

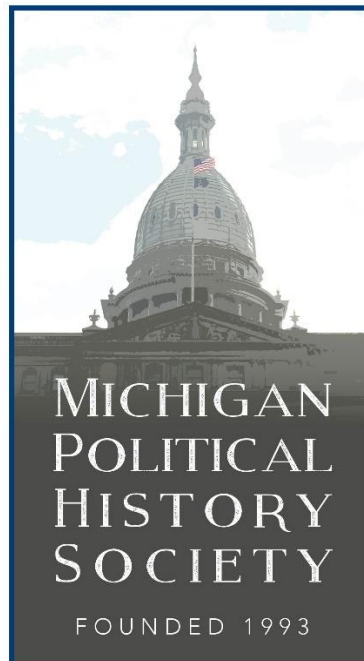
DENNIS O. CAWTHORNE

Interviewed by

Bill Ballenger

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Transcript: MPHS Oral History of Dennis O. Cawthorne, interviewed by Bill Ballenger, 12.08.17

This conversation with Dennis Cawthorne is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History, a project of the Michigan Political History Society.

Bill Ballenger: We have with us today Dennis Cawthorne, former State House of Representatives' Republican Leader, later prominent lawyer-lobbyist, long-time chairman of the Mackinac Island Park Commission. I am Bill Ballenger, publisher of the digital newsletter, *The Ballenger Report.com*. I want to start out, Dennis Cawthorne, by welcoming you to this particular interview.

Dennis Cawthorne: Thank you Bill.

Bill Ballenger: Observe that I think you are a native of Manistee Michigan on the shores of Lake Michigan, if I'm not mistaken.

Dennis Cawthorne: That's correct.

Bill Ballenger: And you were born and brought up there and I think both sides of your family, your mother's and father's side had been up in that area since the 19th century. Were they political junkies?

Dennis Cawthorne: No, they weren't. Now my father, however, was always very civic-minded. And in 1946 as a matter of fact, the local Democratic Party tried to convince him to run for the state House, but he didn't do it, which was a good thing because as all Michigan political historians know, 1946 was the first Republican wave since the depression and in the state House, it was 95 to five Republican and 32 to two in the Senate afterward. So he didn't run. But I got my interest in politics by being, believe it or not, a newspaper delivery boy for the Manistee News Advocate. I would deliver the paper but in the process of delivering the paper, I would read the front page, which caused me to skip quite a few houses by the way. But in reading the front page of the paper, I really got fascinated by the political stories. And when I was in third grade I found a book on the presidents and I had that book at my desk all that school year. So when the school year ended the teacher said, "You may as well take this book and keep it as your own." And I have it, and I have it to this day. And then another example of misspent youth at that age, which was about nine or ten, I also started reading the Michigan Manual. So I got totally engrossed in politics and particularly Michigan politics.

Bill Ballenger: Wow! You were born in 1940. So we're talking about 1950 when you hit your stride here, getting inculcated in political wisdom. So what happened after that? Did you have the Eisenhower election coming up in 1952?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, I got really pumped up in advance to the Eisenhower election and I formed a *Young People for Eisenhower Club* in Manistee. We got a lot of publicity for the

club. A picture appeared on the front page of the *Grand Rapids Press* and *Grand Rapids Herald* and other papers. And I guess the highlight of it all was when I actually got a hand-signed, personally signed letter from Ike thanking me for my endeavors. So, by this time now I'm really pumped up and of course he won the election and we were very, very pleased by that. I didn't get invited to that inauguration, but four years later when he was re-elected, I also got an invitation to the inaugural, which at that time really was sort of a special thing. Now they'd go out en masse, but back in those days it was kind of unusual for particularly a 16-year-old kid to get an invitation to the inaugural.

Bill Ballenger: Absolutely. What about that 1956 election? There were a lot of things going on in that election, weren't there?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, that was a big year for, I guess me personally, in terms of my future. What happened was in the ninth congressional district, which was Western Michigan from Muskegon up through Grand Traverse, the incumbent member of Congress was Ruth Thompson, and Ruth Thompson was the first woman elected to Congress from Michigan. And a lot of people have always assumed it was Martha Griffiths. No, it was Ruth Thompson, a rather conservative Republican female from Western Michigan who is number one. Well, Ruth Thompson had very foolishly, I guess might be the right word, gotten in the middle of a big dispute among the communities in Northern Michigan as to who would be awarded a jet airbase. Now these days, most communities would probably run the other direction if they were offered a jet air base but in the 1950s in the Traverse City, Cadillac, Manistee area it was a big deal because they saw it as potentially a big economic boon. Well, anyway, Miss Thompson got on the wrong side of the issue. Many of the communities were ticked off. Manistee was the one community that she did **not** tick off. Bob Griffin, a young Traverse City attorney ran against her during the primary. I actually worked on Miss Thompson's campaign. She got creamed in the primary everywhere except Manistee County where she won handily. So after that primary election, I wrote Bob Griffin a letter as a 16-year-old, and said, "Hey, the primary is over, I'd be glad to work for you." And in those days, there weren't volunteers on the ground, at least in rural areas. So I was literally a one-man team for Bob Griffin in Manistee County and just before the election of 1956, I wrote him a letter and I said, "I've been out doing this, this and this, and I predict you're going to carry this county by 300 votes." Well, when he got the letter, he chuckled and said, "Well, this young man, is very nice, we appreciate all his work, but we're going to get creamed there." Well, he carried Manistee County by 325 votes.

Bill Ballenger: Wow!

Dennis Cawthorne: And the next spring he came to me and asked me if I'd like to work for a summer in Washington. Well, would I?

Bill Ballenger: You were like between your junior and senior years in high school.

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Dennis Cawthorne: That's correct. That's correct. And one of the interesting things was; these days, Washington is awash in interns on Capitol Hill. There are interns everywhere. But I was told when I came to Washington in that summer of 1957, that there's only one other young intern in a Congressional office. And I believe that was probably true. So I really had an unusual opportunity and that summer I had a chance to meet Richard Nixon - and we did a TV show together. I met LBJ, JFK and one of the interesting things was, I was invited to go with Bob Griffin to the Pentagon to meet with the Assistant Secretary of Defense. Now these days, that will never happen. But that was another memorable occasion for that summer of 1957.

Bill Ballenger: What did you do for housing down there?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, I lived with the Griffin family for the first three weeks in my time there. So I got to know and babysit actually part time...

Bill Ballenger: This is unbelievable!

Dennis Cawthorne: ...for future MI Supreme Court Judge Robert Griffin. So that was a great time. Then after that I lived on my own as a 17-year-old in Washington; something else that I'm not sure these days that would happen. So I really had a chance to spread my wings and learn about the ways of the world.

Bill Ballenger: Well, so you got back to Manistee for your senior year. It must have seemed pretty placid stuff at that point compared to what you'd experienced in the summer of 1957, right?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well that's true. But then Bob Griffin contacted me the following spring and said, "Would you like to come back?" And so I went back to Washington in the spring of 1958, and that was the year that he was beginning to really tune up the Landrum-Griffin Bill, which is a landmark piece of legislation to rein in union excesses. So I had some tangential involvement in that.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Did he have any recommendation for you as to your educational direction at that point? You were getting out of high school, where were you going to go?

Dennis Cawthorne: As a matter of fact, he did play a big role in that because he recommended to me that I attend a small liberal arts school. He thought that was the best thing to do, particularly if later on I was going to go to grad school, like a law school.

Dennis Cawthorne: So one of the places he recommended was Albion College and so I got kind of fascinated with it and I went there and it was a very wise decision as it turned out.

