

Trent Lott Interview

Question:

Herding Cats, huh? [Laughs]

Question:

[**:44**] After I had been in Washington for 3 years as administrative assistant to Congressman Calmer, I had then had 2 young children, a son that would have been I guess about 3 and a new baby girl, and I decided that you know that it wasn't clear to me when he was going to retire or anything, and it was time to go back to my hometown, Pascagoula, Mississippi, practice law and go on with my life there, maybe run for local office or something you know. But when I went in to see him in the late fall, maybe early winter, of 1971, he said, Well, he was thinking about retiring and would I be willing to hold off until after the first of the year when he was going to make the decision. I told him I would. Then he did call me in, I think in late February and said he had decided he was not going to seek reelection. He was then 82, he'd been in Congress 40 years. So then I took a couple weeks and labored with the decision. But decided that I did want to run. The interesting part for my wife and me was that we really concluded by then that we were Republicans, even though I'd been working for him as a Democrat. He was a conservative Democrat, and I just didn't feel comfortable running as a Democrat so I went in and told him I was planning on running and that I would run as a Republican. And he paused, he thought about that, very thoughtful, wonderful old gentleman, he said, Well, I admire your courage and I understand your decision, but I fear you're embarking on a hopeless crusade.

[**2:21**] Well, I was 31 years old, my heart sank, I have a young family. But I had made the decision that I would run and I thought

that I had an opportunity. I knew a lot of people and I had a lot of young people that I had met in college and known through the JC's and various and sundry other places and I just felt like it was the right time and the right thing to do.

Question:

[2:49] Because he – I think there was one or two elected Republican officials in the entire Congressional district. This was 1972. So he really doubted that I could win as a Republican, even though he had done a number of things to give me the opportunity to get to know his people, his campaign organization, his financial people and to make speeches on his behalf. So he had given me lots of opportunities to get in a position where maybe I could run. I don't know if he ever really thought that I would, but then when I did say in addition to the fact that I planned to run I was going to run as a Republican, I think he was a little bit surprised by that, although his best friends, many of his best friends were Republicans in the House in those days. So that's what it was – he just doubted that I could win as a Republican but I had studied the district and the demographics pretty carefully and I just felt like it was the time when a Republican could win there.

Question:

[4:06] Well, first of all, I just felt it was the right thing, and I knew it was the right thing for me. I just didn't – I just felt like I'd be a fraud if I ran as a Democrat when I had learned after three and a half years in Washington that I really was not a Democrat and I realized that most of the people in south Mississippi would not identify with the Democrats in Washington. Keep in mind now, the Democrats who were in power then, you had Lyndon Johnson, you had the Kennedys and McGovern and the Humphreys, that was just not the people and the philosophy that the people in that district identified with. So then I looked at the age demographics,

the fact that we had a number of retired military people that were there, very active business community, it's not, would not be considered sort of a traditional southern district. This is a very progressive district in many respects, higher educated than the rest of the state of Mississippi, lower percentage of minority – I think they only had like 17 or 18% minority. And when I kept looking at those numbers, I just thought that I could do it. The other part of it is, it just seemed like it was the right thing to do, and I had confidence that if I had enough time and could get a relatively small amount that I could get my message out to the people and could win it. Really, you look back on it, in 1972, I think I only spent like \$119,000 for the entire campaign. The primary, where I had 3 opponents, and the general where we had an independent and I think 14 Democrats that had run but of course an independent and a Democrat in the general.

Question:

[5:52] Right, the primary campaign. It was not something to take lightly at all because I had not been in the Republican network. I didn't know a lot of the Republican Party leaders around the district, and I had 2 credible Republican opponents. Past state finance chairman named Buddy Klum [?] a great guy who wound up spending more money to help me in the general than he did to get himself nominated. He was that kind of a great guy. I didn't know him really. I knew his name. But as we went around to different forums, he and I were just in agreement on everything, and I think that's one reason why he wound up supporting me aggressively. The other one was, had been the Republican mayor of one of the larger towns in the district. So he was credible. Then one other one that run that you know really was kind of an unusual sort of fellow.

