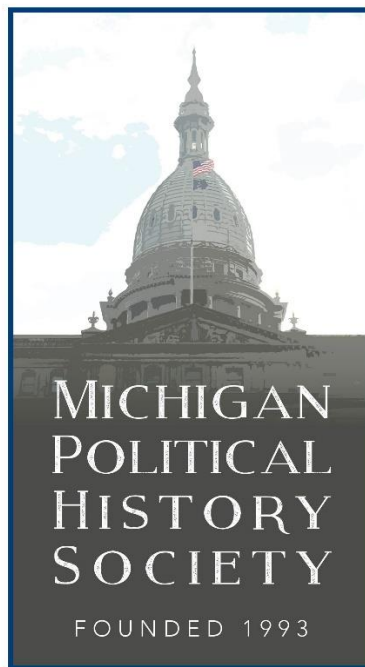


Bob Vanderlaan

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 Senator Bob VanderLaan who was a seminal figure in 20th century Michigan politics. Bob VanderLaan, a great pleasure to be here with you today.

Bob VanderLaan: Well, happy to be here.

Bill Ballenger: Let me start out with this question. You were born in Paris Township, Kent County. I don't even think that exists anymore, does it?

Bob VanderLaan: No, it doesn't. It's now the city of Kentwood.

Bill Ballenger: When did it become Kentwood?

Bob VanderLaan: 1961.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so you were not only born in Paris Township, you eventually became I think a trustee and the clerk, maybe, And also the supervisor.

Bob VanderLaan: I did. I started out as library commissioner and then in 1954, I became a trustee. In 1959, I became clerk, and in 1960, supervisor.

Bill Ballenger: Wow. Steady progress upward.

Bob VanderLaan: Steady progress.

Bill Ballenger: And you were very young. You were in your 20's then, right?

Bob VanderLaan: I was. I left there when I was 32, so I was in the 20's for most of the time.

Bill Ballenger: You were a young Senator. I'm going to go back a little bit here. You were born in Paris Township. Your parents, were they longtime residents of that area?

Bob VanderLaan: My father moved to Paris Township in about 1900. He was born in Grand Rapids, Michigan. My mother was born in Chicago and came to Holland, Michigan, when she was a teenager, and then they married and lived in Paris Township.

Bill Ballenger: Did she have a Dutch background, too?

Bob VanderLaan: She did. She was from Greeceland. She was a Dykstra and came from Greeceland.

Bill Ballenger: Well, all these Dutch, they came either maybe to Chicago in your mother's family's case, but mainly to Holland and West Michigan, what, in the 1840's?

Bob VanderLaan: The early Dutch came in 1840, 1845, 1848. There was a wave of Dutch people. That's about the time the Irish had their potato famine and a lot of Irish came, too. That same economic problem affected most of Europe, and that's why they came over, the early Dutch. The later Dutch in the late 1800's came over primarily for religious reasons. Some settled in Iowa, some in Chicago, and some in Grand Rapids.

Bill Ballenger: Which generation were you from the original Dutch settlers, third or fourth generation?

Bob VanderLaan: My great-grandparents lived in the Netherlands and were there and raised a family. My great-grandmother did come to America. My grandparents came to America as young people, and my parents were born in America, and I was born here, of course.

Bill Ballenger: So you're only the second generation born.

Bob VanderLaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Would they start out as farmers? Were they farmers?

Bob VanderLaan: No, they started out in Grand Rapids primarily as furniture factory workers. They came over as farmers, but they got jobs in the furniture industry.

Bill Ballenger: A furniture factory.

Bob VanderLaan: Then they had roots, of course, in agriculture in the Netherlands, and as soon as they could gather enough money to buy a farm or rent one, then they moved out of the city of Grand Rapids into the suburban areas or township area.

Bill Ballenger: Was that the Paris Township move back around the turn of the century?

Bob VanderLaan: That was Paris Township.

Bill Ballenger: They finally got enough money to start a farm.

Bob VanderLaan: Yes, they did.

Bill Ballenger: So were you raised on a farm?

Bob VanderLaan: I was raised on a farm.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Bob VanderLaan: In Paris Township.

Bill Ballenger: Wow, no kidding.

Bob VanderLaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: So you had the early morning chores and the whole nine yards?

Bob VanderLaan: Sure did, my father was a builder. He started out building barns and later he built homes. He got his start really in World War II. He was in the League Island Navy Yard in Pennsylvania as a construction worker on converting ships over to warships. Then he kept that trade back in Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: Well, now, did you go to the public school system or the private school system over there?

Bob VanderLaan: I went to the public school system for the first eight years, to Smith School as it was called. It was a quarter mile from our House, and I had the same teacher for eight years. Following that, I went to Grand Rapids Christian High School, which was in the city. It was a large high school, still there today.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob VanderLaan: Following that I went to Calvin College and the University of Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: So Smith School was kind of like the old-fashioned little red schoolhouse?

Bob VanderLaan: One room country school, and it was red. We had the same teacher and we had about 30 to 40 students, depending on the particular year.

Bill Ballenger: What was the population roughly when you were growing up of Paris Townships would you say?

Bob VanderLaan: I think it was 2,000 people.

Bill Ballenger: 2,000. And today what is the city of Kentwood?

Bob VanderLaan: Maybe 30,000.

Bill Ballenger: Wow. Okay, so you got through Grand Rapids Christian, and then you went to Calvin?

Bob VanderLaan: Then I went to Calvin College, yep.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, and what did you major in?

Bob VanderLaan: I majored in political science and history.

Bill Ballenger: So you were always interested in political science and history, right?

Bob VanderLaan: I was. Our teacher in the eighth grade had a husband who was very much interested in politics. He used to bring her to school in the morning, and then he would sit and talk politics with us, and we got interested in it.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, I mean, I think I read somewhere that you were a delegate to every state convention beginning in the year Eisenhower was nominated in 1952, right up until the time you left the legislature 30 years later.

Bob VanderLaan: I think that's true.

Bill Ballenger: So you were really into it at an early age.

Bob VanderLaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: So when you got out of Calvin, then what? Did you start teaching right away?

Bob VanderLaan: Yes, I started teaching. I taught in a private school system, a junior high for two years. Then they formed a new high school in South Grand Rapids, South Christian High School, and I taught there for nine years. Then I left for politics.

Bill Ballenger: Well, didn't you also teach at Calvin a little bit, too?

Bob VanderLaan: I did. Michigan had the Constitutional Convention, you will recall.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob VanderLaan: One of the staffers to that convention was Walter De Vries.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, right.

Bob VanderLaan: Maybe you remember Walter De Vries?

Bill Ballenger: Sure, absolutely.

Bob VanderLaan: He was active in it. He was a prof at Calvin, teaching political parties, public opinion, and pressure groups.

Bill Ballenger: He'd been one of your professors?

Bob VanderLaan: No.

Bill Ballenger: He came afterward?

Bob VanderLaan: He came after, and he taught state and local government. He left and I filled in temporarily for two years while he was gone.

Bill Ballenger: While he was a delegate to the Convention.

Bob VanderLaan: While he was a delegate.

Bill Ballenger: That's where he hooked up with George Romney at the Constitutional Convention.

Bob VanderLaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: And the West Michigan mafia.

Bob VanderLaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: They all went on to bigger and better things, and we'll get to that a little bit later. You were township supervisor in Paris Township, you were teaching, and the Constitutional Convention is going on. Then in 1962, there's an election for the state Senate. Now, had you ever run beyond township office before? Had you thought about it? I mean, what was going through your mind at that time?

Bob VanderLaan: When I was teaching, at the end of my teaching career, the Constitutional Convention was called. They were going to elect delegates. I believe they elected a delegate from each house district and one from each senate district. So I filed petitions for a house district delegate to the Constitutional Convention. That was my first statewide venture. Ella Koeze was state committeewoman or national committeewoman.

Bill Ballenger: National committeewoman.

Bob VanderLaan: And John Martin was the committeeman.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Bob VanderLaan: Well, they both came and visited me, and Ella Koeze said, "I never sought political office, but I really would like to be a delegate to the Convention. And you are a candidate for it also, and I don't know how the election is going to come out."

Bill Ballenger: In the same district.

Bob VanderLaan: In the same district. "But I really would appreciate it if you would step aside." Well, John Martin was just a great guy, and he said also, "You know, Ella really deserves this, and if she steps aside, if you have other ambitions later, I'll put together a group that will help you win an office, either state rep or state Senate if you'd like to do it." I felt that was a reasonable request, and I had known Ella a little bit because she was very active as a volunteer.

Bill Ballenger: Right, sure.

Bob VanderLaan: She just gave an awful lot of money and a lot of time. So I felt obligated a little bit, and I pulled out.

Bill Ballenger: So that was your first political deal?

Bob VanderLaan: Yeah, I withdrew my petitions.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, but with the expectation of a greater payoff later.

Bob VanderLaan: Right.

