

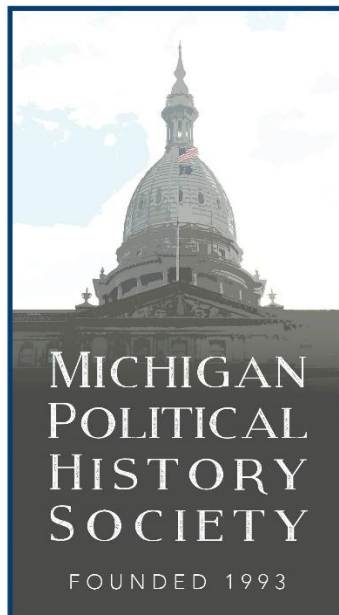
CANDICE MILLER

Interviewed Bill Ballenger

October 2, 2025

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Bill Ballenger:

Commissioner Candice Miller, you have had one of the most amazing political careers in Michigan history, let's say career of a public servant, that would be more polite. The Michigan Democratic Party has a lot of female heroes, Debbie Stabenow, Martha Griffiths, Jennifer Granholm, the current governor, Gretchen Whitmer, but I would say the Michigan Republican Party has you standing head and shoulders above everybody else.

Commissioner Miller:

Nice for you to say that.

Bill Ballenger:

You are one of the most amazing accomplished politicians of the late 20th century and the first 25 years of this 21st century, and you're still going.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

You've had so many offices. So I just want to start at the beginning. You're born, as I understand it, St. Clair Shores?

Commissioner Miller:

I'm born and raised in St. Clair Shores. I'm actually born in the city of Detroit.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

Deaconess Hospital, which is no longer there.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, really? Okay. Your maiden name was Snider?

Commissioner Miller:

Snider, S-N-I-D-E-R.

Bill Ballenger:

Yes, like Duke Snider, the famous Brooklyn Dodgers center fielder.

Commissioner Miller:

Oh, of course.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay, yes. How about your mother's maiden name?

Commissioner Miller:

McLaughlin.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, McLaughlin.

Commissioner Miller:

McLaughlin, yep.

Bill Ballenger:

So you think that-

Commissioner Miller:

Jenny McLaughlin, a good Scott.

Bill Ballenger:

Scottish? Irish? Scotch?

Commissioner Miller:

Scott-Irish.

Bill Ballenger:

Scotch-Irish.

Commissioner Miller:

Scott-Irish, yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. All right.

Commissioner Miller:

I'm actually first generation from Scotland.

Bill Ballenger:

Really? Oh, really?

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:
Her family all came from Ardrossan, outside of Glasgow.

Bill Ballenger:
Wow.

Commissioner Miller:
Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:
You ever been back there for a visit?

Commissioner Miller:
Yes.

Bill Ballenger:
That's unbelievable.

Commissioner Miller:
Oh, yeah. I had to go see my kin.

Bill Ballenger:
Oh, my goodness. That's great. So you had siblings?

Commissioner Miller:
Yes. I have an older brother, and then I have a much younger sister, a little brat.

Bill Ballenger:
Okay.

Commissioner Miller:
I love her dearly.

Bill Ballenger:
You went to Lakeshore?

Commissioner Miller:
I went to Lakeshore High School.

Bill Ballenger:
High school.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, mm-hmm.

Bill Ballenger:

Now, were you on student council or anything there?

Commissioner Miller:

No, never.

Bill Ballenger:

What were your interests? What were your interests when you were in high school or at school at any point?

Commissioner Miller:

I liked being around everybody and socializing with everybody. I was not a particularly good student. I didn't get good grades or anything like that.

Bill Ballenger:

You probably didn't study. You're too busy having a good time.

Commissioner Miller:

I was busy having a good time.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, I have to admit. I loved high school.

Bill Ballenger:

You get out of high school. Do you go to college at all?

Commissioner Miller:

I went for a year at Macomb Community College. And then, later on in life, I took some other classes at Northwood, but I do not have a college degree.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

I always make sure I tell people that immediately because they always say, "Are you an attorney?" I'm going, "You got to be kidding. It's bad enough I'm a politician." I don't recommend it, but that was the path that I went on. My dad said, "We weren't going to waste any money on a woman going to school, and you're going to come to work for me," and I went, "Oh, okay. This is what we're doing, I guess."

Bill Ballenger:

What did your mother and father do, occupation?

Commissioner Miller:

My mother was a housewife.

Bill Ballenger:

She was a housewife.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, my mother was a housewife, yes.

Bill Ballenger:

And your father?

Commissioner Miller:

And my dad, my dad actually graduated from U of M, president of his class as an aeronautical engineer.

Bill Ballenger:

Really?

Commissioner Miller:

When he got out of the university, he immediately went to work for, at that time, Chrysler missile plant, which is at 17 1/2 and Van Dyke in Sterling Heights. He was very involved with obviously the aerospace program. They actually had him go down to Redstone, Alabama. He worked with Wernher Von Braun-

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, my God. Really?

Commissioner Miller:

... some of the original rocket scientists, really. I used to laugh because my dad would tell us, he said, "It was so great back in the day because we would send everything we wanted to out into space until the government got involved. And then we couldn't send a rocket until the weight of the rocket equaled the weight of the paperwork. It was ridiculous," and I think that was sort of... I started thinking, "Geez, I guess we just hate government, right?"

But anyway, he ended up going into the marina business. He built some of the first fiberglass sailboats back in the '50s when that was a real high technology, had a big sign over the back of his workshop that said, "If God would have wanted fiberglass boats, he would have made fiberglass trees." But anyway, he built some fiberglass boats and iceboats and sailboats.

Bill Ballenger:

Was that at St. Clair Shores?

Commissioner Miller:

In St. Clair Shores, yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. But then you moved-

Commissioner Miller:

Now, to Harrison Township.

Bill Ballenger:

... at some point to Harrison Township?

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. His marina, marinas, were out in Harrison Township on the Clinton River, and his principal place of business was also in an industrial corridor that's right by 94 North River Road in Harrison. Yeah-

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. That sounds-

Commissioner Miller:

... that was our thing-

Bill Ballenger:

... fascinating.

Commissioner Miller:

... sailing.

Bill Ballenger:

I think very interesting. Well, we'll get to sailing later because there are a lot more to that story. You were having a job? Did you have a job at all?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, I worked for him.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

I worked for my dad.

Bill Ballenger:

While you were going to Macomb County Community College?

Commissioner Miller:

I worked for my dad, yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

I worked for my dad.

Bill Ballenger:

And then you get married, right?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes. Well, first of all, in our family, by the time you were in about eighth grade, you were expected to work 40 hours a week.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

So it was a very simple concept, "Don't work, don't eat," got it. I often say to my siblings that one thing that Don Snider taught us is how to work.

Bill Ballenger:

How to work, okay.

Commissioner Miller:

You know what? A lot of people don't know how to work, but he did teach us how to work.

Bill Ballenger:

Wow.

Commissioner Miller:

But yeah, we all worked for him. Out of high school, I got married at 19, divorced when I was 21, 22. I had my daughter at 21.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. That's your only child?

Commissioner Miller:

That's my only child, yep. So then, I was a single parent for some period of time.

Bill Ballenger:

During that time, you were still working for your father?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes, mm-hmm.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. Then you get to the point where you get into politics in a rather strange way. Tell me about that.

Commissioner Miller:

Well, working in the family business, the marina business, when you work in a family business, you do whatever they tell you to do, right, whatever needs to be done?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

Whether it was selling boats, whether it was cleaning the bathrooms, whatever. One of the things that I was trying to learn how to do was to do the books. This was in Harrison Township on the Clinton River. The local township board decided that they needed money, and they were going to pass a tax on all the marinas, which is really the largest part of the commercial tax base, so they were going to have so much for in-the-water storage and so much for dry storage. I remember telling my dad, I said, "Dad, we're just not going to be able to afford this. I'm trying to do the books." You know what he said? "This is crazy. These people, who are these people? Don't we hate government? Now, they're going to put us out of business here."