Question:

[6:54] Well, I had had some Republican leaders that had called me and urged me to do this. I had met them some of them along the way and in my hometown a number of doctors called me to one of their houses and sat down and said, We both think you should run. We think you should run as a Republican. We're going to commit to you right here tonight. We're going to raise you \$10,000. Which I thought was an astronomical amount of money. In today's world that is just not much. But I had – I knew some of the Republican leadership around the district. As soon as I made the announcement of course I left Mr. Calmer's payroll and went home in April of 1972, and the first thing I did was to get in the car and go around the district and meet with the state county party chairman in every county wherever I could. I met with the party at a dinner where I could speak to party members or party officials in those counties. Established a pretty good relationship pretty quickly. Now I wound up getting 70% of the Republican primary. That sounds pretty good. The problem was, it was 7,000 votes. There were only 10,000 votes, little over 10,000 votes cast in the Republican primary.

[8:09] But to my surprise and pleasure, a couple of the newspapers reported that "Republican candidate Trent Lott gets 70% of the Republican vote." So that worked out beautifully! I mean, again, when you look back on it, maybe it was a little bit brazen for me to even think I could do that. [8:25] But I was young and full of energy and I did have a lot of experience. My campaign slogan was "Experience Means a Lott in Congress," and that was my bumper sticker. I was one of those that even in 1972 I didn't hide the fact that I was running as a Republican. Lot of Republicans in those days, they wouldn't have Republican on their bumper stickers or on the yard signs. They kind of tried to hide that. But I thought it was the right year to actually say, now I've been up there, I've worked in Washington, I worked with Mr. Calmer, I've seen the 2 parties, the Republican Party is where I belong and I

believe that's where the people should vote.

[9:02] Now when I first started off in the general election, I'd go into these smaller towns and I could see the old guys there sitting on the bench out in front of the country store or the country courthouse. They didn't know about this young fellow, that even though I'd worked with Bill Calmer, they just didn't know. Most of them never met a live Republican. So at least I was a novelty and drew interest because I was, you know, sort of different. Because I was sort of young, running as a Republican and had worked for the beloved congressman Bill Calmer.

Question:

[9:54] Well, first of all, in those days your job as administrative assistant to the congressman, you know, the staff was like 5 or 6. So the administrative assistant did the administrative work, a lot of the legislative work and the press and drove the congressman. I did all of that, so it was a little bit more than legislative or administrative. I didn't really think about it then and didn't for years later but I grew up in a political family. My mother's father was a justice of the peace and rode a horse on the justice of peace circuit. My father's father was a member of the board of supervisors and went on to be the President of the State Board of Supervisors Association. I had an uncle that I was very close to, that was a state senator. I remember handing out his push cards when I was, I don't know how old I would have been, 5 maybe, at political rallies. So I'd been around it all my life and I'd heard it discussed all my life. My grandfather was pretty politically involved. I remember he had been involved in a congressional race. I'd been, you know, was in student leadership positions in high school and in college. I'd been involved in campus politics, so I wasn't, I'd never been in a real campaign, but I read the book, you know, on how to win your election without hardly even cheating. And so I did it, I'm sort of an organization sort of guy,

and I had a chart, you know, and I filled in the boxes, the campaign manager, finance chairman, finance committee, and every county I had a county chairman, a county finance chairman and a county precinct worker or leader. And I put a name in every box in every county. After the primary I moved in and was able to gather up a lot of my opponent's primary opponent. They had a run-off, and the run-off was kind of tough and so a lot of the supporters of the losing Democrat and he was sort of the more conservative Democrat came over pretty much en bloc to me.

[12:09] I had never run for office before, but it didn't seem like anything really that new. I enjoyed it. It was the most exhausting thing I've ever done in my – the strongest opponent I ever had was my first one. We're friends to this day. He was a state senator. He was like 36 and I was 31 and he was Chairman of the State Senate Banking Committee, and he had a lot of the big establishment, the local newspaper, the local television station, you know, were actively for him, so you know he was tough. And I had to – I worked so hard in that last two weeks before that general election I basically got barely sleep and lived mostly on coffee. I was going full out from 6 o'clock until 10 o'clock every day.