Bill Ballenger: And then after that what happened? And by the way, while you were at Albion, that was the election of 1960: Kennedy versus Nixon, whom you had met three

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years before. Did you have any role in that campaign? Did you do anything up in Manistee or down in Albion, or what?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes as a matter of fact at Albion, we kind of restarted the college Republicans there. And so John F. Kennedy came through Albion on a campaign train express and they stopped in Albion and he was talking to a great crowd about "missile gap", which was a big issue in which later on I think has been pretty much debunked as being legitimate, but it was a big issue in '60. Well he said something about the missile gap and this is really crazy: the crowd happened to go silent just at that moment and I don't think I'm a big mouth, but I said from the crowd: "All a matter of statistics." And he said: "No young man, it is not just a matter of statistics." So I actually had an interchange with...totally unplanned.

Bill Ballenger: A public debate!

Dennis Cawthorne: Yeah with JFK totally unplanned, and anyway so that was quite a memorable occasion. And the Albion campus by the way went eight to one for Nixon over Kennedy. It had nothing to do with our campaign, but...

Bill Ballenger: I doubt if the margin would have been of those proportions nowadays.

Dennis Cawthorne: They would not be.

Bill Ballenger: With the student body we have.

Dennis Cawthorne: Things are very different. Yeah, very different. Absolutely.

Bill Ballenger: So anyway you got through 1960, tried to keep your eye on the ball academically. Got out of Albion in like what, 1962?

Dennis Cawthorne: Correct.

Bill Ballenger: And then what? Went to law school?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, I decided that I would like to go to law school, even though I'd already decided, "I don't think I want to be a practicing lawyer." But, as one who had a great interest in politics I thought, "What could be a better piece of preparation?" So I was accepted at Harvard, Duke and Yale. And my first inclination was to go to Yale, but I had a professor, a very revered professor at Albion, and to this day well-known, and well-remembered, Julian Rammelkamp. He had done graduate work at Harvard. When he found out that I was considering going to Yale instead of Harvard, he said, "No-one, **no-one** gets accepted to Harvard Law School and turns it down."

Bill Ballenger: And turns it down, you can't.

Dennis Cawthorne: And I said, "I think that man's got a point." So I went to Harvard.

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Bill Ballenger: But before you started out that fall, remember that year '62 was the year that George Romney was elected governor, the first time a Republican had been elected in fourteen years. Did you have any role in that campaign?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well interestingly enough, and a lot of people don't know this, but Bob Griffin was actually planning to run for governor in '62, until Romney got into it. Because he'd contacted me at Albion and said, "This is what I'm planning on doing, and would you be available to become a part of that?" Well he did not run because Romney then got into it. I did some things, but by the time of the fall campaign, I wasn't in Michigan. I was at Harvard.

Bill Ballenger: No, you were in Cambridge. Yeah, absolutely. So you got through Harvard Law School. You come up to '64 while you're there. That was a turbulent year to say the least. LBJ versus Goldwater. You had re-apportionment of all these legislative districts, and that was going to be important to you, I think a couple of years later. What do you remember about that time, '64, and '66?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well first of all, one of the highlights of the Harvard years was the fact that JFK was assassinated the fall of my second year. Of course he was very much intertwined with Harvard, so that was a very traumatic event, especially on the Harvard campus. But anyway, I had gone to work on Mackinac Island a couple summers before, which is another story. And I decided when on the island, just before going back for my last year of law school, I decided that I would run for the legislature two years hence. So I made this decision – I think it was the day before the September 1964 primary. That primary was delayed because the U.S. Supreme Court had finally settled the issue of "one man, one vote" as applied to state legislatures. So I decided that I would run two years hence against the Republican incumbent, who I assumed was easily going to win reelection in the fall of '64. He was an older man. He had never been popular in the district so I figured, "Well this nice young man coming out of Harvard Law School two years hence would take him on in the primary." Well funny thing happened on the way to that plan. The 1964 election resulted in a Democratic state legislature. In fact the House went Democratic 73 to 37. Romney was saved from overrides by one vote, and the state Senate was also overwhelmingly Democratic. And my old Republican incumbent that I had planned to run against, was defeated in the general election. And that was due to the Goldwater landslide, anti-Goldwater landslide. It was due to the one man – one vote decision of the U.S. Supreme Court, and the districts were gerrymandered. Now these days as you know, there's a lot of talk about Republicans doing gerrymandering. I have to tell you that it's **nothing** compared to the gerrymandering done by the Democratic Party and the unions, in 1964. So the Republicans got wiped out, and I faced the prospect now of running against a Democratic incumbent, if I were to run '66.

Bill Ballenger: That was the famous Austin-Kleiner Plan, gerrymander plan the Democrats drew up in '64, and in '72 it turned out to be the Hatcher-Kleiner Democratic Plan...

Dennis Cawthorne: Which was an even **worse** gerrymandering!

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Bill Ballenger: Even worse gerrymandering; but you survived because in '66 your plan was the same, and still, "I'm going to run for the legislature", but you had to run against the Democratic incumbent, Eugene Cater, wasn't that his name?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes that's correct.

Bill Ballenger: So what happened?

Dennis Cawthorne: I finished law school then in the spring of '65, and took the bar exam, but there was a gap particularly because I believe one of the law examiners died, and so the results were really delayed that year. In the meantime I was fortuitously out of the blue offered a job at Muskegon Community College teaching political science to freshmen and sophomores. Although because it was a community college, many of the students were actually older than me. So I took that job, and it turned out to be a real blessing, because the community college was located just south of the district that I was going to run in. And the district included parts of Muskegon County, as well as areas just to the north. So I was exposed to a whole area of the district that I had no connections in. A lot of my students on their own came to me and volunteered to campaign. And the interesting thing is that, there are about three or four of them who to this day, over 50 years later, are my very best friends. And we get together once a year.

Bill Ballenger: Absolutely.

Dennis Cawthorne: So I knocked on 10,000 doors.

Bill Ballenger: That district was what? Muskegon County, Manistee, was it Mason?

Dennis Cawthorne: Manistee County, Oceana County, Mason County, Lake County, and Manistee County. And it was a very interesting district for the state House of Representatives, because it was very, very diverse. Lake County, particularly in those days, was...

Bill Ballenger: Probably almost the most out-state Democratic county except for the UP maybe.

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, Yes. And it had a heavy black population, and had a very heavy poverty rate.

Bill Ballenger: Right, one of the poorest counties.

Dennis Cawthorne: And Manistee area was very industrial, and very Catholic. Whereas the center of the district was very Protestant and farm areas, and then you had the Northern Muskegon County, which was basically suburbs. So you had a very diverse district.

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Bill Ballenger: So it was a real swing district, a marginal district, and yet '66 really turned out to be as big of a Republican year as '64 had been a Democratic year, right?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, it was fascinating because no one thought that the Republicans could regain control of the House. As I say down 73-37, and down I think it was 24-14 maybe.

Bill Ballenger: I think it was 23-15 – in the Senate.

Dennis Cawthorne: 23-15 in the Senate, but George Romney, Bill Milliken and Bob Griffin now running for the US Senate as an incumbent, having been...

Bill Ballenger: Yes, appointed.

Dennis Cawthorne: ...appointed upon Pat McNamara's death.

Bill Ballenger: By Romney.

Dennis Cawthorne: By Romney, so we had quite a Republican team, but we still didn't think that we're going to win a majority. And in fact, one of the arguments that the Dems made against me in my house district campaign was that, "Well look, even if he wins he'll be in a minority. So support the incumbent, because the Dems are sure to be the majority." Well the "Romney Action Team" as we were called, stunned everybody. We went to a sweep, almost the reverse of '64. The sweep was such that in the House, the House ended up in a 55/55 deadlock. And the state Senate went Republican 20 to 18.

Bill Ballenger: And you were a part of that. You were a freshman Republican, and you had to pick a speaker. What happened?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well we were hoping that our candidate, Bob Waldron would be elected speaker, but his election hinged totally on the decision of a Detroit Democratic Representative, E.D. O'Brien, to withhold his vote at one of the crucial organizing stages. And he withheld his vote and consequently, the Republicans took control of the house 55 to 54 with one abstention, and Bob Waldron became speaker. But further...

