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**Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

University of Arkansas
1 East Center
Fayetteville, AR 72701
(479) 575-6829

# From Blue to Red: The Rise of the GOP in Arkansas

Janine Parry

Interviewed by John C. Davis

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Little Rock, Arkansas

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## Objective

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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 Janine Parry on September 28, 2021, in Little Rock, Arkansas.**

[00:00:00]

John C. Davis: Here with me is Dr. Janine Parry, university professor of political science and director of the Arkansas Poll at the University of Arkansas. Thank you so much on behalf of the Pryor Center and just myself for sitting down today and talking about this historic partisan shift in our state's history. It's a history that you've played a keen role in observing and analyzing, and we know you'll have a lot of valuable insights. Thanks so much.

Janine Parry: I'm really glad to be here. You and I have been having this conversation for a very long time. So it feels like, I don't know, just a fun thing to sort of get to talk about it together.

[00:00:39] JD: It is. It does indeed. So the Pryor Center reached out a couple years ago, and they were interested in looking at the partisan shift, particularly between [20]05 and [20]15. And you, being an astute scholar of Arkansas politics and history, knows that it goes back a little further. And so what we've done is we've broken it up into three generations. [00:01:01] And so I argue that there's—basically the first generation of the

Arkansas GOP in sort of its modern form would start around 1966 with the ascendance of Rockefeller, and it would end in [19]92, in part because at that point you've got a couple decades of peaks and valleys where the party might make a gain here or there—I think it was Jim Ranchino who said, basically, Republicans can win, but when Democrats sort of let them and mess up somehow. And so peaks and valleys—1980, of course, is an upset victory for the Republican Party as governor—there were Ed Bethunes and this sort of—few entities would come in and have some success. It was typically short lived. And of course, [19]92 ends with the state's governor, Democrat Bill Clinton, going to the White House. [00:01:50] The second generation, I posit, is [19]93 until about 2010. And in that era, we see a time where the party is slowly building, slowly gaining something perhaps akin to momentum, but they're not capitalizing. And we're seeing neighboring states that are already going more or less full tilt Republican, and we're all wondering, "When is this going to happen to Arkansas? Is it going to happen? And why hasn't it happened yet if we're expecting it?" [00:02:17] And then the third generation is where we find ourselves today. And it starts somewhere around 2011 when we start to see the General Assembly numbers go, at

first, slowly Republican and then by [20]12 and [20]14, overwhelmingly Republican. And we find ourselves today, of course, in a situation where all the constitutional offices are Republican, all four House members, both US senators. So the state has gone from a Democratic stronghold for well over a century and one-party rule, perhaps, even to one-party domination again in an election cycle or two. It's a real momentous shift. And so I thought today, we could talk a little bit about particularly the second and third generations and just your insights on the matter. [00:03:01] And so, Dr. Parry, you've been in Arkansas since the late [19]90s. Do you recall your perception of Democratic Party and Republican Party politics at the time?

[00:03:13] JP: That's a great question. So, yes, I arrived in the fall of 1998. And my specialties were gender in politics and state politics. And I was expected to teach Arkansas politics right away, having only taught really general state politics and Washington State politics. So immediately and intuitively my classes became comparative state politics, and they've remained that because really, as I've learned from colleagues since then, that's really the only way to teach state politics, right. It's almost like teaching comparative countries. We use a lot of the

same tools. We can't really understand ourselves unless it's relative to something else, right. So I thought about that a lot when I got here, because I had to become expert in something very fast. [00:04:02] And I guess what I noticed right away was that Arkansas—so this is sort of broader, and then I'll take it more specific. Arkansas wasn't as unique in as many ways as she thought she was. And that was a really fun theme, kind of a common thread that I ended up teaching that course with. But it was unique in the sense of how overwhelmingly one party it was. And then of course, as I learned later and everyone learned later, how one party it remained. Because I remember the central question being—'cause I was reading everything, right, my predecessor, Diane Blair—everything she wrote, everything Jay Barth wrote, anything I could get my hands on, most of which had been written, right, in the 1980s and the 1990s, including, of course, the textbook that was then hers and became theirs, et cetera, the readers that had come out over time, all of those kinds of things. And the central question during that period was, "When is Arkansas gonna flip?" And you have all of these pivotal writings really with that implicit or explicit question. And it kept not flipping. [00:05:15] Something else I observed about Arkansas when I first got here

was that the Republicans weren't particularly conservative in an ideological sense, not uniformly so and not even majority so. 'Cause I'm also a person, right, I'm a voter, and I'm experiencing politics. But also that the Democrats were not liberal, like probably even more so. And that might seem sort of trite or like have sort of an, "Oh, duh," you know, response, but it really did sort of take me aback. So it's one thing to study comparative state politics and mostly know Washington State politics, but it's quite another to move to an entirely different region and go, "Oh, Democrats here are only sort of Democrats." Not all Democrats. There were some very liberal Democrats here at the time with whom I interacted. But it took me a while to sort of figure out who those were because they all used a common language. It wasn't usually until sort of deeper in a conversation or a situation, whether they were politicos, elected candidates, events I was at, or whether they were just kind of kingmakers or activists, you know, the Democratic Party of Arkansas, the Women's Auxiliary Organization, whatever it was that I was observing. Sometimes then I would be party to sort of offhand comments, which as a Westerner and as a hyper-educated, secular female [*laughs*] in particular, I would think, "Oh, these were a very different kind of a Democrat than my

Democrat."  Not uniformly.  Again, I think it's really clear to acknowledge that.  I mean, there are always your—Jim Argue, right, and really Mike Beebe in lots of ways, talk the same way as a lot of other kinds of Democrats, which I think helped them be successful and to reach their hands out and that kind of thing.  But more liberal than I think anybody in the rest of the country could probably imagine in a Southerner.  You know it, and I know it, but that kind of Southern Democrat got so, I guess, kind of washed out, right.  Like what would be the right—washed over, right, by the other kind of Southern Democrat, which is all really most Americans know about Arkansas, but I always found those really interesting.  [00:07:35]  But I probably had more experiences where, really, people I knew and kind of circulated with early on and I knew would consider themselves proudly Blue Dog Democrats would say pretty overtly racist and/or sexist things while I was standing there and not think anything of it.  And I remember that being kind of a little bit of a shocker, a little reminder that I'm in a different place.  That happens in Washington State, but it almost always comes from self-identified conservatives and/or Republicans.  So Washington, I guess, had become more polarized in the ways that we expect earlier than had Arkansas.  So it kind of goes

back to that one party, almost no party that you and I know, that Key knew, was really very specifically or—not exclusively but pronouncedly Arkansas, right.  So I felt like I was seeing that right away.

[00:08:26] JD: That's fascinating.  And since then you've published several works on Arkansas politics and certainly state politics more broadly.  But you've also coedited two editions of readings in Arkansas politics and government.  And I believe the first one was published in 2009, I think, released in 2009—most recently in [20]19, I believe, [20]20.  So you've got a ten-year gap there.  Tell me about the political changes that took place in those ten years in sort of high notes.  You know, I know in probably pulling those together, you had to be considering, you know, what worked in [20]09 that might not be applicable now.