Question:

[13:08] Sure, yeah. You know, I never had another election that was that tough, even though I ran statewide in '88 and I had a very credible opponent. By then, I learned what I could do, what was effective, how to pace myself. I'd gotten a little bit more scientific about where the votes were and how to get to them. It was frankly a fun campaign and a relatively easy campaign. But that first one, I was really, I was determined I was going to out-work my opponent, which I did, and the last couple of weeks he kind of gave up. He saw it coming. But you know going right on in to September, I was running behind. I only had one poll. We took one little small poll in September that showed me within, I forgot

what the number was, but within 3 or 4 points of my Democratic opponent. And I knew then I could beat him because I had momentum and of course another factor in that campaign, you have to admit, was the national politics. Nixon in 1972 went on to win that district by about 80[?]% . So there was clearly pull at the top. But the definitive moment actually came about two weeks before the general election when some of my friends in the district had been talking to Mr. Calmer and been writing him and finally a lawyer wrote him a letter said, You know, Mr. Calmer, we all supported you, we love you, we think it's important we get the right person in this position. And we really want to know who you think should be your successor. And he wrote back this beautiful letter which I have kept, and the thrust of it was, You know, the people have been so good to me and given me the honor of representing them for 40 years and I don't think it's incumbent on me to try to tell them how to vote. But as for myself, I will vote for that dedicated young American, Trent Lott. He sent me a copy of it with a note, Use this as you see fit. Well, the next day I had a quarter-page ad in every weekly and daily in the district. And it was over. I wound up winning going away. I went up 15, 5 point something, 3 or 4 percent. Which was pretty good victory.

Question:

[15:26] Yeah, I was prepared for him not to be involved because he was not – that letter really, I was surprised. I never talked to him about it. I never asked him to endorse me. I talked to him about how to do different things and people that I could talk to. He was very careful about that. But I didn't want to put him in any kind of an embarrassing or awkward position, so I was really quite pleased. And it was worded typically the way he would word it, you know. He'd been an English teacher and he had a very good command of the English language.

Question:

[16:17] Yeah, yeah, I think he was – he'd been a district attorney before he was – he'd been a county attorney and he'd been a congressman for 40 years. He'd been through a lot. And he had a great deal of wisdom, was a very wise old gentleman. In fact, I went to see him the month before he died. In September of 1980 I was the Reagan State Chairman, and I went to see him in September and I said, Look, Mr. Calmer, we're struggling in Mississippi. President Reagan's opponent is you know is a Southern Baptist guy from Georgia, and are we going to be able to win this? And he gave me some very thoughtful advice which I immediately went out and employed and he died a month later. He was all for Reagan, but I used some of the techniques that he recommended to me, some of the moves that helped us wind up carrying the state for Reagan by about 10,000 votes.

Question:

[17:34] But, yeah, I think maybe he – [side talk] – I think he realized that it would be better if he waited. I'm not sure he thought he would endorse me. But it could be he just knew that it would have a greater effect if he waited late. But I never pressed him on it. I thought that would have been inappropriate.

Question:

[18:17] Well, there are 2 or 3 things. First of all, I found that I had a natural knack for the legislative process and I didn't know that. But I really developed an interest in how the House worked and how bills became law. And I also found it was something I was comfortable with and I understood and could move into pretty quickly. And I had not necessarily anticipated that. I found out later that some people are good at it and some are not. I had an administrative assistant that worked for me for like 17 years. Best office manager, best handling of people, best organizer, just fantastic. But had no perception of the legislative process. It just

didn't register with him. He wasn't interested in it. He didn't get it. So I learned over the years, some people are natural, instinctive legislators and some are not. So that was one thing. I found it was something I enjoyed.

[19:18] In those days, there were a lot of pretty elegant statesmen that I did admire, and I thought it would be a great honor to be a member of Congress, looking at what I saw in those days, some of the gentle men that I got to know, people, you know, really nice people like Jerry Ford, you know, I could give you a whole list of congressman, Les Arends, who was the Republican whip from Illinois, had his office right down the hall from us. I got to know him, just loved him. So I was interested in the, trying to be in the presence of people like that, and I thought it would be a great honor. But I also found the legislative process extremely interesting.

