

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center  
for  
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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**Blue to Red Oral History Project**

Davy Carter  
Interviewed by John C. Davis  
August 10, 2021  
Little Rock, Arkansas

## Objective

Oral history is a collection of an individual's memories and opinions. As such, it is subject to the innate fallibility of memory and is susceptible to inaccuracy. All researchers using these interviews should be aware of this reality and are encouraged to seek corroborating documentation when using any oral history interview.

The Pryor Center's objective is to collect audio and video recordings of interviews along with scanned images of family photographs and documents. These donated materials are carefully preserved, catalogued, and deposited in the Special Collections Department, University of Arkansas Libraries, Fayetteville. The transcripts, audio and video files, and photographs are made available on the Pryor Center Web site at <http://pryorcenter.uark.edu>. The Pryor Center recommends that researchers utilize the audio and video recordings in addition to the transcripts to enhance their connection with the interviewee.

## Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality.

The Pryor Center transcripts are prepared utilizing the *University of Arkansas Style Manual* for proper names, titles, and terms specific to the university. For all other style elements, we refer to the *Pryor Center Style Manual*, which is based primarily on *The Chicago Manual of Style 17th Edition*. We employ the following guidelines for consistency and readability:

- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.
- Brackets enclose
  - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds, such as a doorbell ringing; and
  - annotations for clarification and identification.

- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

### **Citation Information**

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**John C. Davis interviewed Davy Carter on August 10, 2021, in Little Rock, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

John C. Davis: Here with me is Davy Carter, the first Republican Speaker of the House in the General Assembly in Arkansas since Reconstruction. Davy was elected in 2008, started his service in 2009 as a state legislator representing a district out of Cabot, Arkansas. From 2013 to [20]15, he was the first Republican Speaker in well over a century. He's played a key role in many early policy pursuits when the Republicans first gained the majority, and also perhaps his biggest policy achievement is an effort for Medicaid expansion following the passage of the Affordable Care Act. Davy, thank you so much for being with us today on behalf of the Pryor Center and our efforts to record this significant moment in political history in our state.

Davey Carter: It's an honor to be here. Appreciate the invitation. Looking forward to it.

[00:00:53] JD: So the Pryor Center's project is primarily looking at the time period between 2005 and 2015, not just because it's a nice, round, ten-year number, but because that captures the era where, at least in, you know, modern thought or modern memory, we have seen a Democratic Party that seemed like it

couldn't lose. And you know, especially in [20]06 and the election cycle in [20]08, you had a Democratic Party that had successfully been a buffer for itself from the more liberal Democratic brand that had happened nationally. You had people like the Big Three, as they're dubbed, with Bumpers and Pryor and Clinton. Then after that you had others like Governor Beebe and individuals who were able to show a more moderate stance and keep Arkansas voters chiefly loyal to most Democratic candidates, with exception to national politics. [00:01:50] You're elected, though, in [20]08, a rough election year for Republicans in the state, but we'll get to your career here in a moment. But you're right in that era where we see sort of the decline of the Democratic Party in Arkansas and the rise of the GOP as we see it today. And so your insights will be really just invaluable to the work of the Pryor Center to try to capture this moment. [00:02:16] Davy, what's your earliest political memory in Arkansas?

DC: Oh, personally?

JD: Yeah.

[00:02:22] DC: Oh, wow. Good question. Yeah, I—hmm. Probably when Senator Lincoln got elected. You know, I'm from Marianna, she's from Helena-West Helena, correct, and that was

a big deal in the Delta. And I just remember that and how people locally back home were just, you know, so excited about that. I don't know how old I would have been then, but probably a teenager. I don't know what year that was off the top of my head. That's probably my—you know, that jumped out when you asked me that question, that moment. [00:02:54] And of course, everybody followed, you know, President Clinton's achievement to the White House, but I was pretty young then. So I just remember, you know, that just being kind of a tangent thing that we discussed around our high-school-football type deal. [00:03:12] But you know, that—I grew up in East Arkansas, and it was heavily blue dog Democrats. My family, as far as I know, you know, they were all blue dog Democrats, and that's kind of how I grew up. That was my first memory that popped in my mind.

[00:03:31] JD: You know, and blue dog Democrats—you typically will use that term when we think of probably more fiscally conservative Democrats, maybe even socially more moderate to conservative. And again, that unique brand in Arkansas, where we saw people like former Senator Lincoln and others who were able to thread that needle in a state that was more moderate to conservative and still remind people back home, "Hey, I'm still

one of you, even if you're having a harder time associating with that national party." And you grew up in the First District there where—perhaps the most solidly Democratic district . . .

DC: Yeah.

JD: . . . in the history of the state, if we really think back. Of course, it isn't now. Rick Crawford's currently representing the district. [00:04:16] Do you—and you touched on this a little bit. Do you remember the perception of the Republican Party? I mean, growing up, as you said, where probably most folks were Democrats, or at least voted for maybe Republican presidential candidates but Democrats down ticket. What was your perception of the strength of the Republican Party at that time?

[00:04:34] DC: Well, as a kid, you know, in listening to the adults around me, you know, you—it was the Republican Party was party for the rich people, you know, and that just sticks in my head. And you know, I—it was just, that was it, and everybody were Democrats. I'm from an agricultural family, and you know, there's historically been a lot of support for agricultural from the state's Democratic members of Congress and elsewhere. But it was just kind of more of the—it was a white collar, rich guy Republican Party. I don't know whenever—you know, I can't pinpoint a time when I started to think that I was more akin to

the Republican platform, but probably sometime after college, young, mid-twenties. Whereas it really wasn't evolved—care too much about it before then. But that was a perception. And you know, I was in Cabot at that time. That was certainly a very conservative Republican area that had blossomed there out of Central Arkansas. So you know, that's what sticks out to me just back then. [00:05:57] It was—in fact, I have a funny story. I remember, when I first ran for the House, I remember my dad told me that one of his friends—he—you would know who it was, so I won't name their name. He said, "So-and-so told me to tell you that they were glad you were running, but you're in the wrong party. You know, you can't do anything. Everybody here in Arkansas are Democrats." I said, "Well, thanks for the advice, but I'm gonna run the Republican ticket." But it's funny how things—I mean, the topic of your journey here is very interesting 'cause I—like you said, I lived right through that.