Bill Ballenger: The later payoff may have come as early as what? 1962 then?

Bob VanderLaan: Well, it came very soon, because the senator in that district was Charles Veenstra. Charles Veenstra was considered to be part of the old guard.

Bill Ballenger: Right, he was a World War I veteran.

Bob VanderLaan: Oh, he really was. He would make a speech and he would wrap himself in the American flag literally if one was there. Well, the Republican party in Kent County had undergone quite a change. They had what was called the home front after World War II. They decided that they had to get rid of the old-timers. So they went after Bartel Jonkman who was the congressman with this young returned vet Jerry Ford, and they did away with McKay. They took McKay on.

Bill Ballenger: John McKay.

Bob VanderLaan: Frank D. McKay.

Bill Ballenger: Frank D. McKay.

Bob VanderLaan: As an enemy.

Bill Ballenger: He was a big power broker.

Bob VanderLaan: He was the boss.

Bill Ballenger: Not just in that area, but he was statewide power broker.

Bob VanderLaan: Statewide, yeah, he was a statewide power broker. They took him on, and they took on the members of the senate and the house who were there. Charlie Veenstra was in the Senate and Perry Greene was in the Senate, and then there were three house members, Bolt, Borgman, and Whinery. They said we're kind of going to get rid of all of them. John Martin was one of those who was active in that movement. So he came to me and said, "We will support you for that spot." But a wrinkle appeared. The wrinkle was that my uncle was the chairman

of the board of supervisors at the time, and he decided he wanted to run for the Senate.

Bill Ballenger: For the whole county.

Bob VanderLaan: In 1960.

Bill Ballenger: Where was he from?

Bob VanderLaan: Caledonia Township.

Bill Ballenger: Caledonia Township.

Bob VanderLaan: So he ran for the Senate against Charlie Veenstra in the primary and he lost.

Bill Ballenger: This was in '60?

Bob VanderLaan: That was in '60.

Bill Ballenger: So this is the same year that John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon were running.

Bob VanderLaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: So this was just before the Constitutional Convention started, and it was two years before you decided to get into it. Okay, go ahead. So he lost, so Veenstra was in again.

Bob VanderLaan: Yep, Veenstra was there.

Bill Ballenger: Those were two-year terms at that time.

Bob VanderLaan: They were only two years under the older Constitution.

Bill Ballenger: Under the old Constitution. So Veenstra who had been elected, hadn't he been in the house at one point and then he was in the Senate? I mean, he'd been in since just after World War II, I think.

Bob VanderLaan: He was in the house and he was in the Senate, and he worked for a senator from Oakland County who had GM dealership, and Charlie Veenstra was kind of the truck salesman for it.

Bill Ballenger: You mean, his fellow senator?

Bob VanderLaan: Yeah, and he sold trucks to various political units in the state of Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: These were in the days when senators weren't paid very much.

Bob VanderLaan: Oh, no.

Bill Ballenger: It wasn't a full-time job.

Bob VanderLaan: Nope, nope, three months.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, and so Veenstra would be selling trucks for his fellow senator the rest of the year.

Bob VanderLaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: So you stepped aside for Ella Koeze who was elected to the Constitutional Convention, and the along came another election in 1962 with reapportionment thrown in as a factor.

Bob VanderLaan: Well, we've got to back up a little bit. The Constitution called for an apportionment commission

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob VanderLaan: The Constitution called for the House to be elected on population and the Senate still on area to a degree, on geography.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob VanderLaan: That was changed by a Supreme Court decision, the one man, one vote.

Bill Ballenger: But that was later.

Bob VanderLaan: That was later. But that was changed, but that threw out the apportionment that I was elected under, and that was considered illegal.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, but my point is between '60 and '62, was the district changed at all, that Veenstra had been representing? Were you running against Veenstra in the primary in 1962 with a third candidate, and I'm not sure who that was?

Bob VanderLaan: Yep, Bob Blett.

Bill Ballenger: Now who was Bob Blett, sounds like another Dutchman?

Bob VanderLaan: No.

Bill Ballenger: No wonder he didn't get anywhere.

Bob VanderLaan: He was a trustee in Paris Township, just like the office I had been in.

Bill Ballenger: He was on your board.

Bob VanderLaan: He was on my board, and he was a salesman, and he had a friend, a brother, who was a publisher of a newspaper, local weekly newspaper. So he had some standing in the community.

Bill Ballenger: What was the district that you were running in against Veenstra and Blett in the summer of 1962?

Bob VanderLaan: The district was all out county.

Bill Ballenger: Outside Grand Rapids.

Bob VanderLaan: Outside Grand Rapids, plus the first ward of Grand Rapids.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so you mean like a big donut around the whole of Grand Rapids, except for this one ward.

Bob VanderLaan: Yeah, around the whole city. The second and third ward was one district, and at that particular time, the candidate for that was Milt Zaagman, Senator Zaagman when I ran. And I ran for the rest. The first ward, which was predominately Democrat, but the out county Kent was Republican.

Bill Ballenger: But now that must have been an overwhelmingly Republican district, right?

Bob VanderLaan: It was very much Republican.

Bill Ballenger: So you had to basically just win the Republican primary. So what happened in that race? You had the backing of the so-called Martin machine and Ella Koeze and all these other people who are paying you back for being such a good guy?

Bob VanderLaan: Well, what happened is something that's totally unexpected. It happened before I ran. It happened in the term of office before I was a candidate. That is the state capitol building in Lansing had a ceiling in the Senate which was glass, cut glass. The building itself was steel or iron, wrought iron framework, and it shifted from time to time. The glass would break and it would fall down on the Senate floor. So a decision was made to remove the glass and to replace it with plywood panels.

Bob VanderLaan: Now each one of those pieces of glass had a seal of one of the 48 states on it, but they were taken down and they were put in what was then the lower level, the basement of the capitol. One day, Senator Veenstra was leaving the building and he saw a waste hauler haul these pieces of glass up and put them on a truck. Senator Veenstra said, "What are you going to do with that?" He said, "Well, they want to get rid of it." He said, "Well, I'd like to buy it from you." And the guy said, "Sure." I don't know what the price was, but Senator Veenstra bought the glass, he had it trimmed, those parts that were broken or chipped, and he brought it up to a cottage which he had, kind of an elaborate cottage on the Muskegon River, and they put it in the ceiling of that cottage.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, goodness, wow, what a story.

Bob VanderLaan: Well, what was considered to be useless, worthless, all of a sudden in the eyes of the media became a treasure of the state of Michigan, and Charlie Veenstra got the name of Stained Glass Charlie.

Bill Ballenger: You got to be kidding? So actually in a sense, he saved the glass, although he did it for himself. It would have been scrapped. So it's Stained Glass Charlie, and that haunted him all through his career.

Bob VanderLaan: That haunted him, but that happened before I got into the picture.

Bill Ballenger: Right. So he already was vulnerable potentially.

Bob VanderLaan: He was weakened by that.

Bill Ballenger: Weakened by that, so then enter Bob VanderLaan with the backing of Martin, Koeze, and everybody else, and Blett was kind of a sideshow, so you won really easily I think, didn't you?

Bob VanderLaan: Well, one other thing happened which was pertinent in this. Charlie knew what he was facing. He knew that he had a problem, and at that time we were having annexations to the city of Grand Rapids, the dilly annex issues. We won't go into that annexation law, but it was a very unfair law. It included the city of Grand Rapids and the rest of the Township as one vote, yes or no, and then the people that lived in the annexed area had a vote. So they would vote yes, we want to be annexed, and then the city of Grand Rapids would be dumped in with the rest of the township.

Bill Ballenger: And they were overwhelmingly big, huge.

Bob VanderLaan: Overwhelmed, so we were losing territory every election. Well, Charlie Veenstra tried to stop that, and he came up with a novel idea. He said that the boundary of a second-class city had to be the same as the school district boundary. So now all of a sudden, the Kentwood School District and the Godwin School District, they were very prominent, proud districts, all of a sudden if they were annexed, they were swallowed up by the city of Grand Rapids.

Bill Ballenger: Wow.

Bob VanderLaan: So the people didn't want that, so that put an end to annexation.

Bill Ballenger: To that.

Bob VanderLaan: And Charlie is the one that promoted that bill and got it passed.

Bill Ballenger: Well, Charlie was a hero.

Bob VanderLaan: He was.

Bill Ballenger: But he was still known as Stained Glass Charlie. It didn't do any good.

Bob VanderLaan: But it stopped annexation.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, it did.

Bob VanderLaan: And he's the one that really put an end to it.

Bill Ballenger: 1960 was a fascinating year. '62 when you were elected to the state Senate, maybe even more so, you come in as a 32-year-old youngest state Senator. You find all these new people that you're meeting for the first time, Bill Milliken, Stan Thayer, John Fitzgerald, but a lot of old-timers, too. What was it like at that time? This must have been eyeopening to you.