[00:09:07] JP: Yeah, I would say those collections are more a difference of who I was working with each time.  So in the one collection, I was filling in for a coeditor who had rotated off, and so I was working with a scholar from Arkansas State whose book it was.  And so I was sort of trying to squeeze in a few more things that I thought would be helpful toward teaching.  And really, those books are cultural, right.  They're political, but they're also cultural.  There's so much historiography in them,

there's some sociology in them, and then there's whatever we could round up in terms of, right, overt politics. [00:09:45] And then the second one was a few other scholars, Kim and Cathy, so at UCA and at ASU, also wanted something updated. I knew we needed it, right, but for their students, and so then I was really influenced by what they were interested in, which was more practical politics. Because one of them is a public administration, more specialist in bureaucracy and how systems work, right, the people doing government. And that sort of describes the other one as well, sort of with some more policy stuff as well. But at that point, I was also interested in adding more of the historiography, like even richer but updated, what people were doing with *Arkansas Historical Quarterly*, the work they were publishing that told us a lot more about mid-century, the politics of race and ethnicity in particular, and some other things that I was just interested in at the time. [00:10:36] But I would say with my other work, particularly like, say, with Jay Barth, like the thing you've done with Andrew Dowdle, right, those every four years—I would say that more has been like my tracking over time because I guess my first one I did with him for the *Presidential Elections in the South* series that he had always done with Diane was—I did the first one in 2000 and

then—so I started in 2000. So I've now done 2000, 2004, [200]8, [20]12, [20]16 and [20]20. I just did my last one. And the most exciting table—oh, that's such a nerdy thing to say. [*JD laughs*] Guess which table's the most exciting table—always though, wa—for me was this thing we created where we were looking at the population shifts in Arkansas, and we were connecting it to what was happening with the partisan politics in Arkansas. So there's always a table I think, maybe not for 2000, but probably starting around 2004, we had—we made this table where we had the top ten most populated counties in Arkansas, and then we had—and we would just get to update it every four years. And I mean, you'd get to watch some counties like Jefferson County where Pine Bluff is, right, the only Democratic stronghold in the last three or four election cycles, fall off the list. Because it's not only not growing, it's been shrinking. And so it just—we kept watching it lose its place, right, as a rung on the top-ten ladder, as we watched Benton County, Washington County, Sebastian County, Faulkner County, right, all of those explode. [00:12:06] So Northwest Arkansas, and then the rings around Little Rock. And then of course, we were just comparing it to what's future growth predicted to be? How far has it come? And then what was their last presidential

vote? So what was the most recent, what was the one before that? And then also what was their turnout rate? And so by tracking sort of all of that, you could just see what was unfolding before your very eyes, which is here are places like Benton County that are very high growth. Then there are places—or Saline, right, or Faulkner. In addition to that, they vote very, like double-digit points, at least early on, above average for Republican preference, and often double digit, at least ahead of someplace like Jefferson County, in terms of their voter turnout. And it's like that was the trifecta. Here's what's coming. So it was sort of unfolding exactly as you started out with, and that was the piece that we were watching in slow motion was basically like the demographic piece of all of this.

JD: That's fascinating. And we'll talk a little bit more about, you know, demographics or destiny, then kind of what we think we'll see in the next generation.

JP: Yeah.

[00:13:18] JD: So you were able to see, though—you were documenting this change, and you were in some ways probably able to see it ahead of those who may have just been looking at vote counts or vote totals or election results. And which is a really fascinating piece, I think, in this.

[00:13:35] JP: It is 'cause you can just see their interplay and how it's not just a single thing. As you and I've already had a little bit of opportunity to talk about and to think about and to teach about, so many Arkansans—right, "Well, what happened?" "Obama." It's like, "Oh." Partly, but there are so many other factors that had to be in place before that thing like kind of finally flipped the switch, right. Or not even that, but really—maybe it's more like a dimmer switch, right. And it was already half on [*laughs*] before that election and before all the hyperpolarization and the Tea Party movement and the Affordable Care Act, right, and all those other things happen. Social media, right. All of that was the big sort, right, in America, the rural-urban divide, like, there were a lot of other things that were unfolding before that. And I'm really grateful that Jay and I had a chance to kind of watch it unfold.

[00:14:30] JD: Absolutely. So pivoting to another significant academic endeavor that you've participated in, explain the Arkansas Poll and, you know, if you don't mind, how it came about, and then your role in it.

[00:14:44] JP: The Arkansas Poll was a group project, and really it was the brainchild of a former colleague, Will Miller. He's long since moved on. And he really initiated the Public Policy Ph.D.

program at U of A, Fayetteville, and in addition to that he was, you know, very much an idea guy. And I was new, and he thought that that was something that would be useful, right, to—and I think from Will's perspective—he was a little more like a praxis person, and I've maintained that on the poll, and I think it's probably—the most important part of it is if people will use it, and they do, to inform policymakers between elections, right. Election polls, horse-race polls, are pretty blunt instruments. So I really like that we started out that way. And I've, because of Will, tried to maintain that focus on public policy and the people's policy preferences and try to, like, have series that dig in a little bit deeper to, say, abortion policy or gun regulation or environment or whatever it happens to be. [00:15:49] But Will thought we should do it. And by we, he thought I should do it. [*Laughs*] So that's fine. It was good. We were in a four-member team originally, basically the Americanists in the department, or most of them, and the people who were interested or had time. And at first we were gonna do it twice a year. So in the fall we were gonna do a telephone one. In the spring we were gonna do a mail—you know, to send things out in paper. And we did do that. But the mail survey always ended up being a male—or the first time ended up being a male survey,

*M-A-L-E*, because that's also when public opinion was sort of changing, and we got like 75 percent older white males replying to us by mail. [*Laughs*]

JD: It's a little biased there.

[00:16:35] JP: Yes, a little biased. So it wasn't really useful to us. And it was expensive and time consuming. And so we just—we dropped that piece of it, and we moved to just telephone every fall. So since 1999, which was the first one, always in October, we've spent seven to fourteen days on the phone. We used to have a Survey Research Center on campus. That was really fun to go over and actually get to listen to them. Some of my students got to do it, be hired as interviewers, et cetera. But it wasn't, I guess, a good investment for the university. We were their biggest project. And so that Survey Research Center run by Dr. Molly Longstreth, who was so diligent—we did it with her for probably ten years, and then I started contracting out. And so now we're with Issues and Answers, so you know, a for-profit call center. But they've also been amazing. And so it's been those calls, almost always 750 to 800 respondents. [00:17:34] And the original reason for 800 was we could get 200 per US House district. That's not a great sample size, but people always want it at that level. Really, people often want it at the county

level, and you have to kind of explain sample size [*laughs*], you know, to them. Like, "We really can't talk about these thirteen people in Faulkner County with any certainty." "But couldn't you just tell me?" "No. I'm telling you, it's just noise. It doesn't make any sense." So it's fun to try to do that. And I guess now—a few times—in, let's see, in 2008 for our ten-year anniversary, we actually did 400 or 500, 400 per US House district so that we could speak with a little more certainty. I guess the margin of error there would be plus or minus five or maybe five point five. So that's pretty good. [00:18:24] And we had this big statewide sample, so we had 1600 total. And then one other time we kind of expanded it. Oh, just for Northwest Arkansas we worked with, kind of held hands with the Northwest Arkansas Council and did an over sample of Washington and Benton County so we could kind of see how they were the same or different. So a few times we've had a bigger sample. But I haven't done the math lately. I think that now means we must be approaching 20,000 interviews because we've been doing it for twenty-three, twenty-four years. And that makes it—actually, I have a little article about this in *State Politics and Policy Quarterly* just about the state of state polls, and only about half the states have them, and only a handful

now are older than the Arkansas Poll because they're just really hard to maintain. They're sort of acts of love. And that may be what happens with this one. I'm not sure. It just depends on whether a colleague is interested enough and whether that's still what the Blair Center that's funded it wants to do. [00:19:25] Originally it was funded by the Graduate School, the Dean Collis Geren—who was a spider person. That was his area of specialty, but he was very interested in public opinion. And he wanted the Survey Research Center to have a major project. But then within three years because of the connection to Clinton, because of Diane Blair's connection to the Hutchinsons, they got the congressional delegation to basically earmark, right, pork barrel money that now funds that Blair Center, and since then we've been super lucky. When I talk to other state poll directors, they're just like, "You have to be kidding me." Like, "You're funded by an endowment?" And I'm like, "Well, it's not an endowment I control." But they've been great about wanting to keep it alive, and they just really don't ask many questions about it. It's nice PR for them every time, it's good public service, it seems like something a flagship should be doing, and we've been lucky to have been doing it ever since.