Bill Ballenger:

And he agreed with you?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, he agreed, but he basically sort of patted me on the head and said, "You can't fight city hall, so we're screwed."

Bill Ballenger:

He didn't know you. He didn't know you.

Commissioner Miller:

I ended up going up and down the river roads there, talking to all these marina owners saying, "Look, we got to do something here. We got to make some noise. We can't just roll over." Long story short, we had a petition, and we stormed down to the board meeting. I'll never forget. Because when we got there, we get to our item on the agenda, and these guys all look at me, and I was like, I don't know, 24, 25, or something, and they go, "Okay, get up there. Tell them." "What? I can't do that," but we were actually successful. I thought that was so-

Bill Ballenger:

So you beat the tax?

Commissioner Miller:

They decided not to pass the ordinance, the taxing ordinance. I just thought that was so interesting.

Bill Ballenger:

Exactly. Then what happened with the Harrison Township board of trustees?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, then they had a recall actually in the township.

Bill Ballenger:

Was it built around this tax issue or not?

Commissioner Miller:

No, it was something else.

Bill Ballenger:

Something else.

Commissioner Miller:

Although it wasn't that particular tax issue, but it was the assessments. This was back in the day, right? Remember all the property-

Bill Ballenger:

There were recalls.

Commissioner Miller:

They were recalling everybody, and the property tax assessments were very high. It was before Headlee, before all of that.

Bill Ballenger:

Right, right.

Commissioner Miller:

So anyway, they had a recall, and they recalled two trustees and a clerk. I was actually able, because my dad, we were sort of involved with this campaign to get the nomination from the local Republican Party, which was three people sitting in one of these marina rooms because there weren't any Republicans.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, the whole board was-

Commissioner Miller:

They we like, "Are we the party? Yeah, we must be-"

Bill Ballenger:

The whole board was Democrat at that time, right?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes. It was like, "Where is the Republican Party?" "Well, they don't really exist." Anyway... And then I won this special election, I guess, that they had. I can hardly remember it. But anyway, I became a trustee on the Harrison Township board, and it was just for a nine-month period because that was the remainder of the-

Bill Ballenger:

Unexpired portion, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, until the next term.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

After several of those meetings, I remember telling my dad, I say, "I really like this. This is great," and I said," but I think I should run for supervisor," and he said," You got to be kidding." He said, "Well, why don't you wait another four years. Maybe you can think about doing that." I'm thinking, "Oh, why am I waiting? No, I'm not waiting." I said, "I'm going to go," so I did. I ran.

Bill Ballenger:

You ran and you got the Republican nomination pretty easily, right, because-

Commissioner Miller:

No.

Bill Ballenger:

You didn't?

Commissioner Miller:

No, it wasn't an easy nomination.

Bill Ballenger:

You were opposed?

Commissioner Miller:

There were five people in the race.

Bill Ballenger:

Five running for supervisor.

Commissioner Miller:

Five people in the primary, including a guy named Richard Johnson, who unfortunately has subsequently passed away, but he was the chairman of the County Republican Party and a prominent attorney in the area, and some others that were in there. So there were five of us.

Bill Ballenger:

That's incredible. They wanted to get the nomination to run against the incumbent Democrat.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

And then the incumbent Democrat got beat in a primary?

Commissioner Miller:

By 24 votes or something.

Bill Ballenger:

Wow.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. It was a huge upset.

Bill Ballenger:

But you managed to beat Johnson and these other candidates.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

That's incredible. How did you campaign? What did you do?

Commissioner Miller:

Work. Hard work.

Bill Ballenger:

Like door to door?

Commissioner Miller:

All the door. My gosh, just door knocking, door knocking.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, my gosh. My daughter, who was just, I don't know, two or something at that time, three, she was young. Of course, I couldn't afford a babysitter, so I would pull her around in a wagon. We made sort of a game out of it.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

People still remember that.

Bill Ballenger:

The name of your first husband was McDonald, right?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

So were you running as Candice McDonald?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes, mm-hmm.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, that's incredible. That means that, later, you had to switch and drop the McDonald and still get elected.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

You lose all your name ID.

Commissioner Miller:

I know. It was really-

Bill Ballenger:

Are you kidding?

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:
That's terrible.

Commissioner Miller:
It was.

Bill Ballenger:
But anyway, the bottom line is-

Commissioner Miller:
It was a hard thing, but-

Bill Ballenger:
You beat the Democratic nominee for supervisor.

Commissioner Miller:
Yes.

Bill Ballenger:
So you became the first female supervisor in-

Commissioner Miller:
First woman, first Republican in Harrison Township. I think I was 26 when that happened.

Bill Ballenger:
26 at the time.

Commissioner Miller:
Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:
Yeah. You served for a number of years. I know you got reelected. Now then, didn't you run for Congress?

Commissioner Miller:
Yes, I ran for Congress.

Bill Ballenger:
Against David Bonior-

Commissioner Miller:

Yes, against Bonner.

Bill Ballenger:
... who's a god.

Commissioner Miller:
Yes, he was.

Bill Ballenger:
He was number 3 Democrat in the US House and been in many terms.

Commissioner Miller:
Yes.

Bill Ballenger:
Did you just want to do that on your own, or did people recruit you to run against him?

Commissioner Miller:
Well, there really wasn't a party, so nobody will-

Bill Ballenger:
I know there was.

Commissioner Miller:
... recruit you. No, I just thought, "You know what? I'm going to run against this guy. See how I rule."

Bill Ballenger:
Because you're in the middle of your supervisor term, so you'd still be supervisor if you want.

Commissioner Miller:
Yes.

Bill Ballenger:
Of course, it turned out to be a terrible year for Republicans-

Commissioner Miller:
That was the year that Bill Luther-

Bill Ballenger:
... 1986.

Commissioner Miller:
... was at the top of the ticket. It was a complete wipe out for Republicans.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, completely.

Commissioner Miller:

Needless to say, I did not do-

Bill Ballenger:

Is that the only race you ever lost?

Commissioner Miller:

Only race I ever lost, yeah-

Bill Ballenger:

That's what I thought.

Commissioner Miller:

... and I lost badly.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, yeah, but everybody-

Commissioner Miller:

But you know what?

Bill Ballenger:

... who's a Republican lost back then.

Commissioner Miller:

But sometimes it's good to lose a race also. I really do believe that, and I've told people that over the years.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

You need to know how to look-

Bill Ballenger:

How was it good for you? How was it good for you? What did you learn from running against a top bond here? Did you have any debates?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes, we had some debates. Yeah, we had a couple of debates, and you learn from that. I was still young when I was... I think I was 30 then.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, you were 30.

Commissioner Miller:

I was running against Bonior. You learn a lot and come in contact with... From what I was doing as a township supervisor to be able to now campaign all over this congressional district was very eye-opening for me, learning all these different issues and what was motivating people. I lost, but I learned a lot.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, so you were actually supervisor for like 12 years, weren't you?

Commissioner Miller:

Right, three terms-

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, three terms-

Commissioner Miller:

... four-year terms.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, three terms. The township population was like maybe 20,000 or something?

Commissioner Miller:

It was about, yeah, a little less than 25,000, I think, back in the day. I'll tell you right now, it's still less than 30,000. It really hasn't grown that much. The demographics or the configuration geographically, I should say, of Harrison Township is... Selfridge Air National Guard Base is a third of the township, and then you have Lake Saint Clair and the Clinton River all ringed around there, so you really don't have a lot of room for growth.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, what do you remember the big issues were when you were a supervisor? What were you dealing with?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, at that time, actually, we were sort of a growth community as far as not so many new subdivisions and different things, but just generally growth. I was trying to figure out how to improve our industrial corridor, which had been very slow to develop, by using a tax abatement and different kinds of incentive, and we were pretty successful with some of those kinds of things. Obviously, I was very involved with water quality issues even back in the day because we were on Lake Saint Clair and Clinton

River, different kinds of issues with that, and all the normal things, roads, drains, whatever township supervisors are involved with even today, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

There were a lot of different kinds of things. They tried to recall me several times.