Bob VanderLaan: It was interesting. When Governor Williams was at the end of his term, the slogan was Michigan on the Rocks. Maybe you remember that, Michigan was considered kind of bankrupt.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, it was a national story. Payless paydays.

Bob VanderLaan: And Swainson, John Swainson

Bill Ballenger: The democratic governor.

Bob VanderLaan: He inherited that. Then he also inherited the Bowman bill, which put an end to the city of Detroit's income tax. John Bowman had supported it. Swainson vetoed it, and that hurt Swainson and that helped George Romney of course a lot.

Bill Ballenger: George Romney, yeah.

Bob VanderLaan: But Romney came in and he was a progressive governor and made it known that there were going to be changes in Michigan if he became governor. That kind of permeated the election to the primary election, because the media would say, well, are you going to be a Romney supporter or are you part of the old neanderthals?

Bill Ballenger: Right, right.

Bob VanderLaan: So that was pretty much of a factor. After I was elected, the day or two after elected, I got a call from Bill Milliken. I didn't know Bill Milliken very well, but he said, "I'm going to be going to Lansing. I'd like to meet you at the Morton House in Grand Rapids and talk politics." So he was an emissary already to pave the way for the moderates to take over the Michigan Senate.

Bill Ballenger: Right, but you probably knew him a little bit from maybe state conventions or something. You'd see him passingly.

Bob VanderLaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: But this is the first time you really had a chance to sit down.

Bob VanderLaan: Really met with him.

Bill Ballenger: It sounds like the Morton House luncheon in Grand Rapids with Bill Milliken was pretty important. What did you really discuss there?

Bob VanderLaan: He was very tactful. He didn't use the words take over or a revolt or a rebellion or something. He just talked about the fact that Michigan had to be a more progressive state and there were issues that had to be faced, and that type of thing, which I agreed with. Then he told me about some of the people that were there that were going to be trying to gain power also, Clyde Geerlings from Holland, Elmer Porter, Lloyd Stephens from Scottville.

Bill Ballenger: These were all older men.

Bob VanderLaan: They were all the old-timers.

Bill Ballenger: So they were the old guard.

Bob VanderLaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: But the new guard was headed more, I guess Stan Thayer became the leader, right?

Bob VanderLaan: He was, Stan Thayer was really their leader, but the caucus elected Frank Beadle as the chairman, the caucus majority leader.

Bill Ballenger: As the chairman of the caucus.

Bob VanderLaan: Yes, but also the majority leader.

Bill Ballenger: He was the majority leader?

Bob VanderLaan: For a short time.

Bill Ballenger: For a short time? In '63 and '64.

Bob VanderLaan: He was, and that was sort of a compromise between the old guard and the new ones.

Bill Ballenger: And Frank Beadle was more of a moderate original.

Bob VanderLaan: I remember Frank Beadle, yeah. Well, okay, but you say a short time, the funny thing is you guys took office in January of '63, and three months later, there's a statewide referendum on the constitution.

Bill Ballenger: And it passes by this razor thin, 7,000 votes.

Bob Vanderlaan: Margin, yep.

Bill Ballenger: Did that change things from that point on?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, I think it didn't change much because the apportionment factor favored the Senate Republicans because it was going to be based partially on area, so we didn't worry too much about that. It lengthened the terms, but we had one more election to go with two year terms.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: So, that didn't make much difference. Where it really made the big difference was, it called for a reorganization of state government, and the diminishing of the number of departments. They had to be broken down into fewer departments. And it changed the advising consent procedure because the Republicans, The Old Guard, would not approve of Williams' appointment.

Bill Ballenger: Williams' appointments. Yeah. Williams, the democratic governor of the '50's.

Bob Vanderlaan: Right. They wouldn't. And they would just hang out there for a long period. Romney saw to it in the convention that wasn't going to happen. The new plan was, the person would be appointed, and they would begin serving, and the Senate would have so many days to remove him if it wished.

Bill Ballenger: It kind of shifted the burden of proof, really.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yeah. That made a change.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, that made a change. But that didn't really go into effect until January 1st, '64, right?

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right, it didn't go into effect later, after.

Bill Ballenger: Then, of course, we're going to get to government reorganization in a minute. But let me ask you this, Frank Beadle, did he serve as Majority Leader the entire two years?

Bob Vanderlaan: No he didn't.

Bill Ballenger: Well then, what happened?

Bob Vanderlaan: Thayer became Majority Leader.

Bill Ballenger: The leader. And wasn't Milliken the Majority Floor Leader?

Bob Vanderlaan: Milliken was elected Majority Floor Leader, and there was a change in committee memberships.

Bill Ballenger: Why did that happen? I mean, that's pretty unusual in the middle of a term to have one majority leader step aside and somebody else take over. That is unusual.

Bob Vanderlaan: It is. But there were enough people that were agitating in the Senate for a change.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: Such as Gary Brown was one of those. He had defeated, I guess Carlton Morris, out of Kalamazoo.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right. Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: And then, there were others.

Bill Ballenger: Frank Beadle, even though he was considered to be a conciliator and acceptable, wasn't progressive enough for these people?

Bob Vanderlaan: No. And Frank kind of stepped aside voluntarily and became Chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, I remember that.

Bill Ballenger: The 1964 election ushered in a huge wave of democrats, who became the majority. But it actually, maybe did the progressive new Republicans a favor because it wiped out all those Republican Old Guard people that had been there for decades.

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, '64 was the Goldwater landslide.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: Romney managed to escape the carnage because he didn't support Goldwater. Remember he was at the convention and he was very unhappy.

Bill Ballenger: The Cow Palace in San Francisco.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yeah, domination.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: Romney escaped it.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: But we had Senators elected in that election, that no one had ever heard of before. They had their names on the ballot just to fill it.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. But they weren't all Democrats. You know actually in a way, didn't it also kind of wipe out the remnants of The Old Guard?

Bob Vanderlaan: It did.

Bill Ballenger: I mean, some of the people that were still there, Geerlings and all these other people that were considered mastodons of the Republican Caucus, they were actually wiped out too.

Bob Vanderlaan: They lost. Stevens lost to Oscar Bouwsma from Muskegon.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And Hal Valkema took Geerlings' place.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: I don't know if Paul Younger in Lansing was reelected, or not.

Bill Ballenger: No, he wasn't either.

Bob Vanderlaan: I think he was defeated.

Bill Ballenger: Don Potter.

Bob Vanderlaan: Potter.

Bill Ballenger: Remember Don Potter?

Bob Vanderlaan: Potter. Potter took his place.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. All these guys were wiped out. It was not only a wholesale influx of Democrats, who were now in the majority for the first time since 1938.

Bob Vanderlaan: In the majority. That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Since before World War Two.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: But you had a whole bunch of new Republicans. All of a sudden Bob Vanderlaan, age 34, is a senior statesman in the Republican caucus. Right?

Bob Vanderlaan: A lot of changes. And we know it was only for two years, because we were still under the two year term.

Bill Ballenger: Right. And Bill Milliken became Lieutenant Governor under George Romney, so he was gone from the Senate.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: Who became the Minority Leader for the Republicans in '65, '66?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think Emil Lockwood.

Bill Ballenger: That was Emil Lockwood. Now, who was the majority floor leader? Weren't you the majority floor leader?

Bob Vanderlaan: I was selected majority floor leader.

Bill Ballenger: You were actually elected to succeed Milliken as majority floor leader?

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: You were the number two Republican.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so it looked pretty bad for the Republicans during those two years, because you were in such a small minority. I remember it was 23-15 in the senate. And it was terrible in the house. It was 73 to 37.

Bill Ballenger: The reorganization of state government that was necessitated by the passage of the new constitution, was that a difficult process, or not?

Bob Vanderlaan: No, it wasn't. The house took the lead in the reorg and had the bills that did it. That was not a real partisan issue. Most people believed that government was sort of out of hand and should be reorganized. The constitution had made some changes already with the Secretary of State's office, the Auditor General, and mandated some of them would be elected, others would be appointed. That helped a lot.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Those bills passed pretty easily, without too much controversy.

Bob Vanderlaan: They were non-partisan bills, and they passed with the vote of both parties.

Bill Ballenger: What was Ford Canton? What was that all about?

Bob Vanderlaan: That was the first labor bill. When I was elected to the senate, I was appointed to the labor committee. And when Romney was governor, I was chairman of the labor committee. And Romney, of course, came from the auto industry and he understood what was happening in the union auto management field.

Bob Vanderlaan: The UAW had developed a plan where they would pick a small plant which made vital parts for the auto industry, and then they would strike in that plant. And that would shut down all the other. And in the interim, the other workers would get unemployment comp because they were forced out of work.

Bob Vanderlaan: Romney developed this bill which basically said that if a worker who was unemployed as a result of a strike in one of the plants, of which his union was a member, that they would not be eligible for unemployment benefits. And we had the majority then in the senate at that time, and in the house. I think that maybe George Van Peursen was the State Chairman. Peers was the speaker of the house.