[00:06:35] JD: Well, you might be that first generation of, you know, young professional who had political interests or ambitions who chose to run as a Republican. You know, used to, before you, right, it would be almost default Democrat. If you wanted to win and actually be active in politics, a pretty strong strategic



choice would be to be a Democrat, even if you were more conservative than not. And so I think it's interesting. You run in [20]08 when the state makes national headlines for being so dominantly Democratic. There was really no doubt, I don't think, that Senator McCain was going to win the state in the presidential election in [20]08. But if you recall, there was not a Republican running in a US Senate contest in [20]08. Senator Pryor was running, I think, against a Green Party candidate. And you've also got—you see those supermajorities in the Democratic side in the General Assembly. [00:07:35] So what made you—I mean, not necessarily what made you run as a Republican, but what made you want to run and know that if you win, you're going to be in the minority? Did you see an opportunity for gains for your party, or were you just gonna run because that was kind of how you felt—you felt like you were a Republican, and then you'd play the cards that were dealt?

[00:07:54] DC: Yeah, I think more the latter. I mean, I wasn't then, and I'm certainly [*laughs*] not today, ever a party guy. I mean, I believe in what I believe in, but I mean, I've never been one that went to county meetings and just did all of the party stuff. I mean, that's always been a turnoff. So I think more the latter. It was, you know, just mainly just the—you know, I thought

back then that the Republican Party was—you know, I liked their fiscal conservative nature and just general conservatism. You know, and back then, it seemed to be more about the business part of it and tax policy and growth policy, et cetera, than what it's kinda turned in today. And I, you know, as a young professional, you know, that—I wanted to be a part of that. And I liked being in the minority. It didn't bother me at all.

[00:08:51] I mean, I think that was what my dad was getting to when he told me, "You're in the wrong party." It's like, "Look, kid, you can't do anything up there because you're in the wrong party. Nobody's going to listen to you." But I always liked going against the grain, and it didn't bother me at all. But I think when the sun came up after that [20]08 election—you probably have the numbers, but there were probably twenty, eighteen, seventeen, eighteen, twenty Republicans.

JD: A small portion.

DC: Yeah. It was 80/20, 85/15, and I didn't care. I was just glad to be there. And quite frankly, most people in there today were—you know, that I served with back then, reflecting on that, were pretty conservative people, no matter what party they were in.

[00:09:33] But that's kind of how I got there back in [20]08, and you know, I was—we all get older and learn a little bit more

about yourself as you mature. I mean, I was—I don't even know how old I was. Early thirties, I guess. I mean, so I was still a pretty young guy learning the way of the world.

[00:09:53] JD: So you get elected in [20]08, you wake up the next day, you know you're in the minority, but you've been elected. You get about two months in Arkansas before we start the General Assembly. [00:10:03] And so just how—what was it like to be in a, I mean, at that point, a perennial minority party in the General Assembly? I mean, how—what were the dynamics there? Because as you mentioned earlier, you'd been kind of warned to be—you know, "Oh, you're not getting anything done." How did a member in the minority party operate? I mean, were they—were you working just as a caucus, or were you trying to build bridges with Democrats to get policy completed?

[00:10:30] DC: We had to find our way through it. I remember very soon after the election, I met with some familiar names that you probably know. It was, you know, the same election cycle Jonathan Dismang was elected to the House, Duncan Baird, and John Burris. I think we all met at McDonald's on Broadway in Little Rock before—you know, just to meet each other, and so we all had a pretty good run after that. It was the start of a

great relationship between us all. But we were all just kind of navigating through it. I mean, we had—didn't really know what we were doing. We had some that—you know, when you're new—and that was—there were some people that had been there a while then. I can't remember when—I think that was the same year term limits got approved. So there were some folks that had been there for a while. And you know, you walk into the building, and you get told a lot of different things about, "You need to be doing this. You need to be doing that."

[00:11:30] And you always get caught up in the Speaker race. I mean, that's—you know, there's the constant Speaker races going on at the capitol. We made—I personally made some mistakes early on listening to the wrong people. But it didn't take me long to figure out that, you know, the right way to navigate through that and just to work in general was just to build relationships and, you know, be helpful where you can and issues where you can agree. And that—I learned that early on, and I tried to implement that my, you know, entire time that I was there.

[00:12:12] JD: One thing that I've heard from some who served, maybe not even during your era, but maybe prior to it or just after, was that there had been sort of a strategy in place to try

to distance or separate yourself from the Democratic leadership with maybe certain bills that'd be filed that had no chance, maybe, of passage, but to just get it out there sort of symbolically. Do you recall any of that in your time there prior to maybe being in the majority?

[00:12:39] DC: Not that first session. Maybe that I don't recall, but that wasn't really my mojo. You know, it—there were a lot of bills that session. I think the lottery was kind of the main thing that came down the pipe there. It seemed like there were a lot of—I don't know the proper term—that be the—like nanny-state type bills that would frustrate some of us. [00:13:07] But you know, it was—I don't recall operating that way. Like I said, I got off to some—you know, the cigarette tax, that's where I made the—you know, I listened to—I got caught up in—I take back what I just said 'cause it is one thing that early on we got off track. 'Cause that year was when the Governor Beebe was pushing the cigarette tax. And that was pretty controversial with—amongst the Republican group. And I remember somebody in the caucus, or a group of people, thought it would be a good idea to have Dick Armev come to the capitol. And so—you know, kind of that herd mentality of like, "Come on, we're going down to the rotunda," and you know, Dick—of

course, I'm just young, like, "Oh, Dick Arme y. I don't"—you know, I don't recognize that name. So we show up, and you know, he's there giving a speech about just kind of red-meat type things. And I felt so uncomfortable. I mean, I got up, said some things, you know, and I thought, "This is"—I didn't feel right. And some time after that, I remember going up—and of course it just ticked Beebe off completely. He was irate. Not that really we were opposed to it. It was just like, "This is—we—why are you bringing somebody in from Texas? This is a show, right? It's theater. Why are you doing that?" Like, "Man, he's right. Why are we doing this? This is silly."

[00:14:41] And I remember going up to his office and said, "Hey, can I see Governor Beebe?" I sat down and said like, "Look, I'm sorry. I didn't know what I was doing. I'm just sorry I participated in that. And you won't—I'm not going to be that kind of member. I'm going to tell you what I think and, you know, do what I believe in, but I won't be doing any more of that." And to my knowledge, I don't recall ever getting into any of that kind of stuff after that. I just didn't like it, but anyway.