Question:

[20:14] Oh, I did a – I'm from the South and I'm a Southern Baptist. I thought about it a lot and I prayed about it a lot. I talked about it with my wife a lot. And I talked about it with 2 or 3 people that I really respected and needed their advice and counsel, the senior partner in the law firm I practiced in was like a second father to me and had been in politics himself. He'd been a county attorney, he went on to be a long-time judge. So I counseled with him. He urged me to do it. My whole law firm that I was only with about a year, they really thought it was a great idea and encouraged me and supported me. And that senior partner took off a whole month from the law practice to campaign with me and for me. So it was difficult because I was young. I had a wonderful wife, two young children, no money. I came from a blue-collar family. I think I wound up, we might have had \$2,000 in the bank and I put it all in the campaign. When the campaign was over, I was flat broke. I couldn't even afford to out of town to stay

somewhere for a couple of days to just rest. We didn't have nothing.

[21:34] So I had to weigh all of that. I did have the confidence from my old law firm that if it didn't work out, I could come home. My office was still sitting there, they never put anybody else in my office. I'd have been in the office practicing law the Monday after the election. So that was, that gave me a certain degree of comfort, because I didn't have anything, I didn't own a house. I didn't even own a car, I had a car, but I was paying on it. That was a lot of it was, is this too much of a burden for my family. But my wife was, she was ready to go, and that made a big difference.

Question:

[22:17] Uh, my father had been killed in a car wreck December 7, 1969. So he was deceased. My mother, you know, had taught school and been a bookkeeper, worked at a radio station, but she was working I think part-time. I remember calling her, too, saying, Mother, I'm going to run for Congress. She said, Oh, great, I'll get my friends in the library and B&PW club and we'll get out there and work. I said, Mother, I'm going to run as a Republican. She said, Oh, my God! Like, you know, again, I had just blown it. It was so funny, though. I guess Mother would have been, I don't know, in her 60s then. By the time she passed away at 92, she thought she was the original Republican and I followed her.

[Laughs] But she really was. I talk about it in my book about the first time I ever heard any partisan discussion that made any kind of impression on me was 1952, I'm just a kid, what, 9 years old, no 11 years old, I guess, and my mother and dad were arguing over who to vote for for President. My mother was for Eisenhower. And I was kind of stunned by that, that they would disagree and my mother would have the temerity to be disagreeing with my father on a Presidential election, so it was an awakening moment for me.

Question:

[23:52] Members of Congress and staff members that I'd gotten to know, they all said, Yeah, go for it. Go for it. Jerry Ford probably delivered me one of my first checks. He came to Mr. Calmer's office to give me a check for my campaign.

Question:

[24:15] He ran a couple of negative ones. By comparison to today's ads it was pretty mild, but you know. He said, Trent Lott's not a Republican. He's a quitter. And that one really boiled, that really got me agitated. And there were a couple of others. I actually had a moment. I think I might have written about it in my book where I actually went to Mr. Calmer's house and sat down and said, Mr. Calmer, this is what I had planned on doing, but since Stone's running these negative ads, should I respond to that in kind or should I just go on with my plan? He said, Forget what he's doing. You do your thing. Stay on message. Keep doing what you're doing. You'll be fine. And that's what I did.

Question:

[25:04] You know, there's one political writer in Mississippi that's never liked me and ripped me for years and he used to say that Trent Lott had this all planned all along. 'Scuse me? I'm from Pascagoula, Mississippi with a blue collar background. I never had any idea frankly, until right 2 or 3 years before I graduated from law school who congressmen were or what they – had no idea what they did. I never would have thought I'd have run for Congress. I'd have thought I might have run for district attorney, I might have even run for the Legislature. Events presented themselves, and once I got elected, I always said I wouldn't stay 40 years because I felt like a lot of members of Congress stayed too long, and then I didn't want to stay until I was a teetering old man.

