, went home. And so Bill Ford Sr. said, "That's it." So they decided to build their own field downtown. The field downtown is I think light years ahead of the Silverdome. It's marvelous. It's a great venue for football.

Bill Ballenger: Once The Lions left wasn't there any chance for the Silverdome to be used for anything else on a permanent basis?

L. Brooks Patte: Well, on a permanent basis, I don't know.

Bill Ballenger: Because The Pistons had already left too.

L. Brooks Patte: That really wasn't a good stadium for basketball. It was really for a single purpose only, it was a stadium. It didn't have any real new adaptive use that followed. A gentleman bought it a couple years ago, stole it for \$540,000. He's trying to make an entertainment venue, but with minimal success. So I think really the dome will probably have a wrecker's ball in its future.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask you one final question. Has Oakland County plateaued in terms of economic development and population or is the sky still the limit?

L. Brooks Patte: Oh, I don't think we've plateaued at all. I'm just looking at the numbers, I'm looking at the projections, I talk to economists who we hire to help me see, "Where do you think you're going to be in a given year?" We got a lot of growth, a lot of quality growth. I don't want just growth, I want it to be quality growth. There will be quality jobs that will be here 30-40 years from now. The medical school just came online in August of this year. So we're still hitting some grand slams. I don't think the best days of Oakland County I truly believe are before us.

Bill Ballenger: And you're going for your sixth term?

L. Brooks Patte: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Bill Ballenger: Next year, right?

L. Brooks Patte: It beats working. In 2012, I'll be out there. I love the job. I could retire now, I'm 72. I'm fully vested. But, what would I do? I don't garden. I hate golf. I play it

'cause I have to. I don't have the hobbies. I don't gamble. I wouldn't be going to the casinos, so I'd be sitting around waiting for the phone to ring. So I'll come in here, and sit back, and delegate, delegate, delegate.

Bill Ballenger: L. Brooks Patterson, thank you so much for a really great interview.

L. Brooks Patte: William Ballenger, you're more than welcome.