[00:15:14] JD: Well, it sounds like—so even that instance kind of, I think, hearkens back to the next thing I was going to ask you about, which is one thing Arkansas did for a long time was—and

Republicans, I think, struggled with it. I think they were at a disadvantage where, you know, demographically, maybe, the Republicans should have probably done well politically earlier than they did. I mean, we're whiter, you know, than—demographically than most Southern states. We're a little more homogenous in that regard. We don't have significant urban centers or anything. So you would think we would have gone the way of a lot of other Southern and even Midwestern states earlier on and been more heavily Republican early. [00:15:58] I do wonder—Arkansas was able to sort of avoid the nationalized politics for a long time, it seems. And I wonder if you have any recollection of seeing that change while you were in office. Because you mentioned Dick Armey coming in, you know, an outsider coming in and speaking. You started an era where it was still very much the case where you went to the festivals and the fairs, and that still goes on today, but it seems to be dying out. It seems to be that you don't necessarily do that anymore. You can blast everybody with media ad buys, and generally that will suffice because the Republican brand seems to jive really well with both the state party, the state voters, and the national party, where Democrats had this split. [00:16:41] So was that—do you think you saw the beginning of that with stuff like

having Dick Armey speak in the rotunda?

[00:16:46] DC: Yeah, that was—yes. I mean, that was a very small example of it. It all came a head with—you know, when President Obama got elected. I mean, that's when I saw the nationalization and the DC type politics everywhere. [00:17:10] And I remember—maybe it was during the Armey incident or—you know, some of that time, I remember Beebe, you know, kind of getting mad at people and saying, "You all are bringing DC politics to Arkansas." And he was probably a little early in that statement, but it certainly was a good forecast of what was to come. [00:17:26] But you know, when—unfairly, when President Obama got elected and then the push for the Affordable Healthcare Act, that is when you started to see just a complete nationalization of the state politics. I mean, every county judge, city council, school board member—I mean, everybody was running races just—"No Obamacare." I mean, you know, it just went everywhere. And the state Democrats felt a lot of pressure. They didn't want to be identified with that. You know, they would tell you that privately and probably some publicly. It was, you know, it was a drag on them. And that's when, you know—to me, that's when all of that really came to light, and it hasn't stopped. That was the beginning of it, and



it's gotten worse. But it was president—it was that time period when it happened. It was not a good time to be a Democrat in Arkansas. [00:18:37] And the crazy thing about it is that—the members that I served with, you know, the 85 percent, 80 percent Democrat, they were just as conservative as the Republicans that I served with. It was more of a geographical thing. In fact, some of them would say, "Hey, you got to watch So-and-so. They're a little liberal, and this one's this." I mean, it was just—it's the—I have a theory about politics. It's like kickball when you're in elementary school. You know, it's just like, "Do you want to be on this team or that team?" And you know, and it's just the branding part of it, and human nature is human nature. And you know, that's just kind of the way it is, and they didn't want to be associated with that. And it just—again, it's not fair, but that's what happened. Things just got—nobody wanted to be on that team, and then we saw in those subsequent elections—I mean, it went quick. Very quick.

[00:19:35] JD: So you're elected in [20]08. Of course, Barack Obama's elected President of the United States at that time. So as you said, there's that push in the spring of [200]9 into [20]10, if I remember correctly, really, where—about a year there where there's this push for this healthcare act. Do you

think—and I'm not trying to put you on spot here 'cause there's a lot of different—I've heard a lot of different explanations. I'm just genuinely curious. [00:19:59] What was it about President Obama and maybe that policy? I mean, the policy—you know as much about it as anybody else. It was, you know, as it was dubbed here, a private option. There was still a lot of—the big government scenario that was being portrayed wasn't necessarily accurate as a depiction. What was it? Was it the policy that was just so unpopular, or was it, you know, was it Barack Obama being, you know, not just African American, but African American, Ivy league, maybe a little out of step—the perception was out of step with rural voters. What was it, do you think? Just being a guy who was there, what was it that turned all this on the dime over one individual?

[00:20:45] DC: Yeah, it was a perfect storm. And I think it started with, you know, President Obama and peoples, you know—I don't know what the right word is, but it was—may—you know, I def—I mean, I do think that race was, you know, an issue with some. Maybe the swiftness of such a big change was part of it. And you know, that was really—I guess the social media was sort of out there then. But you know, the Republicans did a great job on kind of branding this as, you know, taking your

health care away and this socialized medicine, and they got out in front of it and won that branding message really, really, really well. And it was—I mean, it—well, it cost Senator, arguably, Senator Lincoln her Senate seat and Ag chair, and you know, people were just really, really, really upset about all of that. So you know, I—it was just a perfect storm. It was a perfect storm.

[00:22:03] JD: And it seems like Republicans were uniquely poised in 2010 to really gain some ground. Historically, Republicans have had some occasions where Democrats would sort of fumble, and you'd get a Winthrop Rockefeller governor, or you'd get a Bill White in 1980s, or blow back to a young Clinton, sort of teaching him a lesson. Mike Huckabee, of course, ascends to the office in unusual circumstances, but then is elected in his own right and then reelected. But you never saw Republicans really keep any kind of power that they might have been able to grasp for one or two election cycles. And you know, 2010 seems like that start of something that I don't think anyone would've been able to predict would have lasted, because previously we had seen some pretty good election years, relatively so for Republicans, and then it fell flat after two, four, six years.

[00:22:56] So you've touched on this a little bit with 2010, but looking at 2011, looking at the General Assembly where you're

starting to gain significant ground as a member of the Republican caucus, how does the mood change among Republicans in that time period?

[00:23:14] DC: It was definitely different. I think there were fortyish Republicans during that session, forty—close to forty, maybe a little bit more. And then it became, "Well, hey, you know, we can make some policy changes here." So a lot of effort went into, you know, into committee choices and committee selections and just areas where people wanted to be involved in. Of course, public health was an important committee at that time with the Affordable Health Care Act that came along. So you know, the way the numbers are in the House, you can do a lot—you can be influential in a minority if you have a decent size minority. You know, and it did happen so fast. I mean, we—some of my colleagues that were involved in recruiting candidates—I mean, it was like drinking out of a fire hose trying to recruit people to run. It just happened really, really, really, really quick. [00:23:14] And I think I'll give the Republican Party credit. I mean, it was a—you know, there—I remember sometime during that time frame that some people from Tennessee legislature that were invited down to talk. And you know, they had had some success there and elsewhere. You

know, it was like the strategy is the state legislatures. You know, it's like you get House and Senate members at the state level elected first, and then you go for the statewide and other races. That's what they honed in on and ultimately were very successful with all of that tailwind they had from kind of the anti-Obama and anti-Affordable Healthcare Act. But it happened so fast. But I guess that's a long answer to your question.