Bill Ballenger:

Did it ever get to a vote?

Commissioner Miller:

Oh, yeah. I was on the ballot in my first term.

Bill Ballenger:

Whoa.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, I was on the ballot.

Bill Ballenger:

What were they mad at you about?

Commissioner Miller:

They were mad at me then about a pay raise, I think.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. We had this compensation commission, and they gave the board members a couple thousand dollar raise or something like that. This was back in the... Yeah, geez. This was-

Bill Ballenger:

It was recall city.

Commissioner Miller:

They were just recalling everything.

Bill Ballenger:

All over the place, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

It was more personality-driven because I'm in there shaking things up, and a lot of people don't like that. But anyway, yeah, I was actually on the ballot. Everybody else that year, the recalls were all successful.

Bill Ballenger:

They were all successful.

Commissioner Miller:

But we did not get recalled. It was myself-

Bill Ballenger:

Wait a second.

Commissioner Miller:

... and a couple others.

Bill Ballenger:

You mean the others were recalled, but you weren't?

Commissioner Miller:

No. Some of the other recalls that were like... They were trying to, and they were successful at recalling a state senator.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, yeah. Oh, but not-

Commissioner Miller:

[inaudible 00:16:17].

Bill Ballenger:

... in Harrison Township.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, not in Harrison Township.

Bill Ballenger:

How did you get along with your other board members?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, I did pretty well with the majority of them. I quickly figured out I had to have four votes. So that was me and three others, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Some I got along with very well and others not so well.

Bill Ballenger:

Not so much.

Commissioner Miller:

In fact, there was one guy that ran against me the next time. He didn't like me anymore. I could always blame him, and I then said, "I was always going numb. We're going to do this." You know what you're talking about. As bad as I am now, Bill, I was a lot worse when I was in my 20s.

Bill Ballenger:

So in 1992, you served three terms as supervisor. You decide, "It's time to try for something else now." Why treasurer of Macomb County? Why?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, at that time, the treasurer, the clerk, and the drain commissioner were double dipping.

Bill Ballenger:

Who?

Commissioner Miller:

In other words, they decided... The Democrats, of course, controlled Macomb County. They controlled all the apparatus. These individuals decided that they were going to collect their pension while they were still working. Why not? Have two incomes, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

Seriously? Yeah. It couldn't even have been legal, but who are you going to challenge to the Democratic judiciary there? That's just how it was. I thought that was so ridiculous and I was ready for... I didn't want to be the township supervisor forever, and so I decided I would run against Adam Nowakowski who was the county treasurer, and they said, "Oh, you can't win. We've never had a Republican countywide in Macomb County." This was the most Democratic county in the country during the Kennedy administration. We've certainly never had a woman. "What is worse, a Republican or a woman? You have both those things, right? You don't have a chance, et cetera, et cetera." I thought, "Well, whatever, I'm going to go. I'm going to get in this race." I had this... Because of this double dipping, I thought, "That's such a great issue. I don't care how long this guy's been."

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, exactly. He'd been in six terms.

Commissioner Miller:

Twenty-four years.

Bill Ballenger:

This is the first of three people, we'll get to that, that you knocked off who had served six 4-year terms. Each one of them 24 years, and you beat them all. Anyway, so this one-

Commissioner Miller:

First, I had to go through the primary.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. Oh, you get-

Commissioner Miller:

No, I had five people in the primary.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, my God.

Commissioner Miller:

Do you remember Kirby Holmes?

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, my gosh. He was in it?

Commissioner Miller:

He was in that primary. Now, he was a big deal at that time-

Bill Ballenger:

He was a big deal.

Commissioner Miller:

... a state senator, and he was running one of those Bingos, so he had cash, a lot of cash.

Bill Ballenger:

Unbelievable.

Commissioner Miller:

And I didn't have cash, but I was a hard worker.

Bill Ballenger:

Again, door to door?

Commissioner Miller:

I did some door to door. You can't do the door to door all over the county.

Bill Ballenger:

How about fundraising? How about fundraising?

Commissioner Miller:

I raised some money, but not as much as he had, but still I was-

Bill Ballenger:

Did he come in second?

Commissioner Miller:

I think he was second.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Whatever, I beat him.

Bill Ballenger:

But behind you anyway. You knock off Nowakowski.

Commissioner Miller:

So I got the Republican nomination, and now I'm running for treasurer against Nowakowski. What I did actually is I had this double-scoop ice cream cone, like a double dip, and that was on-

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, that was a symbol of-

Commissioner Miller:

That was a symbol.

Bill Ballenger:

... the issue.

Commissioner Miller:

And I got that all over because people could understand that.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, absolutely.

Commissioner Miller:

A double dip, right? "Oh, yeah, it's a double dip." "That's what this guy's doing. He's double dipping. You think that's right?" "No, that's not right." "Well, then vote for me."

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. But you get in and you only served two years, but of course you could have still kept going four years altogether. But in 1994, you decided to do something else. What was that?

Commissioner Miller:

I decided to run for secretary of state.

Bill Ballenger:

Now, why?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, when I won that treasurer seat, honestly, all of a sudden, the Michigan Republican Party and the political figures at that time couldn't believe it, that a Republican had won countywide.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

So there was a lot of attention paid all of a sudden. They were like, "Wow."

Bill Ballenger:

You were the first Republican in 60 years, right?

Commissioner Miller:

Long time, yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

To get elected, countywide.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Unbelievable. They're in awe. They're shocked.

Commissioner Miller:

They're shocked.

Bill Ballenger:

So then what?

Commissioner Miller:

So they're like, "Well, who is this person?" Right? "Well, how did this happen?" and et cetera. Anyway, so there was quite a bit of attention paid to it at that time. For whatever reason, I just thought, "You know what? This is my time. I want to be sitting here and..." All of a sudden, you got some political capital. When you have political capital, you don't leave it in the bank. You better play it, right, at the right time?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

And I just thought, "This is the time to try this thing." I remember talking to Governor Engler, at that time, and others, and I said, "I'm going to be running for Michigan secretary of state. I'm going to run against Richard Austin," And they all went, "What?"

Bill Ballenger:

Because he'd been in six 4-year terms as well, 24 years.

Commissioner Miller:

And he was an icon, really.

Bill Ballenger:

Exactly.

Commissioner Miller:

He was beloved.

Bill Ballenger:

Yes. Yeah, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

For all the reasons that people thought he was strong, I thought he would be weak because he'd been there too long, and the branch offices were a disaster. Everybody talked about him all the time. There wasn't so much talk at that time about the secretary of state being the elections official, which obviously was an important, very critical component, but it was more about the branch offices, which every resident had dealings with and they were all negative.

Bill Ballenger:

So how did you convert that into a theme in your campaign?

Commissioner Miller:

I just kept saying, "No more long lines. You will never have to stand in line again in all of these."

Bill Ballenger:

It's almost like the ice cream cone in the other race.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, you got to have a thing, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

People are like, "Yeah. Why are we standing in these lines hour after hour? You have to take a day off of work to go to the secretary of state's office." And then, really, what happened in that race was a debate.

Bill Ballenger:

Exactly. On Michigan public television, Tim Skubick, you, and Richard Austin. He kind of had a meltdown on some social issues.

Commissioner Miller:

He got very confused.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, really.

Commissioner Miller:

I knew that he had some issues, but obviously you couldn't talk about those things at that time because people were much more polite. Yet the camera showed vividly what I couldn't ever really talk about. When that happened, I'll never forget, because this was before texting and everyone had cell phones and all these kinds of things, but we got copies of that debate and had it run to every TV station all over Michigan to play on the 6:00 news, 5:00 news, and that became quite a story and people went, "Whoa, maybe it's time for a change here."

