ROBERT WALDRON

Interviewed by
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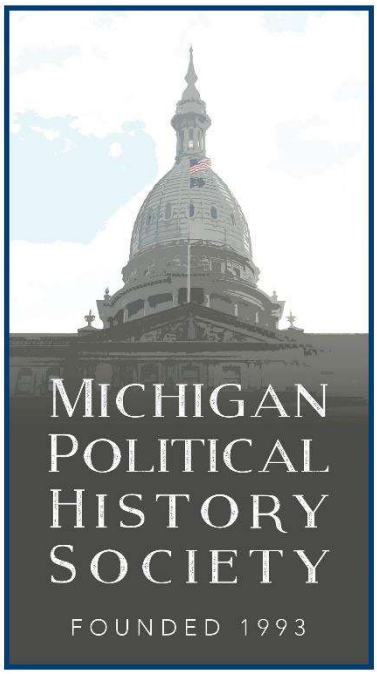

An Interview with Robert Waldron, Former Speaker of the House

Intro: This interview is part of the James J. Blanchard Living Library of Michigan Political History.

John Kerekes (JK): I'm John Kerekes with the American Petroleum Institute and today we'll be talking with former Speaker of the House, RW on behalf of the Michigan Political History Society. Bob, can you tell us a little bit about your personal background?

Robert Waldron (RW): What I like to say on my background, is that I was a Michigander born out of state. When my dad was stationed in the Boston Navy Yard. But my Michigan roots are from St. Johns. I grew up in Michigan all my life. I went to the public high schools and went to University of Michigan Law School. I did go out of state to Dartmouth College and I graduated from all these things.

RW: But I've worked in Detroit factories, I worked for Cadillac. I worked for Briggs Manufacturing Company, and those experiences were, were just tremendous for my political career. And then I was in the Army. I went in as a private, went through Communications Cadet School and then lucked out. I flunked code, and so they didn't want me (laughter) they didn't want me to do something like that.

RW: So, I got into aviation gasoline supply and believe it or not, API, when they hired me didn't have the slightest idea that I knew octane from sextane or dextane or any other thing, but I did. I knew it very, very well. So, I think that takes care of some of this background. The other background is that I practiced law for 20 years in, in Detroit.

JK: Yes.

RW: Concurrently with 16 years in the Michigan legislature. And uh, when I knew that I was going to be elected from Grosse Pointe, when I was nominated, why I looked around to somebody to keep my store open and I wound up with Tommy Brennan and we, we ran a, a political internship for all sorts of people in Detroit for, for about 20 years (laugh) and we, we had people run through our shop like Brickley and Jim Ryan and Roman Gribbs and, and so it was a lot of fun. We had a great time and, and Tommy showed his brilliance by putting, running two campaigns for uh, for the Con Con while he was the Common Police Court elect judge. One of the first judges that, knowing Republicans just swept the Common Police Court. Well, those are sort of two careers. But anyway, that, that's the background and then oh, while I was in Detroit, um, I was extremely active in the Republican party. I was uh, active in the Young Republicans in several d- congressional districts. Right in downtown Detroit, and uh, then I was Wayne County Young Republican Chairman before I was Wayne County Chairman later on.

JK: Yes.

RW: And so I guess that brings us pretty much up to date. And I think that the Political Historical Society would mainly want us to talk about the politics that I encountered when I was in the Michigan Legislature.

JK: You were also as I recall, a huge Detroit Tigers fan. So you stated.

RW: Yeah, well but I didn't go to very many games, and I still am a fan but I'm not a fanatic. I can remember skipping school and going down to the World Series and-

JK: Were you a member? Are you still a member of the Mayo Smith's Society? Remember that group?

RW: I do remember that group very well. As a matter of fact, last fall, several months, last spring, in May, I stopped by and visited Dale Petroskey-

JK: Okay.

RW: ... at Cooperstown.

JK: That's great.

RW: That was less than six months ago.

JK: That's great. And Dale was the general manager I think of the Mayo Smith's Society for a while.

RW: He and his brother started it.

JK: That's right. Okay.

JK: As we were discussing your involvement in Wayne County politics, it seems that was also about the beginnings of the Soapy Williams era. That Governor Williams was elected.

RW: Yeah, well, I graduated from law school in '49 and Soapy was elected in '48. So I I was active in the recounts for the 1950 and 1952 elections. Kelly and Alger respectively, I believe. And so I was active in that and I wrote the constitutions for the Young Republicans of the first and thirteenth in Wayne County. So, all this time, Soapy was my Governor.

JK: Yes sir.

RW: Later, I was his state representative. And he was my Governor.

JK: You ran for the first time in 1950?

RW: Yeah, but that was just for the hell of it.

JK: Okay. But first elected then in 1954.

RW: Yeah, but 1950 believe it or not, was a, was a horrible hodgepodge. 21 state representatives were elected at large in Detroit and Harper Woods. It was the damnedest thing. Nobody knew ... when the Democrats first were elected at 21, I've forgotten just when, they all thought they were going to Washington. And then 1940-

JK: What a disappointment Lansing must've been.

RW: Yeah, in 1946 all the Republicans got in. And they were all these terrific guys that ran, hoping they'd never win. And they all went to the legislature and the legislature wound up, there was only a hundred then, 95 to 5. And of course, that didn't work very well.

JK: Well that began to change, obviously, the, numbers-

RW: Yeah, that, Soapy-

JK: ... game became ...

RW: Soapy changed that. I didn't run seriously at all in '50. I was precinct delegate and stuff like that. I lived on Seward and Second in those years. In 1950, I guess I lived on Brevard and Jefferson downtown. And in 1954, I seriously ran and we ran in the primary with eight candidates and, and six of them were preferred by the civic searchlight. Six of us, and I had more experience in running than any of them, and so I won. And I was the best qualified of the bunch. And I don't mean to be immodest about that, but I just figured that I had no business running. And, so I just said that.