Bill Ballenger: Don Peers was also from west Michigan.

Bob Vanderlaan: We worked out the agreement to pass it.

Bill Ballenger: And that was back in '63, '64 during your first term.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right. And that was the only major labor bill which labor opposed violently and lost.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, and the Democrats, of course, also would have opposed it.

Bob Vanderlaan: Oh sure.

Bill Ballenger: But because the Republicans still control ... Now, in '65, '66, you never could have gotten that through.

Bob Vanderlaan: Never would have got it.

Bill Ballenger: Because the Democrats had control of the house and senate.

Bob Vanderlaan: But Romney was just adamant on that bill. And he could be, of course, very forceful and persuasive. And there was just no other way than it was going to pass, and it passed.

Bill Ballenger: All right. You've come to 1966, and that was a much better year for Republicans. You may remember George Romney was running for the first four year term that a governor ever got, under the new constitution. He was running with Bill

Milliken. You were running for your third term, and the first time you, as a state senator, would get a four year term. And what happened in that election?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, the Republicans did well.

Bill Ballenger: I'd say.

Bob Vanderlaan: You were probably elected that year.

Bill Ballenger: No, I was a couple years later, but ...

Bob Vanderlaan: It gets a little vague, but I think we might have ended up with a tie vote that ... No, that came later, the tie vote.

Bill Ballenger: You were ahead 20-18 in the senate, so you picked up five seats. You went from 15 to 20. The Democrats lost five, so it's 20-18. In the house, the Republicans picked up 18 seats and they tied, but they organized, because one of the Democrats defected and then they had a special election and the Republicans won that, so they had a narrow 56-54 majority.

Bill Ballenger: But anyway, you were back in the driver's seat, and Romney was governor. Along comes George Romney's idea of a state income tax. Now, what about that? Because Michigan had never had an income tax. And it's kind of ironic nowadays, with all this debate and controversy over how high the income tax should be, whether it should be graduated or flat. And the Republicans are almost entirely on one side, and that is, ideally, we probably shouldn't have an income tax, or at least should it be low, or it should be flat. And the Democrats are on the other side saying the higher the better, and maybe it should be graduated. It was a Republican legislature of which you were a member, and a Republican governor who actually instituted the income tax.

Bob Vanderlaan: Williams had proposed an income tax. I think Swainson probably had proposed an income tax, and the senate always rejected it, and the house did too. Romney came on the scene and made it clear that states should have an income tax, state income tax, but it was not going to be graduated. It would be a flat rate income tax.

Bill Ballenger: That's written right into the constitution.

Bob Vanderlaan: And the moderate Republicans, most of us, bought into that and said it's a reasonable approach.

Bill Ballenger: What was the feeling and the thinking at that time, from your perspective, about why Michigan should have an income tax? Because we never had one. And a lot of states didn't. There are certain States that don't have income taxes now.

Bob Vanderlaan: I think we looked back at the period when Williams had his economic problems and didn't want to go back into that era again.

Bill Ballenger: You thought maybe there wasn't a balanced enough tax structure, maybe too much emphasis on sales and property, and so forth, and so let's bring in an income component.

Bob Vanderlaan: And at that time, people argued, and I think rightly so, that the sales tax was sort of the regressive tax. Later on, of course, food and drugs were removed from the sales tax to make it a little more progressive. But it was regressive. It hurt poor people more than others.

Bill Ballenger: The summer of 1967, the state income tax, first one in Michigan history, finally was enacted with almost unanimous Democratic support. Well, Romney needed enough progressive or moderate Republicans to support it to get it through.

Bob Vanderlaan: He did. And he gave that task to Emil Lockwood, I guess.

Bill Ballenger: There was the famous lapel story. Tell the lapel story.

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, Emil was an accountant. And he was very bright, very sharp. And he was not an early supporter of the income tax. He really didn't like it. Emil had certain alliances with people. He was almost a friend with everyone, and he had a strong alliance with some of the old-time lobbyists and the old-time movers and shakers in the Capital. He was not really on board, and Romney knew that. Romney was perceptive, very perceptive. And he had this early morning meeting with Emil Lockwood and Lockwood kind of said he wasn't going to take the bill up, and Romney grabbed him by his lapels and apparently ripped them off his suit coat. That became the story.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, that became the big story.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: He got intense. That was the word. George Romney became intense. Lockwood saw the light enough to at least allow the vote, huh?

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: And then it passed.

Bob Vanderlaan: It passed.

Bill Ballenger: What about the Detroit riots in 1967? What do you remember about that?

Bob Vanderlaan: We were vacationing, our family, in Rhinelander, Wisconsin, and we got a call that Romney wanted a meeting on Mackinac Island. The riots, I guess, had

started already and they were somewhat under control, I think. And a state plane picked up Charlie Zollar in Benton Harbor. It picked up, in Flint, Gar Lane, and then I was picked up in Rhinelander, Wisconsin. And Joe Mack was picked up in Ironwood, Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: Ironwood, yep.

Bob Vanderlaan: And we flew to Mackinac Island. That's when Romney unveiled his plan for New Detroit.

Bill Ballenger: New Detroit.

Bob Vanderlaan: New Detroit, that he was going to promote.

Bill Ballenger: And what was New Detroit?

Bob Vanderlaan: New Detroit was an organization of individuals that were going to help improve the quality of life in the city of Detroit, to improve the schools in Detroit, to provide certain state assistance to the city of Detroit.

Bill Ballenger: Were they all people from Detroit, or the metro Detroit area? Or were they from all over the state?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think they were from all over the state.

Bill Ballenger: All over the state. Okay. And of course, Charlie Zollar, now there was another colorful character. By that time, he was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee.

Bob Vanderlaan: Right. And Gar Lane was the ranking Democrat.

Bill Ballenger: And had been Chairman during '65, '66. Okay, so we get up to Romney deciding he wants to run for president. And then you get up to the election in 1968. You get Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey. You get Romney running early on, but pulling out. What do you remember about that? Anything much?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, he made his famous Vietnam speech, or his comments. He had gone there to observe, to get first-hand knowledge and came home and had a press conference, a small press conference and asked about Vietnam and how things had changed, and said, "I've been brain-washed by the military." Nobody thought much about it for a day or two. I guess that's the way it happened.

Bill Ballenger: It is, yeah. It was on the Lou Gordon show.

Bob Vanderlaan: And finally, it reached the media, the mainstream media and it became a major issue and it did him in.

Bill Ballenger: Of course, brain-washing at that time had a kind of pejorative connotation. Like, there was the Manchurian Candidate, and there was brain-washing in the Korean war.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's what happened.

Bill Ballenger: Any politician who says he was brain-washed, that kind of made people a little nervous.

Bob Vanderlaan: It meant that you changed, or you lost your basic views, and you accepted the viewpoint of another cause that was not honorable.

Bill Ballenger: Another big issue, very controversial at that time, was open housing. What do you remember about that?

Bob Vanderlaan: That came in a little earlier with George Romney. He was a strong advocate of open housing, and so was Bill Milliken.

Bill Ballenger: What was open housing?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, at that particular time, it was assumed that the real estate people and plot developers and others had used their tactics to deprive primarily blacks from living in certain areas. They were, more or less, shuttled into the ghetto areas.

Bill Ballenger: Kind of red-lining them out.

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, the banks engaged in red-lining. They wouldn't provide loans outside of the area. And Romney wanted a person, and rightly so, to live wherever they would choose to live.

Bill Ballenger: In other words, the idea was to strengthen state law to end the practice of, basically, segregating-

Bob Vanderlaan: Segregated housing.

Bill Ballenger: ... housing in certain areas, and opening it up. That was very controversial.

Bob Vanderlaan: It was, at that time. It was opposed by the Chamber of Commerce. It was opposed by the real estate board, and many other people at that time. Remember, we're not too far removed from the passage of the civil rights act of President Johnson. And we're not too far removed from the segregation in the military that occurred in World War II and ...

Bill Ballenger: You think the fault lines on that were pretty much the same they were on the income tax, that maybe most Democrats probably supported open housing, but it took the more progressive and moderate elements of the Republicans, along with the Republican governor, to get it through.

Bob Vanderlaan: Correct.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, so that happened. Romney was pretty much skunked in his presidential run by his Vietnam gaffe and he pulled out. And then, in the election of '68, now the Senate wasn't up for the first time ever. You had a four year term, so you're still in control. The House became Democratic in the election of '68. Bill Ryan became the speaker of the house, a democrat with strong labor ties.

Bill Ballenger: And then, we come up to 1970. Parochiaid was a huge issue. It was on the ballot in 1970. What can you tell us about that?

Bob Vanderlaan: Parochiaid was going to provide vouchers for parents, to parents, if they sent their children to a private or a religious school.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. Was it going to give vouchers to the parents, or was it going to give aid directly to the school?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, that hadn't really been determined. Vouchers, which the word really was ... came later, that went to the individual parents.