Well, I did wind up staying 35 years, 16 in the House and 19 in the Senate. But I finally did say, You know what? It's time to make a move. So I didn't have a vision of how long I would stay or what I would do. I knew that I wanted to get on the Rules Committee, took me 2 years to do that. And then a few years after that by 1978 there was a leadership slot open, Chairman of the Research Committee. I said, You know what? I think I can win that. So I had 2 opponents, so I ran and won that. And then 2 years later, 1980, I hesitated, hesitated, but then I thought, You know, I believe I can, I've got a great relationship with all these people, I believe I can be elected Whip. Again, I kind of started late and I barely won, but I think it was 96 to 92, had a very credible opponent. I hadn't planned all that. A lot of people thought that maybe I was aiming to be Speaker someday. But I never really, I didn't really think about that. I guess I always really kind of had in mind that I might run for the Senate if the opportunity came along. It came along in 1978 but I was enjoying the House and I made the conscious decision to not run in 1978. That's when Senator Cochran was elected to succeed Jim Eastland. But then 10 years later, it looked like maybe Stennis was going to retire and it just seemed like the right time to make the move. A lot of people said, You're going to give up being Whip in the House and run for the Senate? And I said, Yeah, I've been here 16 years, I've been in leadership 8 years. Time for me to go up or out. So I ran for it and was able to win the Senate.

Question:

[28:05] Well, I think, like I said at the beginning, it's just physically exhausting. I mean, it's the hardest work you'll ever do. Because you're your own stage basically all day every day and you're going from one small town to another. I wound up having campaign caravans where we'd hit 8 or 9 towns in a day. And I did that for 7 days running. It was tough. Also, I was a little

surprised at the beginning how – now, keep in mind, I'm 31 years old when I was running; I had just turned 32 when I got elected – so they would look at me like, Okay, you work for Mr. Calmer but he's running as a Republican, gosh, he's young, 32. I was a little surprised that they pretty hesitant and I thought they would be more accepting of what I was doing. It took time to bring them along. But I saw the change. I'd go back toward the end of the campaign, some of the same towns, same people, that I could tell they were saying, Uh, I don't think so. By the time I came back, they were giving me the nod and the go-ahead and I could sense the momentum was there. I just actually it was a lot of fun. I enjoyed it. I enjoy campaigning. I enjoy people. I love to work a crowd, be with people, and I like old people, I like working country farm people, and I found that particularly with country people and with old people, if you like them and you're comfortable with them, they know it. They sense it. If you're not – I used to work the ship docks, where you know you had blue collar, longshoreman, African-American, union members – but I went down there because I had a blue collar background and they sensed that I was comfortable with them, that I liked them and I appreciated what they were doing. So that was very enjoyable to me. And my wife worked the shipyard docks, which I think stunned them. Here comes this 30-year-old beautiful, you know, former Miss Pascagoula beauty queen down there on the docks, shaking hands with the ship workers. She turned out to be a great campaigner, too.

Question:

[30:38] Well, I, you know, I'd never run for anything before I ran the first time for Congress. And I didn't, it was much bigger and much harder than I thought it would be. I did not like fundraising. That was a problem for me, so I had to set up an apparatus of others to raise the money. You know, I had to – I didn't know for

sure how I would adjust out there sort of in the trenches, but I was comfortable once I got there and was pleased that I felt about it the way I did. I had some mornings I was so tired [inaudible], I'd get up, eat breakfast, go to the bathroom and throw it up, put on my clothes and go hit the campaign trail.

Question:

[31:31] Well, it just, you know, you had to – I always kept my phone listed so I'd get phone calls at wee hours of the night and you know I had to get up. I remember the ones I did not like were the ones where I had to get up like 5:30 or 6 o'clock and drive 70 miles to speak at a breakfast. So you're groggy and you're driving yourself. I didn't, toward the, right up until the end finally my campaign manager said, You know, you gotta quit driving yourself. We're going to put an assistant in the car with you to drive you, help you write notes and deal with crowds and besides that, you're not in any kind of shape to be driving yourself. But for a long time, I bummed around the district in a car by myself. And then of course closer toward the end, you wind up getting on a single-engine airplanes with young pilots that you never saw before, thinking, Oh, Lord, what am I doing here? Flying in a small aircraft did bug me. I didn't like that. I don't think I've ever flown in a small plane before my campaign. But in the end, you just got to get to so many places to fast, so you drive from one part of the district on the east side, drive to the west side, get in a plane to fly to the northeast side and back that night to the southern part of the district. You gotta be everywhere at once.