Bill Ballenger:

That's true. Well, and also, to be fair, that was as good a Republican year as 1986 had been a good Democratic year.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

John Engler won huge at the top of the ticket.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Republicans won nationally everywhere. They got control of Congress for the first time in 40 years, so it was a great time for you to run, and you won, and so you become secretary of state. How did you feel you handled that job over eight years, two 4-year terms?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, I think I did very well. I really think that we transformed the department. It was transformational, what we did. Talking about not having to wait in line anymore, I'll never forget about three years into my term, I think, I think it was channel 4, one of the local stations where they were going to have this big thing and, "Watch on the 6:00 news. She said you never have to wait in line again. We went to all that. We're going to tell you what we found." I thought, "Oh, my gosh. What did they actually find?" Well, they went into a bunch of branches, most of them in the Detroit area here, and the longest wait time was five minutes, so something had changed dramatically, and people still to this day remember how dramatic that change was.

Bill Ballenger:

Great.

Commissioner Miller:

So yeah, I think everything went... When you think about the qualified voter file that people talk about all the time, that was my baby. I went in there, you had all these clerks, because in Michigan... it's not like if you go to Florida, the county clerk handles the elections. As you know, in Michigan, it's every clerk, village, township, city, all the municipal clerks, and to the extent that there's about 1,600 various voter registration files that were being maintained in some different ways. Some people, small communities, were literally keeping them in cigar boxes, various things. I used technology to build a voter file, and it was easy because, I shouldn't say easy, but it was more... It was easier for me because I had the file from not only the voter registration as well as the motor registration, right? So we were able to use all of those things.

But anyway, long story short, when we first melded all of these things together, we took almost 800,000 names off the voter registration file in Michigan. You had a household where it was Bob, Bobby, Robert, Robbie, all those same guy. Now, there was only one. We did a lot of those kinds of things. I think we used technology to be much more effective, much more efficient. Customer service was a big orientation, and the branch offices really saw the difference. And then in the elections as well, as I say with the qualified voter file, when I ran for my first reelection, I think I was the highest vote getter in Michigan history at that time.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, yeah, absolutely. I remember that. Well, you served two 4-year terms there. And then term limits had been enacted back in 1992, so you couldn't run again in 2002. Let me ask you this. Let's say there were no term limits. Would you have been happy being secretary of state for life?

Commissioner Miller:

No, I wouldn't say for life. No. I didn't want to do anything for life. I might have run another term. But I walked into that with my eyes wide open, knowing I was term-limited, so I never had the mindset that I was going to be there any more than eight years. You plan your workout with the understanding of that-

Bill Ballenger:

Well, there was an open seat for governor in 2002. Did you think about running for governor? Because people throughout Michigan thought you were probably the hottest ticket for the Republicans for any of the major offices, like US senator, governor, whatever. Did you consider that? What-

Commissioner Miller:

I think politics is different all the time, right? At that time, it was pretty much known that Dick Posthumus was supposed to be running for governor.

Bill Ballenger:

He was a lieutenant governor at that time.

Commissioner Miller:

He was a lieutenant governor, and that's who the party wanted, I think, and the powers that be.

Bill Ballenger:

Did Engler pretty much side with Posthumous, do you think?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

He did?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Even though he knew you were the biggest vote getter in 1998, whatever. Anyway, that happened.

Commissioner Miller:

No comment on that.

Bill Ballenger:

So you get a reapportionment though, and that kind of cuts David Bonior off at the knees, takes him out of his district. He decides, "I'm not even going to run for reelection. I'm going to get beat probably, maybe by Candice Miller, so I will run for governor." So he ran for governor, and the new district... What was that, the 10th?

Commissioner Miller:

The 10th, yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Instead of just being centered down in Macomb County, it went all the way up in the Thumb, and it became a Republican seat.

Commissioner Miller:

It was only like 52% Republican there.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, not overwhelming-

Commissioner Miller:

Not the first time.

Bill Ballenger:

... but it was a heck of a lot better than the old district.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. Although I tell you, in the old district, Engler wanted me to run against Bonior the time before that.

Bill Ballenger:

Before that.

Commissioner Miller:

He kept pushing me and I said, "No, I'm going to finish my turn here." Well, then the NRCC got involved, and they did a poll and... I forget if it was 12 or 14 points ahead of Bonior in the old district.

Bill Ballenger:

In the old district?

Commissioner Miller:

In the old district.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, my gosh.

Commissioner Miller:

I knew Bonior, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

And he was like, "Are you going to run against me?"

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

I go, "Well, I don't know if I will this time, but next time. I don't know. What are you going to do here?" Right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

"I have to go somewhere, and I'm interested in the congressional seat, so I most likely... We'll see." As it ended up, I decided that that is what I would do. But yeah, the district was better then. I'm just telling you, in the old district, I was still ahead of... I just got to tell you.

Bill Ballenger:

No, I think that's very interesting. So you get elected to Congress, US House of Representatives, pretty easily.

Commissioner Miller:

I ran against Marlinga... and Marlinga thought he was going to win.

Bill Ballenger:

... he was a county prosecuting attorney, right?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, and he'd been in for a long time.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, you have no problems running against people who've been in office a long time.

Commissioner Miller:

And what are they going to do?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. Anyway-

Commissioner Miller:

You have to get out there. I don't mean to make a political speech here. First of all, you got to figure out, what is it that you think that you are good at? Right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

What can you do? Where can you accrue positively to your constituency, whatever it is? Right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

And then I think if you're interested in doing that kind of a thing, you got to do the best that you can. You got to put together a business plan really, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

You have to raise money. You have to think about how you get your message out, who are you going to talk to, who are the constituency, who are the interest groups in that area. It's sort of like running a business, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

And then you have to be willing to be pretty obsessed with it, quite frankly, because you have to work at it. You can't just say, "Oh, yeah, I'm going to run, and maybe I'll take the weekends off." It's not going to be in the cards. You have got to really work at it all the time.

Bill Ballenger:

Absolutely.

Commissioner Miller:

And then you can't be afraid to lose, really. You don't want to lose, of course. But is that the end of your life? No. Right?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

What are you going to do? Shoot you? Just try. Do your best.

Bill Ballenger:

Right, okay. So you get elected, you go to Washington. What did you encounter there? How did it look to you walking in the door for the first time, and what you learned in your early days?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, like every freshman, I'm sure. First, you're like, "Whoa," you're walking around the halls of Congress, you're walking around the US Capitol building. I remember going across from my first night vote where you're crossing the... you're going over and you see the dome all lit up and Lady Freedom looking pretty good at the top of the dome there, the statue and everything, and just thinking, "My gosh." I also remember laughing because I said when I first got there, I thought, "How in the world did I ever get here?" Well, then after you're there for about six months, you're looking around going, "How did we get here?"

Bill Ballenger:

"How did they get there?" That's pretty good.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, but it was a fantastic opportunity.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. Well, so what about your committee assignments? Did you know going in what you wanted to get on, because you had some very important committee assignments during your tenure?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, when you first come in as a freshman, there's the A committees and then the ones that are not A committees. You're never going to get on what they call the A committees first term. But I wanted to get on the House Armed Services Committee because Selfridge Air National Guard Base is in the district. So I was fortunate to get onto that committee.

Bill Ballenger:

Was your husband, we can go into this a little bit later, was he the base commander at that time or not?

Commissioner Miller:

Not at that time, but he had been a previous base commander at Selfridge back in the '80s and flew fighter jets in Vietnam, and then he was in the Air National Guard. Anyway, I always had a big affinity for Selfridge.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

I thought that was such an important committee assignment anyway. I've often said that the first and foremost responsibility of the federal government is to provide for the common defense, right, national security? That's in the preamble of the constitution.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

Anyway, yeah, I was happy to be on that. And then I was also on the Government Reform committee, which did oversight on all kinds of things, regulatory kinds of things and that, which I also had an interest in. So yeah, that was where I was the first term and just trying to get your feet wet. But even when I went in there my first term, I became a deputy whip, a WIP.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. How did you-

Commissioner Miller:

I don't know if I was a deputy whip. I was on the whip team the first term, I can't remember. But at one point, pretty early on, I got then onto the deputy whip. So there's a whip team of which there were about 30, maybe, trying to remember exactly, about 30 members in the Republican Conference, and of course the Democrats had the same kind of a thing. And then subsequently then, I became a deputy whip, which was about a dozen or 14 members. The whip is an important position in the House, well, in the Senate as well, any legislative body, because you're trying to get people to vote yes on things that would be easier for them to vote no on, but you got to get legislation through. We had some huge pieces of legislation-

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. How long were you in Congress before you got chosen to be deputy whip and so forth?