[00:20:16] JD: What's so amazing to me about it is not only the

insights that it offers but the fact that we're a small media market. So if—I mean, I can only think of a couple other—really maybe one other, maybe Roby Brock's, which is the Hendrix Poll. And it's not an annual, you know, it's a little more seasonal or periodical. I can't think of another one offhand that we can reliably expect to see or anticipate other than the Arkansas Poll over the last, you know, few decades.

[00:20:44] JP: And experience and—you know, actually interviewing other poll directors back when I did that project. It's just that it's really hard to sustain. You know, people enter different phases of their career, they move on to other things. It's certainly not a moneymaker. It's just really hard to keep them going. So KATV, you know, had one off and on over the years. Really, that was something Jim Ranchino did, right . . .

JD: Sure. Yeah, that's right.

JP: . . . when you think of that little book, that from *Faubus to Bumpers*.

JD: *Arkansas Votes*?

JP: Yeah, very early polling, very cool for its time. And then I was—it seemed like a few times like one of the TV stations would decide—and I think even one of them for a while in the system was like, "Do we need to patent, you know, or trademark, right,

the Arkansas Poll?"  And it was like, "Eh.  I don't know.  Maybe."  It was something we talked about for a while, but I knew enough at that point to go, "We can kind of go down this road, but they'll probably stop doing it in two or three years."  It's just—it just takes a lot of time.  Again, it's kind of a labor of love.  And it would be awesome if they kept that going.  [00:21:49]  The difference, though, between when media usually do it—like take the Iowa Poll.  The *Des Moines Register* has done it for years.  I think they're still doing it like since the [19]40s—is that the results are still interesting, right.  So you get that public service component and really the politics component, but you don't get the scholarship because usually—and I'm not sure about the Iowan one, but for us our thing has been it's all transparent.  You can see every bit of the protocol, which questions we asked, how we asked them, in what order, what the answer options were, and whether we rotated them or not.  You can see all of the programming.  Most people, 99 percent of the people, don't know to look at that, or it's not that interesting, but scholars know that it matters tremendously, right, in terms of the answers you get.  You can see we've always put on the sample—and this is probably also like a Will Miller legacy of just complete transparency—here's how our sample compares to what the

Arkansas, right, population looks like. And you can see the ways that we're high on education, higher than we should be on income, more women, right, but in a weird way. Oh yeah, higher in age. But of course, while we were trying to get a sample of Arkansans and not a sample of voters, right—that was something that was important early on—because of the nature of political efficacy and who has the time and interest to answer political poll, we actually have long ended up capturing, right, a sample of likely voters. So those are all kind of interesting aspects of it over time that I think make it different and I hope useful, you know, whether it continues or not because it's all archived at the Odum Institute, it's archived, I think, now with Roper, and then of course, it's archived—the raw data are available. Like anybody can do what they want with it. Yeah.

[00:23:37] JD: That's excellent. So—and perhaps it's your work in the Arkansas Poll, perhaps it's the coauthored pieces we've discussed looking at the demographic shifts. Do you recall when you thought, "Okay, the—it's finally happening," and then, you know, if you can recall, what was the reaction of others? Because what I've found is, a lot of—I've had the good fortune to talk to some people who seemed to see it coming, at least in hindsight. I think they recognize it now. But it wasn't maybe

received well with their peers. You know, it was sort of thought as, "Oh, we've been talking about this for years." That kind of thing. So do you remember when you kind of had that a-ha, or oh-oh-oh-oh moment? And then sort of what the reaction was just around you when you shared it with people?

[00:24:27] JP: Yes. So I should have added earlier about the Arkansas Poll. It's like sixty to seventy questions, and some of them are kind of—whatever's contemporaneous we might ask them only one time, we might be collaborating with other people on campus who are looking for a sample for a specific area of public policy. But most of them are repeated. So whether it's every other year or whether it's every year, right, it means we have this distance, this—what do we call that? I guess time series, right. If you want to think about it that way, you can use it for that kind of analysis, right. Something scholars talk about it. But you can look at changes over time because it's been asked in exactly the same way, right, since 1998. [00:25:06] And as every reporter who's ever worked in this state, at least doing state politics, knows, that's always—the partisanship question, like, "How do you see yourself?" is the first thing I look at. Most people look at—when they're reading the results on the other end, they look at whatever election prediction we're doing,

or if it's not a year for that 'cause it's an odd-numbered year or something, they'll look at the governor's approval ratings. Like, for years, those were like the main things on the Arkansas Poll that interested other people. Me, it was always, what's going on with the way people identify themselves? [00:25:38] And what I can say is that the way—and what you know because you've looked at it, is the way Arkansans identify themselves really didn't significantly change with respect to their brand of party until 2010. And even in 2010, it was only—it wasn't that more people identified as Republican, it was that we saw this double-digit jump in the people who identified as Independent. So like the Democrats drop, right. I think that year even the Republicans dropped slightly, and the Independents, right, just explode. And then you have the follow up question, which handily, we'd always ask just 'cause that's what other—right, you just copy what other people are doing, and Michigan or whoever had always had that follow up question of just the Independents, right. Well, you can tell me. You know, do you—are you—do you sort of consider yourself most of the time—like which way do you vote, or is it truly down the middle? And it was—and it had always been roughly like a third, a third, and a third Republican, Independent, Democrat. But in 2010 they

wouldn't say they were a Republican, right. But then on the sec—out of the gate, but on the second question, right, they said, "Well, I'm usually—I'm leaning Republican, right. I lean Republican." And so in 2010—then I got interested in, in [20]11, [20]12, [20]13, [20]14, [20]15, right—I'm trying to remember when that finally tipped. It's only been in the last few years. They would still just say they were Independent on the first take. And then on the second take, right, you'd get like, 53 percent of them, you know, 52 percent saying they're Republican. [00:27:15] So then I got in the business of, "Just say it." [*Laughs*] Like when are you going to stop buying the product and go all in for the brand? Like that was the metaphor that like Andrew deMello and I started, you know—for the Associated Press, started sort of kicking around. But boy, it took a long time. It took almost another decade, right, for the Independents to finally say, "Okay, I'm a Republican." So for me it really wasn't until 2010. I mean, you know this. In 2008 the Greens ran more people, right. Or Mark Pryor didn't have a Republican opponent, right. The Green Party candidate, right, Rebecca Kennedy, was his only competition, the only thing eating at all in there. And then in—I guess maybe that would be like, 2006, right, the Greens are more—running more people

statewide than the Republicans are. And then wasn't it also around 2008 or so, too, that the Republicans didn't even contest? It wasn't just Mark Pryor, it's like they didn't even contest the House seats.

JD: Right. That was [20]08.

JP: And that hadn't happened since the [19]30s.

JD: Yeah.

[00:28:24] JP: Some other reporter, and now I can't remember who—I think it's in the big binder, my teaching binder, but that hadn't happened. That—at least both parties like put somebody up, like, put up a sacrificial lamb. But so really a lot of that wasn't evident. Like you saw the jumps because of term limits, right, in the legislature in 1998. But that's a jump from like 12 to 24 percent, right. But other than that, remember, then the Republicans just kind of level out. In fact they lose some seats, right, as we move into the early 2000s. Hutchinson just takes a beating, right, against Beebe . . .

JD: Beebe in [20]06.

JP: . . . in [20]06, and it's like, well, he's got great credentials. And this is a Southern state, right. And I know, you know, the Beebe is the Beebe. [*Laughs*] But also you would just—that is—that tells you something about the landscape of the state and the one

partyism that's so one partyism it's still kind of no partyism. It was so lopsided. So really, I didn't see what I'd been expecting to see, you know, what all the scholarship of the [19]80s and [19]90s had told us to be looking for. I didn't see it in Arkansas until 2010, and even then it was kind of subtle, right. You had to go to the second question. But then once it started happening, right, the votes, right, started changing. And then finally the partisan identity changed after that.

[00:29:46] JD: The one data point that stuck with me in particular looking at the party ID and the, you know, quote "Independents" and those who leaned and were likely voters . . .

JP: Yeah.