Question:

[33:11] No, no, I had thought when I finished law school and went back to my hometown that I might run for office, but the year that I went back to my hometown, I went back – I graduated I guess in June and I went right on down to my hometown at the law firm –

and it was an election year. Some people said, Why don't you run for the Legislature? I said, Look, I have no money. I just graduated law school. I got a wife. Well, I had a son – she's pregnant. My son was born in September. Premature. I did get involved. I was the youth campaign manager for the candidate for governor that year, and my law partners were for 2 other candidates. My candidate won. We had a little pool, a little wager in the firm – there were only 4 lawyers in the firm on who would win 12 different races, and I picked 11 out of 12. The other guy said, Hey, what's going on here? What do you know? I said, Well, you know, I've been out there moving around and I just know a lot of these people, and I felt like this one or that one would win. But so what was the question?

Question:

[34:38] Uh, it's different but really it's the same, too. The way you – see, I believe the way you are an effective legislator is you do it one on one. It's not just about the language of the bill, the tax bill, the defense bill, it's about what's in that bill that should be passed and how do you get this congressman or that congressman, Democrat or Republican, liberal or conservative or moderate, to vote for a package. So really it's the same. Life is just a big campaign. The way you deal with your family, the way you deal with your church, the way you deal with your civic club, the way you legislate. Personal skills and communications and contacts is the way you get things done. When you build contacts and confidence with people, that's how you move events.

Question:

[35:55] Well, the people can be fickle. Sometimes they looking for one thing and sometimes they're looking for another. I think you know in my case, I think they kind of said, You know, there's a guy who's been up there, he worked for Mr. Calmer, he must be

okay. He's got a lot of energy. Why don't we give a young guy a chance? I kind of felt that that was the mood towards me and they were saying, You know, let's give this young whippersnapper a chance and see how he does. So that, you get a sense of what people are thinking and how they feel about how you're campaigning. Appearance makes a difference, you know. I remember one time I campaigned for a guy who was running for the Senate in Florida. He was a former Air Force officer, and he always wore dark blue suits and light blue shirts and red ties cinched up to the neck. He's campaigning in Florida! I said to him, Man, drop the coat! Throw that tie away. Get down the button down. Roll up your sleeves and get with the people. When I ran for the Senate in '88, some people were curious about that. I didn't campaign in a shirt and tie. I campaigned in a plaid shirt and khaki pants or blue. But I was casual. I mean it didn't make any sense to be campaigning in Mississippi in August all cinched up like a Wall Street lawyer. So how you look and how people feel about you, every little thing makes a difference.

Question:

[37:32] No, I never was much of a – you know, I'd get rid of that coat and I'd roll up my sleeves. For the most part, I did wear a tie. Remember I was trying to overcome a little bit the age factor. So I had to give a little bit of an appearance, okay, well, this is what I want my Congressman to look like. When I was running for the Senate, I had a little more – since I'd been in Congress a long time and I'd been in leadership, I had more latitude to loosen up a little bit. People want that, too.

Question:

[38:24] I don't think ego was much of a factor in that first race. I really I felt like this was something I wanted to do, that I could do, where maybe I could make a difference. I think probably in later

years it got to be a little bit more that, a little bit more have people run against you and you're almost a little bit offended that they would, after all you've worked so hard and what you've been doing, that they'd run against you. Which is not a good attitude. But it does kind of set in after a while. Because the caliber of the opponents went down with the years and yet I don't know how many times I wound up running, probably a dozen times all told, I had an opponent every time but one. I was unopposed only in 1978.