Commissioner Miller:

Really, I can't quite recall. It was pretty early on. Tom DeLay was the whip-

Bill Ballenger:

The Hammer.

Commissioner Miller:

... at the time. The Hammer, that's what they called him, The Hammer.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. Well, you got over 200 members of the Republican caucus. How do you think you rose like cream to the top so quickly as a freshman or sophomore or whatever to be a deputy whip? That's quite an amazing accomplishment.

Commissioner Miller:

I think that they... Listen, everybody's a politician there, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

You're trying to read people and try to understand, and he wanted to have folks that he thought would be effective.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

Some people are... You're not going to be really an effective whip if you're really a jerk because people that get to Congress... The system sort of weeds out those that shouldn't be there to begin with. They got there almost by accident or a fluke or something. The system weeds them out, I think. But you have to be able to articulate a position of why it's good for the country or, whatever the piece of legislation is, how important it is, and you have to be able to talk people through on why this is something that they need to do. You do have to operate as a team. That's some of the problems that we see now where they can't get anything through. You got one or two people that are... they're off on their own, right? Well, then they shouldn't even run under the party banner, in my opinion. Go be an independent if you're going to be an independent, really.

Whether you're Republican or Democrat, who's ever in the majority, you do have to get some legislation through, and so you do have to compromise. I know that's not a good term in a lot of circles, but things... You have to be able to-

Bill Ballenger:

Well, you were good at that because I think one [inaudible 00:36:24] rated you as the 71st most bipartisan member of Congress while you were there. This is out of 435 members, so 71 is pretty high up there. You knew how to work with Democrats.

Commissioner Miller:

Well, remember where I come from, Palm County.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

The Reagan Democrats.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

That term, the Reagan Democrats, had its genesis and the political nomenclature here.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, right here.

Commissioner Miller:

We were like laboratory rats. Every election, they'd come and study us. "Are they going to be Democrats, Republicans? How are they going to vote this time?"

Bill Ballenger:

How about the Michigan congressional delegation, which shrank while you were there, kept getting smaller because-

Commissioner Miller:

It continues to.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, it continues to. It's down to 13 now. It once was 19.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

But the point is they're split between Democrats and Republicans. Did you guys try and work together as a group? Did you have periodic caucuses or meetings?

Commissioner Miller:

All the time. All the time.

Bill Ballenger:

How did that go?

Commissioner Miller:

Well.

Bill Ballenger:

Was it pretty... or a lot of cooperation on a lot of issues?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes. You mean the Republicans and the Democrats?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes. Well, the Republicans, we met all the time.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

We had sort of a standing meeting. There was-

Bill Ballenger:

But you also met with the Democrats.

Commissioner Miller:

And we would meet with the Democrats because... During the time that I was there, you remember we went through the really bad time with the auto industry and talk about all hands on deck.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

My gosh, really.

Bill Ballenger:

Sure.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, John Dingell at that time and Fred Upton, all of us, everybody pulled together. With those kinds of issues... I really don't know if it's like that now. Hopefully, it is. But in that kind of an issue, that was our life, the auto industry. Gosh.

Bill Ballenger:

And you had a good relationship with John Dingell, as I understand.

Commissioner Miller:

I loved John Dingell.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah?

Commissioner Miller:

I really did.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. That's great.

Commissioner Miller:

He was just such a fantastic human being.

Bill Ballenger:

That's great.

Commissioner Miller:

Anyway, I used to tease Debbie, I'd say, "He's my boyfriend. You don't mind, do you?"

Bill Ballenger:

Well, Debbie, of course, is his widow-

Commissioner Miller:

She's my... Yes, she's widowed.

Bill Ballenger:

... and she's now a member of Congress-

Commissioner Miller:

She's a very good friend of mine.

Bill Ballenger:

... and she's a good friend of yours.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, because she's great, great people.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

But yeah, I was very fortunate to be in the Congress at a time of some lions, as far as I'm concerned, John Dingell, Tom Santos, an incredible human being from California, Henry Hyde-

Bill Ballenger:

Henry Hyde, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. We used to call Henry Hyde, the velvet ice pick.

Bill Ballenger:

Really?

Commissioner Miller:

Because he would... and you never knew.

Bill Ballenger:

You never knew.

Commissioner Miller:

He was smooth.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, that's really good.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. Fantastic orators, and their word was their bond. They really weren't in there to... They were going to tell you something, that something else was going to happen. That was not the way those guys operated-

Bill Ballenger:

That's great.

Commissioner Miller:

And I appreciated that-

Bill Ballenger:

Sure. Absolutely.

Commissioner Miller:

... because I like to think that's the way I operate.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, I got along fine there. At one time, actually with the Michigan Congressional Delegation, we had four committee chairmen. Because I was a committee chairman, I was the only female chairman of a committee in the House.

Bill Ballenger:

That was administration, right?

Commissioner Miller:

House administration, yes.

Bill Ballenger:

What is that responsible for? Isn't it like elections and stuff maybe?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, they used to call you the mayor of Capitol Hill, whoever was the chairman, because you were responsible for the budgets, what they call the MRAs, members' representational allowances, so the budgets for the members, the budgets for the committees. We had jurisdiction over the Smithsonian, so all of the Smithsonian everywhere. The Capitol Police was sort of a... You sort of ran, on the House side, everything that was going on there, House administration, all the... We put in a lot of new technology and various things to help members, a lot of members' services.

Bill Ballenger:

Was that something you aspired to serve on or as chairman of, because maybe secretary of state kind of fed into that?

Commissioner Miller:

No.

Bill Ballenger:

No?

Commissioner Miller:

But the secretary of state did really help me. My background.

Bill Ballenger:

It did, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Actually, I was trying to become the chairman of Homeland Security.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

And I wasn't-

Bill Ballenger:

But weren't you on the committee?

Commissioner Miller:

I was on the committee, and Mike McCaul and I were the two that were... The steering committee, of which I was also a member of the steering committee, a couple of my terms. The steering committee on

the Republican side determines who's going to be the committee chairman. Okay, so we had this opening for... Because on the Republican side, we don't let you become a chairman forever, right? You're there for six years, unless you get a waiver, and occasionally there's a waiver that's given. But anyway, there was a vacancy for the chairman of the Homeland Security. Peter King had been the chairman.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, I remember him, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

They moved him off. I loved Peter King. Wow, that guy was fantastic.

Bill Ballenger:

From New York?

Commissioner Miller:

From New York.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

My gosh. The whole 9/11 thing.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

He took us one time, not to get off the subject, down to the station, the fire station, right next to the towers.

Bill Ballenger:

Really?

Commissioner Miller:

And then we had lunch with these guys. Oh, my gosh. I don't want to start crying, even talking about it. It was so emotional. But anyway, he was a great guy. Now, he was off as the chairman of the Homeland Security, so it was between me and McCaul. Both of us were working the steering committee, doing our thing. They had three votes before they decided. Boehner called me, he was the speaker at the time-

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

... and he said, "I've been through so many of these things. We have never had three votes before."

Bill Ballenger:

Wow.

Commissioner Miller:

It was only one vote that... McCaul won by one vote.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, my gosh.

Commissioner Miller:

I said to him, "I'm sure you swung that guy's vote."

Bill Ballenger:

What?

Commissioner Miller:

Against me.

Bill Ballenger:

Against, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

Because he liked McCaul-

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

... and I got it. Anyway, yeah, when he called me, he didn't say anything. He just said, "No." I go, "Okay, I guess I understand. I didn't win the vote then."