Bill Ballenger: Right, right.

Bob Vanderlaan: Early on, I suppose Parochiaid was going provide aid to the schools.

Bill Ballenger: It was really for the institution. But now, this is really fascinating because you had a strange alliance on this issue, strange to many people, between the Roman Catholic church, which obviously had many parochial schools throughout Michigan and which were in real financial trouble, and the Christian Reform schools, which you had attended in west Michigan. You had conservative Republicans from west Michigan, including probably Bob Vanderlaan. But correct me if I'm wrong.

Bob Vanderlaan: I'll correct you.

Bill Ballenger: Aligned with a lot of otherwise very liberal labor Democrats who were maybe Roman Catholics themselves, or had strong Roman Catholic constituencies, particularly in southeastern Michigan. You had all those people aligned against a lot of other people in the legislature and outside the legislature who said, "This is not the way to go. We should not be giving public money to non-public education." Right?

Bob Vanderlaan: Right.

Bill Ballenger: And so, what happened?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, you have to back up a little bit. The first bill I introduced in the senate was the Fair Bus Bill.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Bob Vanderlaan: The Fair Bus Bill mandated that the public schools pick up private school kids and bring them to their school if it were not too far away from the boundary of the district. That bill I introduced, it passed the House, passed the Senate with a great deal of ease and was signed by George Romney. That was the first major break in the aid to private education. That was supported by both Republicans and Democrats, and it was supported by people that really weren't private school people. It passed in the Senate with maybe one or two dissenting votes.

Bill Ballenger: When we talk about Parochiaid, there was not just Parochiaid, but there were busing services, auxiliary services.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's correct. And shared time.

Bill Ballenger: Shared time.

Bob Vanderlaan: Where the public school teacher might go into the private school and teach a phys ed class or a music class, or something like that.

Bob Vanderlaan: Then the idea of Parochiaid was developed, primarily by the Michigan Catholic Conference, and it was pushed in the legislature. The legislature in the Senate passed the Parochiaid legislation. And the MEA was the chief opponent of it.

Bill Ballenger: The House passed it too.

Bob Vanderlaan: The House passed it.

Bill Ballenger: And Milliken signed it.

Bob Vanderlaan: Milliken signed it.

Bill Ballenger: And Milliken came out and said, "I support it."

Bob Vanderlaan: Sure. I did not happen to vote for that. You might be surprised.

Bill Ballenger: Oh, I didn't know that.

Bob Vanderlaan: And here again was a discussion with the people that were going to circulate petitions. They made it very clear that if that bill passed, they were going to circulate petitions, not as a referendum on the bill, but a constitutional amendment. And they were going to be very restrictive. And they more or less said, "If you vote for that bill, we're going to take your busing right out of it, also."

Bill Ballenger: So you would have lost everything.

Bob Vanderlaan: I would have lost everything.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: So I hesitate to say I made a deal with them, but they left busing out of the constitutional amendment and busing today, under the constitution, is legal and authorized, but the voters, of course, voted on the constitutional amendment and passed by an overwhelming margin and it's in the constitution today.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Absolutely. That was on the ballot in 1970 and it was very strange to see the voting patterns and Milliken, who was elected to a full term by only 44,000 votes, may just have won because of his support for that because he got huge support in Roman Catholic areas.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's true.

Bill Ballenger: That he never would have probably gotten otherwise.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's true.

Bill Ballenger: That's very interesting. Well, you must have been one of the few people from West Michigan who did not support the bill.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's true.

Bill Ballenger: But you got something for it. You saved busing.

Bob Vanderlaan: I saved busing.

Bill Ballenger: Your original. Well, that is a great story.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. One other program that I think proved to be very successful was that Ford Fellowship student internship program in the legislature. What can you tell us about that?

Bob Vanderlaan: The money came from the Ford Foundation.

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Bob Vanderlaan: And it was developed somewhere in one of the universities in Michigan. They developed the idea and they had a consortium of Wayne State, Michigan State, Western Michigan, and the University of Michigan. And they were going to provide interns who were usually in a masters program or a doctoral program in public affairs or some governmental-related program. And they were going to send to Lansing people that would be assigned to the Governor's Office, the

Senate, the House and I'm not sure if the Supreme Court was in on this. I'm not aware of that, but this was the program that they had and it lasted for a number of years.

Bill Ballenger: Many of those Ford student interns went on to illustrious careers in the state government. Mary Kay Scullion, Bruce Timmons, Bob Carr, Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. and wasn't there a story about Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. and his future political ambitions?

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right. You talked about when Joe Kowalski passed away, there was going to be a special election.

Bill Ballenger: He was Speaker of the House.

Bob Vanderlaan: Special election.

Bill Ballenger: In the spring of 1967.

Bob Vanderlaan: Right and Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. wanted to run in that seat and there was a tentative agreement that had been accepted, at least by the House, I don't think we in the Senate agreed with that, and Jimmy Hoffa was assigned to the House, that they would not run for office. If there's anything a sitting House member or Senate member worries about is who's going to run against him and here's somebody that's working with your body all day long and he's looking your shoulder and he knows all the secrets and you say, "Hey, he may run against me."

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: So they put a provision in the House contract that they wouldn't run for an office if there were a vacancy.

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. really wanted to run. And he came to me and I was the chairman of the entire internship program for the government and made a strong argument that he ought to be allowed to run and I sort of overruled the House rules and said, "You may run." And he ran and he won the primary and then I think he lost in the general to Tony Licata.

Bill Ballenger: He did. That's right. You maybe set that up. You knew he'd lose in the general and the Republicans could win the seat there and that gave them their 56th vote in the House.

Bob Vanderlaan: I'd like to take credit for it, but I don't think I can.

Bill Ballenger: You don't think so?

Bob Vanderlaan: I don't think so.

Bill Ballenger: You were trying to be statesman-like and nonpartisan.

Bob Vanderlaan: I was impressed with Jimmy Hoffa, Jr. He was very bright.

Bill Ballenger: Well, look at what's happened since.

Bob Vanderlaan: He was hardworking.

Bill Ballenger: Sure.

Bob Vanderlaan: He really did the job well and I just kind of felt he should be given a chance.

Bill Ballenger: So this program was really a pretty successful program?

Bob Vanderlaan: It was successful and I don't know why it didn't continue.

Bill Ballenger: Well, maybe it's because the legislature built up its own staff.

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, that could be.

Bill Ballenger: Because remember back in the 60's, there wasn't much staff in the legislature.

Bob Vanderlaan: No.

Bill Ballenger: You were just kind of emerging from the Stone Age.

Bob Vanderlaan: We were. We didn't have, we shared a secretary with four or five senators.

Bill Ballenger: Right, exactly.

Bob Vanderlaan: Now, if you look at the members that were there, you mentioned them. Bob Carr became a congressman. And, he was a flamboyant good-looking type of guy.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And Mary Kay Scullion, of course, worked for the House for a long time. Bruce Timmons, I think may still be.

Bill Ballenger: He's still there.

Bob Vanderlaan: Employed. Gord Vandertill went to work for Jerry Ford in Grand Rapids and in our nation's capital.

Bill Ballenger: Right

Bob Vanderlaan: So these people, and Jimmy Hoffa is now, I think, the head of the Teamsters.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, absolutely.

Bob Vanderlaan: So they did well.

Bill Ballenger: They did very well. And if you were the chairman of that committee, that really says something. That's really great.

Bill Ballenger: Abortion was a huge issue climaxing with the Roe v. Wade decision in early 1973, but before that it had been an item of controversy in the 60's. You had a fellow state senator, Lorraine Beebe make a dramatic speech on the Senate floor that she had had an abortion.

Bob Vanderlaan: When I first came to the Senate and for the first four years, we never heard of abortion. It wasn't an issue. And then a governor in Colorado by the name of Dick Lamb had legislation introduced in Colorado to legalize abortion. And all of a sudden it became a major issue. And in the Senate, Senator Gil Bursley, I think, he introduced the first abortion bill and the chief opponent was Bill Ryan in the House. And for all these years, Gil Bursley argued in favor of it and Bill Ryan argued against it and they never came together and never resolved the issue. So that's when it started, the abortion controversy.

Bob Vanderlaan: And, of course, we had bills that would have authorized it. We had amendments to appropriation bills which would prohibit welfare money from being used for abortion. And all these ancillary issues came up until finally in '73, I think it might have been in January of '73, the U.S. Supreme Court took it away from the states, nationalized the issue, and the major issue then died.

Bill Ballenger: Right. What about the PBB issue?

Bob Vanderlaan: Milliken was governor at that time and I think that was one of the major headaches that Bill Milliken had was the PBB issue.

Bill Ballenger: PBB was Polybrominated biphenyls, wasn't that it?

Bob Vanderlaan: It was a product which was used basically in the electrical world. It was a fire retardant.