JK: Yes.

RW: And my campaign literature was almost identical to this, which was the campaign material I used about 14 years later. Almost identical, except it was an application to represent the people of Grosse Pointe and Harper Woods.

JK: As you showed us before, before this taping too, it, it's not a puff piece. There's lots of specific-

RW: Lots of meat in it.

JK: --- specific information in there. Your positions-

RW: Right.

JK: ... are spelled out clearly. There's not pictures of the children and the parks and the playgrounds.

RW: Well, in one of them we had a picture of the kids.

JK: But it's quite a contrast to today's handouts.

RW: This really laid it out.

JK: Yeah.

RW: And I remember my first one. My very first campaign I said the job of state legislator is, to lead the district. That you are hired by the district to be their expert. You don't go back to them and ask them what to do, you go back to them and you say, "Well now, what are all the facts and what do you think I should do," and all of that stuff.

RW: But, you'd have to decide that. And you and I believe that a person going into politics should have a philosophy, a measuring stick by which he measures almost every piece of legislation. And if the people in your district know your measuring stick, they're going to know how you're going to vote on almost everything. And as John C. Calhoun said, "Oftentimes, the job of democracy is not to sacrifice yourself to the masses but for the masses. And very often if you work for them, you must oppose them and educate them." And the people in my district bought that so they bought me.

JK: Do you have any idea whatsoever what that campaign might've cost?

RW: Practically nothing.

JK: No radio ads or?

RW: No. No, I didn't even do direct mail. I think my campaigns never ran more than $3,000, and we used to distribute this door-to-door with, with Little Leaguers and stuff like that.

JK: I used to do that.

RW: People like that. And we'd pay them a little bit. And they were delighted to do it and it was a lot of fun. But direct mailings cost a lot of money. So that's what we did and we had a get out the vote drive and that sort of thing.

JK: When you got to Lansing, you were assigned to the Judiciary Committee and the Rules Committee

RW: Well I guess so. On the Rules Committee I remember once on one motion sending 25 resolutions to the table. All of which were asking Congress to do

something and we knew they wouldn't pay attention to it so that was just a stupid exercise and the whole committee agreed with me.

JK: Do you recall your first bill?

RW: No. I do know in my first year, I, I wasn't responsible for this, and that was making Wayne University - Wayne State University. And that was a big bill and lots of people signed it like Lucille McCullough, and Jim Bradley, and me. All these win kind of guys. And I happened to be the only Republican and we ran the show so I was the first guy. And then I was on the Final Conference Committee, the Business Activities Tax. And that was an interesting deal because the freshmen usually aren't put on something like that, but I had a good understanding of taxation. As a matter of fact, I caught the Senate in a gross mathematical error where they multiplied fairly large number by zero and came out with, with a fairly large number. That was how we were able to settle this thing.

JK: Yes.

RW: Properly on the second conference deal. I think one of the first bills I had was on sexual criminal psychopaths. And this came from a Soapy Williams study committee, and there were four bills and the only one I got through was a central filing system which helped in their modus operandi and, and it helped in apprehending a lot of them. But eventually, I turned those over to Lucille McCullough (laughs) because I didn't want to be stuck with those things forever.

JK: Now, you, you mentioned a study committee.

RW: Yeah.

JK: Which is contrary, or it-

RW: Yeah well the study committee-

JK: ... it's somewhat different than what's done today.

RW: ... Yeah, the study committee by Soapy Williams was not a legislative study committee. It was an executive blue ribbon committee-

JK: Okay.

RW: That he worked on, as was the Wayne State. Now what you're talking about is what we don't have now. And that we should have because this is the constitutional way to do it. In those days, when the legislature had a problem, we either had a one house resolution or two house resolution. Setting up a study committee, outlining the parameters of the study. Perhaps putting in an appropriation. Perhaps giving it the power of subpoena. Telling how many

members and usually there was a ... an odd number and the majority party would, would have four to three or, or three to two or whatever it was. And I was fortunate enough, and I lobbied for this. In other words, you lobby within the legislature among your colleagues. And I lobbied to get on the committee for joint study committee on K-12 education. And we could see the beginnings of the deterioration of the K to 12 system that is the issue today. The absolute top issue today is what we were studying in 1955.

JK: What were some of the things that you saw?

RW: Well one of the things that we saw was that there was an unwritten college high school agreement that the colleges would take anybody. Now, I know they didn't do that with you - because you went to James Madison.

JK: (laughs).

RW: But believe it or not, they'd take anybody, whether they graduated from high school or not and say they're going to bring them up to speed. And one of the reasons they wanted to do that, that's a well-known kingdom building.

JK: Yes.

RW: And that happened. But that wasn't only at, in those days you were beginning to move away from phonics and into sight reading, and the do-good stuff. Like self-esteem rather than learning. It was, sort of wishy-washy but nevertheless pernicious and was away from the traditional stuff, which we're getting back to today, thank God.

JK: Less merit driven?

RW: Less, absolutely.

JK: You had some, some Republican leaders in those days. George Van Pearson, Allison Greene,

RW: Yeah.

JK: Any comments on some of the people you worked with?

RW: Well yeah. I, I have a couple. My memory of Wade Van Valkenburg was that he was a good presider. Don Pears was a good presider. Don Pears did nothing in regards to policy. I'm not even sure that he had anything to do with committee assignments. And yet he served for Speaker for four years. But he was just there because Allison Greene didn't want to be Speaker, he wanted to be Floor Leader. Allison Greene was absolutely great. George Van Pearson was a leader, he got to be Speaker sort of the same way I did. By being Chairman of the Labor Committee, which is the most controversial committee of any in the legislature.