Bill Ballenger:

Well, do you think if you'd won that and been chairman, you would have stayed in Congress longer?

Commissioner Miller:

Probably not. The reason I left Congress is because my husband had developed Alzheimer's, so it was really impossible for me to continue to stay there. At least that's the way I looked at it.

Bill Ballenger:

Because of the distance between Washington and here.

Commissioner Miller:

I didn't want to be there three nights a week when I was dealing with all of his challenges.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, before we get into that, when you look back at your entire career or tenure, what acts are you most proud of that you accomplished that maybe had an impact on your 10th district here?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, I always had a huge interest, first of all, in infrastructure, quite frankly. In fact, for many years, I was the only Michigan member on the Transportation and Infrastructure Committee. We did a lot of various kinds of things there with road funding, with infrastructure funding, the ability for states to get the state revolving funds for all kinds of infrastructure, above ground, underground, all of this, which I think infrastructure is a huge issue, obviously, an enormous issue and more attention should be paid for that. So there were a lot of different things I did on that committee. Actually, being the chairman of the House Administration committee, we really straightened out a lot of various things. It was like being the secretary of state again.

All these antiquated systems and people couldn't under... There wasn't enough transparency, and putting all the expenditures of every member's office up on the web, so you can go look at everything that everybody spends money on right now. Of course, there was a lot of pushback to me to be dealing those kinds of things, but I thought it was important. And then I was always very, very interested in the Great Lakes and water quality. So almost all the years I was there, I was on the Great Lakes caucus, either the chairman or the co-chairman or just a member of the caucus. We worked on the Great Lakes Restoration Initiative, which is still going on today, has done incredible things for the Great Lakes all around the basin... Invasive species, I'm trying to remember all this stuff. I'll just give you one example. Remember the zebra mussels?

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

They're really devastated. Well, they've changed. I would say they've dramatically changed, a very delicate ecosystem, and they were brought in by Salties. These are the smaller ocean-going freighters that are small enough to get through the St. Lawrence Seaway into the Great Lakes Basin. So now, all of the Salties are required to discharge their ballast miles out into the ocean before they come into the basin, and they have to be certified to the Coast Guard that they have done so. And if you think about it, you're not really having that much. You don't really hear about invasive species too much anymore. So the invasive species was a big issue.

Fred Upton and I worked on phosphorus, getting phosphorus out of... I used to go to Home Depot or Lowe's, and you'd buy these big bags of fertilizer that were phosphorus. Of course, that was all feeding into the drains and ultimately into streams, rivers, the lakes. Again, it was very bad. It was very bad contaminant to get into the lakes. That, we worked on, and you don't see that anymore.

Bill Ballenger:

No, you don't.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Let me ask you, national security, that's always something you've been big on.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Very tough. What did you accomplish down there in that regard?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, one thing, I ensured that my parochial interests with Selfridge Air National Guard Base were taken care of, that we had adequate military construction projects. We did a lot of things in the years that I was there. Fortunately, my good buddy, Joe Knollenberg, was the appropriations chair of military construction for a couple of terms, so we really got things at the base that had been neglected for so long at that time.

One thing that I did... Well, two things. One thing was... Because of that position, I would travel to Iraq and Afghanistan. What I noticed there, that about 30 percentile of everybody that was there was either in the Guard or Reserve. I'm just going to tell you what, a bullet does not know if you are an active duty or a Guard and Reserve, and yet the Guard did not have a seat at the table with the joint chiefs. No wonder they were always treated as a second sister with hand-me-down equipment and training and everything else, and I didn't think that was right. So I introduced a piece of legislation in the House, myself and Nicki Rahall, who was a member from West Virginia, who was-

Bill Ballenger:

I remember him.

Commissioner Miller:

... one of the co-sponsors.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

I told McCain, John McCain, I said, "We're going to get this thing through the House, and then you got to get it through the Senate." "Oh, it's going to take forever." "Yeah, we got to do it." "Yeah. Okay." We got ours through unanimous consent.

Bill Ballenger:

Ooh, really?

Commissioner Miller:

So it just went through.

Bill Ballenger:

That's unbelievable.

Commissioner Miller:

Unbelievable, and that took them months in the Senate-

Bill Ballenger:

Months.

Commissioner Miller:

... but they did get it through. And then, subsequently, I was awarded the Harry S. Truman Award-

Bill Ballenger:

I saw that, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

... which is something that the National Guard gives out once a year. Sometimes if they don't have anybody, they don't give it to anybody.

Bill Ballenger:

I think there've been only like 30 in the entire history.

Commissioner Miller:

They gave it to Ronald Reagan one year, Bob Hope, so a pretty good company.

Bill Ballenger:

Wow.

Commissioner Miller:

That was because... As you know, if you don't have a seat at the table, you could quickly become an item on the menu. They needed a seat at the table.

Bill Ballenger:

That is fantastic.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, so that was... And then the other thing I will mention about the A-10s, the A-10s are legacy aircraft, an old jet that is still being flown as we speak. The Air Force decided that they wanted to retire the A-10s. Well, we have a squadron of A-10s at Selfridge, McCain had a bunch of them down in Tucson, Davis-Monthan, and different places in the country. They were old, but they were incredibly effective, particularly with the kind of theater that we were involved in there, Afghanistan, Iraq, et cetera. The secretary of the Air Force and everybody decided this is what they were going to do. They were going to

retire these A-10s, and I thought that was a bad idea, so that was about a year-long battle. Talking about political capital, I spent every political chit I had in the bank on what was called the Miller Amendment, and we got 300 votes, so we saved the A-10 in the House, and then McCain, in a way, saved it in the Senate.

Bill Ballenger:

That's fantastic.

Commissioner Miller:

That was it, yeah. The chairman of the House Armed Services, the chairman of the Senate Armed Services, the secretary of the Air Force, the joint chiefs, blah, blah, but we beat them.

Bill Ballenger:

That's fantastic.

Commissioner Miller:

And we did it for the right reason, the right reason. Because, after that, everybody said, "Well, we shouldn't have really talked about retiring them because they're so effective," you just want to go, "You're kidding, right?" Geez.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, let me ask you this. Your routine, week after week, having to go back and forth between your district and Washington, what was that like? When did you come home? How long were you here? What did you have to do while you were in the district? How much time did you have to spend up in the Thumb? Very different constituency, the Macomb County, even though you're all in the same district, how did that go over time?

Commissioner Miller:

I never really got used to the travel, to tell you the truth. Some people drive to work. I was flying to work, right? And there was always something wrong with one of the airplanes, right? God, you were delayed and... It just seemed like you had to spend so much time in the airport sometimes, like you were wasting your life sometimes. I hated that part of it. Although I didn't like to complain too much because Detroit Metro was a hub, right? It was Northwest when I first started in Congress, and now Delta. There were flights six times a day coming and going, so we had a lot of options.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, not only that, you had fellow members who suffered more than you did. They had to go to Oregon-

Commissioner Miller:

[inaudible 00:51:09].

Bill Ballenger:

... and Hawaii and California.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes, right, so they couldn't come home every weekend, really. You just couldn't do it. Still, regardless of that, I didn't like that part of it, but it was part of the job.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, when you got home, then how much time did you spend campaigning and have some kind of private home life of your own?

Commissioner Miller:

The jobs are obsessive. They really are. It takes so much time. When you get home, my staff would have me just scheduled to everywhere and you try to be everywhere. Even when you were everywhere, people were still complaining they didn't see you enough. I know there's no sympathy for members of Congress, but it's not an easy life. It's not an easy life. Fortunately, my daughter was grown. I didn't have young children at home. I know members that do that, and I can't imagine how difficult that is. Anyway, it was also such an incredible opportunity. My grandmother, my dad's side, they came from Calumet, Laurium area, in the Upper Peninsula.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, really?

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

My grandmother graduated from Calumet High School, and then she went to... That time, it was called Northern Normal because it was a teaching school.

Bill Ballenger:

What's now Northern Michigan University.