[00:25:08] We were much more—I don't even remember exactly what the—other than healthcare, what was the top issues then—but just the strategic placement of committee members. And you know, then when you start—I'll tell you what, it was a lot more fun when we were in the greater minority, I will say that. You know, with that comes a lot of responsibility, and I think I did witness firsthand that—I guess starting then, once you have some influence, you know, you got to be able to handle that responsibly and run a group effectively. You know, the more people are involved in anything, the more difficult it is to get people on the same page. But you know, it was—but I will say that in that session, it still—I still didn't feel a lot of partisanship. It didn't—my first and second session just didn't seem that way. I mean, look, we were going out to eat dinner with our Democratic colleagues. You know, we would go

have a beer or two. *[Laughter]* You know, but we socialized, and we got to know each other, and you know, it was—it just was—it was a different time then. And then, you know, then that really started—that sort of behavior really started that third session, or going into it. But those first couple were not that way. Everybody got along pretty well, and we were respectful to each other. Speaker Moore appointed me chair of revenue and tax my second—as a Republican in my second term, and there were other Republicans. I mean, you know, it was—everybody seemed to be work—you know, worked together, even as late as that 2011 session.

[00:27:15] JD: Twenty twelve rolls around. We have another presidential race. We see Republicans, maybe even more so than in 2010, not only poised to do well in Arkansas, but prepared to do well. I mean, we—you touched on this earlier. In 2010 even, where you had a lot of folks who—you know, in [20]08, you couldn't get anybody to run for practically anything as a Republican in Arkansas. And now you had a lot of intraparty contests, even, people vying for these positions even in primaries at the state and local, more localized levels. Twenty twelve, of course, we see the state go for Mitt Romney in strong opposition to Barack Obama's reelection. But perhaps more

importantly to what we're talking about, the General Assembly shifts for the first time since the late 1800s to Republican hands. [00:28:06] And so tell me what that was like, how you became Speaker, and then the challenges of the governing, which was a new thing for Republicans in the legislature at that time.

[00:28:17] DC: Yeah. It certainly was. And I would say going into that election night, the Republican caucus thought that there could be as high as seventy-plus Republican seats. In fact, I would say that was kind of the expectation. So from the Democratic Party side, I think it was—you know, it turned out to be kind of a, at least in this last decade, a kind of a last great stand 'cause when we woke up the day after Election Day, there were fifty Republicans, and one election was undecided that ultimately was won by a Republican out of Harrisburg. But there were fifty-one, fifty-one/forty-nine. I remember getting a text message from Bill Vickery early the next day. And I was at work early doing—you know, I was at the bank. You know, it said something like, "Hey, peep—you know, Davy Carter, your vote becomes pretty important when there's fifty to fifty-one." And you know, Bill was just being Bill. [00:29:26] But it was—so the expectations were there to have a much greater majority. But nevertheless, there was still a majority. You know, after

that, those next few months were pretty intense. I mean, I went into that election just pretty content with my career and path. And you know, back then it's, you know—and I say back then, I mean, we still kind of viewed it more of a part-time legislature, even as recent as then than today, you know, and small kids, et cetera. [00:30:08] And there were people in the caucus that asked me to run for Speaker before then, and I just really didn't have the time to do it, honestly. I was honored to do it, I just didn't really want to do it. So you know, you asked me how I became Speaker and kind of how that was governing. I mean, it was—you know, there was certainly some interesting days that occurred after the election with kind of the organizational efforts of the caucus. And there was certainly a new-sheriff-in-town attitude. There's not any denying that. And I certainly was all for the policy-type changes that felt like that needed to be made, but I wasn't personally too excited about getting into, you know, some of the—I guess we'll refer to it as DC type things. And I remember one small group of the caucus, you know, they wanted to remove Robert Moore from the Speaker's chair like before—you know, than it's traditionally done in January. And then there was, you know, an effort by some that wanted to just make Beebe look as bad as possible



because he was so popular. And I didn't want any part of that. And you know, things just kind of went downhill really quick in that regard just with some of our interpersonal relationships.

[00:31:43] And I remember one day I called John Burris and a few others and said, "Let's meet and talk about this." And you know, there's a lot of things that happened in the next two weeks, but you know, ultimately just didn't like the direction we were going. I said, "I'm not going to be a part of that, and let's see what we can do differently." And you know, I would tell you that going into the day of that election, I had no idea what was going to happen and—which I can't think of any other—that doesn't happen in the House of Representatives when you're electing the Speaker. I don't know that that'll ever happen again, but it was certainly dramatic.

[00:32:31] JD: Well, and if I recall, you had kind of a split caucus. I mean, there were—there was another individual who was running against you or put his hat in the ring, and it seemed, anyway, at least in hindsight, correct me if I'm wrong, that ideologically, you know, you were more of the moderate, middle-of-the-road candidate for Speaker in the Republican caucus, or for the General Assembly but leader of the caucus, as opposed to your opponent, who probably kind of cornered out the more

conservative end of the market. So you had a challenge of within your party, but also getting maybe some repub—some Democratic votes, perhaps to help you out there.

DC: A lot. A lot of Democratic votes.

JD: Yeah, [inaudible 00:33:16].

[00:33:14] DC: No, it was—that's—I mean, no, it's commonly—I hear that a lot, that it was—I was kind of the more—and I take pride with kind of being a pragmatic, moderate person, but you know, my voting record was pretty conservative. I mean, I got sort of painted in this, you know, "He's a whatever, he's really a Democrat. He's from mari—you know, he's a Democrat." You know, that—but that's—it—that really wasn't true. I mean, what was true is I'd had some pretty good experience, and just, you know, back to that first session, I mean, it's just better to—you know, I don't—it doesn't matter who gets the credit. Look, let's all go up here and work together and everybody can go home and go back to work and stay out of everybody's lives. And you know, I—that's the way I wanted things to work, and you know, it—we had more—the differences weren't in that so much about policy then, although there were some organizational things that didn't—you know, I—that some of us didn't like about committee selections and that sort of thing early on when—you know,

Representative Williams was the Speaker designee, good friend of mine, a Democrat from Little Rock. He gracefully, when he recognized that the votes weren't there, you know, he stepped down. And you know, it was just a—when I finally made that determination that we cannot let this happen, I was determined to just work with people that I knew and trusted. I didn't care what party they were in. And that was sort of—you know, that had been my style from day one for the most part, since I had been there. And that's, you know, back to having these relationships with people. I mean, relationships really matter when things get difficult. I mean, if you wait until things are difficult to try to form relationships, it is way too late.