And he led on the issues. But Allison Greene led on all issues. And he was a very, very strong Speaker and I was so fortunate to be Majority Floor Leader when Allison Greene was Speaker because he just taught me all sorts of stuff. I just love that guy. And I talked to him from now, from time to time. And he's 87 years old.

JK: ... his daughter's a friend of mine. I know-

RW: Yeah. Margaret?

JK: Marjorie.

RW: Marjorie, named after his wife.

JK: Yes.

RW: So there, he's just the greatest guy that I ever served with, but these are the Speakers and they're not always necessarily the leaders. Arnell Engstrom was a powerhouse in the house.

JK: Was he from the UP?

RW: He was Traverse City. And if he hadn't supported me I don't think I could've become Speaker even though George Romney supported me. But, he and I were very close friends and, he was Chairman of the Appropriations Committee. And then Jim Folks was Chairman of the Taxation Committee. We had a lot of good leaders all the way up and down the line. And the thing that impressed me the most about my whole career is that I finished this ... well I, I can go ahead with it. What impressed me the most was that all of us had jobs. We practiced law a lot. When I'd go home I'd practice Friday and Saturday and Sunday and then we'd adjourn around the first of June or the middle of May and then we'd practice the rest of the year. But all of us except maybe a few who were retired said, there was a little slot in your handbook, as to what your occupation was. There isn't any slot like that today. They're all legislators.

JK: There were many farmers too, as I recall.

RW: Well there were, there were quite a few farmers. And we had a lot of lawyers. And when the legislature got to be full-time, you couldn't practice law anymore, so you replaced the lawyers with teachers.

JK: Okay.

RW: Which in, in spite of the fact that lawyers are really a crappy group of people-

JK: (laughs).

RW: They're smarter than teachers.

JK: (laughter)

RW: I'm going to get hell for that, but they really are. And so we need them. In my opinion, when I was running the House, we hardly had any staff.

JK: Yes.

RW: And I figured that I needed 20 good lawyers in the Legislature to run the place. And the lawyers that we had, guys like Jim Heinz and Dick Young, and Danny Cooper, and Al Kramer, and, and Don ... you know, a guy that's appellate judge, what's his name?

JK: Holbrook?

RW: ... chairman of my judiciary, Judge Holbrook.

JK: Holbrook?

RW: And, these lawyers, including myself were, were just as competent, or more competent than anybody in the Service Bureau.

JK: Yes.

RW: And we could write legislation. We could write amendments. We weren't quite as quick as doing it, but we were just as competent.

JK: But you were truly lawmakers?

RW: We were truly lawmakers. And we didn't have any staff to campaign for us. Ergo, we had to do the work. And the way it seems to be now is that the staff does the work and the Legislators now this is a broad, general statement, do a lot of the campaigning all the time.

JK: Yes.

RW: But, but that's not true across the board. Of course, a lot of them work their butt off right now. But it seemed to me that we ... that more of us had what a calling versus a vocation.

JK: Yes.

RW: And we had a calling that was different than the way things are at the moment.

JK: You mentioned staffing. As I recall, when, when you were Speaker, you, mention Steve Stockmeyer?

RW: No, that was when I was a Minority Leader the first time. I had my total staff was one person. And then out of 37 people, we had nine secretaries. Now when Kowalski became Speaker and I'm very fond of Kowalski, he was backed by UAW, but basically he was a pretty much of a free enterprise UAW guy.

JK: That's interesting.

RW: Um. Yeah. He was a very interesting man. I would, he and I were very fond of each other. He had a staff of about four or six. And then when we had a tie, in the next time around, 55-55, we agreed that ... that the staff would remain the same, except that the Speaker would just get a little extra commensurate with his administrative duties. But not commensurate with his legislative responsibilities. You separate the two.

JK: Okay.

RW: So the staff would be the same vis-a-vis, legislative and policy, but because of the administration, the Speaker would get a little bit more.

JK: Which tie was that? Apparently there was another tie in '58?

RW: Yeah, there was another tie with Don Pears. That was when Josephine Hunsinger decided to have a hysterectomy. Uh, (laughs), this was, I say this is when Josephine Hunsinger organized the House in her Maidenform bra.

JK: By not showing up, they didn't want it.

JK: They didn't want control?

RW: They didn't want control, no.

JK: Okay.

RW: It's a lot easier if you're in the minority. They didn't want it. So the next time around when we had a little majority, but we got clobbered in the '64 apportionment. Absolutely clobbered by the Austin-Kleiner plan, and we came out with only 37, in '64.

JK: So you were the minority leader?

RW: Yeah.

JK: And Kowalski was the Speaker?

RW: Right. And Bobby Traxler was majority ...

RW: The minority leader in those days was the minority leader, the minority floor leader, the minority janitor and the minority whatever. They did just about everything. And I worked my butt off. I really worked harder as minority leader that I've ever worked in my life and it paid off.

JK: I don't want to skip too fast. I don't want to go by Con Con because that was obviously a very, very important time in the state's history.

RW: It was a super important time.

JK: Yes. And the leadership, I've just got some of the names from key participants at Con Con that I wanted to run by you also. But how was the legislature viewing Con Con?

RW: Well I can't be anything but subjective about that. I viewed it extremely positively. Some of them, I suppose, the natural inclination is to be negative about something but I don't think so, I think that ... You see Michigan had 150 to 160 different agencies that were almost impossible to follow. It was a sort of a weak governorship. The legislature was pretty powerful, and yet it didn't meet all that long during the year and didn't follow through. The legislature wasn't too strong but stronger. The Executive wasn't strong enough. The Judiciary was okay I guess. But the theory of the new Constitution was to have an organization where the Executive was strong, the Legislature was strong and they had an auditor general that was appointed by the Legislature which gave the Legislature the where with all for really intensive oversight. And we had a provision in there to get everything down to 20 departments so that they could be followed.