Commissioner Miller:

Right.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

She graduated in 1917, I think, and there were just one or two women because... She used to tell me, she'd say, "Candice, the only thing I could ever do really was be a teacher or a secretary, because that's the only thing they'd let women do outside of the house," and she says, "You have opportunities." This is when I was younger, "You're going to go through your life. They're going to tell you, 'You're too old.

You're too young. You're too something,' and you just go," and I go, "Okay, grandma." When I think about all of these things, my grandmother would be amazed at the life that I have been able to live.

Bill Ballenger:

Oh, boy. Yeah, I can imagine.

Commissioner Miller:

So wonderful opportunities is what I'm saying. Being in Congress, it's really quite a fantastic thing.

Bill Ballenger:

Is there anything we're leaving out about your experience in Congress that you think is really worth mentioning? One of your committee assignments, the legislation you sponsored, anything else, or we've kind of covered the waterfront?

Commissioner Miller:

I think you've covered it there. There's great people.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

There's just great people. If I miss anything in Congress, it's the people. There are some fantastic people and-

Bill Ballenger:

Are you still in touch with them?

Commissioner Miller:

Some of them.

Bill Ballenger:

Over time?

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, over time?

Commissioner Miller:

They'll text me or call me and, "Don't you miss it?" I think, "It's sort of like a toothache," particularly now with how toxic it is, unfortunately. Because I talked to both Republicans and Democrats, and it's funny they both say the same thing. "It's so dysfunctional, it's this, and it's that," and I think, "Wow..." I don't

know. It's always that... Listen, I'm not pure on politics here, but it has changed, and it's really not good for the country.

Bill Ballenger:

Tell me a little about your husband, Don Miller.

Commissioner Miller:

My husband was, as I say, was in the Air Force, and then he was in the Air National Guard. I met him when I was the township supervisor in Harrison Township and he was the base commander at Selfridge at that time, so we met, and we married. He was a wonderful man. He retired from the National Guard. Fortunately, he had his law degree, and so he practiced law for several years after that, and then he became a judge.

Bill Ballenger:

A circuit?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Circuit judge?

Commissioner Miller:

We call him circuit judge, yeah. He was on the circuit court here for a dozen years.

Bill Ballenger:

And then he couldn't run again because you can't run after you hit age 70.

Commissioner Miller:

Right.

Bill Ballenger:

Right?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

So he was forcibly retired, just like you were a secretary of state.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah, but he was ready to retire also because, to tell you the truth, he was starting to recognize that he was not as sharp on the bench as he needed to be.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. Well, going back to your early days in the boat industry with your father, you developed a love of sailing, didn't you?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes, that's what we did. We all sailed.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, haven't you been in the Port Huron to Mackinac races and everything? Tell me about your life as a sailor.

Commissioner Miller:

Well, this is another, God loved my dad, my chauvinistic father, who said that women were already involved in too many things and they didn't need to be racing sailboats. I thought, "Well, that doesn't sound right because I like sailing," but he didn't let me race. But anyway, a good friend of mine, a woman that was a gym teacher, that's what they used to call them at the time, a gym teacher, she bought this boat with the idea of racing at the Mackinac race. I was 15 at the time, and she developed this... She said, "Well, we're going to have this all female crew, and we're going to race the Mackinac race." "Well, isn't that going to be great? I'm just going to tell my dad I'm going."

And then we were not able to race because the sponsoring club said, under the guise of, "You don't have an able-bodied crew," "We're not going to let you race." So they effectively kept us out of the race that year. Maybe this is how I got into the politics. We started talking to the reporter to the... The free press used to have the woman's section back in the day. They wrote an article about this. The club heard a lot of outrage about this thing, so the next year they let us race. Well, then I was 16 at that time, and we raced, and we had the first all female crew. We raced the Mackinac race, and we didn't win, but I think we were 13th out of like 23 or 24 boats or something.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. You weren't-

Commissioner Miller:

So we were in the middle of the fleet.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

We were the first all-female crew in the port here in the Mackinac race. I also raced in the first all-female crew in the Chicago-Mackinac race, not that year, but later on, about 10 years later, some eight years later, whatever, on a different boat. So yeah, I've done 29 port here on the Mackinac races. After you complete 25, they induct you into what is known as the Old Goat Society. Now, in my case, I'm an old nanny goat. I used to tell people in Washington, I know I'm the only old nanny goat in the US House.

Bill Ballenger:

That's fantastic. Talking about being a woman in politics, what advice do you have to women today? They've come a long way during your lifetime in politics compared to the way it was back in the Paleolithic era. Seriously, what do you think you can communicate to women today who are thinking or interested in politics and maybe want to run for something? What would you say?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, everybody has their own approach, I suppose. In my case, people talk about the glass ceiling. I'm just not into it. I'm not interested in participating with the glass ceiling. I try not to think about it. In most of my jobs, it was sort of me and the guys... Really even racing on sailboats, after the all-woman thing, I quickly found it was a lot better to be able to race with a whole bunch of men that were much stronger and all these kind of things. You had to have a mixed crew. Anyway, I think you... I never thought of myself as... I wasn't the woman secretary of state. I was the secretary of state. I wasn't the woman member of Congress. I was a member of Congress. That was my mindset.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, you proved that. You've been so successful. Regardless of gender, you are one of the great towering figures of the last half century and more-

Commissioner Miller:

Nice for you to say that.

Bill Ballenger:

... in Michigan politics. No, but, seriously, you are.

Commissioner Miller:

But for women, I would also say this, I think it's particularly important that women handle themselves with a high degree of integrity and professionalism and you try to do your jobs well.

Bill Ballenger:

You feel there's kind of a double standard?

Commissioner Miller:

There is. There just is. Whether you want to say there is or not, there just is. I think it's important for women to do that, not just for themselves, but but for all the sisters that you got to bring up along behind you, the next group.

Bill Ballenger:

Right. Well, look, we could talk about all sorts of things all day long. It's up to you. If you have anything more to add that we haven't covered, let me know.

Well, I should go into the biggest and best part of your chapter at all, and that is running for commissioner of Public Works here in Macomb County. I broke you off when you tried to tell me why you felt you had to end your tenure in Congress, but you decided, "Okay. I'm going to end my tenure," but did you already have your eye on the commissioner of Public Works?

Commissioner Miller:

No.

Bill Ballenger:

You didn't? So you just-

Commissioner Miller:

I did not. I knew it was time for me to leave the House. I had to come home.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay, and you announced that early in 2015, I think.

Commissioner Miller:

I did that on purpose because I knew I was going to leave. I could see the condition, what was happening with my husband. I knew I could not run again.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

I wanted people... Really, if you run for Congress, you just don't do that on a whim. You need to put together your organization. You need to have time, and I wanted to make sure whoever was going to run for my seat would have plenty of time. Quite frankly, I had a very loyal and a wonderful staff, some of who are still with me. I wanted them to have time to find other jobs, those that lived in DC, those that were here, et cetera, so I did announce it very early. But no, I had some offers, when I decided not to run, to run associations in Washington and various things, and I'm like, "No, I'm not doing that. I'm leaving. Going home. Okay. Goodbye."

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. You announced it at the beginning of your last term, so you had a long time until the next election in 2016. When did it kind of hit you that, "You know what? I could be here and I can be looking after my husband, Don. But you know what? I still got the fire in my belly, and there's an office here that needs some renovation and restructuring in a big time way, and that was commissioner of Public Works"?

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah. Really as I looked at it, first of all, this was another incumbent, and he'd been here a long time. He was known-

Bill Ballenger:

Another six 4-year term, 24 years, just like the first two.

Commissioner Miller:

Well, there you go. Of course, I decided-

Bill Ballenger:

When you saw that, you said, "I'm going for it. This is my specialty."

Commissioner Miller:

Yep.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

Right. Anyway... Of course, as I say, I always have had an interest in infrastructure. This is the Public Works commission, right? We do all the underground infrastructure here, the drains, et cetera. And then of course my interest and advocacy for clean water and our magnificent Great Lakes, and I sort of saw this job as a perfect nexus of those two interests.