Question:

[39:20] Well, a lot of it is, are they comfortable with you? Do they like you? Or, it's a fact that more people have an opponent who loses, than they win. So people do vote against people, that's one factor. So you want – it's best if you're a candidate or if you have a candidate who people do look at and they feel comfortable with and they like them, but a lot of people get elected because they don't like their opponent. One phenomenon that has developed and I experienced it a little bit in 1972, you are affected some time by bigger events, by the Presidential election, they pull you up or they pull you down. So external events do kick in, but there are a lot of – I think people at least in my part of the country - it may be different, I mean, they're looking to check the book, the box. What's his background? Is he experienced? Was he a businessman? Was he a lawyer? Is the family from here? Where did he go to school? Is he married? Does he have children? What church does he go to? That all comes into play.

Question:

[40:42] Well, I'm - I grew up First Baptist Church, Pascagoula. The majority of the people in south Mississippi are Southern Baptists, but we have a large - in my hometown probably 40, 50% are Catholic. So but I was comfortable in that community, too,

because I grew up with them. I'd go to their - I went to the Catholic Church with some of my buddies. But there's no question that where you went to school - you get the alumni of that school to - every town I went into I'd go back to see the pharmacist because more than likely the pharmacist went to the University of Mississippi Pharmacy School. Only Pharmacy School in the state. Nine times out of ten, I was right. And I had two or three pharmacists who were my county chairmen. And everybody loves the pharmacist, so you had the, you know, I had the old guys that worked with my dad in shipyard. I'm running as a Republican, they're probably old school Democrats, but they knew my dad, so they said, Well, we knew Chester so you must be okay. And then alumni says the same thing and then my fraternity brothers, had a lot of guys that were in the same fraternity that I was in. So I knew them very well, and they were supportive. I was active in the JC's and been to state convention of the JC's, so I had the network of young men and women that had been JC's and I remember one county I couldn't get any of the elected officials, the old political leaders to support me, so I built my whole campaign around young people that were mostly in their 20s and I carried the county because they were energetic, they worked hard.

[42:20] I also found that my youth did help to this extent, I had a lot of young people, including high school students were for me and I wound up toward the end having a parent stop me on the sidewalk and say, I don't know you and I wasn't going to vote for you but my daughter's for you. I want to know who you are. Because I had worked in the high schools and so that served me very well. I had a lot of very young people that got out there and put out bumper stickers and put up signs and worked hard for me and two towns in particularly, Gulfport, Mississippi, and Ocean Springs, Mississippi.

Question:

[43:03] Again, one of my strategies based on my study of the district and campaigns, I worked the hardest early on the furthest away from my hometown. I worked the hinterlands, the rural areas, much more aggressively at the beginning, rather than the coastal towns where I was from and better know. Then as the campaign got closer and closer and closer, I pulled closer and closer and closer into where the big votes were and into my home area. Election morning, I was at the shipyard gate at 5 o'clock to get the two shifts that would come into that shipyard at 6, 7, 8 o'clock, because you had the workers come in at 7 and the office people at 9 so I would shift from the gate to the office administration building on election morning. Then I went and had coffee at the local coffee shop. Then I worked the 3 o'clock shift coming out of the paper mill because they went in early, come out early. Then I worked the gate but you had to stand away from the gate. I waved at the workers come out of the shipyard because they run over you if you try to stop them coming out. They'll stop and take your card going in, but you try to give them something coming out, you get killed. And then I voted in my home precinct and went home, cleaned up, had a victory celebration at the local motel, the Lafont Inn in Pascagoula, stayed there for a couple of hours, then drove over to Gulfport to the Gulfport Holiday Inn where all of my, that was where my state, I mean my district campaign headquarters was and spent the rest of the night there in Gulfport, Mississippi. Holiday Inn. The building's still there.

Question:

[44:54] I probably would have come on back to Pascagoula and gone on back to practicing law and three years later probably run for county attorney and maybe district attorney. But maybe neither, you know. You never know what life really holds for you. It was funny, though, I never, it never, I never really thought I'd lose. I always thought I'd win. I think it's a part of winning. If

you really believe you're going to win and you work that way, I think chances are better that you will win.

Question:

[45:46] Well, organization skill for one thing. You know, I did it by the book. I really paid attention to getting the right people in the right slot and encouraged them and supporting them. I found that I had and I still - not sure sometime how that worked - but I found that I was able to get people to give of their own time and work hard to help me get elected. I wound up with a huge organization. And I think that, while I'd always liked people and been involved in campus politics, I think that just realizing that I enjoyed communicating with people, really liked it, you never it until you get into it, but a lot of people think it's hard and they don't like it. But some and I guess that probably do the best actually do enjoy and like meeting people, and I do and I do to this day.