Bill Ballenger: Didn't E.D. O'Brien get a committee chairmanship?

Dennis Cawthorne: I think he did, but he got paid back by the Dems four years later.

Bill Ballenger: They drew him out of the district.

Dennis Cawthorne: They partially drew him out of his district, and they put him in with Bill Fitzgerald, a young, dynamic, Detroit representative. And so, E.D. O'Brien got beat in the 1970 primary by Bill Fitzgerald. But further irony is, that in March

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just after we organized in January, the man who had been the Democratic speaker in that '65, '66 legislature, Joe Kowalski, dropped dead.

Bill Ballenger: And he was still the Democratic leader at that point. I mean in other words, if E.D. O'Brien hadn't sat on his hands Joe Kowalski might be speaker or something.

Dennis Cawthorne: Right exactly.

Bill Ballenger: So and he dropped dead in March of '67.

Dennis Cawthorne: Right, and so that set up a special election, and again Republicans figured, "Well we don't have any chance of winning this special election. It's in the city of Detroit." But we did run a guy by the name of Tony Licata, and the Dems had a big primary. And the winner of the Dem primary was Jimmy Hoffa Jr., and to everyone's astonishment in the general election to succeed Kowalski, Jimmy Hoffa Jr., lost to Tony Licata. And that was the second to the last time that any democrat running for the state House of Representatives, in the city of Detroit has lost. And no Republican has been elected in the city of Detroit since the 1970 election.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Right. Absolutely.

Dennis Cawthorne: But Hoffa was the second to last loss.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah it's unbelievable. I think the Republicans tagged him with being carpet bagger, remember? He didn't really live in the district?

Dennis Cawthorne: I don't recall that.

Bill Ballenger: I think that was one of the issues. Whatever. Anyway, okay so the Republicans at this point actually had an absolute 56/54 majority for the balance of that session, ending at the tail-end of '68. So what do you remember from that time? What were the issues at that time? What happened?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, there were a lot of issues of course. Certainly "open housing" was one. I mean probably viewers today don't even know what the open housing issue was, but it had to do with whether or not there could be discrimination in the sale of real estate. And in the Detroit area it was a big issue. The realtors would not show homes to blacks in certain areas, et cetera. So George Romney was very much in favor of an open housing law, and that was very controversial, but it was enacted by a very narrow vote.

Bill Ballenger: What about the state's finances?

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Dennis Cawthorne: States finances, then as now, and George Romney and *the action team* was in favor of enacting the first state income tax. Now Democrats had advocated for it in the past.

Bill Ballenger: Right. "Soapy" Williams wanted one all during the 1950s, and Republican legislature wouldn't let him have it.

Dennis Cawthorne: Republican legislature wouldn't let him have it, but George Romney came out in favor of the state income tax, and so we always to this day kind of have to chuckle at we of the *action team* certainly gave some action, because we did enact the first state income tax. I believe there were 57 yes votes, so it had like one or two votes to spare, and I was a yes vote. But one of the interesting things was, I have to sort of chuckle. These days the politicians in Lansing bite their nails over every tax vote. We enacted the first state income tax, and I do not believe that it was even an issue in the following campaign. And it was basically a non-issue, it was non-controversial.

Bill Ballenger: Well it was part of an overall juggling of the tax rates, both from business, for private individuals. There were some tax reductions in connection with imposing an income tax. The whole idea according to Romney was supposedly fiscal integrity, and getting more of a balance in the tax structure. But you're absolutely right, I mean it was not a controversial issue after that. So what about the Detroit riot in '68? Did that have any direct impact on what was going on in Lansing?

Dennis Cawthorne: In terms of legislation, my recollection is that it didn't have that much of an impact. But sort of the specter, and the memory of it was very present. I mean debates on the issues always somehow brought in the specter of that. But as far as actual direct legislations, not particularly. Because we had actually enacted open housing just before the riots as I recall. But one area that did emerge then in '68, although I think it was '69 before it was finally resolved, were police and firemen strikes, and teachers were going out on strike. And public employees had just gotten the right to collectively bargain in Michigan in 1965 and '66.

Bill Ballenger: Five and six.

Dennis Cawthorne: Yeah, previous legislature. So then there were strikes. And so I was on the House Labor Committee that first term and into the second term and that was a major issue. And we resolved it, not in the ways that the municipalities liked, we enacted what's now known as PA 312, which provided binding arbitration for police and fire strikes. But that was another big issue of 1967-68.

Bill Ballenger: OK, so we get up to 1970, you had been in the House for two terms. Another big issue that came up in 1970, Parochiaid, what about Parochiaid?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, Parochiaid was, I have always said, the nastiest, most divisive, most hair-pulling legislative issue that I ever encountered. And particularly in my district, it

was... There were other districts too where it was a very divisive issue, and in my district it was because we had a lot of parochial schools. And so no issue topped that one in terms of being divisive. The Legislature did, by a very narrow vote, with mainly Democrats for and Republicans against, did vote yes on Parochiaid. One of the things, and Governor Milliken by the way, was also very much for it, which I've never quite fully understood. But anyway, after Parochiaid was approved in the Legislature, I was walking out of the Capitol with the MEA lobbyist at the time, and I'm not sure who it was, I think probably Dan Welburn, who for a long time was the MEA lobbyist. And I said to him, "You know, at this stage, the only thing you can do is to go for a constitutional amendment which would bar this." Well, I don't want to flatter myself. It really wasn't a revolutionary idea, but I'm not sure anyone had even proposed it up to that point.

Bill Ballenger: There wasn't any public conversation.

Dennis Cawthorne: There was no conversation about going that route, but immediately after I proposed that to Dan Welburn, the idea took off. And consequently, in the November 1970 election, it was on the ballot: Proposal C, to bar aide to non-public schools. And it became the major issue of the 1970 campaign. Bill Milliken running for reelection for it, Sandy Levin, the Democratic candidate running against Milliken, very much in favor of Prop C. Well, in the election, the outcome of that election was, to my great surprise, Prop C to bar public money for parochial schools passed statewide, and ironically in my own district, in my home county, Manistee County. The vote for and against Parochiaid, almost exactly mirrored the vote for and against me.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, it's amazing. Explain a little bit, why do you think Democrats by and large were for Parochiaid and Republicans against, although there were elements of the Republican party, particularly in the Christian reform community around Grand Rapids and Western Michigan, who were for Parochiaid, but not that many.

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, the Parochiaid issue was a strange one in a number of respects. For example, the Catholic schools and the Christian reform schools, both were very much for it. Whereas the Missouri Synod Lutherans, who had a number of schools in my district and elsewhere across the state, were very much opposed to it. And, as you say, the Dems were very much for it.

Bill Ballenger: Probably because there were a lot more Roman Catholics who were Democrats. And these were Roman Catholic schools and they were in financial trouble. That's basically... the battle cry was, "If we don't get help from the state, we're going to start closing schools." And they did.

Dennis Cawthorne: That's correct.

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Bill Ballenger: Wow. So anyway, huge issue. So we move on to 1972, Richard Nixon is President. He's running for re-election. And Bill Milliken is governor. Republicans are in the minority in the House. I think you assumed a leadership role around this time in the caucus for the Republicans. What do you remember about that time, and maybe going into '74 and so forth?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, again, in contrast to today, I didn't even think about running for a leadership position, no matter how minor, until my third term. And I was elected to Assistant Floor Leader my third term. And then in 1972, after that election, I was elected Republican Floor Leader. And in '72 we had our best chance to achieve a majority.

Bill Ballenger: Because Richard Nixon won a big landslide victory against George McGovern.