JD: And I think it was [20]18 and [20]20, but [20]20 in particular, where it's 51, 52 percent. And I know you're kind of splicing samples at that point, but still, I mean, that's amazing. And to see that Democrats hadn't lost a whole lot of ground there, but basically, the whole thi—the whole board has shifted, right. They've pretty much—their column is more or less unchanged, but those that might swing back and forth are all in for the GOP. And I can't help but think that demographically those are those white conservatives who've split ticket for a while, probably a long while in some cases.

[00:30:35] JP: Yep. Frank White, Bill Clinton, right, Mike Huckabee, Bill Clinton, right, like whatever was going on with them they were . . .

JD: Vote for a Republican who's a . . .

JP: Mm-hmm. David Pryor.

JD: . . . non-Southerner, maybe, in the White House, of course, but then a David Pryor or a Dale Bumpers or something like that . . .

JP: Was still . . .

JD: . . . back home.

JP: Yeah. And that—they were perfectly comfortable with that for a very long time. [00:30:57] So you know, in the Arkansas politics class with the undergraduates, it's like Arkansans were ticket splitting before ticket splitting was cool, and then that—and then also it lasted longer, right. And then all of a sudden, when it shifted, right, we were all in. [00:31:16] I wanna say something else, though, that might be interesting if you haven't looked at it. And forgive me if we've talked about it before, but it was actually Frank Lockwood, the DC bureau reporter with the *Democrat-Gazette*, who noticed this because he is sometimes assigned for the *Democrat-Gazette*, especially as it shrinks, right, or size corrects, right, in a difficult environment. I so admire what they're doing. They're still putting out great stuff.

But I'm sympathetic to those reporters. But Frank stuck with it. And Frank, a couple years ago, was doing the Arkan—the annual Arkansas Poll story instead of one of the Little Rock reporters. And he said, "Could you talk with me about the ideology question?" I'd never found—one of the questions, too, that we've asked every year, right. So we have twenty-three different observations. [00:32:02] One of the things—I'd never paid attention to it, because it didn't seem like it moved much. Only 15 to 18 percent of Arkansans identify as liberal, and that looks a lot like the country, and then about 40 percent were moderates, and about 40 percent were conservatives. What Frank noticed and I didn't—I'd just—it got boring, right. And I had my question [*laughs*] that I was watching closely. Frank noticed that, ever so subtly but in almost a perfect social science line, right, like not a lot of dips and valleys and—but almost a perfect line, the percent—the moderates and the conservatives, which I had always kind of rounded up or rounded down, to 35, to 42, had switched places. And so we were becoming less moderate and more conservative, or rather, we were correctly identifying, right, as more conservative. So that actually was changing, right, as those national signals were coming down, right, and as media were nationalizing, and Arkansas had access

to nationalized media, et cetera. So all those signals were finally coming down so that people were going, "Oh, I'm conservative." Which at the same time, but in a less linear way, right, it was more, maybe, maybe, maybe, and then pow, we became more Republican. But the ideological orientation actually was moving pretty smoothly. Isn't that wild?

JD: It is. And I've not seen that either 'cause I was a party . . .

JP: It's interesting to look at.

JD: I'm the PID observer. And so . . .

JP: Right. Exactly.

JD: . . . I have to look that up. Thank you, Frank.

[00:33:41] JP: Well, and political scientists, right, we're snobs. We kind of figure that most Americans don't really understand what ideology means, right. Well, they—I know this, too, we do in the last ten to fifteen years, right, as we've polarized, like that ideology is part of it as well. I mean, my own parents are Democrats, and they're Pacific Northwest Democrats, but my mother in particular has had some ideas and some policy preferences that are not the dem—not part of the Democratic platform. My father, a few too. But now even they, I've noticed, are much more—they're fully partisan aligned, right. Which means their ideological orientation lines up totally with the

Democratic Party, and that's all part of their ideology, right, being pulled away, probably not really toward liberalism and toward the blue side, but away from the red side. Well, of course that was happening. So I just—I should have known to look. It's just never been my focus.

[00:34:46] JD: What I'm hearing, too, is something that has come up in a few of these conversations where—the GOP brand was and is more aligned, more consistent, and top down, right. And so in a more nationalized . . .

JP: They always have been.

JD: . . . politics, it's a much easier or more efficient message, and it's probably received a little more appetizingly, perhaps. It's a little easier maybe to digest than the classic Arkansas Democrat. "Well, I'm not as liberal as the folks in DC, I'm kind of my own, vote for me."

JP: "Arkansas first."

JD: "I'm"—right, "I'm not exactly one of those Democrats, but I'm another type of Democrat." And that's a pretty tough ask, right, especially today.

JP: Yes.

JD: To ask voters who are probably—especially white voters in Arkansas, which are, you know, a disproportionate amount if you

compare some of the population demographics in other Southern states. That's a lot to ask this voting bloc that's pretty conservative, has been voting for Republican presidents for decades at this point. And so it gets back to—and Diane Blair had written about the Big Three, Bumpers, Pryor, and Clinton, and talked about how, you know, that was part of sort of a barrier the—or a firewall, if you will. [*JP laughs*] They were the ones who could, you know, work in—especially Pryors and—Pryor and Bumpers could work in DC, and then come back home and still relate to people here. Be effective in DC, be a good caucus member, but then still come back and communicate Arkansas values and work well with people and be a source of—seen as a source of support, right, year in year out from people.

JP: Yeah.

JD: And Clinton did that as well.

JP: Yeah.

JD: I think we talked a little bit on Beebe.

JP: Yeah.

[00:36:44] JD: If we—if Diane were to write that today, [*JP laughs*] would it be a Big Four? Because I think of someone like Beebe who was—really up until no one could, he was able to communicate that message that I think's very similar. And when

she's writing in the early [19]90s, I think it's—about the Big Three in [19]93, Beebe is on the scene, but he's a leader in the Senate, and he's, at that point, not really shown any other ambition. So it's not that she missed him, it's just he wasn't really on the radar at that time.

JP: Yeah.

[00:37:16] JD: So I just wonder, and this kind of gets to—this is a long question, I guess. So wh—you mentioned earlier there's more to the Obama story. And one thing that I've considered is—Obama was, of course, the first African American president. We know that. He was Northern, he was more urbane, very intellectual, a lot of un-Arkansas things in many ways. But I wonder, too, if he was the first time in decades that Arkansas voters saw a Democratic president who wasn't a Southerner and who wasn't able to articulate that message the way that Clinton had. And even the way Carter may have rather unsuccessfully, perhaps, years before. I mean, so it's maybe still Obama, but I wonder if it's the multiple dynamics at play that can still kind of go back to President Obama and characteristics of him. But I wonder if that's what made it—you know, other than Beebe, who still wins all seventy-five counties in 2010. But with exception to him, right, everything else is in the ditch . . .

JP: Yeah.

JD: . . . for the Democratic Party. I'm just wondering what brand—is that part of this? Is it, you know, we had these now maybe four individuals who held up that wall, and then the dam broke?