RW: And the theme was responsibility and accountability. And I think basically people were in favor of that. And the real fun in the Legislature, after the Constitution passed, was implementing this thing. They had a lot of stuff to do like getting rid of the JPs. That was one of the hardest things. It doesn't sound hard but it was damn hard to get rid of the JPs and a few things like that. But one of the things that the Legislature knew wouldn't work, and George Romney was a little bit too idealistic about this and that was apportionment. He thought that you could have an equal number of people appointed by their respected political parties come to an agreement and that's just totally impossible. And we knew that and it didn't work and everything went to the courts.

JK: And it has subsequently. It seems like every apportionment plan is ultimately decided by the courts.

RW: Yeah, ultimately decided by T. John Lesinski or somebody like that. And so, that's not a good system. I think what a lot of people in Michigan don't understand ... I'm going to get myself a bouquet because Tom Ford introduced a bill that would set up the counties, and I think I told this haven't I? They would set up the counties in exactly the same way as the state which would mean that you would have lawsuits all over the place and they would all go to and the courts would be deciding what the county districts would be. When that would be a litigious disaster. There's no if ands or butts about that. So I looked at that, I said this isn't going to work and I drafted something

that would work and that was an odd numbered of county officials, drawing a map and the only judicable issue would be whether it's constitutional or not.

RW: If it's unconstitutional we had to go back to the political group and they could get another try at it and not get the judges anything. That sounded pretty good to me. And I went to Marv Stempien who was a ... This was when I was minority leader I believe, yes. I went to Marv Stempien and he agreed that the system that was in the bill itself was just totally unworkable and he and I corresponded our amendment and was perfectly okay with Tom Ford, he thought it was much better. And that thing sailed through the legislature. Was signed by the governor and we haven't had boo one I don't think on cars have we and that thing run smoothly. And who gets any credit for that? Stempien, no. Waldron, no. Ford, no. But they all deserve a lot of credit for it.

JK: Absolutely.

RW: But this is just one of those things that you do on a day by day basis if you have a calling rather than wetting your finger in the political wind.

JK: Let me mention some of the folks that were prominent in Con Con. Glenn Allen, Dick Austin, Malcolm Dade, who served in Detroit City Council I believe for years. Tom Downs, Senator Faxon, Bill Ford, who was one of Michigan's longest serving congressman. Morris Hood Senior.

RW: But Bill Ford was also in the state senate.

JK: Morris Hood Senior, Weldon Yeager and Coleman Young. But a who's who of political leaders for the next couple of decades.

RW: Con Con, you left out quite a few as you know. But the Con Con as everybody knows, been one of my prime examples of why term limits is okay because this was one of the finest legislative bodies that I have in my political memory and these guys went in there with the experience that they had in life, not as a staffer or anything like that. But as presidents of college, business men, former governors, and Glen Allen, former mayors and various other things, and they went in there as a body and they put this constitution together and they did it extremely well. Now, they were willing to sacrifice their time for the good of the state of Michigan for an unlimited period of time. And I think that's what term limits are all about. And I'll tell you one of the things that we don't get, that we haven't gotten yet with term limits, is the quality of a legislator who can walk into that place and feel at home immediately.

JK: Let's talk if we can for a minute about the speaker-ship era and E.D. O'Brien.

RW: When we were in the minority with 37 we very carefully kept track of all the votes and we also set up votes if we needed to, to make a point, and we worked very hard and we figured that in the election and whatever had happened that we could affect the election, maybe two or three seats, one way or the other and it just so happened in 1966 was a super year for the republican party and instead of picking up 15 seats we

picked up 18 and that gave us a tie, 55-55. And my reasoning at that time and the reasoning of our Caucus was that since we had the governorship and the senate and we were the responsible party, that we at least ought to have the ability to control the flow of the legislature even though that we didn't have enough votes to pass anything. And we just were adamant about that. And we wouldn't give in.

RW: And in the meantime, over the years, E.D. O'Brien who was from the east side of Detroit, was never very enamored with the UAW and that was some other things, he just decided he was going to sit on his hands if they were going to put up somebody like Bill Ryan, with whom I'm very close and very fond of. He's a UAW guy. So he just didn't vote and we won the speakership 55 to 54 with Danny Cooper screaming that it was unconstitutional but of course it isn't. You have to pass a bill with 56 votes. You can elect a speaker one to nothing but that was the way it was. And then, unfortunately, two of us died, Jim Nunneley and then Joe Kowalski, a republican and democrat, and we picked up both of those seats. So we had a technical majority of 56, that's not a working majority.

JK: Well that was my next question. How did it function? How did the house function? Did it function well?

RW: Beautifully. It functioned beautifully. I had a system of committee stuff that's never been done before. I had a Ouija board outside my office that was copied from Marty Buth's charts of how he kept track of his milk from his cow and I had a list of committees across the top and a list of members across the top and a list of committees down here. And I had pins as to what their competency was, what their wishes were, what their experience was and the black pin was my final choice. Now that Ouija board was open to every member, all the public, the press, the whole ball of wax, everybody was happy. And the democrats refused to accept my offer to allow them to appoint the people for whatever they wanted to. Which I did when i was minority leader, for the first time in the history of Michigan, the minority said where they wanted their members to go. That's the way they do it in Congress. And I figured that I had a responsibility if I was minority leader to put guys where I knew they would do the best for the people and that's what I did and Joe Kowalski went along with that.

JK: During your legislative career there were a whole host of things, taxes, civil rights, environmental bond issues, you want to elaborate on some of the ones that you think were probably the most important?