Dennis Cawthorne: A landslide. But, as we discussed earlier, the Dems, and the plan was written by the unions, had a new reapportionment plan and it was really fine-tuned. And the result was that although we lost control 60 to 50, there were more than six seats that were won by the Dems by the thinnest of margins. They carved those districts beautifully. In the case of my own district, it changed so that the only way you could get from the north of my district to the south of my district and not go into another district, was by water.

Bill Ballenger: Wow! That's a real gerrymander.

Dennis Cawthorne: That was a **real** gerrymander. So we could've won with a fair plan in '72, but we didn't. And then, in '74 I was elected Republican Leader of the House. I didn't have any opposition in the caucus elections, either that time or when I ran for re-election two years later.

Bill Ballenger: Watergate came along.

Dennis Cawthorne: Then Watergate occurred, of course, in '73, and Watergate really resulted in just a whole array of reform legislations enacted by the legislature, pretty much on a bipartisan basis. There was campaign finance reform, a lot more disclosure reporting, because it was really weak prior to that point. Freedom of information, open meetings, all that sort of sunshine stuff was enacted, again, pretty much with bipartisan support. And by the way, under Bill Milliken, we would have every week, in the governor's office a so-called quadrant meeting, whereby the governor and the Republican leader of the House and Senate, and the Democratic leader of the House and Senate would sit down every week and hash out the issues. Well that just doesn't occur anymore. It just doesn't occur.

Bill Ballenger: I know, whoever is in the majority seems to completely suppress the minority and the governor himself or herself doesn't seem to put much emphasis on getting the minority in the room if the majority doesn't want them there. And this is a bad thing, you think?

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Dennis Cawthorne: I certainly think it is, because we got a lot of good stuff done. And it was because of those quadrant meetings. As Minority Leader, there were advantages in having the governor of your own party. I think in some respects it gave more gravitas, more weight to your position as Minority Leader. However, it had a downside. Now I said I was elected unanimously both times as leader. That didn't mean that within the caucus there weren't those who didn't try to, you know, oppose a lot of what I did. And so the challenge for me was to bridge the gap between a somewhat conservative caucus and the very progressive Bill Milliken. So trying to bridge the gap didn't always make me super popular with the caucus, but it was an important thing and had to be done.

Bill Ballenger: What do you remember of some of the other members, like, let's say Bill Ryan, who succeeded Joe Kowalski as the Democratic leader? He was, I think, Roman Catholic, he was born and brought up in West Virginia. He was a union guy, a very stubborn negotiator.

Dennis Cawthorne: I always said that he was the American version of the European party, the Christian Socialists. He was very religious, but he was also sort of socialist.

Bill Ballenger: He was pretty far out there.

Dennis Cawthorne: And, if you'd meet him, he's not the typical political leader. He was not a good-looking guy...

Bill Ballenger: Very quiet, self-effacing, modest.

Dennis Cawthorne: Very self-effacing...

Bill Ballenger: Soft spoken...

Dennis Cawthorne: Very modest, but very good, highly respected, very able. And so I always had a lot of respect for Bill Ryan.

Bill Ballenger: What about Bobby Crim who succeeded him?

Dennis Cawthorne: Bobby was certainly a very able person.

Bill Ballenger: Former school teacher.

Dennis Cawthorne: Former school teacher who had been elected in the '64 Dem landslide and then defeated in the '66 Republican landslide.

Bill Ballenger: Yes, exactly.

Dennis Cawthorne: And then they carved a district for him in the seventy...

Bill Ballenger: Under Hatcher-Kleiner.

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Dennis Cawthorne: ...in the '72 plan so he had a district; came back in and immediately became a Dem floor leader. So when I was a Republican floor leader, he was my Dem counterpart. And then two years later, when I became leader, he was the Dem leader, as Speaker of the House. So we were in tandem in that respect.

Bill Ballenger: There was somebody else who was elected while you were a member of the House in 1970, in your party, a guy named John Engler, and he was only like 21 - 22 years old. And you served with him for eight years, from '70 to '78. At which point you left, we'll get to that in a minute, and John Engler ran for the state Senate in that year, and won. But those eight years... so what do you remember of John Engler then? Was there any inkling that John Engler would go on to become the governor of Michigan for 12 years and do what John Engler did?

Dennis Cawthorne: I will say that to the great majority of us, the answer to that would be no. But then I'm going to redeem myself here in a minute. He very much got under the skin of the Democratic members of the House and the Democratic leadership. I mean, they really...

Bill Ballenger: How could somebody who was a lowly little freshman grub worm in the minority, bother the Democrats so much?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well he was very assiduous, he was very diligent. And he would offer amendments; amendments that were designed to drive them crazy, which it did. And so he was very ... did a lot of homework, offered a lot of amendments, made a lot of speeches that were maybe short speeches, but kind of caustic regarding the Democrats and their agenda. He was not a good speaker. It was one of his great weaknesses. I will say that he and I had a very good relationship all the time he was in the House. And I will also then say, despite the fact that few would've guessed based on those early years, that in my opinion, when he was elected governor, he turned out to be a very good governor. I think one of our best, frankly.

Bill Ballenger: And he actually hadn't gone to Cooley Law School at that point and become a lawyer. That maybe, probably whetted his skills somewhat...

Dennis Cawthorne: Could be, it could be.

Bill Ballenger: ...and maybe gave him the final boost. So anyway, it comes to 1978, you've been in the House for six two-year terms. And several things were going on that year, Governor Milliken decided, "I'm going to run again for a third, full term." And he had to pick a lieutenant governor. And I think your name was very much in evidence, as a possibility. What happened in that year and what did it do for your future in politics or outside of politics?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, 1978 was kind of a watershed year for me. There's an old saying, "either go up or go out." And I've often said that politics and political office is not like starting up a new store in town. If you want to start a new hardware store right

across the street from another hardware store, you can do it. But in politics, there are certain slots: governor, lieutenant governor, U.S. Senate, Congress, and practicality suggests that you can't always run for those positions. If those positions are held by members of your own party, and they are well-regarded, you're shut out basically. In my own case, yes, I was very interested in achieving higher office, I was very much interested in doing that. But what happened was that, in the case of the governorship, Bill Milliken decided, although he debated right to the very end whether to do it or not, he decided to run for one more term as governor. And Bob Griffin, the incumbent U.S. Senator who first said he was not going to run for reelection, basically dropped out. But then had a change of mind, and so he was running for re-election, which shut that possibility off. Guy Vander Jagt was our member of Congress, very popular at the time. Very accomplished speaker, very well-known nationally, he decided to run for re-election. And to sort of add icing to the cake, Bill Milliken, in an unprecedented move, when he announced his reelection on that very day, walked in to the assembled press with his lieutenant governor choice on his arm. And it was Jim Bickley who had been his lieutenant governor in the first term.

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, the net result of that was that anyone like me was ... there were no opportunities.

Bill Ballenger: You could have run for the state Senate. There was an open state Senate seat.

Dennis Cawthorne: But at that point, after 12 years in the House of Representatives and being a leader, I didn't want to run for the state Senate and maybe start ... so that was out. However, ironically, Bill Milliken did subsequently in '78, ask me to be the Republican candidate for attorney general to run against Frank Kelley. I turned that down.

Bill Ballenger: Who would be your later partner, but we'll get to that in a few minutes.

Dennis Cawthorne: My later partner in law, yes.

Bill Ballenger: So, in other words, you were certainly interested in and willing to consider office outside the legislature in '78. That didn't happen for all of the reasons you described. But you had decided, "Look, I've had enough of the legislature, whether it's the House or the Senate, I would just as soon move on."

Dennis Cawthorne: Yeah, but Bill let's talk about something else for a minute before we do that. And that is, kind of how some things have changed on the legislative and state government scene since the time I was first elected. For example, the legislature itself underwent a great transformation beginning in really 1965, the first Democratic...

Bill Ballenger: Right.

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Dennis Cawthorne: Both the Democratic leadership and somewhat reluctantly, but still complicit Republican leadership, decided we wanted to make the legislature a respected branch of government.