[00:38:35] JP: Yes. And it goes back to that idea about the personalism in politics, right, that so many of us have observed, that when there's not the nationalization of political messaging, when it's hard to swamp—that was the verb I was looking for before—when it's hard to swamp our televisions with these pre-packaged, slick, Republican or Democrat talking points, that the Arkansas Democrats still had brand, tradition, and familiarity going for them, right. And so this goes back to—they're still going around, and they are quite literally, right—people think we're exaggerating, but you and I know we're not—kissing babies, shaking hands, talking about, right, what you—you know, what me and your dad did when we were up at the university, when we were up at Fayetteville, right. I'm privy to so many, or I was for a long time, to so many of those conversations, which goes back to your, "Well, he's a Democrat, but he's an Arkansas Democrat. He looks right, he sounds right." Or Blanche Lincoln early on. "She looks right, she sounds right." And so it just was still possible to do that two

step. But once Citizens United and the 2002, right, the FEC case, et cetera, once those companion cases come through the US Supreme Court and blow the lid off of spending and it becomes possible to swamp Arkansas's very small, hard to access media markets with the same messaging that every—you know, everybody else in the country except West Virginia has been getting right, uniformly, kind of that plug and play. Once that happened, right, I think that was the thing that finally said, "It was not who I know." Or you know, "I don't worry so much that it's a Democrat, because it's mi—it's not even a Democrat, it's Mike Beebe." Or before that, right, "It's not even a Democrat, it's a Pryor." [00:40:40] I mean, when people—when we've talked about like 2014 and what happened there between Pryor and Cotton. I thought that was the most interesting test, right. Because it wasn't really about the Democrat versus the Republican anymore. Because really the Pryor brand, in a one-party so much to the point of being a no-party state, the Pryor brand I think was actually more significant for huge swaths of especially those white rural Arkansans, who are a disproportionate, right, part of a—particularly a Southern electorate and with no urban center, like they—if they stop voting for a Pryor whenever there's a Pryor on

the ballot, that's it, right. And so that total blowout was it. And I don't even really think it was about the party switch so much as it—or it was. I guess it gave you the magnitude, right, of the earthquake that had just happened. Because I mean, a freshman, right, you know, one term in. Republicans had been talking about him for a while, right. They knew about him as he was doing a good job building a reputation, you know, even before he was serving in the US House. He was working those conservative networks, you know, with just real acumen early, early on. But ark—the average Arkansas voter had no idea who that was. And for him to take out not just a Democrat, but mainly a Pryor by the gap that he did, right, to the magnitude that he did, I mean, that's, I think, really telling.

[00:42:13] JD: And the way that he did it, too. If I recall, he would often—Tom Cotton, now Senator Cotton, was criticized with not doing the retail, traditional politics that you would typically see. So his network was very strong, vibrant, and robust outside of Arkansas.

JP: Absolutely.

JD: Which I remember many people thinking, "Well, that's not going to help him in Arkansas." And as you're saying by that point the politics, the media-driven politics, were such that that worked.

That was the correct recipe.

[00:42:46] JP: It was the fin—yeah, the final thing that could overwhelm that retail politics because he didn't have to do retail politics, and he understood that. With enough money and enough—well, with enough money, you can buy or build on, right, the polarization and the nationalization that's already happening. And we can't overlook that local news sources are just collapsing at this point, right. And so that means local news stories are collapsing and being swamped by national news stories. And so nobody cares anymore about really—maybe we care about who the governor is and what they're—we know what's going on with them, but Arkansans had been interested kind of in what their state legislature was doing. [00:43:29] And I never was able to compare this because there aren't enough state polls, and you'd have to get so locally into counties and legislative districts, but it is my strong belief that our more—that more Arkansans, especially in light of our lower education and income levels, right, as a surrogate for political knowledge or a predictor of political knowledge. I think more people knew who their legislators were. And we know that's true in more rural states, right, because just the legislative districts are smaller, right.

JD: You'll see them at the store . . .

JP: Totally.

JD: . . . high-school football games.

JP: Everybody knows—yeah, well, that's So-and-so. And that's why you have, you know, cousins serving and brothers serving and all the things that, you know, we've had over the years. So in a small state like that, that was still—that was significant. But all of that goes away when your national media are folding, people aren't really getting much coverage of that, they—so that also breaks the connection, right, with the retail politics, with the hyperlocalism, the personality-driven politics, right, so all those factors are swirling together.

[00:44:34] JD: So as we've talked about, in 2010, we see Republicans make these unprecedented gains. But what can be, I think, sometimes overlooked, is that it's really the [20]12 and [20]14 cycles where we see dramatic policy effects. In [20]12 we see the General Assembly for the first time since Reconstruction go Republican majority by a very slim margin. And then by [20]14—where for parliamentary requirements in the Arkansas State Constitution, the majority is sufficient enough to where—we're getting to a point where Democrats aren't really needed for votes and for policymaking.

JP: Right.

JD: So this is a dramatic shift in just a matter of maybe one but certainly two, no more than two election cycles. [00:45:20] So what is it about that that makes it so significant? Could you explain, you know, why extraordinary majority for the Republicans is such an important goal for them going into [20]14 and even to today?

[00:45:32] JP: Well, I think what we were all really watching after 2010 and then into [20]12 and [20]14 was, in Arkansas—and it's not just an Arkansas thing, right, but supermajorities are required for certain laws to be passed and other kinds of procedures, and budgets, right, are the classic ones. So you and I know that. We study state politics. And in Arkansas we have a not just a supermajority, but a super-duper majority, right. You've got to hit that three-quarters majority of both chambers in order to do almost anything having to do with money, right. So if you want to raise additional revenue, if you want to spend revenue, you've got to hit, right—seventy-five of them have to hold hands. And while the Republicans spent a lot of time, right, under that threshold, there was sort of this in-between period where it wasn't clear, right, for certain kinds of things if we were going to do that. And that slowed the Republicans' roll, maybe,

in terms of shrinking the scope and scale of government because they couldn't get to that supermajority. And then even then, they all had to hold hands. You couldn't have one defector, right, go to the Democrats, and you could negotiate. So that was really fun, I think, to watch. [00:46:45] It was interesting to watch from a social, scientific, political science perspective because you could watch Beebe during the massive throw down over whether—over Obamacare or the Affordable Care Act, what, right, what we know as Medicaid expansion and all of the Arkansas-specific labels that we gave to that to make it more palatable. And you had Beebe negotiating during this period, as a Democratic governor with these—this supermajority Republican legislature, but right on the edge of the supermajority, negotiating with them for certain things, right, to get those votes. And I'm trying to remember who was it. Jane? Who was it who negotiated for like, more of the technical schools and remaking . . .

JD: Jane English.

[00:47:30] JP: Jane English. And I remember when he finally got Jane English's vote, right, to keep the Medicaid expansion, you know, kind of keep that going. And she had obviously negotiated, right, she's in a position of power. She'd negotiated

for I think, like, sort of an overhaul of technical education and all the things that mattered, right, to her. I always was playing music—I still do—in Arkansas Politics. And that day, every song had something about Jane, right. "Jane Says." [*Laughter*] And of course, only like four students, right, get the joke because the rest of them are gonna read the news later. But was fun for the four who totally got it. They're like, "I know, right. She did the thing." She got what she wanted, and she became, right, the magic vote that this Democratic governor needed in order to get a majority Republican, newly majority Republican legislature to maintain like, the most Democratic with a capital D, right, the most partisan policy initiative nationally that we had seen in some time. And darn it if they didn't do it.

JD: An issue they ran against.

[00:48:31] JP: Yes. Right. Remember all those ads against Lincoln, and then same playbook against Pryor, right, really. Not really for either Boozman or Cotton, right, in many sense, but against them because it was, you know, Obama, Pelosi, and Reid, Obama, Pelosi, and Reid, and then you know, you just update that for 2014. And that's all you had to do. And all of that was about Affordable Care Act, right, the rise of the Tea Party movement, and just, "We don't know what we're for, but we're

against that." So being able to manage that in that environment and with that supermajority requirement, all of that was really fascinating to watch. It just was always teetering on the edge.

[00:49:21] JD: So we've—we're to a point now where—in 2016, of course, we see the GOP make more gains in the General Assembly, but it was really [20]20 when I think the party realized that it's not just anti-Obama, but there was a pro-Trump certain zeal to a lot of Arkansas voters.

JP: The game changed.

JD: Yes. And so, I get the feeling that maybe in [20]16 there was some surprise there by just how top down, how popular—well, as we call it now, Trumpism is, and we seem to kind of all have an understanding of what that means whether it's a positive or negative connotation. [00:50:05] But in [20]20 the Republican Party makes a concerted effort to go after state legislative seats that they would not have dreamed—in fact, they didn't even file candidates for in [20]16. And these are places in Southeast Arkansas, in the Delta, on the Southwest Arkansas part, where you have people who culturally, historically, demographically, everything seemed to continue to advantage this sort of conservative Democratic brand. And maybe because these areas are relatively sparsely populated places, it almost hadn't

occurred to people to sort of pump the sort of national attention into these districts. Until [20]20. And in [20]20 we see these remaining seats be picked up by Republicans. Virtually every seat they contested in one of these areas, they won or they lost incredibly narrowly. I think there was a couple there, and one particular in Central Arkansas that comes to mind. Like a few votes, right.