RW: This is from my campaign stuff. This is the campaign material that I had. This is my whole campaign piece. I said we start by putting the backbone back into state government. Among the legislation passed this term, are laws provided for fiscal reform and plag consent, that's the drunk driving deal, good roads package, and I didn't even mention reducing the fares on the Mackinac bridge, we just did that as an aside, crime and riot prevention, open housing, tenant's rights, lower court reorganization, Sunday liquor, major improvements and aid to higher education and school aid, legislation against crime and for exchange of information by grand jury's, court hearings on Ionia inmates, that's by the criminally insane, to protect society from premature release,

reorganization of state military structure, anti-pollution legislation covering both air and water, a bill to submit a vote, a bond issue for vast improvement of parks and recreation facilities and conflict of interest legislation.

RW: And then I got a whole thing in this campaign about the open housing business. And that didn't even mention the income tax that we had to do but I mentioned that here. There were only six of us in the house. Excuse me, four of us in the legislature that have a record which would be compatible with voting no on an income tax, only four and we got into deep trouble fiscally and there wasn't any way that we could get out of it except on income tax and that's what we had to do. I happen to be one of those four business I led the fight for the income tax. We had an unbelievably constructive session and I have every reason to be proud of my part in it all. Of course we did have a Senate, and we did have a Governor and Governor Romney was a big leader was a super guy to work with. Very easy to work with, unlike what a lot of people think. So it was just fun putting all this stuff together.

JK: Romney also had a pretty solid staff too, didn't he?

RW: Yeah.

JK: Folks that went on to great promise.

RW: They were fun to work with too. And he did not have yes people around him at all. I can remember once we had a meeting, there were 18 of us in a room and Romney and Allison Green was speaker of the house, and Romney and Allison Green wanted to do something, and I said I don't think we ought to do that, and Dick Van Deusen was the Governor's legal advisor and he says, I agree with Bob Waldron. And so we discussed this thing for a while and it was 16 to 2 against the speaker of the house and the governor, and Romney just laughed and threw up his hands and said, let's go on to the next subject. Well now that's pretty nice. That pretty good stuff. I can't imagine Janowitz doing that but I can imagine Charlie DeBona doing that.

JK: Talk about the Detroit riots for a moment and what you mentioned, the coordinating committee.

RW: That was an extremely interesting period. And a tragic period. We had a horrible riot in Detroit during the war, I was overseas at the time, I think this was in '44, it was really bad. And I think we all take judicial notes on how it started and stuff but for some reason, because of the good operation of the state police or other information gathering services, there was some suspicion that there was a problem.

RW: So when the legislature adjourned or recessed in '67 we were still working on income tax, I think, so we recessed for a while and tried ... And this is close to the truth. We signed some papers that Bob Danhof put together who was then the governor's legal advisor, that said that we wouldn't be able to call the legislature back into session immediately on the drop of a hat and we did that because the Constitution of the United States says that the United States forces can be brought in on a riot at the

request of the governor only if the legislature's not in session and then it has to be at the request of the legislature.

RW: And so we wanted to make sure that the legislature couldn't ask for the troops. So when the riot occurred, why governor Romney asked for the troops after the state militia couldn't handle the whole business and President Johnson made a big thing about governor Romney, he was a little upset but what Romney didn't understand was that the President was trying to make it all constitutional, was trying to make the federal assistance totally constitutional, which he did pretty much. Then the riots were calmed down and all that sort of stuff and what I knew was that I knew my colleagues and they're all human beings, and they're all politicians and I knew that there was a possibility, not a probability but there was a possibility that they would move into these riots and start study committees and come in there like vultures and do no good. In other words, they could stir up a lot of stuff that was unnecessary to stir up, the saw dust that didn't need to be sawed again, and so forth.

RW: So I devised, they never heard of this before, a coordinating committee and this coordinating committee was adopted by both houses of the legislature. Coleman Young was on the coordinating committee and the leaders of both houses were on the coordinating committee and that committee was given the power to coordinate all the legislation and all the study and all that stuff regarding to the riots. And it was given the power to order members and committees to cease and desists if they were doing something that we thought was in-amicable to the peace of the community. And we didn't need to do anything more than just pass that thing to get everybody to be careful and so it worked out very well. But we had several meetings. And this really endeared Coleman Young to me a lot because we were good friends from then on. We were always okay friends but he was really impressed with that.

RW: So then we went out and embarked on the open housing and Governor Romney called a special session on open housing and we had a big long session on open housing. We weren't able to pass a bill but we were the next year in 1968, we passed the bill on open housing. So those were very tough days. And we did have a house discussion group which was a bi-partisan discussion group. Mel DeStigter was on it, he was chairman of the civil rights committee. And this was a discussion with the black Caucus and all that stuff. The kinds of things that we should do to ameliorate what happened and prevent anything like this from the future.

JK: In '68 the democrats again took control.

RW: On the election of '68, right.

JK: And Bill Ryan became speaker.

RW: Right.

JK: And then you became minority leader.

RW: Yeah, I became minority leader and for the first time in the history of Michigan, I do believe, that they had a minority floor leader and a minority leader that were separate. Bill Hampton had been my majority floor leader. I didn't want both jobs anyway. So we split them into two.

JK: What happened under the Ryan speakership?

RW: Well the worst thing that happened was under my speakership. And that was, these guys got together and they, inimitable pusillanimity ... That'll throw anybody listening to this.

JK: Including me.

RW: That means cowardly.

JK: For some reason I was thinking cheap.

RW: Well it was close. Cheap too. Anyway, they put this state auditors compensation commission on a ballot in the primary election of 1968, which I never read in my life. They did it at the end of a newspaper strike that had been going on for months and they knew that the press wouldn't be able to analyze the thing in the metropolitan area. They knew that the public, once they said, "Well, do you think the legislature ought to set their own salaries?" would say, "No, we think they shouldn't do that."

RW: But the public not knowing that the legislature didn't dare give themselves a raise and that we were much safer in the hands of the legislature than we were with bunch of people that were beholden to the legislature and appointed by the governor and so forth. The legislature then carefully left out a couple so they could ratchet it. Oh, it was a mess. But that was the beginning of the full-time legislature.