Bill Ballenger: It was almost a national movement going on at that time.

Dennis Cawthorne: And there was a national movement to provide adequate staff to state legislatures.

Bill Ballenger: Strengthen the legislative branch.

Dennis Cawthorne: Strengthen the legislative branch, give them adequate staff, give them a decent salary and give them all sorts of support that they would need to do a good job. And to make them full-time, so that they could take care of their constituents, in the constituent's dealing with the bureaucracy. And so we took great pride in being here in Michigan, one of the first truly professional, full-time legislatures. And I always supported that and I still do, to the point where I think that some efforts going on right now to roll that back are greatly misguided. So the legislature did become very professional. When I was first elected also, there were no multi-client lobbyists. That was a phenomenon that first occurred in this state in about 1969 when Jim Karoub, who was defeated for reelection in the Democratic primary, for reelection to the House, he then started a multi-client lobbying firm, the first in Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: Right, 1969.

Dennis Cawthorne: '69. And then, we also had a very vibrant press. Every major news outlet had active press in the capitol.

Bill Ballenger: The media corps, the press corps was big. A lot of people.

Dennis Cawthorne: It was big and they had a lot of influence. There was Tom Green, although I think Tom Green was a little later than the '60s, but we all sort of quaked when Tom Green came around to interview. And there was a guy named Lou Gordon, and he had a big show in Detroit and we all sort of quaked when Lou Gordon made noise. All that is now gone. The capitol press is a pussy cat, if it exists at all.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, absolutely.

Dennis Cawthorne: And as far as money in politics, the unions not only provided a lot of money to the Dems, but the unions really dictated the Democratic legislative agenda. I mean, the Democratic caucuses in the House and Senate, they were dictated to totally by the unions. In fact, one memorable event when I was in the House and on the House Labor Committee, I'll never forget, Cy Chappel was a major lobbyist for AFL-CIO, I think.

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Dennis Cawthorne: Anyway, the chairperson of the House Labor Committee...

Bill Ballenger: Was it Jim Bradley?

Dennis Cawthorne: It was, and then it was Daisy Elliott, a Democratic Representative from Detroit. And I'll never forget Daisy Elliott coming out of the committee room and saying, "Why that Cy Chappel, he adjourned my committee and never even told me!" I always thought that epitomized the control that the unions had. And conversely, a big difference from today, the State Chamber and the business community was not politically active at all. When I was the Republican Leader of the House, I tried to convince the State Chamber to put up money, give us support, because we basically support your agenda. We could get no support from the State Chamber in terms of money or manpower. It was only when Jim Barrett subsequently became the President of the State Chamber of Commerce, and he brought in from outside Bob LaBrant...

Bill Ballenger: Bob LaBrant.

Dennis Cawthorne: ...that the Chamber really changed things. And now, of course, many people would argue that the legislature is dominated by the Chamber, and the influence of the unions is really miniscule compared to what it had been.

Bill Ballenger: You mean maybe the Chamber is adjourning the meetings before the Republicans...

Dennis Cawthorne: That is very possible. Although not quite as graphically as Cy Chapel and Daisy Elliott.

Bill Ballenger: So that's a very good point. In other words, these things that have happened, or are in the process of maybe happening right now, like term limits in 1992, and now, of course you have a petition drive for a part-time legislature, I gather you do not think either one of those developments are in the best interest of not just the legislative branch, but maybe the citizens of Michigan.

Dennis Cawthorne: Absolutely. I think term limits has been, I don't know if disaster is too strong a word, but it's not been good in my estimation. And this effort to create a part-time legislature, very ill-advised. Finally the legislature branch had some power and could be a counterweight. If these things should occur, i.e., part-time legislature with term limits, you're going to have an emasculated legislature and there'll be no constituent service. Why are legislators going to spend a lot of time in Lansing taking your case to the DNR or the Public Service Commission if they're not being paid and given adequate respect, it just won't happen.

Bill Ballenger: Dennis, were there other things that you remember from that time in the legislature, particularly during the late '70s that you've thought were important, not only to you personally, but maybe going forward, what you would end up doing after you were out of public service?

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Dennis Cawthorne: Well, one of the great things that happened to me was the opportunity to make a number of very interesting international trips. The State Department selected several of us to be members of a so-called NATO Inspection Team. And so we were selected to go to Brussels, Belgium, and inspect the NATO facilities as citizen observers. And that was quite a great opportunity. And then in 1977, the State Department selected a number of young political leaders to be part of a delegation to go to China. And China had just been opened up through the diplomacy of Nixon and Kissinger, and so our delegation was the first delegation of Americans in the province of Inner Mongolia in over 30 years. And one of the highlights of that trip was the opportunity to have dinner with the Vice Premier of China, Li Xiannian in the Great Hall of the People. And our delegation included the Lieutenant Governor of Massachusetts, Tip O'Neil's son, Lieutenant Governor of Arkansas Win Rockefeller III, and the President of the New York City Council, the Mayor of New Orleans, the Mayor of Portland. So it was just a great delegation. And then, also in the 1970s, I had the opportunity, again, through the Legislature, to visit South Africa at a time when apartheid was really riding high. And we had a chance to go throughout South Africa as guests of the government. And probably one of the greatest international trips was after I was out of the legislature, but practicing law: it was the first and only Soviet-American legal conference. And so I was invited with quite a number of other American lawyers to Moscow in September of 1990. The highlight of that was having dinner in the Kremlin with Premier Gorbachev. That was quite a great occasion. So I've had some great opportunities in that respect.

Bill Ballenger: Right. A few minutes ago we were talking about Governor Milliken meeting with the quadrant, Republican and Democrat House, Senate; it seemed to be more collegiality in the legislature between members who had served together for a while. What was your experience with that?

Dennis Cawthorne: Well, when I first came to the Legislature and throughout my time here, members did not go home at night like they do these days. Part of the reason was we didn't have as many freeways, I guess.

Bill Ballenger: And you met five days a week.

Dennis Cawthorne: We met five days a week. We started our sessions on Monday night and we didn't finish until Friday noon. Another big change in how things operate. And members stayed in Lansing, so you had a chance to rub elbows and bend elbows with members of the other party. But one of the interesting things is that when I was Republican Leader of the House, my roommate in Lansing was the Democratic Leader of the Senate, Bill Fitzgerald. These days, we would've been drummed out of our respective caucuses. We actually roomed together. And nobody made, well there were a few, maybe rumblings, but nobody made a big deal out of it. And, as a matter of fact, then Bill Fitzgerald, subsequently, in 1978, and we talked about that '78 election, Bill Fitzgerald ended up being the Democratic nominee for governor. And so he was the Democratic nominee for governor and Bill Milliken asked me to be the head of an entity called "Michigan for Milliken." So I worked opposite Bill.

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Bill Ballenger: Against Bill Fitzgerald.

Dennis Cawthorne: And when that election was over, then Bill Fitzgerald asked me to join his Detroit-based law firm – and I did. And we opened a Lansing office to begin our enterprise as lawyer slash lobbyists.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, so you were running the Lansing office of this Fitzgerald-based, Detroit law firm. And that arrangement lasted how long, because you build up clientele here in Lansing and that led you to where you are today? We can get there, it's a long story, maybe you want to go through that, how it grew, because your concept of what you wanted to do with that law firm and combine that with lobbying, was fairly unique wasn't it?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, because in Michigan, there were no lawyers who were lobbyists. At the federal level, in Washington, then and now, most lobbyists, well, probably most lobbyists are, in fact lawyers. And in most states, it's lawyers - law firms that do the lobby. In Michigan that had not been the case. And we saw this as an opportunity to break new ground and offer really broadened services. More comprehensive. We can do more for the clients as lawyers who are lobbyists or lobbyists who are lawyers. And so we became the first firm of that kind. And again, at that time, 1979, there were only about three or four multi-client firms. We were one of the very first ones. There was, as I have mentioned earlier, Jimmy Karoub. And then-Senate Majority Leader Emil Lockwood, when he left the Senate, joined up with Jerry Coombs...