Bob Vanderlaan: And it got accidentally mixed into cattle feed.

Bob Vanderlaan: It was a retardant that was used by the electrical world in transformers and other devices. When you would take a high voltage and you'd want to lower it to a lower voltage, it would create a great deal of heat. So this product was developed to stop that and then it was used for fire retardant and farmers would buy it to paint their barnyard fences and the interior of the barn and stuff like that. It would be mixed in with a whitewash or the paint. And in some grain mill in southern Michigan, it got mixed in with the feed and it was pretty widespread in Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: The Vanderlaan farm wasn't still going at that time was it?

Bob Vanderlaan: No. It was in Cadillac, Michigan.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: And then I had some big farms, and we toured some of these farms and the cattle were grotesque. It was just hard to look at these cows and they were slaughtered and the question was what do you do with them? And finally, I think some sparsely-populated county around Atlanta, Michigan was chosen as the place where they would bury these cattle, much to the chagrin of the people that lived there, but at least they had to go somewhere.

Bill Ballenger: Well, the criticism of the governor was that it was his agriculture department that oversaw farming in Michigan. "How could he have let this happen?" Was that basically it?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think so and the remedial action was way too slow. It should have been caught much quicker. They didn't know for a long time what was causing it and they didn't have any idea. But we would meet on it weekly, the leadership of the Senate and the House, and talk about how to resolve this problem. And one member of the Senate very seriously one morning had a great creative idea. He wanted the governor to contact NASA and put it all into orbit.

Bill Ballenger: Really?

Bob Vanderlaan: Get it off the planet.

Bill Ballenger: That is pretty unique. That is pretty unique. Well, okay. So it became an issue actually in Milliken's reelection campaign in '78. I mean, we're getting kind of way laid here. Bill Fitzgerald was a Democratic state senator. He was the Democratic nominee and he tried to make a big issue out of it. Did the PBB controversy really catch on as an issue in that Milliken reelection campaign of 1978?

Bob Vanderlaan: No, it really didn't. I think Milliken's first two opponents were probably Sander Levin and then there was Bill Fitzgerald and Fitzgerald, I don't think he really ever caught on as a serious contender for the job. He had a good name. The Fitzgerald name was a good name.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask you this, and we've just kind of scanned over this, after the election in 1970, when Milliken was elected to his first full term, we went through the parochial issue and everything else, the Republicans lost one seat in the Senate. That was Lorraine Beebe's. They had a 19-19 tie and lieutenant governor who was Jim Brickley, a Republican could cast the tie-breaking vote, so who's going to control the Senate here? It's 19-19. Brickley is the tie-breaking guy. You're selected by your fellow Republicans as the leader of the caucus, but are you going to be the majority leader? Are you going to be minority? You

going to be a co-leader with a Democratic counterpart? What's the deal? What happened?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, we had a lot of caucuses on how we were going to resolve that problem. And we decided that we would change the rules before the end of the current session. And the rule would be that you would elect the majority leader by a majority of vote rather than by a majority of those seats. In other words, if we would have 15 votes and the Democrats would have 14, then I would be the majority leader. In other words, we didn't need the lieutenant governor's tie-breaking vote.

Bill Ballenger: So you're saying between the November election in 1970 and the end of the year when the new Senate would come in and only be 19-19, you changed the rules to say, "we can include the lieutenant governor's vote if we have to."

Bob Vanderlaan: If we had a tie, 19-19, the lieutenant governor would break the tie. Or what would be the Democratic plan then? Well, one of them would pull off. So the lieutenant governor wouldn't have the possibility of a tie vote.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And then under the old rule, you couldn't elect the leader. But we changed the rule that said you could elect the leader with less than a complete or majority at that time.

Bill Ballenger: I see. Okay.

Bob Vanderlaan: And that worked, but we had a problem.

Bill Ballenger: That's right.

Bob Vanderlaan: Charlie Zollar had a heart attack.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And he wasn't able to come to the Senate, at least it looked that way. So I went to visit him a number of times in his hospital room. And the last time he said, "You know, Van," he said, "I'm counting all the little tiles in the ceiling of my room and I think that means I'm well enough and I'll be there when you have your organizational meeting."

Bill Ballenger: Didn't they kind of wheel him in? I mean it was elaborate wasn't it? It was like a hospital room.

Bob Vanderlaan: He was in his office and everyone was in the Senate and was going to be highly emotional and everyone was there, and Jim Brickley was clued in, so he'd know what was going on and Charlie Zollar came in the back door. We had an elevator

in the back of the Senate there. In a wheelchair and Charlie had a flair for this type of thing.

Bill Ballenger: The dramatic, yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: And came in and wheeled into his seat and we had the vote.

Bill Ballenger: And that was it.

Bob Vanderlaan: That was it.

Bill Ballenger: Those magical four years between 1970 and 74 when you were a majority leader, what do you remember about that time?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, Bill Faust was the leader of the Democratic Party. And Bill Faust was a reasonable person, good to work with and we were pretty close friends. He was a very close friend of Al DeGrow and Al DeGrow had a lot of contact with him at the time.

Bob Vanderlaan: We had an awful lot of meetings between Bill Faust, myself, and I think it was Bobby Crim.

Bill Ballenger: The Democratic Speaker of the House.

Bob Vanderlaan: And the Governor's Office. And that led to a sort of a friendship between Bobby Crim. We worked together and we learned to trust each other. And that led, of course, eventually to our partnership.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: And Milliken was in on the meetings, so we had an awful lot of compromises in that period of time on issues. I don't look upon it as a contentious period. We passed budget bills. Charlie Zollar was chairman of Approp. Garlene was on the Approp and Charlie kind of treated Garlene as almost an equal on the committee and things worked pretty well.

Bill Ballenger: One thing I do remember where Charlie Zollar got crosswise with his caucus was reapportionment. Do you remember that?

Bob Vanderlaan: Charlie wanted to run for Congress.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And he didn't like Hutchinson, at least that's the seat he wanted.

Bill Ballenger: Who was the incumbent Republican Congressman over there.

Bob Vanderlaan: The Fifth District. And he had been there for a long time. So Charlie, apportionment, of course, of Congress was very controversial. It was one of the major issues. And we had a committee and the apportionment committee came up with a plan and Charlie cut a deal with the Democrats to change that district to give him a more favorable district.

Bill Ballenger: I think Tony Stam in Kalamazoo had the same motivation. Right?

Bob Vanderlaan: He probably did.

Bill Ballenger: The two of them. Remember the bill was on the floor and everybody thought the votes were there to pass a reapportionment plan that would have been good for the Republicans and Charlie and Tony Stam bolted.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yup.

Bill Ballenger: So what happened as a consequence of that? Do you remember?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, the whole Republican organization turned against Charlie and he didn't make it.

Bill Ballenger: Well, not only that, but how about the Senate Republican Caucus? Do you remember what happened?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, we stripped him of his caucus chairmanship.

Bob Vanderlaan: He was the chair of the Republican Caucus and that was removed, but he stayed on.

Bill Ballenger: We didn't go as far as to take away the chairmanship because, I think, most people thought, "We're not sure anybody's going to be able to handle appropriations as well as Charlie did."

Bill Ballenger: Between 1968 and 74, I believe Bill Ryan was actually the Speaker all during that time in the House and Bobby Crim was his majority floor leader. What do you remember about your relationship with Bill Ryan then?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, I had a good relationship with Ryan because we had agreed on certain of these basic issues over the years. On the busing bill we agreed. We agreed on the abortion issue over the years.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: And Ryan was a thoughtful person.

Bill Ballenger: Oh yeah, he was.

Bob Vanderlaan: He was serious what he did and he was honest, completely honest, trustworthy and easy to work with.

Bill Ballenger: Let me ask a question at this point. Term limits is getting a lot of criticism nowadays because it limits people to three two-year terms in the House, two four-year terms in the Senate and everybody says "This just isn't working. These people don't have enough experience to know how to run a railroad" and yet you look back in the 1960's and all these people that came in knew like you and Bill Milliken and John Fitzgerald and Stan Thayer. They were viewed as kind of saviors as coming in to sweep away these old troglodyte Methuselah's that had been there for decades. So why was short-time service or inexperience a virtue in the 60's when all of a sudden now it's viewed as something very bad.

Bob Vanderlaan: I think that term limits have more of an effect than just being there six years. I think they have an effect on you while you are there.

Bob Vanderlaan: When I was there I didn't think I'm only going to be here for eight years. Two terms. I looked down the road and I think my attitude toward getting things accomplished, working with people, working with constituents, all was based on a fact that we did not have term limits. That wasn't uppermost in my mind, but I didn't have term limits on my mind.

Bill Ballenger: Well, in other words, you saw yourself serving for a long time and you did.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yeah, sure.

Bill Ballenger: And you thought, "I've got years to get this accomplished and I want to build this up. I want to build my relationships."