JK: Okay, and the growth in staff.

RW: Right. That was the beginning of the whole business.

JK: Lengthening of the sessions.

RW: Yeah. This had been going on during a decade, to a degree. Bobby Traxler was in the vanguard along with Spencer.

JK: Roy Spencer.

RW: They had the bipartisan counterparts in the Senate. I've checked this whole thing out. I've written on it and I've had it checked out with people that were there so, my stuff is pretty objective. It was done to do just exactly what it did, is to move into a full-time legislature. That's what we have now and that's destroyed pretty much the collegiality of the legislature, the closeness that I told you that Al Horrigan and I had, Joe Kowalski and I. It used to be that there weren't any multi-client lobbyists and I think the multi-

client lobbyist is really, they're not illegal but they're not very helpful. We have a system now where there's a fundraiser almost every night.

JK: That's true.

RW: ... in this town. You learn how to put on a fundraiser before you learn where the latrine is. That's not a good thing. When you go to a fundraiser, it's usually partisan. The lobbyists are there, but there're not very many people of the other party there. There's some, but there's not very many. It used to be that our extracurricular stuff was almost always on a bipartisan basis. We'd go out to dinner with them. The American Petroleum Institute would send somebody out. You'd take a group out to dinner, you'd take two or three Democrats and two or three Republicans and you'd all have a good time. There'd be a collegiality there, you'd discuss the issues of the day, and you wouldn't do it in trying to do a one-ups on one or the other.

JK: But there were partisan hangouts. As I recall, the Democrats hung out at the Capitol Park, or at least the-

RW: The Roosevelt.

JK: Yeah. The labor guys had a place to hang out.

RW: Well, yeah, that's true. But there was some of that and quite a bit of that. But there was a lot more mixing than there is today. When you have too much staff, now we didn't have enough staff. But there's a happy medium. But when you have too much, it screens the legislators from each other.

JK: That's a good point.

RW: I think that in your lobbying right now, you find that very often, you have to go in and talk to the staff guy. You don't always talk to the legislator.

JK: That's right.

RW: That was impossible in my time. You either have to talk to me or nobody. You'd whistle for a while.

JK: You've also talked in the past to me about the growth of the budget of the legislature and the amount of state dollars-

RW: Oh. Unbelievable.

JK: ... that are spent by the legislative branch, as opposed to your tenure.

RW: I've forgotten what it was, but it's grown up 10 or 15, 20, 30 times. It's just huge. Well, look at the stuff they've got now. So, I think of the clerk and his secretary are now replaced by two clerks and their whole flock of secretaries and finance people and they

also have something called a bill analysis, and you've looked those over, I'm sure. The guys that do the analyzing don't have the political background for the political nuances one way or the other.

JK: The committees all have staff now in addition to the individual staff of the members.

RW: Exactly. It seemed to me that if you can't analyze a bill, you ought not to be running for the legislature. You ought to wait until you can analyze a bill and then run for the legislature.

JK: Now, that 1969-70 session was your final one?

RW: That was my final one. Yeah.

JK: You decided to retire from the legislature?

RW: In 1964, I decided that I was not going to run again in '68 or '70 and I didn't tell anybody because that would have created a vacuum in my district that I didn't want it filled by anybody, but I wanted to do the filling myself.

JK: The filee-

JK: Bill Bryant?

RW: ... was Bill Bryant. He might not like that. But the filee was Billy Bryant.

JK: Filee.

RW: The filee. Replaced the stud.

JK: Talk about your relationship with Bill. I think Bill is a relative, isn't he? Is he a nephew?

RW: Well, he's not a relative of mine, but he's my kid's third cousin.

JK: Oh, okay.

RW: Okay?

JK: You were very proud of Bill. I know you spent time-

RW: Oh, he was a good friend of mine and he and I have been close. So, I wanted to make sure that that district was represented by a non-kook.

JK: In January 1971, you joined the American Petroleum Institute as the Michigan office's executive director. You replaced Bill Palmer, former senator Palmer, who had served with the API for a long, long time.

RW: I guess so. Off and on since the '30s.

JK: 1938 is when he was first hired. You walked smack dab into the OPEC energy crisis of the '70s as the API director.

RW: That was pretty exciting.

JK: I know you're also very proud of the tenure with API and the service with the oil industry. But those had to be some pretty fascinating times.

RW: Well, I remember the legislature better than that. But they were and we had to explain the industry to the people as much as anything else. I can remember sitting in a meeting, great big meeting on the fourth floor of the Capitol. This was a meeting conducted by Tom Anderson, who was a real good guy.

JK: My next door neighbor.

RW: Right. Yeah. Don-

JK: That's right. Don River.

RW: Right. We had three PhDs. This was one of those big rooms, half as big as this, on the fourth floor. We had three PhDs there and we had a meeting that lasted, oh, I don't know, an hour and a half over what they're going to do about all this stuff. Not once was the word "price" mentioned. P-R-I-C-E. I said to Tom, I said, "Let me give these guys a 15- minute lecture," and Tom said, "Oh, I know what you're going to say. We know all about that anyway. But let these guys pop off."

RW: We were in a situation that was exacerbated by the federal government, by President Nixon putting on price controls and all of that sort of stuff. Otherwise, we'd have gotten out of the mess a lot sooner. We had lines in this country at the service stations. That means gas stations to most people. But they didn't in Europe because they let the price regulate where the demand was going to be. So, we got it all screwed up. But I remember we were working hard on that. Then during all that time, we had tax battles and we had where we're going to drill in the Arctic Circle or drill on the offshore.

JK: Pigeon River.

RW: All that stuff. Pardon me?

JK: The Pigeon River came up?

RW: Oh, the Pigeon River thing. But that was mainly the Michigan Oil and Gas Association.