Bill Ballenger: From the Catholic Conference...

Dennis Cawthorne: ...from the Catholic Conference, which came about sort of because of Parochiaid, by the way. And so they had, I think the second multi-client, called...

Bill Ballenger: Public Affairs Associates.

Dennis Cawthorne: ...Public Affairs Associates. The third was Tom Cleary, although Tom was more of a one-man shop at that time. And so we were the next ones.

Bill Ballenger: Then a couple years after you started, Governmental Consultant Services started. We've talked about Bob VanderLaan the Senate Republican Leader and Bobby Crim, the Democratic Leader of the House.

Dennis Cawthorne: They formed a multi-client firm. So we were just about the first, but certainly the only one that emphasized law. And yes, the firm grew very rapidly, as all lobbying firms did at that time, because there was a great explosion in lobbying activity. What had happened was, there would be umbrella organizations, let's take for example the Michigan Municipal League. Well they had lobbying activity on behalf of cities generally. But then pretty soon the City of Detroit said, "Well we need our own lobbyists." And Grand Rapids did, and this one and that one. And that proliferated with the colleges and universities, with the

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school districts. And so the array of clients just kept expanding and expanding. There were times when I thought there can't possibly be any more entities out there, but there always were.

Bill Ballenger: There always were.

Dennis Cawthorne: And it's still true today.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, amazing. Well this went on, I'm going to really jump ahead. We're going to go backwards in time again in a few minutes, but you get to 1997, '98, Frank Kelley, has been the longest-serving attorney general in the history of the United States, 37 years and he finally says, "I'm not going to run again." And that led to a development for your firm. And, by the way, I want to ask you, all during your tenure in the House, and afterwards, up till 1997, '98, Frank Kelley was the attorney general. What was your impression of him at that time? And how did things evolve and develop in 1997, '98?

Dennis Cawthorne: We'd mentioned a moments ago that I had started out with Bill Fitzgerald. And that relationship lasted about eight and a half years. And then the firm, which had grown much larger, as law firms do, kind of split. So I took that opportunity to make the Lansing office kind of independent. So we were our own firm and Bill Fitzgerald was no longer connected with us, although he and I left on very good terms. So then, yes, I had known Frank Kelley, but not well. I had very little interchange with him. I've gone through my scrapbooks, and I found some photos and newspaper articles of he and I together on a program, for example, at a Fraternal Order of Police event in Ludington. And some other stuff, but I really didn't know him very well, but knew he had a sterling reputation and also was unbeatable as I indicated.

Bill Ballenger: Except by Bob Griffin in 1972 when he ran for the U.S. Senate, anyway, go ahead.

Dennis Cawthorne: That's correct. So in 19..., I think it was the Spring of 1998, because I believe that I was in Florida at the time. I got a phone call from him, and he expressed to me his interest in joining our firm. Now, I think a lot of people might have guessed at the time that we courted him. That was not the case. He shocked me by calling me. In fact, when he called me to express that interest, I really didn't think that this would go anywhere. Because I really didn't think that he was all that serious. But then I guess I didn't know Frank Kelley very well, because he was serious, and before very long we had reached an agreement, that he would join the firm and in deference to his seniority and his reputation and everything else, I said, "We'll rename the firm, with you first," and it's good marketing, too. "We'll rename the firm with you, Mr. Kelley, first, and I'll be second." So it was his idea and it worked out very well. He and I had a very good relationship, always have had. As he will tell many of his friends, we have never had a cross word in our relationship. It was always built on great respect and great trust. And that relationship endured until finally, in two thousand, I believe, fifteen, at the end of 2015, he decided he was going to retire completely. But his name

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and my names are still on this firm. Although neither one of us currently has an ownership interest in the firm.

Bill Ballenger: So let's go back in time again, just eight years. It's 1990, you have had your lawyer-lobbyist operation going for about a dozen years here in Lansing. Suddenly there's a momentous election, a big upset when John Engler, your former colleague in the House, up until that time a state senator, defeated, by a narrow margin, the incumbent governor Jim Blanchard, and became governor. What happened from that point on? Didn't John Engler ask you to do something that led to a whole new experience for you that you might not have ever foreseen?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes. Well, first of all, when John Engler ran against Jim Blanchard, who was seeking his third term, almost no one gave him a chance of winning. I guess to this day, I'm still kind of wondering what was going through my mind when I openly endorsed him. Probably the only person in the lobbying community who endorsed him. And so, and again, we'd always had a good relationship. And so when he was elected to everybody's surprise, we saw that as opening up new possibilities. Not to sound self-righteous, I never tried to exploit that. But anyway, after he was elected, he had a transition office. And one day, this was like in December, he walked into the transition office, looked over in my direction, I just happened to be there, and he said loudly, "Well, there's my new Mackinac Island State Park Commission member." And crazy as it sounds, I had never even thought about the possibility of going on the commission with an appointment from him. And so, the minute he said that I thought, "Well, I guess that works."

Bill Ballenger: Well, of course. At this point, you had had a lot of experience on Mackinac Island, starting when you worked up there as a student in the summer. And then hadn't you become a property owner and you'd been going up there for years? He knew you really knew quite a bit about Mackinac Island and you loved the place, so it wasn't like he was asking you to go to Beaver Island or something, you know?

Dennis Cawthorne: That's true. Yes, I had started working there as a student when I was at Albion. And I worked for the Carriage Tours Company and then after a year doing that, the Company decided that I should be the General Manager of their Chamber of Commerce up there. I was only 22 years old, so I became Manager of the Chamber of Commerce. And while my colleagues at Harvard Law School were working on Wall Street, getting great experience, making a lot of money, I was toiling as the General Manager in the summer of the Mackinac Island Chamber of Commerce.

Bill Ballenger: I bet you had a lot more fun than they did.

Dennis Cawthorne: I had a lot more fun.

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Bill Ballenger: A lot more fun.

Dennis Cawthorne: It also was a good place to make political connections. For example, I took George Romney around in the summer of '63 to meet the local business community and legislators liked to come to the Island and do various things. I had a chance to interface with them, it was some of those Republican members that I told I was going to be running for the House. And that helped pave the way with the Lansing party group. Right after law school and after being the Manager of the Chamber of Commerce, I did continue my relationships up there, I bought property up there.

Bill Ballenger: What about The Village Inn?

Dennis Cawthorne: And I got married up there in the summer of 1976. I came back from the Republican National Convention in Kansas City, where Ford and Reagan were duking it out, came back from being a delegate out there and got married on the Island.

Bill Ballenger: Wow!

Dennis Cawthorne: In August of 1976. And then, subsequently, built from the ground up, The Village Inn. There had been a Village Inn, but we built a brand new one from the ground up. Opened it, and had other people run it of course for us. And enjoyed that. Enjoyed that aspect.

Bill Ballenger: Did you buy or build a house up there on the Island?

Dennis Cawthorne: I also built a house up there right on the beach, a great place, in fact John Engler had been there a number of times, up to that house. So yes, my connections there were very strong and very deep. And so being asked to, or being appointed to the Commission, was a good fit and I enjoyed it. And then, I was actually one of the very first appointments that Engler announced publicly. I think I was among the first ten or 12. And then at the first meeting I was elected chairman, because the tradition had been that the governor's party has the chairmanship. So I became chairman in February of 1991. And subsequently became the longest serving chairman in the history of the Commission.

Bill Ballenger: How big was the Commission?