JP: Yeah.

[00:51:05] JD: So where we are today is back to where, in some ways, we were in Ranchino's day, right. Maybe not Key but certainly Ranchino's day. What kind of policy output differences are we expecting? And I guess I say that because the state's always been more conservative than not. Now that can mean a lot of different things, right. There's always been certain—a kind of a populist, maybe, zeal, an agrarian history there, all this stuff. But what do you think it's gonna mean? I mean, if—for the average Arkansan who says, "Yeah, the Ds lost, the Rs now won. But they're all pretty much fairly conservative. So what does it mean for me? How is it different?"

[00:51:50] JP: I don't know. But I suspect that it hinges on Sarah Huckabee Sanders' inevitable governorship and what kind of governor she chooses to be. Because to me, short of whatever

na—well, always in the midst of this nationalization of messaging that now completely has subsumed state politics everywhere, not just in Arkansas, but even especially in Arkansas, where we don't have high levels of income and education, we don't have a big urban center to work as any kind of counterweight, whatever direction the majority of the voters are going, they go all in, right. We kind of have a herd thing, right. So we're back to one partyism that's so one partyism, it's almost no partyism. And we're back to kind of this personalism. And I say back to. Maybe we really never left it. But it seems to me that Trump and our affinity for Trump and being one of these states, right, that was just all in shouldn't have surprised any of us who've watched Arkansas politics for a long time. And I think you're exactly right, going all the way back to Ranchino, except that he was a national figure instead of a state figure, right, a president instead of a governor—that we would hang on every word and adopt it for our own and maybe occasionally punish if he did—you know, sort of made us mad like we did with Clinton, right, in 1980. [00:53:23] But I think it all hinges on what happens with her and whether she stays for long or moves up into the national stage, which I think is clearly among her goals, but she's got plenty of time for that, and which direction she tries to lead.

Because she's got that Trump brand. She's an heir apparent in that way. I think being a native Arkansan and sounding right and looking right and now having sort of the brand, right, that's also correct for this time period—I just think it's kind of hers to direct. So I suspect that a lot of that personality-based stuff, much as it did for her dad and made him a long-lived and really quite successful governor in terms of getting policies through after that first session or two, you know, where he had to do some vetoes and not—he reached across the aisle, right. I mean, he governed like governors do or have for most of the late twentieth century, which is bread-and-butter, education, get some jobs, you know, coming to the area, amenities, parks, you know, roads, et cetera, infrastructure. [00:54:38] So I think the future of the Republican Party and future Republican candidates and that kind of thing maybe isn't really as much about the party in a weird way. It's like, wholly about the party and yet not wholly about the party. It also has a lot to do with her as its vessel, because I think that personalism is still a part of it. I could be wrong. Maybe now party is totally swamping everything else, and the Trump thing was just a short-lived Trump thing. I'm curious to see how that unfolds and what kind of leader she'll be. Everything I'm hearing—I haven't had a

chance to see her in person yet in the pandemic, and it's not like she's been up here a lot, or if she has, right, these have been private fundraising affairs, and the invitations don't get to me, the information doesn't get to me. But I've heard from reporters who are clear eyed about this kind of thing but watching it like with the same kind of eye I am that she's just magnetic in person. So she has all of the credentials in this environment, right, to do really well, but then she also just really connects with people. And it's like, "Oh, well, that's what Arkansans are used to." It's like, in a weird way, what we expect, so I'm just really curious to see, I guess, like, what that means for the future of the party and for policy, which was your question, in the state and how that's all gonna, I think, hinge on—is she just gonna wanna cut taxes to the degree that she says she is, you know, while she's here, understanding that eventually that may jeopardize services, because she has national aspirations, and that's the wing of the party, right, the future of the party that she's chosen for her own, you know, either ideological or career, right, reasons? Or will she be more pragmatic, you know, maybe in a more Hutchinson way than we would sort of expect, in a sort of more typical governor way because maybe she—after she's elected, right, after she rides that horse, right, decides to

govern pragmatically and come up, you know, in this other direction. So maybe make that part of her national bid. So I don't know. I can just tell you I'm curious about it.

[00:57:00] JD: It's hard to imagine a governor-elect. I know we're being presumptuous here, but, you know, at the time of recording it seems very likely that she'll be the nominee and just as likely that she would win the general election in [20]22.

JP: 'Cause that's how one-party-no-party we are.

JD: Exactly. Exactly. And so I think—in fact, we're so comfortable and confident saying this that I'm almost—back to—you know, since we're gonna kind of—you mentioned Ranchino, and we've talked—he's come up a couple of times. I've mentioned him a few times. You know, his whole thing was there were—you know, you get Rockefeller because, in part, he was able to kind of get a reform-minded coalition of people.

JP: Yes.

JD: And the Democrats had messed up in sort of trying to do a re-Faubus sort of approach.

JP: Wrong direction. Mm-hmm.

JD: And so voters punished him or punished the party, right . . .

JP: Yeah.

JD: . . . and rewarded Rockefeller. [Nineteen] eighty, of course,

you've talked about that. [JD note: [19]80 refers to the 1980 election of Republican Frank White over Bill Clinton].

JP: Mm-hmm.

[00:57:58] JD: I wonder if we're at a point now, though, where even if the Republicans, you know, and sort of to paraphrase Ranchino, messed up that it wouldn't matter. That as long as there was a Republican on the ballot, the negative partisanship and nationalist politics are so strong right now that we would still see a Republican. And so having said that, I imagine it would be—there's a potential that she could be a governor with the wind at her back like no other governor we've ever seen in the state. And so I do think it'll be a real interesting—and a real challenge for her, right, to govern in sort of this pragmatic way that we've had the fortune of for fifty years. Because there will be so many expectations and so much anticipation that the kind of politics she engages in will be like the politics that we're—we seem to have an appetite for—it's more nationalized. It's not necessarily—it's not nearly as parochial as it may have once been.

[00:58:56] JP: Yes. I think you're right. And I guess that's what I was thinking as I was saying—what I was trying to convey is I just think it has to do with whatever she decides Republican

means in Arkansas—Republican as it means for Arkansas for now. And it may mean that that's the Trump brand of Republicanism, and we're—we look a little more like a Georgia or a Florida for a while except, right, without these big urban centers that can kind of counterbalance things, but where the leadership is all in on kind of the red-meat version of whatever Republicanism is. [00:59:36] But when you look at the demographics of the country, that's gonna peter out in twenty to thirty years. So she's thirty-nine, and I guess that—and she's real smart, [*laughs*] right. So that's where I kind of wonder about—like the way she's running right now is totally what it takes to win. And all of that's clear, and it shouldn't surprise anyone. And I almost, like, with all my, you know, sort of peer group—like it shouldn't frighten or disgust them in any way, really. That all kind of confuses me because it's just like, "Well, this is just the politics of it. And of course she's nationalizing the race," you know, and it's like, "That's just how you win. That just makes her smart." I guess, if you wanna . . .