JK: You were engaged in the debate over the Joint Rules Committee.

RW: The API, I was not representing the API. I don't know whether you know that.

JK: Yes, I do know that.

RW: I was not representing the API. However, they did not object to my political activities in that direction. What it amounted to was they tried to put a constitutional amendment that would allow the Administrative Rules Committee to veto any administrative rule. I think that's about the size of it, which in my opinion, is unconstitutional federally-wise, and it's possible, I don't know whether it'd be statewide or not, but you could argue. But that's irrelevant if it's unconstitutional federally-wise.

JK: But that plan actually got on the ballot.

RW: That got on the ballot. There were all sorts of people for it, including the State Chamber, Farm Bureau, AAA. God, I don't know how many people. Somebody called me from CBS in Detroit and said, "Well, you're the only organized person against it." I said, "Yeah. I suppose so." But I did some lobbying with all the newspapers, that sort of stuff, and explained the whole business, not that they weren't smart enough to figure it out for themselves.

RW: I wrote a piece that I put out to 124 local newspapers and some other stuff. I spent $124. I don't know how many newspapers it went to. We finally had a vote on this thing and I won by a half a million votes, I think. But Glenn Allen said, "Well, they always vote something down they don't understand." So, he just undermined my euphoria. But I may be a little more humble.

JK: Well, I also think, didn't you get a call from the Governor-

RW: Oh, yeah.

JK: ... following the election?

RW: Were you there then? No, you weren't there.

JK: No, but you had mentioned it.

RW: I got a call from Governor Blanchard the next day. The next morning, as a matter of fact. Jim Barrett passed me on Grand Avenue and he waved to me and he said, "Congrats."

JK: Did he use his full hand or just this one finger?

RW: Well, no. A full hand. His full hand. He didn't give me the family gesture. He waved his hand and congratulated me. Then I got to the office and somebody said the Governor was on the phone. That was Governor Blanchard. So, he got on the phone and he said, "Bob Waldron, I want to tell you, I want to thank you. You saved my ass." That's exactly what he said. I said, "Well, I think you deserve to ... This had to be anyways." But that was very nice of him. I think Rick called on him to do that.

JK: But you had a good relationship with Governor Blanchard, as I know you do with Governor Engler.

RW: Yeah, but I didn't know Governor Blanchard too well. But we had a good relationship.

JK: Now, you spent a lot of time in the public domain, as did the eternal general, Frank Kelley. I know that we had had some meetings together with Mr. Kelley. I wonder what kind of working relationship you had with Frank through all the years.

RW: The only time that Frank has ever bothered me or the Attorney General's Office, that wasn't necessarily under Frank either, it was before Frank, was that they would have opinions on legislation that weren't necessarily sound and that we didn't feel that we had to pay all that much attention to them. But it wasn't a big deal. They didn't come in sick and fast. But when Kelley got in there and stayed in there longer and longer and longer, these opinions proliferated and were easier to get and became more troublesome.

RW: Then you had stuff like, and I'm not sure of this, they had stuff like representing both sides on the Public Service Commission. I don't know that there's a statute that tells them that they can represent the public. Is there? I didn't think so. So, that's something that Frank Kelley developed and that's something that most lawyers just can't believe is happening and yet, they defend it, and they still do. So, when this operation gets to the point where it sues the very people that it's supposed to defend, then you begin to think that there ought to be some thinking about just where it goes and what the parameters of this office are.

RW: It was only last year that I started delving into this, the real meat of this thing. I was absolutely surprised to find that there's nothing, nothing in Michigan's Constitution that gives any duties whatsoever to the Attorney General. That's the only office so negated. But it realized on the common law and the statutes that are there and all that, and there were lots of that. But there's nothing in the Constitution. So, I suggested once the legislature very clumsily tried to do something about it and they were very rightfully embarrassed because they didn't use the right procedure, they should have sat down with the Attorney General and various other people involved in and in an orderly manner, begin to discuss this whole business.

RW: They didn't and I said to myself, "Well, this ought to be something that the Law Revision Commission ought to look at." So, I called McLellan and I said, "How do you get something on the agenda?" He said, "Well, any citizen can write a letter. Why don't you?" I said, "Okay. I will." So, that's where it stands now. They haven't forgotten it. It'll come up again because Judge Griffin asked for opinions on this representing both sides and so forth.

JK: What have we left out? What haven't we touched on?

RW: Well, we've left out my impression of Bill Ryan, who is one of the most dedicated guys. He's one of the guys that I've got to say, came into the legislature as a calling and never

forgot that it was a calling. He was almost like a priest. He was self-depriving and all that sort of stuff.

JK: He was certainly a public servant.

RW: He was a public servant. His ideas of what government ought to be were almost the opposite of mine. He wanted lots of government and I wanted limited government like Jefferson. He wanted a lot of government, more than even Franklin Roosevelt.

JK: But I can assume that when you disagreed, it was very civil.

RW: Yeah, it was. But we didn't hesitate to raise our voices to each other. One of the things that I got the biggest charge out of was that Romney didn't think he was going to have much trouble negotiating with him on the income tax. But I knew he would and that Romney can shout pretty loudly. But he didn't think Bill Ryan was able to do that. But I knew Bill Ryan could take off his shoe and pound the table. That's exactly what happened. He found out in a big, fat hurry that Bill Ryan was no pushover.

JK: He also, I think, enjoyed taking his time on those kinds of things.

RW: That is an understatement. That's what I've got written down here. He has the most patience of anybody. But that's part of the UAW negotiation.

JK: Could not be hurried.

RW: So, he was schooled in the UAW negotiation. He used to write for the Catholic labor newspaper, and a very sincere guy. I visited him a few times lately out at the nursing home. So, he and I were brought up with the breezes coming off Lake St. Clair along with Zolton Ferency and Bill Ryan and Bob Waldron. Now, that's a triumvirate.