Dennis Cawthorne: Seven member Commission. By law, not more than four can be of one political party. Now, some governors have stretched that so that they don't appoint, we'll say the opposition, they appoint someone who at least is not another out and out member of their party.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

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Dennis Cawthorne: So I served for 22 years on the Commission, 18 and a half as chairperson. Again, the tradition had been that the chairman is a member of the governor's party. Well, when Jennifer Granholm was elected governor, I kind of figured my days as chairman at least, were numbered. But she didn't make any changes until my term came up about three years later. And Governor Granholm called me and she said, "I'm happy to reappoint you as a member." Because Frank Kelley was already on the Commission and Frank was a great booster of hers and of me to her. So I was always pretty sure I'd get reappointed. But she said, "However, I would like to have a member of my party as the chairman."

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Dennis Cawthorne: And so she said, "How about if Frank becomes chairman?" So that worked out. I was vice-chairman for that three and a half year period. And then when her governorship ended, and we had a new governor in 2010...

Bill Ballenger: '11.

Dennis Cawthorne: 2011. I immediately became chairman again.

Bill Ballenger: For another two years.

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, and Frank became vice-chairman.

Bill Ballenger: And he became vice-chairman. Well, okay. Mackinac Island is a special place. There are some very arcane lease and tax arrangements up there that are peculiar to Mackinac Island. What are some of the things that you encountered? For instance, and this seems really minor, but wasn't there some controversy over selling the Captain's Quarters up there next to Fort Michilimackinac?

Dennis Cawthorne: Every once in a while, it's like clockwork, we're overdue for it now, so we should be having one, one of these days. Soon someone will say, "To raise money for the State, let's just sell the governor's residence." Or, "We'll sell the Captain's Quarters and the Major's Quarters." So then we have to remind them that the State of Michigan acquired these properties from the federal government in 1895, but with a "reverter clause", which says that if these are not used for public purposes, these properties revert to the federal government. So then we have to tell them, "No, you can't do that, unless you want this all to revert to the federal government." So there were some cries for selling the governor's residence and the Captain's and Major's, but one of the first big controversies, when I became a member and chair was over the leasing of the land on which these big West Bluff and East Bluff homes, cottages...

Bill Ballenger: Mansions!

Dennis Cawthorne: ...mansions sit. Individuals own the residences, the buildings, but they do not own the land under. That land is leased from the State Park Commission. Now

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that first started when the federal government owned that property, so it wasn't an invention of the State Park Commission. The State Park Commission in 1895, when it succeeded the federal government and inherited that system. But the issue was, what is a fair rent to charge for that land? And in the depression, and people forget this, in the depression a number of the residences up there went into tax delinquency. You could've bought almost any place in "The Bluffs" for \$800, a thousand, fifteen hundred. And the argument at the time with the State Park Commission was, "Well, we've got to lower these rents so that people can continue to own these houses, if possible." So the rents were lowered to, in many cases, \$50 and \$25 a year. Well the depression ended. We went into the good times of the '50s, the '60s and '70s, and '80s, but the rent never changed. And I always thought that that was wrong and I determined, after being notified that I would be on the Commission, that one of my first objectives would be to make the whole rent system more fair, because it's the taxpayers who are losing the revenue. Well, coincidentally, the Detroit Free Press at about the time after I was appointed...

Bill Ballenger: In the early '90s.

Dennis Cawthorne: ...yeah, the early '90s, went on a rampage over the scandal of these low lease rates. And I was sympathetic to it although they overplayed their hand. But on the other hand, the incumbent cottage owners wanted no part of raising these rates. So what I did was to diffuse it, was to appoint a commission, the old political standby ploy. And we appointed good people to the commission.

Bill Ballenger: Wasn't Kelley on it?

Dennis Cawthorne: No, Phil Runkel, the outgoing State Superintendent of Public ... He had been State Superintendent of Public Instruction. I made him chairman. Because he owned property on the Island, so he wasn't just picked off the wall. And a highly respected local circuit judge, Edward Fenlon, who used to be a rum runner between Mackinac Island and the Snow Islands, long before he was a judge in the prohibition days. And we appointed an historian, a real estate expert – appointed this blue ribbon committee. They came back with recommendations that we adopted and they are in place to this day. And they have a CPI in them, so they stay fresh. And so we cleaned that system up completely. And another big issue always was the funding, the proper funding of the state park, because we needed adequate money to run and preserve Mackinac.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right. Well, also, didn't Governor Granholm at some point in your tenure zero out Mackinac Island, saying, "Hey, you're getting no money this year, we've got a fiscal crisis." What happened then?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, she did and she took some very bad advice from her Director of the DNR, whose name at the moment, fortunately, escapes me. The Director of the DNR recommended to the governor that we get zero general fund monies and that there be an admission fee basically charged. There'd be a head tax. You come to

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Mackinac Island you pay, whatever. I don't know if it was going to be five dollars, I don't know what it was.

Bill Ballenger: You mean that tourists come over on the ferry and they have to pay a head tax.

Dennis Cawthorne: And we pointed out that number one, the ferries don't land in the state park, therefore, we don't even know how you can collect this, because they land in the City of Mackinac Island and the park boundaries are very irregular. They're not what you might think, by the way. But the bottom line is that when you come to Mackinac Island, you don't land in the state park, you land in the city. You soon get into the state park, but unless you had gates all over, you could never collect that tax. So, once again, we appointed a citizen's committee to make recommendations. Which quickly came back and said, "This head tax is a bad idea; won't fly." And we came up with some other things, but eventually the governor wisely saw that this is not a good approach and she very wisely, to her credit, dropped the idea, and to this day we do not have a head tax for entering Mackinac Island.

Bill Ballenger: Let's get to Proposal A, which actually happened earlier than what we just talked about, back in 1994. A famous vote, Proposal A, to completely change the funding mechanism for K-12 public education in Michigan, but it had big ramifications for Mackinac Island and how did you negotiate a solution to that crisis?

Dennis Cawthorne: In terms of dollar and cents benefit to Mackinac Island, that probably was one of my greatest accomplishments. Proposal A, as you've indicated, was a very drastic proposal at the time and had the effect of greatly reducing property taxes in Michigan, except in the case of Mackinac Island, where, because of high property tax values, we had a very low school millage. So, to adopt the Proposal A formula, whereby it was 18 mills flat and then ... I guess 18 mills flat. We would have had to have doubled our schools tax. Well I discovered that Senator Harry Gast was very...

Bill Ballenger: ...Who was from Southwest Michigan, and he had a little community called Bridgeman, which I think was the only other community in the entire state with a situation like Mackinac Island for other reasons. So you got together with your old buddy Harry Gast, because you served with him in the House.

Dennis Cawthorne: Yeah, I said, "Harry, we've got to solve this problem for our two communities." And so we did. We wrote into the law that under certain circumstances, your old millage is your base millage. And consequently, instead of paying 18 mills for schools, we only pay like nine mills. And the net result for our business community and for second home owners was huge relief. So that was a very important thing.

Bill Ballenger: And you saved millions of dollars to these businesses and second home owners.

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Dennis Cawthorne: Of course, the first homes, the local population, they were okay anyway, because they had homesteads. So homesteads were taxed at a lower level. But it was the second homes and the businesses that would've gotten a huge leap. And by the way, one of the reasons that we never want Mackinac Island schools, even though they only now have 75 students, we do not want a merger with anybody else, because if we have a merger with for example, Saint Ignace, we would inherit their property tax structure. And it would result in a big jump in taxes. So we do not want any mergers.

Bill Ballenger: What about "the ferry wars?" That was one of the most recent crises you had on the Island?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yeah, although it was more a private business crisis. Basically the Arnold Line, which has served the Straits since 1878 was sold, and actually I represented in my law/lobbying capacity the buyers of the Arnold Line. But the Arnold Line purchasers did some very foolish things in terms of financing their purchase, and they quickly ran into huge problems, resulting in their being essentially foreclosed on by their note holders. And when it was all said and done, Arnold Line basically went out of business. But we were very concerned about the impact of all that. And indeed, that event, of Arnold Line going out of business, has greatly changed the shape of downtown Mackinac Island. Because prior to that, the great bulk of passengers arrived in the downtown toward Marquette Park. Now the whole scale's been tilted so that most people arrive, actually at the end toward the Village Inn, which has certain positive things. But it resulted in changing the traffic flow. It resulted in buildings that had not been on the market being sold and being redeveloped or developed from the ground up. And so it had a major impact on the Island. And its reverberations are still felt. But there wasn't much that the Commission could do, and by that time I was off the Commission, by the way. But it was a major event on the Island, but nothing that we could do from a governmental standpoint.