Bob Vanderlaan: Yep. I want to build relationships. I want to build friendships. I want to work with constituents.

Bill Ballenger: I mean, you're saying now these people are sitting there thinking, "I can't. I don't have any time to build relationships. I've either got to make something happen right away or it isn't going to happen."

Bob Vanderlaan: Yeah.

Bill Ballenger: And they're also maybe looking at what office do they run for next to stay alive. Whereas you weren't really looking for another office.

Bob Vanderlaan: Nope. Not at all.

Bill Ballenger: Okay. Except there was one office that did come up. And that was 1974 when Jerry Ford was appointed to be Vice President and then became President. His congressional seat opened up and you were nominated by the Republicans at a terrible time for the Republican Party, the Watergate year. There was another

special election over in the thumb at the same time. What did you feel at that time? What did you think?

Bob Vanderlaan: I had looked at that seat for a number of years, which was normal, and I had a good relationship with Jerry Ford. We felt, or I felt, that Jerry Ford would be there for a long time. He always said, "I have no aspirations to be President." He could have run for Senator in the State of Michigan and he didn't do that. He always said, "I just want to be Speaker of the House. That's my goal."

Bob Vanderlaan: So although I looked at it, I didn't think it was going to be much of a possibility. Then, of course, the Spiro Agnew scandal broke and Jerry Ford was appointed and confirmed and the seat opened up and Milliken said he was going to call a special election and we talked about the timetable of it and we had Senator Zaagman run in that special. Jim Miller, the prosecutor in Kent County and Bowlin's who was working for the City of Grand Rapids and I won the primary handily and really thought the general was going to be easily one also because it had in the past. But it didn't turn out that way. The Democrats wisely nominated a fellow Hollander, Dick Vanderveen. He was a credible candidate.

Bill Ballenger: His name almost sounded like yours.

Bob Vanderlaan: It sounded like it. People got mixed up. And I had a record in the Senate of voting on certain issues and that record was used against me.

Bill Ballenger: Well, it was a terrible climate for the Republicans. If you were a Republican, you were almost doomed to defeat.

Bob Vanderlaan: The Watergate era.

Bill Ballenger: It was terrible. And Traxler, a Democrat won the seat over in the thumb area, in the Bay City area, which had always been a Republican seat.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: Almost the same times. And remember Nixon came over and campaigned for Traxler.

Bob Vanderlaan: Not for Traxler.

Bill Ballenger: For Jim Sparling against Traxler. You probably were trying to keep Nixon away from Grand Rapids.

Bob Vanderlaan: He didn't come to Grand Rapids. We had Jerry Ford in Grand Rapids, of course.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And he did everything he could.

Bill Ballenger: He could.

Bob Vanderlaan: But there were five seats at that time that nationwide that were lost because of the Watergate issue.

Bill Ballenger: Right. Well, that must have been very depressing to you because you gave up your majority leadership just to make this run. And then you had to come back to the senate, you still had your seat, but without the leadership position, and I think Milt Zaagman, at that point, been appointed the leader. And so you go up to '76, and there's an election then.

Bill Ballenger: Then in 77-78, what happens? They elect, the Republicans elect a new leader, I think it's Bob Davis.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yes.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: Yep.

Bill Ballenger: Bob Davis, and Bob Davis is the leader for one term, while you guys are in the minority because you lost the majority in '74, and then in '78, he runs for Congress, and then your fellow Republican Senators reelect you as the Caucus Leader, but you're still in the minority.

Bob Vanderlaan: Still the minority.

Bill Ballenger: Still the minority for the last four years, and that's probably when you really got to know Bobby Crim well, right?

Bob Vanderlaan: Probably the best in that-

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, yeah. What do you remember about the Environmental Protection Act?

Bob Vanderlaan: That was one of Governor Milliken's proposals. I guess I was caught a little bit off-guard. The environmental movement came on pretty fast, pretty swift, as these movements do. And I looked at that Act, and I felt there were many parts to it that were not too wise. Many of those things have been changed since it was adopted.

Bob Vanderlaan: I did vote for the Act, but the banks had certain responsibility if they loaned money to a business, and the business polluted the soil, the banks were going to be held liable for it, partially responsible.

Bob Vanderlaan: And it allowed certain types of lawsuits, which were not allowed before. So I guess I had some misgivings on it, but not as many misgivings as Joe Mack.

Bill Ballenger: Well, so there were some Democrats, obviously, like Joe Mack who were against it. But, by and large, probably it had more Democratic support, didn't it, than Republican?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think so.

Bill Ballenger: So again, it probably took some progressive moderate Republicans to support it, to get it through, yeah. 1978, you're reelected for the last time. You become the Caucus Leader again, but a new senator comes in from the House, a guy named John Engler.

Bill Ballenger: What do you recall about John Engler's arrival in the Senate, and your relationship with him during those four years?

Bob Vanderlaan: We watched the House quite a bit because I roomed with Martin Booth, maybe you remember Martin Booth.

Bill Ballenger: Right, yes.

Bob Vanderlaan: We roomed together with Al DeGrow and Gordon Rockwell before that, and Martin Booth kept telling me about this John Engler, who beat Jack Kemp. Now I knew Jack Kemp very well, and Jack Kemp never thought he was going to lose that election. He was a radio broadcaster in that area. Everyone seemed to be his friend in the district.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: And he lost.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, that gave us some cause to say, "What's this John Engler doing?" I think he also got involved in an election-based city when Colleen House won.

Bill Ballenger: Right, the special election there to take the place of Bob Traxler, who had been elected to Congress.

Bob Vanderlaan: And so then with all that happening we said, "John Engler is to be watched a little bit.

Bill Ballenger: A force to be reckoned with.

Bob Vanderlaan: "He's aggressive."

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: But then some of the House leadership said, "Well, he's kind of a back-bencher, he's doing nothing but giving us fits on motions, and procedural issues. You got to kind of watch him a little bit." So that was the reputation that he had in the House a little bit, and that spilled over to the Senate, we realized it.

Bob Vanderlaan: In the election, after the election in '78, when I knew we were in the minority, and I was going to be elected running for Majority or Minority Leader, we were on vacation down south after the November election, and I got a call from Bill Snow, who was my assistant. He said, "You better come home because John Engler's rounding up votes." I said, "What for?" And he said, "Majority or Minority Leader."

Bob Vanderlaan: So I couldn't hardly believe it. He just came over here. So I said, "Well, I better start making some phone calls." So I did, I called Harry Gast, and Jack Mowat, and Don Bishop, and I found that they had all been contacted, but they all said, "Don't worry, he's not going to make it, and he's got one person working against him, and he's going to help you, and that's Harry DeMaso. Harry wanted to be the leader."

Bob Vanderlaan: So I had John out there picking up maybe a vote or two, and Harry DeMaso picking up a couple votes, but the rest were solid. But I knew then that he had strong ambitions, and I thought, "Well, we're going to funnel this in a good way. We're going to make him Chairman of the Campaign Committee."

Bill Ballenger: Okay.

Bob Vanderlaan: Which we did.

Bill Ballenger: Right.

Bob Vanderlaan: But that had an issue that backfired on us, too.

Bill Ballenger: Well, how did that? Explain.

Bob Vanderlaan: We had a campaign committee, and we started to raise funds and John said, "We're going to have a so-called Senate Trust, and the Senate Trust would have a number of campaign committees that would all be separate, so we could raise extra money." And we had fundraisers, somewhat successful. Jerry Ford came in at my request, and spoke at, I think it was John McGoff's house maybe, out in Williamston. So we raised quite a bit of money, and we were putting that in the bank to elect people in seats which were marginal seats. And then one day, I was told that John Engler had written checks to a primary guy.

Bill Ballenger: Against another Republican.

Bob Vanderlaan: Against another Republican in the primary.

Bill Ballenger: Without caucus.

Bob Vanderlaan: Without caucus.

Bill Ballenger: Permission.

Bob Vanderlaan: Approval.

Bill Ballenger: Approval.

Bob Vanderlaan: And we, in the caucus, were somewhat upset about that. It was out of the special funds, in a trust fund. Now what had happened is, John as Campaign Chairman, we had signed a statement of who could write checks, and he was Campaign Chairman, and his name got on that thing, so he could write checks.

Bill Ballenger: Without anybody else having any input. So what happened at that point? Did you call him on the carpet? Did you take the trust away from him? What happened?

Bob Vanderlaan: He was the member of the Appropriation's Committee, and the caucus removed him from the Appropriation's Committee.

Bill Ballenger: From the Appropriation's Committee. Well, what about the trust? Could he still write checks?

Bob Vanderlaan: No, we changed that also.

Bill Ballenger: You changed that. This was like after the election of probably 1980, the Reagan election?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think so. It was prior to the '82 election.

Bill Ballenger: Which was when you retired.

Bob Vanderlaan: That's right.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah. 1982, 20 years in the State Senate, and you decide to leave. What did you do next?