JK: Yeah. I knew Zolton.

RW: But we were all dedicated public servants, I think I should say.

JK: I believe that Zolton probably inhaled more of Great Lakes Steel well and the Detroit River than Lake St. Clair-

RW: Well, he might've.

JK: ... coming from Delray.

RW: Yeah. His political stuff, he may have grown up over there by you, but he'd moved out to the 14th District because I know he worked under Bert Donlon, who was a chairman of the 14th Congressional District Democrats and a guy I got to know pretty well. Well, I don't know whether that covers the waterfront, but that covers some of it.

JK: You worked with various labor leads through the years and labor lobbyists like Gus Schoelle.

RW: I didn't work with Gus Schoelle very much. I knew who he was, but I didn't work with him. I can't say that I sat down and worked with him. The labor leaders that I worked with mainly were the ones that were around the legislature. He wasn't around a lot, and if he was, he was pretty much with the Democrats. I worked with the police and the fire and the MEA. One of the things that I introduced was a bill very early on, believe it or not, that would have allowed a teacher with a master's degree to teach the subject matter that they have a master's degree in, in high school if they were certified by the superintendent that they could teach.

RW: And I almost got that through the legislature. In the 50s, and now they're thinking about that now, or at least, maybe they haven't now, I'm not sure. But we couldn't get that through the House.

RW: Oh, the Elimination District Courts. That was Elimination of JP is the District Courts. I think one of the things that I spent the most time on of any one apparently small issue, now this is example of what a speaker has to do every now and then, was that we were abolishing the JPs. That's a big structure. And we had a conference committee ... was Don Holbrook and Danny Cooper, I don't know whether it was Joe Swallow or somebody else ... somebody on the Judiciary Committee, and they didn't get anyplace. So, we had to have a second conference committee. And I wanted to get a bill on this thing, and I knew that these guys were in districts where there was too much pressure so that they wouldn't come up with a bill.

RW: And I spent a long time figuring out who to put on that deal, so I took off ... I couldn't not keep Holbrook on it, because he was chairman of the Judiciary. So, I put Jim Heinz, who was a super lawyer from Battle Creek, and Dick Young, who was a super lawyer from Dearborn Heights. And I told those guys, "We want a bill." And I knew all bedlam was going to break when this second conference committee was announced, so instead of presiding, I went down to my seat next to Bill Fitzgerald Sr. ready to defend my position, which I did, and there was bedlam.

RW: Danny Cooper got up and raised hell and so did some of the other people, but we prevailed. And they prevailed, they did a wonderful job of getting a bill through.

JK: You mentioned Joe Swallow, who was famous for the proposal for the Unicameral Legislature.

RW: Yeah, well, he and I debated that, and that doesn't work, as you know.

JK: As I watch Nebraska now, much closer than I ever did before, I agree with you completely. It is a nightmare.

RW: Well, so does Vince Braun. And we know the Secretary of the Senate in Nebraska.

JK: Yes, we do.

RW: But, let's see, what else have you got on here? In April of 1970, we worked ... Bill Bryant and Carl Purcell were two out of 26 on the Wayne County Commissioners. And they really worked hard. They were a big power, believe it. Two out of 26 and they came to the legislature at the same time, but I remember it, at breakfast once, I told Bill Bryant that I wasn't going to run again. This was in April, that was the first time I told anybody. This was after ... this including my wife. I didn't even tell ... anybody, I didn't tell anybody. And I said, "I'm not going to run again."

RW: "I expect you to run." So, that's the way it happened.

JK: And he was ready.

RW: Yeah.

JK: Was Bill a teacher?

RW: No, no, no. Bill's a lawyer. Bill's a graduate of Princeton and a graduate of that school in Ann Arbor, law school in Ann Arbor, you've heard of that.

JK: Yes, I have.

RW: And practiced law in Detroit for a number of years.

JK: I guess I thought of him as a teacher, because one of the last things that you and I did was to look at his textbook. The textbook he was-

RW: Oh, that thing. Yeah, wow.

JK: Yeah, he was writing about government.

RW: Well, okay. Then you might have thought he was a teacher, but he's ... and he was also very interested, he was a chairman of the education committee.

JK: That's right. You also had what I thought was a really healthy relationship with the press. You always were very easy to talk with with Tom Bray, with the media, in fact, at one point, you and I talked about you doing even more of the press work rather than hiring an API, a meeting specialist, because you enjoyed working with them.

RW: I had a very good relationship with the press when I was in the legislature. And it's easy to have a good relationship with the press. You just tell it the way it is. I mean, if you can't tell it, you tell them you can tell it. I mean, they're fine to work with. I've never had any problem with the press.

JK: You and Hugh McDiarmid seemed to have a good relationship.

RW: Yeah.

JK: You mentioned some Tom Greene stories.

RW: Yeah, well, I've never had any problem at all, but where I really got to enjoy it was when the API had a retrenchment situation and I was the only guy, so I did all the press work and all of everything. And then my famous cockroach theory. You know that.

JK: Absolutely.

RW: My famous cockroach theory is that we in the API didn't have any PAC, so we had to rely on facts and all that sort of stuff. And believe it or not, representing the Big Oil companies, our position was usually best for the consumer, and so when we had legislation going that were trying to outflank us and change the marketplace to the disadvantage of the consumer, why, the only recourse that we had from people that gave campaign contributions was to go to the press. To make sure that the press lambasted these bills in the districts where we had swing votes, like DeMaso, and stuff like that.

JK: They would shine the light.

RW: They would shine the light and the cockroaches would run for cover, and that's why we call it the cockroach theory. So, that works very well.

JK: I want to thank you very much, Bob. This has been very enjoyable.

RW: Thank you, John.

JK: My pleasure.

NOTE: This transcript was edited on 11/2/2021 by Bill Gnodtke.