Bill Ballenger: So Star Line and Shepler are the only two ferries right now?

Dennis Cawthorne: That's correct.

Bill Ballenger: Arnold is kaput.

Dennis Cawthorne: Except they still maintain a freight business. Although even it's diminished in size and scope.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, when you look at Mackinac Island today, compared to the halcyon years of the 1950s, when you first started working there, how do you see the Island today? Do you think it's in better shape, are things going better overall after all these years, half a century later?

Dennis Cawthorne: Yes, I think a lot of people, when these new buildings go up or there are changes on the Island, a lot of people, they moan and say, "Well the place, the character

is changing, etc. Well, to a certain extent, that's true. However, basically the Island has never been in better shape. The local government is much more sophisticated than it ever was. There are regulations and rules in place that protect it much more than in the past. And I was instrumental, I think it's fair to say, in convincing the city council, because those things were under the jurisdiction of the council, to adopt them. For example, we have a sign ordinance, which we didn't have before. We have now historic preservation districts, which we didn't have before, although I will say it's something of a mixed blessing there. And we have building regulations that we never had before. And the properties are much better cared-for then they ever were before. So if you would look at Mackinac Island as compared to what it was when I first came there in the '60s, the physical shape of it is much better. Yes, there are some aspects of it that have been lost, I don't deny that. But overall, the community is better-protected and it can offer better services and is safer; we have far-better fire protection than we've ever had before. And we've had a mayor there, she's been mayor, Margaret Doud, for over 40 years. She has overseen a lot of very progressive changes, so there's much to be said in a positive sense.

Bill Ballenger: Is the tourist flow into the Island the same as it was back in the '50s? Larger, smaller? Has there been an ebb and flow over the years?

Dennis Cawthorne: That's an interesting question. And there has been an ebb and flow to some extent. We had some leaner years when you wouldn't think we would've had them, maybe in, say, the late '80s, early '90s. Our biggest year ever probably, was the bicentennial year of 1976 by actual count. Then we went into something of a swoon and now we're back pretty well. But one of the interesting things to contemplate is the effect that the Indian casinos have had on leisure time spending. I think a lot of people don't realize what a huge impact that has had. That has taken a lot of discretionary money away from places like Mackinac Island, in my opinion...

Bill Ballenger: Interesting.

Dennis Cawthorne: ...and has shifted it elsewhere. So that the casinos, as far as the Island looking at it narrowly is concerned, I think were very much of a mixed blessing. But traffic is good, we've had good years, our hotels have never done better than they have the last few years. So the prospects are bright.

Bill Ballenger: How about The Village Inn, what's happening with The Village Inn now?

Dennis Cawthorne: The Village Inn is doing well. For the last six years, Grand Hotel leased the business from us. They are going to concentrate on their own properties going forward, so it's a new, and I think, basically a very good chapter that The Village Inn is entering into. We had a very positive relationship with Grand Hotel, and the relationship has ended, but on very positive terms. So we all look forward to...

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Bill Ballenger: So you're resuming your active involvement in The Village Inn? You're going to be in there polishing glasses?

Dennis Cawthorne: I'm not going to be in the kitchen. No, probably not. We'll have some good people who will do that. But the old layer between us which was taken care of by Grand Hotel, for example, and before that, another local person, Ron Dufina, that was removed.

Bill Ballenger: The Grand Hotel itself is such an iconic building and it has such a grand and glorious history all by itself, independent of anything else almost on the Island. Do you feel its prominence on the Island is, let's say proportionately greater today than it was, let's say, back after World War II, or in the early years of the 20th century, or not as much? Have other things built up around it? The infrastructure on the Island, entertainment tours down on main street and elsewhere to the point where maybe The Grand isn't quite as dominant? How do you look at it?

Dennis Cawthorne: I would say this. I have known the past three operators. First was W. Stewart Woodfield, who was the uncle of Dan Musser, Jr., who's the father of Dan Musser III, who is now the CEO. Grand Hotel has always been very important to the Island and the relationship between Grand Hotel and the local community has always been very positive. The Mussers in particular, senior and junior, have always worked very hard to show their appreciation for the community. For example, every year they have an appreciation night: all the firemen, all the policemen, all the street sweepers. Everyone's invited who has contributed anything to the Island. And so the Musser family's always been very, very generous in supporting the community. So I don't think they're any more dominant or less dominant, but they are certainly very supportive of that community and I know the community appreciates that. Which reminds me that one of the things that I was able to do for the Island, by the way, in connection with this: we now have a very good health system on the Island. We're affiliated with Mackinac Straits Hospital in St. Ignace, which has become a very good rural hospital. One of the things that I was able to do after I left the legislature and was in the law-lobbying field, was to convince Tommy Thompson, the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services to designate the Mackinac Island facility with a special designation that no other rural hospital got, and the result was increased federal funds to this day to that facility. And so that's very important.

Bill Ballenger: Amazing. One last question about Mackinac Island and that is telephone rates. That was a big controversy. What happened on that?

Dennis Cawthorne: That was something we were able to accomplish for the Island also. Every time you picked up a phone and called St. Ignace or Mackinac City, you were paying a toll. Well, particularly in the case of St. Ignace, which really has a close relationship and always has had with the Island. That was very burdensome and troublesome. So I did go to the Public Service Commission and put some pressure on AT&T, and the result is that at least St. Ignace is no longer a toll call.

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And that saved people a lot of money and just made the connection with St. Ignace that much stronger. A lot of people, in their mind's eye, think of Mackinac City and maybe Mackinac Island, but there's never been a very strong relationship. But St. Ignace community and Mackinac Island community has always been a very strong relationship. A lot of loyalty back and forth.

Bill Ballenger: Interesting. Okay, so at this point, how much time are you spending, in a year let's say, on Mackinac Island, compared to downstate and East Lansing, where I think you've lived over the years. Or do you ever get back to Manistee, are there any Cawthornes left over there? I mean, what's going on?

Dennis Cawthorne: I have only a handful, well less than a handful of living relatives in the Manistee area, which is too bad, because as you say, our families, on both sides, went back to the 1880s, when my mother's family came from Berlin and my father's family came from Indiana via all sorts of places, and ultimately, England.

I spend nearly all my time from late May to late October on the Island. I enjoy living there, I enjoy our home, which is just a great place. It's humble, but it's a very, very nice place. And the rest of the time I'm in East Lansing, although I do like to travel and I have traveled a lot in the past. I've been on every continent except Antarctica and I have no desire to go to Antarctica, by the way. And so I love to travel and we do a lot of that. As far as the business, it's in the hands of our younger people. We have no ownership interest anymore, although they kindly provide me with a desk and a telephone and even a computer, which I occasionally use.

Bill Ballenger: So you're down here in the office when you're ensconced in East Lansing, your home most of the time.

Dennis Cawthorne: That's correct.

Bill Ballenger: Well listen, Dennis Cawthorne, I want to thank you very much for a tremendous interview. A fantastic career. We've covered hopefully the waterfront; a little bit of everything. If there's anything else you want to get out right now, now's your chance. Otherwise, thank you very much.

Dennis Cawthorne: I can't think of anything further and I appreciate all the friendship of so many people. I appreciate the good work of the Michigan Political History Society and you've been a great interviewer, and we've had a great relationship over the years. And I hope it continues for a long time to come.

Bill Ballenger: It will!

Dennis Cawthorne: Good!

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