Bob Vanderlaan: Well, this was an election year. Jim Brickley was the candidate for the primary for governor. Two weeks before the end of the primary, Jim Brickley contacted me and said, "I'd like to have you campaign with me for the last two weeks," and indicated or said, "He would have to consider Lieutenant Governor spot, and he wanted just to have me with him, and to ... No promises, no commitments, but just to see how things would work." So I did that.

Bob Vanderlaan: Prior to that, I was considering a couple positions. I was considering a position with Amway, which had been offering in government affairs, and there is an organization called the National Union of Christian Schools, they had contacted me and asked, and there was a group in Grand Rapids called the Employers Association, that deals with unemployment comp and workers' comp. So I had those things in the back of my mind.

Bob Vanderlaan: But then I kind of put them aside, and we campaigned for two weeks in Michigan with Jim Brickley. And I went down to the victory celebration at the Sheraton the night of the election, and of course, things didn't go well for Jim Brickley.

Bill Ballenger: Now this was a primary between Brooks Patterson, Dick Headlee.

Bob Vanderlaan: Dick Headlee, yeah.

Bill Ballenger: And Jim Brickley?

Bob Vanderlaan: Headlee was the main candidate, and the winner.

Bill Ballenger: And the winner in an upset.

Bob Vanderlaan: And we had a room there at the Sheraton, we were going to stay overnight, and I said to Millie, "We're going to go home, no use staying." And we said goodbye to Jim Brickley, and we went home. And when I got home and in bed, went to sleep. Next morning, Bobby Crim called and said, "Meet me for breakfast. We're going to start a lobbying firm tomorrow morning."

Bill Ballenger: Okay. So but, the idea is if Brickley had somehow won the nomination, you might have been his pick for lieutenant governor, and then he would have been running in the general election that fall against Jim Blanchard. And of course, Blanchard ended up beating Headlee and becoming governor. But that was out the window, when Crim saw that, he says, "Let's have breakfast."

Bob Vanderlaan: I think it was outside chance. I don't know how serious he was but whatever.

Bill Ballenger: Was this a surprise to you?

Bob Vanderlaan: No, we had talked a little bit about it before.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: So we had breakfast in Lansing here, and made an agreement that we were going to start out lobbying firm, we'd start in January of the following year.

Bill Ballenger: This is fascinating because just 10 years earlier, your former colleague State Senator Emil Lockwood had partnered with Jerry Coomes to form Public Affairs

Associates, and at the same time, Jim Karoub started his lobbying firm. What made you think there was any more lobbying that needed to be done?

Bob Vanderlaan: We had a lot of encouragement from Jerry Coomes. I had worked closely with him over the years, and from Emil Lockwood. Emil Lockwood was a friend of mine, and he was a friend of Bobby Crim.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah.

Bob Vanderlaan: And we weren't sure that we could make a go of it.

Bill Ballenger: I mean, in other words, your fellow competitors, so to speak, were actually encouraging you saying, "There is so much business out here, we can't handle it all. You might as well get into it."

Bob Vanderlaan: There are so many conflicts out there.

Bill Ballenger: I see. Well, the whole concept of multi-client lobbying, which is really what Governmental Consultant Services, Inc., is and was, that you and Bobby Crim started, and what Emil Lockwood, and Coomes, and Karoub did.

Bill Ballenger: That didn't even really exist when you first entered the Senate in 1962.

Bob Vanderlaan: No it didn't at all.

Bill Ballenger: And why has this proliferated?

Bob Vanderlaan: Most lobbyists, when I came to the Senate, were employees of the company or organization that they lobbied for. That's the way it started. But it almost became impossible for that lobbyist to do the job, to cover the whole gamut of the legislature, and he needed help. He needed some assistance because lobbying was becoming much more than just talking to a person about a bill. It was becoming entertaining, it was becoming raising campaign contributions. That's a major part of it for the lobbyist.

Bill Ballenger: Public relations.

Bob Vanderlaan: The legislature became more or less full-time, and became involved in many more issues than before, so it was a different, it was a changing period. The legislature changed, but so did the lobbying change.

Bill Ballenger: So once you started GCSI, how did you like being a lobbyist? Was that a huge adjustment for you?

Bob Vanderlaan: I didn't like it at all. I never liked it. I left home early in the morning, we stayed all day, we entertained at night, it took an awful lot of time, and the public didn't have a high opinion of lobbyists. And even your close friends would kind

of look at you and say, "How come you're doing something like that?" So I wasn't especially happy with it.

Bill Ballenger: How about Bobby Crim? Did he feel more comfortable with it than you, or not?

Bob Vanderlaan: Bobby Crim had somewhat of a different lifestyle than I did, and I think he was probably more accustomed to it than I was.

Bill Ballenger: Did you feel, as a lobbyist, you weren't really as engaged in public policy, as you would have liked?

Bob Vanderlaan: In the legislature, you're often on the offense, and in the lobbying business, we were primarily on the defense.

Bill Ballenger: On the defense.

Bob Vanderlaan: Often on the defensive end of it.

Bill Ballenger: Okay, I gotcha.

Bob Vanderlaan: And it's much more fun to be on the offense than defense.

Bill Ballenger: Well, actually being a lobbyist, and with a bad reputation, is that lobbyists, perhaps unfairly, have everywhere, whether it's Michigan or at the national level. Maybe that was somewhat of a clash with your traditional religion and culture in west Michigan?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think so.

Bill Ballenger: Yeah, and let me ask you about that. How deeply do you think your membership in the Reformed Church shape your vision of what should be done in politics, and looking at it? I mean, there were issues at the national and state level, where it seems to me, people like Paul Henry, who was another legislator and later congressman, who came along, voted in certain ways that you might not have predicted. And it might have come right out of the church.

Bob Vanderlaan: If you are convicted of what you are doing, if it's your basic belief and your core value, even your opponents will recognize that. The Grand Rapids press, for a long time, was pro-abortion, and I knew Mike Lloyd very well. But he always said, "Van, I know how you feel about it. I know your views, and we're not going to attack you on it."

Bob Vanderlaan: So I think that's how you handle that. If you become a chameleon, if you say one thing, and do another, you're going to have a hard time. But I always respected Bill Ryan's views on union politics, because I knew where he came from.

Bill Ballenger: You knew he was sincere.

Bob Vanderlaan: He was sincere about it, yeah.

Bill Ballenger: When you look back over your 20 years in the State Senate, do you view it as a really productive time in state government, historically? You're a historian, to a certain extent, you're a student of political science. What do you look, what do you see when you look at those years, '62 to '82?

Bob Vanderlaan: I think they were very productive. We mentioned a few of them, we mentioned open housing, which turned out to be a very good issue. The Bottle Bill, although that was passed by a referendum. I supported that in the Senate, it was an attempt to clean up the environment. I think that was good.

Bob Vanderlaan: I think the abortion fight was worth fighting, keeping that alive for me. I think the balanced budget provision to the Constitution, and trying to have our various meetings to cut back on expenditures, I think that was very important for the State of Michigan, and it's still important today. So I think they were good years for the state.

Bill Ballenger: When you look at George Romney, what do you think? Real quick answer.

Bob Vanderlaan: Determined, aggressive, very determined to see his programs carried out, and do what's best for the state.

Bill Ballenger: How about Bill Milliken?

Bob Vanderlaan: Oh, extremely honest, loyal, a kind, really a kind individual.

Bill Ballenger: How about Sander Levin, we haven't asked about, you served with him in the State Senate, he was the Democratic State Chairman, and he ran against Bill Milliken twice in '70 and '74, and he's now a Congressman.

Bill Ballenger: What do you remember about him?

Bob Vanderlaan: He was highly partisan in his views, I remember that. I think he was really committed to what he believed in, he worked hard for it. He was a career politician.

Bill Ballenger: What about John Engler? We discussed, in the senate, were you surprised when he eventually became governor? What kind of a governor he was, or not?

Bob Vanderlaan: I saw the Patton movie, in which George Patton gets in front of the mirror and says, "This is just the day I was raised and trained for." I think that's John Engler. John Engler knew more about state government, I think, than another man alive. He knew how it worked, he understood it, I think he still does. And that's why he was successful.

Bill Ballenger: Do you think he gained most of that knowledge during the '80's after you left, or did you already discern between '78 and '82, when you served with him in the Senate, that he really did know a lot about state government even then?

Bob Vanderlaan: John Engler was brought up with a father, who really was involved in state government, and understood it. He was active in high school, he was active in college with Republicans. He and Dick Posthumus were buddies. And his whole life was active and involved in government, and it was a learning process, he did very well at it. And he still does.

Bill Ballenger: I'm going to end it right there. Thank you very much, Senator Bob VanderLaan, you were a great Senate Republican Leader, whether you were in the majority or in minority, in the 20th century. Thank you very much for this interview.

Bob Vanderlaan: Thank you very much, Bill.