[00:35:14] But so the dividing line really wasn't more of, you know—I mean, it got painted to that some, you know, that super conservative, "Davy's a moderate, a demo"—but it fell out that way, but that's not really what started it all. And ultimately, you know, it's a secret vote, but I mean, I'm pretty sure all but one Democrat voted for me, and I'm proud of that. I mean, and maybe all of them did. I mean, you know, they—afterwards, everybody tells you they voted for you, so. [Laughs] But you know, I know that wasn't the case, but I said, "Look, we're going to do this like it's been done in the past, and we're going to have

representation. You know, the majority should—you know, the people vote in the majority. There's ramifications for that. But you can do it where—you know, I think, the Arkansas way and not the DC way." [00:36:12] I'll tell you, I met with, you know—and I don't have any personal beef with him at all, but I remember Tim Griffin did not like any of this, right. And so I remember back—Vickery said, "You're going to have to meet with Tim." So you know, I met with Tim and, you know—just to give you an example, because he was in Congress then. He was like, "Well, you've gotta"—you know, we talked about kind of how all this happened, et cetera. He said, "Well, you need to—we have these cards or this point system and committees and the way the Speaker does." And I said, "Well, we're not doing that here." You know, I mean, like—but you know that DC mindset—nothing against Tim, but he was in DC, he was part of that, and I said, "Well, we're not going to do that." [00:36:57] And you know, to pile on all of that, the Supreme Court, I think that same month, you know, in their decision on the Affordable Healthcare Act basically told the states that they can do what they want to do. They had to fix this. They had to opt in, opt out, et cetera. So the one issue that arguably caused all of the shift, not only in Arkansas but elsewhere, healthcare, you know,

was on the table. And nobody expected that. Everybody that ran a race that election cycle was either for Obamacare or against it. And you know, it was—that made the stakes even higher. I mean, it was a big deal.

[00:37:56] JD: So yeah, you're coming off the heels of the 2012 election. You've got a—the thinnest of margins of majorities. You're pushing back against some of the—sort of the branding politics, I guess you could say, where—the sort of clubbishness, maybe, of one party over the other. And then also you're—I say dealing with, but you're working with a governor who is still the last Democrat to win a statewide election. He wins all seventy-five counties in his reelection bid in 2010. So Governor Beebe's a popular Democrat in a state that is turning, ever increasingly so, conservative—Republican, red. [00:38:41] And now you have this thing dropped in your lap, right. As you said, where I would guess that most of the Republicans in the General Assembly had adamantly opposed and run against the Affordable Care Act, at least if it came up on the campaign trail. So how do you approach that? How—I mean, maybe you work with some Democrats, but you've got to get Republicans on board as well. And then you've got this added challenge, right, of showing the state that you can govern, showing the state that Republicans

can lead in a conservative way amidst a lot of increasing polarization, and you have this huge policy puzzle to deal with. So just how does that work? How do you—long and short of it is, how do you get the thing passed?

[00:39:23] DC: Yeah. Well, I'll tell you, the—I never thought we would. Where it started was, on day one, myself—I may leave a few names out that I just—but here's who I remember. I mean, it was, you know, John Burriss, Michael Lamoureux, maybe Duncan Baird, Dismang, maybe Larry Teague. I can't remember if Larry was in there or not. But I said, "Look, what do we—we have to do something." I mean, you know, if you really took time to evaluate our choices and the ramifications of the way the lawsuit was resolved—remember, we met in a—this is true—in a janitor's closet on the Senate end of the building. And we ended up having regular meetings there. And the first meeting was, "Look, I know we all ran"—I mean, I, you know, I didn't have a—I don't think I had—I didn't have a race, but ever—you know, I did not think I was for it going into it, right. I mean, it was as I said, we—and every member had just ran these races telling their constituents that, you know, they were opposed to this. But we had a problem, and we had to fix the problem. And you know, it's like, "How can we address this?" And we just really at

least started with that small group. We just started working on it. We are not just going to say no to be saying no. The easy thing would've been to do—politically was to stand up the first day and have some big dramatic theater talking about how judicial activism, and we could've disparaged the Supreme Court, and we would have stood on our Republican principle. It would have been so easy, so easy to do. [00:41:21B] So hats off to the group that started the, you know, the discussions with me about at least seeing if there's some alternatives. But that's what happened. I mean, we got in the janitor's closet, and it was a learning process because nobody knew—nobody in the country. We're the—I think, and check me on this, I think we were the first legislature to meet after that Supreme Court decision. Nobody in the country knew what the rules were. But you know, I guess it's turning out that's kind of my theme of my interview with you today, is that's where the relationships, you know, with the Democratic colleagues and most importantly Governor Beebe were important. I mean, and we went to him and said, "Look, we're going to do something, we're going to try, but will you help us go ask for permission to do these things?" And he said, "Absolutely." You know, I mean, he believed in it, and you know, he believed in most of everything that we ended

up putting in the legislation. I mean, you—he would need to confirm that, but you know, it was just kind of just common sense, decent, generally conservative viewpoint on the subject. And had he not been governor, had we not had those relationships prior to being in that position, it would have never happened. Because he was the one that had to go to the President Obama and his secretary of health and ask them for waivers for all the stuff we kept asking for. And they didn't want to do that, but at the same time—and we knew that—we thought we knew. You know, said "Look, they need to win too." I mean, they—you know, this may—you know, we felt like we had some leverage to negotiate something that was good, you know, we thought was good and tailored for Arkansas. [00:43:26] But you know, Beebe, he went and did it, and to his credit. I mean, he also could have stood there and yelled and screamed at us and got on TV every night and talked about how the Republicans, you know, were holding back healthcare for Arkansans. I mean, it could have turned into what we see today so easily, but that's not the approach we took. And not only did we have to get fifty-one votes, we had to get seventy-five votes for the appropriation. But you know, I give the entire membership credit, even the ones that voted against it. They all



took an incredible amount of time trying to learn what we were dealing with. I mean, it was an intense learning curve for everybody. And just the way—you know, if you remember, there was a big gap of people that were gonna be left out completely, and the poorest of all Arkansans that certainly were the ones that needed the help were going to be left out if there was any kind of consensus to do anything. And you know, we—it was—you know, it took a lot of—it just took a lot of efforts. It was a lot of whiteboards. We had a whiteboard in my Speaker's office. I mean, just literally sleeves rolled up with Magic Markers, erasable markers, and just constantly trying to figure this out. [00:45:05] John Burriss was—David Sanders was there. I forgot about him earlier. These guys put a lot of—and Dismang—a lot of work into the details. And you know, had they not done that, I mean, we could have never convinced—this wasn't a str—you know, got down to the end on the appropriation votes, and it was—you know, it took some—several times to—attempts to pass that, but people forget. I mean, I don't remember what the vote was on the substantive bill. It was pretty high, and to get that much support for that bill and as controversial as that was was really remarkable.

[00:45:51] But you know, we just wanted to solve the problem.