Bill Ballenger:

Well, not only that, you had a commissioner who was slightly tainted, I would say, in the eyes of many people, but he'd been able to be elected all this time. You probably decided what? "I can really use a few issues against him"?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes. There's no secret that this was a transactional office. In fact, the former commissioner served some time in the federal pen for his actions here.

Bill Ballenger:

Tony Marrocco?

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay. Got it.

Commissioner Miller:

And the only thing... and that's all I'll say about that, but I will say that that was not Macomb County. That is not who we are. It's not who the people of this county are, and I felt like he needed to go, and I had an interest in this position. I remember telling my friend, Mark Hackel, we were having breakfast at the Cracker Barrel, and I said, "I think I'm going to run against Marrocco," because he was talking to me about other opportunities, and he goes, "What?" I go, "Yeah, I'm running against him."

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. I had democratic-

Commissioner Miller:

"I will endorse you."

Bill Ballenger:

He said, "I'll endorse you"?

Commissioner Miller:

Right then, he said, "I will endorse you."

Bill Ballenger:

Well, that's huge.

Commissioner Miller:

And I said-

Bill Ballenger:

That was big.

Commissioner Miller:

"Well, how can you do that? You're the Democrat. I'm a Republican," they sort of call us the odd couple down here, and he did, and that was helpful.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. I had Democratic legislators come up to me and say, "Hey, Tony's going to win this thing. He's got so much money, whatever," because I-

Commissioner Miller:

No, I wasn't supposed to win again.

Bill Ballenger:

I know. Again, I made a few observations in the media saying, "Candice Miller, are you kidding? She's probably going to win this thing," and these legislators would come up and say, "No, no, no."

Commissioner Miller:

"Never going to happen."

Bill Ballenger:

Okay, but you'd heard this so many times and you disproved all these...

Commissioner Miller:

Just got to keep going, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, absolutely.

Commissioner Miller:

You got to try to win the day, every day, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Win the day.

Commissioner Miller:

Win the day.

Bill Ballenger:

Win the day.

Commissioner Miller:

Go to the next day.

Bill Ballenger:

Go to the next day. So you beat him pretty easily, and then he had-

Commissioner Miller:

Eight to 10 points or something.

Bill Ballenger:

... later problems. Yeah. But my point is you get in now as commissioner, and how do you look at this job? When you first got into it, were there surprises, or were you pretty familiar with the responsibilities and everything else?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, literally, four or five days... I took office on January 1st. Christmas Eve, we had the largest infrastructure disaster in Michigan history with a big sinkhole on 15 Mile Road.

Bill Ballenger:

I remember that.

Commissioner Miller:

We had houses literally falling into the hole-

Bill Ballenger:

I remember that.

Commissioner Miller:

... 65 feet below the surface where the interceptor had collapsed.

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

That was an interesting baptism by fire, so to speak.

Bill Ballenger:

Absolutely, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

They said it would be \$150 million in three years to fix that. We fix it in a year for \$75 million. Still a little changing your blue jeans, but not 150 million. And then we've inspected everything since then. I have spent several hundred million dollars, much of which I've been able to raise through federal, state, and county funding. Hopefully, I've learned something in my legislative career about, if you're going to shoot ducks, go where the ducks are, figure out how to get the money, and that the experiences that I have had in my life can now positively accrue to my community, to my friends, my family, Macomb County. I love it here. So we're trying to fix everything, been very successful really of transforming this department in fixing infrastructure, setting a new standard.

And also, with my advocacy for clean water, for decades, we've been discharging combined sewer overflows into Lake Saint Clair and the Clinton River. As we speak, we have now reduced our CSO discharges by 75%. In the spring, I'm going to announce another project that will get us into the 90 percentile. So we have made enormous progress on there. I hope that other counties around the state that continue to discharge combined sewer overflows can say, "Yes, this can happen." You have to have the political will and figure out how to get the money, but the people will be behind you because everybody wants clean water, whether you're recreating in it, whether you're fishing in it, whether you're boating in it, or drinking it, right?

Bill Ballenger:

Right.

Commissioner Miller:

And in this day and age, for us to be putting partially treated sewage into our lakes is nutty, nutty.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah. Well, you've got nearly 500 drains in this county.

Commissioner Miller:

Yes.

Bill Ballenger:

We just looked it up. I think it's got the fourth most drains Macomb does of any county out of 83 in Michigan. That's pretty daunting when you think about it.

Commissioner Miller:

It is. There wasn't a drain maintenance program here previously. These drains hadn't been touched in decades. Quite frankly, the drain maintenance crew, that was here, spent their days at the local topless

bar. Honestly, that's what they did. They would shovel snow and take care of snow for some of the people here or move their girlfriend's furniture to another state. This is what was going on here, okay?

Bill Ballenger:

Wow.

Commissioner Miller:

No, now we are cleaning drains. We have a really aggressive drain maintenance program. We work with all the municipalities, and we've made great success. Really, stormwater management, which is a critical part of this job, when you think about whether it's climate change or what... The weather's changing. We're getting a lot more rain and the intensity of the rainfall is enormous. We have to be able to manage our stormwater so you're not having all of this flooding, flooding in basements and roads and expressways, everything else. We made a lot of progress on that also, so I feel good about that. Guess what? The best part of this job, at the end of the day, I drive home to my house and I sleep in my own bed. I don't have to get on the airplane the next morning. Love it.

Bill Ballenger:

Yeah, exactly. Exactly right. There's a former state representative later, Bay County Drain Commissioner Joe Rivet, the husband of Congresswoman McDonald Rivet right now. He once told me, he said, "Being drain commissioner," or, in your case, public works commissioner, "is the most powerful job in county government." He says, "You are a czar, the most powerful person in county government compared to prosecutor, sheriff, register of deeds, you name it. You're a czar." What do you think?

Commissioner Miller:

Well, I've never thought of it in those terms, but I think you do have a lot of authority, but in different... Really, if you're the prosecutor, that's a pretty powerful position, right? Any of these positions, you just have to stay in your own lane, do your own job, and try to get the work done, and you take this-

Bill Ballenger:

How do you get along with the other countywide elected officials? Do you guys ever meet collectively, sit down together?

Commissioner Miller:

Not really.

Bill Ballenger:

Not really?

Commissioner Miller:

Not really. Although Mark Hackel, who's our county executive, I talk to him almost every day.

Bill Ballenger:

All the time, yeah.

Commissioner Miller:

And I get along very well with Tony Forlini, who's our clerk, and is running for Michigan secretary of state.

Bill Ballenger:

Correct.

Commissioner Miller:

I get along with everybody fine, but I try not to get in their lane, and I don't need them to do what I'm doing, right? We all do our job.

Bill Ballenger:

Are you going to run again, you think?

Commissioner Miller:

I don't know.

Bill Ballenger:

You're not sure?

Commissioner Miller:

I just got reelected here, so I have another three years.

Bill Ballenger:

You're just taking it one step at a time?

Commissioner Miller:

One step at a time, yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Decide how long you want to go?

Commissioner Miller:

I'm starting to get up here, up there.

Bill Ballenger:

You don't sound like it. I think you're sharper than ever.

Commissioner Miller:

Well, I don't know.

Bill Ballenger:

You're ready for the long distance award, the marathon.

Commissioner Miller:

Yeah.

Bill Ballenger:

Anyway, listen, Candice Miller, this has been a delight talking to you, an unbelievable career. Michigan should be so proud-

Commissioner Miller:

Oh, thank you.

Bill Ballenger:

... that you have been so willing to serve in so many different capacities over time.

Commissioner Miller:

Nice of you to say that.

Bill Ballenger:

... and you are such a valuable person.

Commissioner Miller:

It's been my honor. It really has been my honor.

Bill Ballenger:

Okay.

Commissioner Miller:

The people of Michigan have given me these fantastic opportunities, so I appreciate that.

Bill Ballenger:

Thank you so much.

Commissioner Miller:

Thank you.