JD: And she—on that *This Week* in that grade A piece [*unclear words*]

[01:00:20] JP: Yes, which I thought was so interesting, and Andrew's story was so good. I love those thoughtful pieces that

he does, and he lands them in national media. It's just wonderful. Such a good reporter. But then, I don't know—it almost makes me wonder. And you know, again, I'm still a political person. So I try to think, "Okay, well, is this more wishful thinking on my part?" I'm interested in women being successful in politics. So that's interesting to me, sort of personally and professionally. But there's just a piece of me that also thinks she may—well, what is that in sailing, right, like where you—there's the tack—you know, tack to a different wind or something like that. Because I think she's smart enough to know and a young enough Republican to see that she needs to be—if she has national aspirations, I would be playing chess instead of checkers. [01:01:15] So right now, she only has to play checkers, right. It's a real easy game. Wind at her back. I like that. But I wonder if as governor for a term or two, she'll start playing more chess, which is that Trump-branded Republicanism is gonna fizzle out because the national demographics simply don't sustain it. It's why—and it might be going far afield, but I'm sure you've thought about this, too, and I wish more people could see it. It's so interesting, but it's why Republican Party politics I think, objectively, are somewhat more extreme right now with certain ones in terms of the rules and

bending the rules. Yes, you need to change the electorate's qualifications, because you need to shrink the electorate 'cause the electorate isn't with you. Yes, you need to gerrymander like nobody's ever gerrymandered before. You need to be better at it than the Democrats were when they were in charge. Because the demographics aren't with you. Yes, you need to nominate really young people through the court, you need to withstand when you should be approving nomination because there's a year left, and you need to ram nominations through when you can because the wind is not at the back of the National Republican Party as it is currently configured. So their tactics are the tactics of a dying brand that doesn't have—that can't—that can no longer marshal a national majority. [01:02:35] So if you're thirty-nine years old and you have the smarts and the charisma that apparently Sarah Huckabee Sanders has, I think she has to see those two things. She doesn't have to say them. She shouldn't say them right now. But that's where I'm real interested in what she's like in 2026, right, or 2028, 2030, that kind of thing, because she's still got a lot of years ahead of her. And this current configuration of leaders in the Republican Party, right, I guess other than Lynne Cheney and a handful of others, Mitt Romney, et cetera, that has an expiration date.

[01:03:15] JD: So we're kind of on this already. You've studied and written about demographics in the state. Where do you think we are in twenty or thirty years? Are we a Georgia or Texas where it's a little more interesting? Or are we where we are today, where, you know, we may be that area where the current Republican Party politics sticks for twenty or thirty years, even if it struggles nationally? Where do you think we are?

[01:03:46] JP: This reminds me of whether it's Mark Twain or—oh, who was the actor from *Designing Women*?

JD: Holbrook?

JP: Yes. Hal . . .

JD: Hal Holbrook.

JP: . . . Hal Holbrook. Right. When the world ends, I want to be in Arkansas, because everything here happens twenty years later. So some of those Southern states with big metropolitan areas, with cities, right, will flip, and those will become competitive, I think, for the foreseeable future. Because those—we kind of think like South versus North, right, or coasts versus inland, but it's really rural versus urban, and then the suburbs, right, are the swingers, the shifters, right. So it seems to me—because this was a little frustrating in 2018 and then 2020. You know, we're kind of armchair analysts, right, on the Facebook [*laughs*],

who almost always have PhDs in areas not political science. We're talking about how Arkansas, right, could be the next Georgia, right, if we can only register enough people and this kind of thing. And I would just like, [*gasps*] "People don't take that seriously, right?" It's like, "Oh, no, they do 'cause it's wishful thinking." But it's like, "No, you'd have to have an Atlanta. There is no what's happening in Georgia without Stacey Abrams, yes, absolutely. But you also have to have Atlanta. Like, you all understand that, right?" And it turns out that not everyone does. So when it happens, I think it'll be Northwest Arkansas, but I think, you know, it might not be twenty years, might be forty years. But the kind of person, right, who's relocating, and the amenities they expect, the things they're willing to pay for, how they want to live is gonna be the thing, right, that turns us into a Georgia, right, or a Texas. But far later than Georgia or Texas, right, are actually gonna be experiencing that. So I do think that eventually it changes. It's just that it's gonna be a really long time. And of course, you and I know the parties could be totally reconfigured at that point.

JD: Right.

[01:06:03] JP: 'Cause I think, right, we're in a period of realignment. We have a party that's crumbling and grasping at

straws. And that's a very strange thing to say when they have, right, trifecta control of two thirds or three quarters of the states, right. But nobody cares about that. [*Laughter*] You and I do. But I still contend, right, that they're gonna do everything they can in this round of reapportionment, right, and that'll prolong it. But it's a party that is in the death rattles. And it's a very slow-moving, right, labored breathing. But they're either gonna have to reconfigure or a new party system is—it is gonna rise, right, and maybe it'll come from that reconfiguring. So who knows, by the time Arkansas changes, right, the whole national landscape may have changed. Yeah.

[01:06:49] JD: Very insightful. Is there something we've missed? What are some closing thoughts on what we've seen over the last twenty years in particular? But really even ten or, I mean, you can go five years, in some ways, right. And you know . . .

JP: Yes.

JD: . . . at some point, right, we've become as incredibly solidly Republican as we were incredibly solidly Democratic in [20]08, right. And so just any final thoughts?

JP: I have to ask you if you've had a chance to talk to Clint Reed or anybody who was around. If—have you had a chance to ask them whether, in addition to the Obama factor and the collapse

of local media—so the nationalization and the local media is like, sort of part of that, though Arkansas's right media has hung on there—hung in there longer than most. And then the campaign finance landscape, right, also nationalizing the race. Have you asked anyone about the 2008 presidential primary, and the fact that we ran a dual primary for the first time in however many years? Right, we used to do it to disenfranchise people and to collapse the electorate, but when we did that, right, then we created this mailing list of people who'd been doing the presidential Republicanism, right. And I know that it might be hard for them to remember because, of course, we know the parties were building their own databases and their own voter targeting at that point, et cetera, but I also know it wasn't—2008 is a long time ago in terms of their technology in the parties. So have you talked about that? Did anybody say . . .

JD: It came up with Hal Bass.

JP: Okay.

JD: So Hal was the one who—I know he had talked about it before.

JP: Yeah.

JD: So he was able to discuss that a little bit. [01:08:43] What are—so what are your—why does that matter? Maybe start from the beginning. You know, why is that significant? What happens

in 2008?

[01:08:50] JP: I believe it was significant. And this is one of those things where it's only because of some other project that you even understand to ask the question. But because I did some voter targeting for a nonpartisan school board race right around 2000's races, 2006, 2007, 2008. Like right in that time period was the only experience I've had, and then some millage elections, so wha—so nonpartisan school board stuff. I got very interested in that. I started seeing what a voter database looks like, right. So at the county level, at the state level, et cetera. [01:09:24] And what I understood, finally, was that when the supermajority Democrat legislature in 2008, and the total—right, almost entirely it wasn't their deal. But this is a Democratically controlled state, every branch, right, every level in 2008, but they wanted to matter in the 2008 presidential contest. And when that happened, one of the things they did was move the—everybody talked about as we all—as states often do, right. Because you got the New Hampshire problem, you got the—maybe at South Carolina, you got the Iowa problem. And these aren't very representative, and nobody wants to buy money on our television channels or come visit us, and why can't we matter more, right. Well, we don't matter more, because we're

kind of little [*laughs*] but—and a foregone conclusion in presidential contests. [01:10:16] But our legislature decided, a supermajority Democrat legislature decided, well, what if we—they thought about moving it forward, right, to February, and as I remember, it was February 5. "Let's move the primaries forward." But then you have the problem of, well, the legislative candidates, right, they don't want to have it during that period, they've just come off a legislative session, like all these other things. So they made the brilliant decision [*laughs*] to say, well—they kind of split the baby, right. Like, "We'll run the presidential contest so that we can matter." And I can't remember if they officially called it an SEC primary that year or if that was until 2012, but it was kind of that idea, right. And we thought we'd be real special and we were real clever. But of course, a bunch of other states also moved it to February 5, if not earlier, and blah, blah, blah, and Arkansas still didn't matter, right, hardly a lick. [01:11:04] But by moving only the presidential primary to February and holding all the other primaries in the usual time, right, in May, the consequence was that we basically—the Democrats made a voter file that showed who was interested in voting Republican sometimes. Because prior to that time, right—and it's so hard to see unless you've