We had a problem, we wanted to fix it. And you know, we—I think that in hindsight that was a difficult time, but I did—as uncomfortable as that was just politically and with relationships, particularly after all the drama that went along with the Speaker's race, I still had a pretty good sense of ease that we were doing the right thing. [00:46:18] And I think hindsight—I just saw a poll here recently that that was just a part of some of the polling, and you know, it's pretty popular today. Here we are dealing with, you know, COVID and the health—you know, overruns to our health system, and you could imagine a state that had a lot of hospitals that potentially would have closed back in the day, and I'm glad that didn't happen. But like I said, if that would have been today in this political environment, the now me—I'm not saying I would do that, but it'd been so easy to sit up there and start telling everybody else how the other guys and girls were wrong. And it could have blown up immediately, and it didn't.

[00:47:11] JD: It seems like, you know, one thing that—thinking back to the party brand or something that maybe Tim Griffin had been a little more accustomed to, as you had mentioned earlier, it seems that the national Republican brand, and I'm overusing that word probably, is a little more in agreement, I think, with

most Arkansas voters. Whereas, you know, Democrats for years had that more liberal sort of national image and policy preferences and goals, and then Democrats in the state had to figure out a way to sort of keep an arm's length from that image. So it would have been, as you said, easier, right, for Republican majority, a new Republican majority to say, "No, we're not doing that. That's Obamacare. We ran against it."

[00:47:59] I guess what I'm curious about is, did you get any pressure nationally? I mean, were there Republican groups nationally that were actively trying to get you and others to just drop any kind of attempts at pursuing this further?

[00:48:16] DC: Some. I remember one or two that did that really we brought in—tried to help with some guidance. But for the most part, no. I don't know if it all happened so fast. I remember doing an interview or two with non-Arkansas journalists, and you know, they didn't particularly like—you know, I don't know, it just—there was a little bit of, "Why are y'all doing this?" But I don't recall getting a lot of, you know, pressure from the national Republican groups. I don't recall that.

[00:48:58] JD: You really give a roadmap to other states, because after you do it, you start to see other states, and some more

Republican leaning, certainly, doing similar things. I mean, I don't know that any one state has adopted exactly what . . .

DC: Right.

JC: . . . what y'all had, and I know it's changed a little bit since then, but—you know, and it may have been that you kind of gave some cover to other states with Republican majorities who were kind of wanting to see how this thing played out. So certainly a significant political achievement. As you said, today, do you think it—I mean, if it happened today, you don't see it passing if you were to do it again?

[00:49:36] DC: Zero percent chance. Zero percent chance. And you know, I—it just there's no way. I mean, it was—it would never happen. Because what it—you know, and this is not—I do think the national groups are more vocal. The social media is more present. And so I'm gonna say that. And I'm not, you know, being negative to the current members of the General Assembly. I just think it's a completely different environment. You know, and it's—you know, it was—there's no way it would happen. You know, I mean, I—it was—we knew that doing the private option and writing that legislation like we did was for the best of people of Arkansas. We sincerely believed that. We also knew that it was very difficult to explain to the base. But notwithstanding

that, we, you know, we tried to explain it, but we carried on anyway, not considering our own political futures, the ramifications of that. I mean, it was, you know—[*laughs*] it wasn't—I mean, it—I didn't make a lot of friends with the Republican base doin' it, but I'm not stupid, I knew that. But it was still the right thing to do. [00:51:12] And you know, you do—I do think they're under so much more pressure now with just the DC stuff just taking over the dialogue. And you know, I hear routinely how their members vote for things or don't vote for things that—it's not really what they want to do, but they feel, you know, they don't really have a choice. And you know, I remember a guy coming in to see me in the Speaker's office during the Affordable Healthcare Act, the private option debate, and he was like, "Look, I campaigned against this heavily. I know that voting for this is the right thing to do, but I can't do it. I campaigned against it. And I can't explain to my constituents why I would do it." And you know, I mean [*laughs*], at that point, you know, I mean, I was—it's like, "Well, so did I." You know, I mean it was like, "There's no free passes here. Like, we're all in that position. But that's—you know, sometimes you got to step up to the plate." So you know, I'm—it just—it would not happen today. There's no way. It's just zero percent

chance. I don't think, quite honestly, I don't think people would put the effort in that some of the guys put in and girls put in to try and figure out the problem. I mean, it—you know, it's just that pragmatic approach is—you know, I don't see it much anywhere else. Not only here in Arkansas, just anywhere.

[00:53:11] JD: Well, following that session, the 2014 elections really kinda start that trend that we've seen now, where the Republicans pick up seats that had long been Democratic seats in the General Assembly. Even rural sort of blue dog Democrat districts now go red. And now you're in supermajority status world, where the Democrats have been for a long time prior to your coming into office back in [20]08. So it's changed a lot in a really short amount of time. We go from a state that is dominated by Democratic Party politics, kind of its own unique brand of politics, but nonetheless, the Democrats as a team, if you will. Then you are in that period where you have not only a divided government, but you have a very slim Republican margin in the General Assembly with a Democratic governor. And since then, really that [20]14 election, we see everything go Republican. I mean, top down, virtually every seat. There's a—you've got a few places in Northwest Arkansas, a few places in Central Arkansas. And since, Democrats continue to lose seats,

even after the 2020 election results were reported. So we know it's changed. [00:54:26] What do you think—how are the dynamics different when you've got a supermajority? Now you had to work, you had to craft together a coalition with Democrats and Republicans. Now how's it different today?

[00:54:41] DC: Oh. I think it has to be exponentially more difficult. Like I said earlier, it was easy when we were in the minority with eighteen. It was a little more difficult when we were in forty. We just went through the unusual circumstances of, you know, a fifty-one/fifty. But when you get a supermajority and there's really no opposition, then you start seeing fractures within your own caucus. There's just no way around it. I mean, the people are too different. You've got, you know, all these—there are other different things that come into play, you know, rural, urban, age, whatever. I mean, it's just—and particularly in today's world with, you know, the—how people have been so polarized over the last couple of presidential elections.

[00:55:42] You know, I used to tell the members that served with me when we got in to some of these difficult situations where—and I realize this is a major generalization, but you know, say, "Look, for the most part, it's the same three million people that live here today that did,"—especially back then in

[20]06 and [20]04. It's the same people. The members of the legislature were conservative. The movement went elsewhere. It was the national movement. They could no longer identify with the National Democratic Party. So today—I mean, it's gettin' back—I mean, we're at the 80/20. We're back to the 80/20 deal. It becomes—you know, I guess the question that I don't have an answer for is how far does it go before that pressure point is hit and people in Arkansas no longer identify with what's being represented out of the DC party. And then, by virtue of that, what you end up with at the state legislature. I mean, there's not a lot of signs that that's going to slow down, but it only can go so far. I mean, it will go back the other way. Now when that happens, I don't know, but there has to be, you know, antagonists through all of this. [00:57:24] You have to have some other viable opponent and—to debate ideas and to keep people in check. I mean, then you have all Republicans trying to keep other Republicans in check. Well, that's just the same thing—when I saw that when I was in the minority with Democrats. It's harder to keep—Democrats to keep other Democrats in—you know, because most people can't overcome, "You're one of us. I helped you get elected. What do you mean you're not going to vote for me?" I mean, most people cave into



that stuff. It's a herd mentality, and it's hard to get people that are comfortable enough with themselves and having those roles to just, you know, to not go along with that sort of mentality. It's very, very, very difficult. So you know, it only can go so far. Hopefully sooner than later we'll start going back the other way. I'm a big believer in, you know, having two strong parties. And I mean, you know, today I would tell you I believe we need more than two. And you know, I've talked to a lot of people that are disgruntled by the time November rolls around with their choices, but you know, come—and we can talk about primaries, and that's probably a whole nother topic and interview, but you know, peep—you gotta give people some viable choices, and there has to be some, you know, intelligent debate about some of these issues instead of just one—one-party rule is bad, no matter what party's involved. And it'll go back the other way. I don't know when.

[00:59:21] JD: And it seems—you know, as we're talking, it seems like for over a century, right, it was Democrats being primaried by Democrats, and the race was settled in the summer, early fall. November was almost a formality for decades. And then you're in that moment in time—and we're talking maybe four years, two or four years, right, where you did have two

competitive parties competing. And really what we probably had was one that had a lot of ground that was slipping it dramatically. I don't know that they were ever really 50/50 competitive, right.

DC: Right.

JD: Republicans were gaining just incredibly fast. [00:59:58] And now we find ourselves again in an era of another one-party dominated state, with the exception of a more nationalized politics and probably a more nationally cohesive brand of politics. I think being a Republican in Arkansas is very similar, frankly, nowadays, to being a Republican in Oklahoma or Georgia, or maybe even New Jersey. Whereas I don't think Democrats could ever have said that, you know, ten years back. [01:00:23] So I guess, knowing the landscape's shifted so, just to put you on the spot, would you run again? I mean, if you were to do this all over again, say in [20]08, the situation was what it is today, do you think you would have run?

DC: Would I—had I ran back then if the situation was like it is today?

JD: Yeah.

[01:00:44] DC: Probably. Probably. I mean, I love a good fight. I probably would have. You know, I mean, until people do, none of this is going to change. That's what it's going to take. I

mean, it—I don't like it. I don't like what's going on. I don't like, you know, people that I still know that're down there calling and telling, you know, or explaining to me how things are, that people don't talk to each other, there's—you know, don't want to be seen with the—I mean, it just doesn't make any sense at all. Arkansas's a small state. We have stuff that we need to fix here. I love our state. Wouldn't—I've never left here, and I don't ever plan on leaving here, but we have some work to do on a lot of Arkansas things, and talking about, you know, the national things that get the headlines with—you know, and I don't get it. I know why they're doing it, but they're not doing anybody any good, except for, you know, dividing people.

[01:01:59] I mean, I would like—you know, I can't wait for the next holiday where we—you know, my entire family can have a discussion about this stuff because we haven't been able to do that in a long time. So maybe that's the litmus test, but we got to get back on just focusing on Arkansas, I mean, and how we advance and how we stop our kids from moving to Dallas and, you know, Nashville and Austin and going to all these other places. Little Rock folks not—you know, wanting their kids to go to—I don't know. I mean, go be—if you—we have stuff to do here that doesn't require all of that nonsense. But we got to get

people to run that have that mindset or change the system, the primary system, or we're going to continue to—it's only going to get worse. I mean, now you just see that, you know—you can't [*laughs*] out conser—I don't know. I'm gonna use conservative as a wor—you know, in a way it's not even a word, but you can't out cons—you know . . .

JD: Sort of as a verb.

[01:03:04] DC: Yeah. You can't out-conservative people. Like, so you know, so you do one thing or vote one way. There's somebody else there to their right that's gonna get in the primary with them. It's hard to win a primary unless you're standing on the very edge. You know, I used to tell people, "Look," if you have a little group, like, "Raise your hand if you've been to a county political party meeting, Democrat or Republican, in the last five years." I mean, nobody ever raises their hand because nobody ever goes. Like, you know, it's like, "If you don't go to one of those, then you're not—they don't care about you." I mean, that's the group that's electing all of our elected officials because of the primary system the way it is.

JD: So the more activists in the parties are doing it. Sort of the . . .

DC: One hundred percent.

JD: . . . maybe the people that might hold more extreme views

perhaps, or more impassioned views.

[01:04:01] DC: Yeah. I mean, most people are—they care, but they have other stuff going on in their lives to think about this twenty-four hours a day and go do all that stuff. And so by the time primary day rolls around and you go to vote, you know—like, how many phone calls have you gotten like—you know, I'll get, "Davy,"—or my wife will call, "Hey, So-and-so—who are we supp—you know, who's running, and who are we supposed to vote for?" You know, these are like her friends and my friends, like—people live their own lives, right, and they don't keep up with all this stuff. I mean, I know that a lot of us think that they do, but they don't. And then, you know, you're like, "Well, how"—and like, "Really, these are the two choices?" [01:04:40] But I guess the point is, you can't—it just keeps going with that supermajority. It just—that herd mentality, you can't out-conservative somebody, and there's no forgiveness, and they will—gonna primary you. And then the only way to combat that is if you don't care if you're going to get primaried and you just—you go, "I think people will respect that." But I don't know, you know, that—we gotta get people to run for those offices that kind of have that mindset.

[01:05:17] JD: Well, I think you very—and actually, I think it's a

creative way, but it's an appropriate way to use conservative sort of as a verb in this context. Does it mean something differently now than it did in [20]08 or when you were coming up? And we've thrown that word around a lot, conservative, you know, liberal, moderate, but they're all kind of relative to the time in which I guess we're discussing things. I guess I'm thinking back to people like Winthrop Rockefeller, maybe even Mike Huckabee in the [19]90s. We see Governor Hutchinson struggling right now with the intraparty strife, just wrapping up a legislative session where—you know, he's largely one of the framers of the party if you look back at a guy who took it on the chin for, I mean, years in elections and then helped be chair of the party. And now we're seeing certain members of the parties are just outwardly challenging him. [01:06:11] Is that term being, not misused, but maybe used differently now than it once was? In other words, a conservative in the 1990s, early 2000s—is that the same as a conservative today, especially in sort of the Trump era, where we have a now-former president that was wildly popular in Arkansas, and still is, but is also very polarizing? Has that brand changed?