like seen a voter file, but it has the names, the addresses, which party profi—which party primary you participated in. And last time I looked, only like five states actually have that. So it's a public thing, which primary you participate in in Arkansas. It's part of like, "Did you vote, right?" Yes or no, you can see that. Did you vote absentee? Did you vote early? Did you vote at the polling place? All of that is public information that's available to anybody who wants it, right. So the candidates, their campaign professionals, their allies, the interest groups, right, whoever wants that information can get it. Plus, it has your date of birth, which tells you a lot about your likelihood of voting, as you know, and then your mailing address. And while your telephone number is almost always wrong, right, because of cell phones and because of when people register, your voting address, your mailing address, at least for, right, regular voters, they keep it up to date so they can keep voting, right. That's something they update regularly. [01:12:25] So it always seemed to me that the Democrats, in trying to be important in a presidential contest they stood no chance of influencing or even getting their candidate very far, actually handed a list of people to the Republicans who were likely Republican voters, who were probably sometimes Republican voters. Because prior to that

time, Republicans had no other candidates to vote for. Presidential contests were the only time. Not just that they did vote Republican, but that they even could vote Republican. Most Republicans didn't participate in the Republican presidential primary because that would mean they had to give up their votes for state legislature, for US House, if there was a US Senate seat, right, 'cause there were no other Republican candidates. They always had participated, often had participated in the Democratic primary and just kind of given up, sacrificed their presidential vote 'cause it was all decided by then anyway, right, nationwide who the nominee was going to be by May. But by making the separation, it just always felt to me like the Democrats had handcrafted a voter file for Republicans. [01:13:34] And then it just so happened to come at this nationalization, blow the lid off the money jar, Tea Party movement, urbane candidate on the Democratic side, that—all those things. Like it's just like—it's another thing that if—I guess I'm gonna go back to this metaphor of the dimmer switch, like it's another thing that was already on, I think, totally accidentally. And then that turned it all the way up. And I—what I'd love to know, and it's impossible, I think, to know, is whether any Democrats might have foreseen that coming. But

in 2008, how could the Democrats have seen that coming? They still were actually making inroads in what should have been, quote unquote, "a Republican state." So they would never be afraid of that in 2008. And then—but I want to know if some of the Republicans realized. But again, they might have been engrossed in their own voter files and whatever they could get from the national party. But if it were me doing the voter targeting, which I had, in fact, been doing, right, just in the Fayetteville school district, I totally would have been using that list, right. Like, "Oh, here's a list of people who usually vote Democrat, and I've just—I've been able to now sort them out. I've been able to parse them out of a list where they otherwise previously weren't identifiable because they were all just massed in there. I couldn't tell whether they were voting for some Republicans, right. They"—because, right, we have an open primary, right, in the sense that you got to go in and choose, but it's not a blanket primary, right. They don't get to go back and forth. And so they'd been either skipping, right, or voting for maybe the weakest Democrat on the presidential side. But they've been par—they'd had to—they've been forced to participate in the Democratic pre-funk for decades. And now they weren't. Now they could peel off. Does that make sense?

[01:15:19] JD: It does. And if we think about—even looking since then. I mean, 2014, we finally hit that historical milestone where there's more people participating in the GOP primary. And we see in rural parts of the state where previously—you had kind of a carryover to this where most of your—a lot of city council races would be settled in the Democratic primary, even though most of them were probably, even up till recently, voting Republican. But they would settle the issue early because who wants to have to do that all summer? And now—knock on doors in the heat and everything. We'll knock it out in the spring. And so I think you're right in that I don't know if it was realized.

JP: That's what I wonder.

[01:16:04] JD: But since then, we've seen a move away from the Democratic primaries, you've got more nonpartisan—those local elections, or they're partisan, but now we've got more people voting in the Republican ranks anyway. And all that happens, you've got to think, not just entirely—it's not just entirely all related to the unpopularity of a single guy who's elected to the White House, right.

JP: Yeah.

JD: Or the popularity of the next guy . . .

JP: Yeah.

JD: . . . who is elected to the White House. There's gonna be other things at play.

JP: Other things that are afoot.

JD: I think there has to be a key factor.

JP: And that one's so boring, right?

JD: Yeah.

[01:16:36] JP: It's so in the weeds. But it just feels like there are always people who are really smart in the room and the political strategists, right, I think are usually top among them. So they're just sitting back there watching, and it'd be so easy to claim credit for it now, I totally understand. Or to say, "Oh, no, no." 'Cause this could be true. We had our own voter targeting systems. We didn't need that. But never before had they had access to here are the people who are interested in voting Republican. We've actually sorted them out for you and their names and addresses.

[01:17:11] JD: Well, think in 2010—so you're Doyle Webb . . .

JP: Yeah.

JD: . . . your party chair in [20]09, in his own admittance, his own quotes, they were struggling. He is the first full-time party chairperson, which I think was a stroke of genius.

JP: Yes.

JD: The office was already—that—their office was already becoming a little more professionalized. But that was a big deal. And then you just sort of happen on this 2010, anti-Affordable Care Act, Tea Party movement. And so now you're scrambling. You went from a party that couldn't file for pe—couldn't convince people to run to now people who are, you know, wanting—remember the person in Central Arkansas? It was a city—I believe a city council race. She changed her na—her middle name to Republican because it was a nonpartisan contest. [01:18:01] So all this is going on, and say you're the state party chairperson, you're working with your county committees, you're scrambling. Who can we get to run? We have multiple people who are wanting to run now, but maybe they don't have that kind of background. Here's a voter file that I can offer you that is made to order, right.

JP: That's another—you know, think about that . . .

JD: It's better than one we would have given you two years ago.

JP: Yes, that's, that I even think about that use. And we didn't have to come to it, you know, through consumer data, or like all these other things where . . .

JD: And it was there. We didn't have to pull it quickly. Because that's the one thing I've caught by a lot of political operatives

between [20]08 and [20]10 was that they were shocked. It was a, you know, it was a fortuitous thing. But they were overwhelmed. They went from people having no interest in running to people wanting to run, but they were—a lot of them were political novices. Mark Darr, you know, someone like that running for lieutenant governor, who was not well known and also didn't have that kind of experience. So imagine being able to give a Candidate Darr something like this.

JP: Hey, by the way, this is easy.

JD: Here you go.

[01:19:03] JP: Or even if Candidate Darr, right, has somebody in his life, who knows, right, that the statewide voter file, all 1.2 million records or whatever, cost $2.50. And they'll give it to you on a, you know, a CD, and you can just open it in Excel because that's what it is. I mean, the counties, right, charge you $25, but they'll sort it for you however you want. So somebody in those people's lives, right, even for novices probably, they would have asked somebody to know that, "Oh, yeah, that's how you do that. You go down there, and you get it." And it's kind of surprising the information you can get about people. Oh my gosh, all of a sudden, we can see, if we're thinking at all, well, who participated in the Democratic primary

for president on February 5 of 2008, and who participated in the Republican primary on February 5 of 2008. And this is really one of only a handful of states where you can see that part. Usually it's just did the person vote or did they not vote? But here we actually offer that level of detail. And if you were ready with that information, boy, what a propitious, I guess, right, fortuitous confluence of events that would let you ride that current, right, such that it turned into a tsunami. Anyway, I think it's all super interesting. [*Laughs*] Let me know if you ever get to the bottom of it, if anybody ever claims credit for it, because that's totally what I would have done.

[01:20:30] JD: Well, Dr. Janine Parry, thank you so much for sitting down with me today and discussing this. And on behalf again of the Pryor Center, your insights are invaluable, and in just your ability to have been involved but from an observer's perspective, but also have the analytical skills and the ability to communicate it to various audiences over the years, you're really a very valuable asset in sort of capturing this historical moment. And thank you so much for your time.

JP: I really appreciate it. Thank you, Dr. John Davis for asking me to do it. And really, this is such a valuable contribution to Arkansas political history. So thanks for including me.

JD: Thank you.

[End of interview 01:21:30]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]