[01:06:37] DC: Yeah, no doubt. You know, I don't know that I can articulate it. I'll tell you what it means to me. You know, I—it

means to me that we're gonna be smart with our money. We're gonna be smart with fiscal policy. We're going to adhere to the Constitution, the rule of law. You know, I do generally believe that—you know, in limited government, but we gotta have a government. Somebody's gotta—I mean, we have to have some. Today—and you know, I'm really hesitant to say this, but this is how I feel, you know, you—I see a lot more attempts—not attempts, because they're successful in doing it. We're bringing in, you know, very deep, social, religious things into politics. Don't—I mean, I grew up in the Baptist church, I'm still a Baptist. [01:07:52] I see a lot of people that would rather, this is going to sting, but I'm going to say it, would rather their politicians be their witnesses for them instead of themselves. It's gone too far. And you know, I think that's part of it. You know, we can—I don't like that at all. I mean, I think, you know, I'm who I am because of what I believe, and you are who you are because of what you believe, but I can respect your differences of opinion on that. And I can stand my ground respectfully on that. But I don't need to—we don't just sit around to beat each other with the heads with it. [01:08:40] And then on the money side, I don't know there are any—I mean, I don't know where the fiscal conservatives are. I mean,

you know, today they voted on the infrastructure package, and there were some Republicans that voted for it, but you know, there's some now that are beating the deficit drum. Well, I mean, the Trump administration just increased the deficit by from \$6 or \$7 trillion. I mean, I think it went from \$14 to \$21 trillion under a Republican administration and with both chambers of Congress. Nobody's got any credibility on that side. [01:09:24] So I think, back to your question, I don't know that a lot of people know what that means anymore. It's been muddied up. It—and I don't know that people even care anymore. It's more about the big picture branding, it's about the kickball deal. Republicans have been incredibly successful in branding in Arkansas. Nationally, too. I mean, Trump just blew it, honestly. I mean, he has his own personal shortfalls, but his message of just busting everything up and shaking things up was—still resonates with people. I think that's why he's still popular here. And the Democrats here have been terrible at branding. And you know, it's just—it's more about that than it is about—they don't want take the time to analyze, you know, the definition of being conservative or liberal. It's just easy to not do that. [01:10:23] But you know, in Arkansas, to me, and I've been on the record saying this before, we do a lot of issues at



the capitol. But by large, I mean, it's education and managing the state's money and prioritizing, you know, our resources. Yes, there are other things, and I get that, but that's what people want. I mean, how are we going to grow the economy? How are we going to get jobs? How are we going to get our—you know, again, have a quality of life that keeps our kids from wanting to go elsewhere? The other stuff doesn't—it just muddies all that up and creates all the tension. And now we're in a situation where people are up there that don't want to work together because of all that. And you know, people, the citizens, we all lose, right, when that happens. But that's what it means to me. I think it all, you know—I guess to each his own.

[01:11:19] JD: You know, we've been talking. We've covered a lot of ground. We've been talking about predominantly your time in the state legislature between [20]08 and when you leave office there in [20]15. We're not that far removed from that time, that era, but we have seen a lot of changes. [01:11:35] Do you have any closing thoughts just on what we've seen? Because I think sometimes we forget—you can look at it on paper, and it's like, "Well, they were Democrats. Now they're Republicans. You know, big deal." But it was not only that the Democrats had had such longevity, but it was that they had dominated so

completely. And in that, give or take, maybe one election cycle where you have two parties that are both viable and duking it out, we're back to one-party rule in perhaps a different way than we had seen in the past. Huge, significant, historic moment for Arkansas. Just any closing thoughts from somebody who saw it first hand and was involved?

[01:12:18] DC: Well, I just hope that we can get back to having professional debates. People are gonna disagree. You know, I think people have placed politicians way too high up their priority list. I don't remember it dominating life back then like it does today, you know, and I feel like we'll get back to that point, but it may be a while. You know, I know this, I talk to a lot of people in my daily, just social and business network, and nobody's really happy with what's going on. But you gotta give people viable choices. They're going to pick the least of the evils. And you know, when you make people decide on the two kickball teams, they're going to make a choice. They're gonna do that. Hopefully some of these efforts with Senator Hendren and the Common Ground group can—you know, that's—he deserves a tremendous amount of credit for organizing that. It's off to a great start. I hope and believe that we will be successful. And you know, it's just another voice out there to

help achieve some of these things that I've been talking about today.

[01:13:48] JD: And this is a push, you know, just for the record, this is a push from really both parties. I mean, individuals from both parties, current and former elected officials. Senator Hendren, of course, now famously leaves the Republican Party, the nephew of the current governor, Republican Asa Hutchinson. Hendren leaves the Republican Party now as an Independent in office. You're speaking about that group . . .

DC: Right.

JD: . . . a movement in the state of Arkansas.

[01:14:17] DC: Right. I think it goes back to, you know, hopefully we can bring some change in that regard and get—you know, look, I'm such a believer in Arkansas and the people of Arkansas, and you know, there's—you know, people like to say that Arkansas's got an independent streak. I do believe that. I mean, it's not showing up much today in the voting, but I still think it's there. Again, it's the same three million people, for the most part, that are here now than there were then. And you know, they're—I say they. We. We're stubborn, which I like that to some degree, but we're stubborn. I think we are independent minded. We got to be able to give some choices.

And it's a small state. People know each other. I mean, I always say if I went to, you know, DeWitt and did something stupid, it would be like two people before the word got back to my dad or somebody. I mean, everyb—you know, that—you're—it's a small enough state where I think the personal relationships still matter. You know, we gotta get people that aren't career politicians. I don't like that phrase. We just gotta get some more people in the fray, some more business people that that's just not their full-time gig and that don't really get caught up in that herd mentality. If you only identify with a party—you know, like I—I mean, I saw—I'll kind of close with this. Watched the debate at the public health committee on—the other day on, you know, repealing the mask ban, right.

[01:15:56] And I saw Jan Morgan get up with a Republican platform book and started reading the, you know, Republican principles. You know, just talked about Republican Party, Republican Party, Republican Party, Republican Party. I mean, that is the—you know, I just sat there and watched that. It was hard for me to watch that, but you know, that's what's wrong with that way of thinking. That wasn't the time to do that. And you know, unfortunately, we got a lot of folks that think that is the only way you can get elected and keep your office. So you

just need independent thinkers that aren't scared to go against the herd.

[01:16:41] JD: Davy Carter, banker, lawyer, first Republican

Speaker since Reconstruction in the state of Arkansas, on behalf of the Pryor Center, thank you so much for sitting down with us today and sharing a very unique and experienced perspective.

DC: Thank you.

[End of interview 01:17:10]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]