Question:

[47:02] That's right. Well, I learned some different techniques. First of all, I was really fortunate that in all my campaigns for the House and the Senate I never had a really dirty opponent. They ran some negative spots. Ben Stone did. So did Wayne Dowdy. But they were fair enough. They attacked me for some of my votes or Ben Stone said, Oh, well, Trent Lott goes up there, everybody up there's a Democrat, he won't be able to get anything done. So that's fair enough. So but I also found out that in modern days if you're getting hammered with negative ads, you gotta deal with them. I still think that negativity for negativity's sake or one negative ad begets another negative ad is a losing strategy, for one thing, that's just not my style and I would hate it. And that's one reason why I finally said, You know, this thing is getting so hard to get anything positive done. It's getting so hard

to be bipartisan. One of the things I was criticized for was being a compromiser. Yeah? You want to get anything done legislatively, you gotta be prepared to give a little, get a little to move the ball down to get something done. But I also found by the time I ran for the Senate that the way to respond to a negative ad is what I call “rocking the snowball”. It’s a negative spot, but it’s with a sense of humor and with a twist at the end where you’re responding to their negativity but you’re doing it in a way that makes people kind of laugh, they say, Yeah, that’s good. So if you can do a negative ad but put a twist at the end of it, it has a less I think negative effect. You can just wipe out - in fact I had a spot that I ran in 1988 that got some kind of a national award for the best negative response ad and it wound up, it was - people across the board liked it. Well, I don’t want to get into it unless you just want to get into it, but that’s the way I think I would try to respond to it. Humor is also good in a campaign.

Question:

[49:29] Well, if you just you know if you can you know you can always use anything that will make people kind of laugh at a spot or animals, you always can bring in animals to in effect hammer your opponent but they laugh at it because it’s an animal that’s doing it perhaps.

Question:

[49:55] Yeah, when I was in college, the first night I was probably the first Friday night on the campus we had fraternity pledging where you pick your fraternity and we wound up four of us standing around a piano and we started to sing and we decided, Hey, we sound pretty good. And one of the four was a tenor by the name of Guy Hovis, he wound up going to - after we graduated we sang together for four years - and we graduated he said, Let’s go to California. We think this is - there’s the Kingston Trio, the

Brothers Four, you probably don't even know those names. But the kind of music we sang was very popular and he thought we could go California maybe make a go of it. But the other two, the baritone and the bass both had been in ROTC and had active duty commitments and I was, had opted to go and go to law school first because I was afraid if I ever went out and got another job or went in the military I wouldn't come back to law school. So we basically just said, No, we're not going. So he got in 1963 Pontiac and off he went to California where he stayed 21 years. But he was a regular on the Lawrence Welk Show and people watch him all the time. I didn't realize when I first got him committed to come, you know, sing with me or to sing at my events how hugely popular he was. So when in Gulfport, Mississippi, in September, I had another one of fraternity brothers who was then a lawyer in Gulfport to chair an event where we had event there at the high school auditorium where I was going to speak and Guy Hovis was going to sing.

[51:30] Well, when we got there and I pulled back the curtain and peered out at the audience, it was a sea of silver hair. The room was packed with all these Lawrence Welk people that watched Lawrence Welk. And it was a hugely successful event and helped me - that, he sang with me all over the - well, we traveled together and he sang and then when I ran for the Senate we actually sang together some. And my son sang and we'd go into little towns and they'd go into the square and they'd get up the two of them would sing and then I would work the square and then I'd come up and speak when they got through singing and they'd break down their equipment and go on to the next town. Start singing, draw the crowd, I'd follow behind them. So he was a great asset in the campaign.

Question:

[52:14] Well, one of the - yeah. A campaign really can be about

entertainment. And I'm a firm believer, I always use music in my campaigns because [inaudible] people, lot of people and I see people in airports who, I remember you. You're that singer that sang "Elvira". It's funny how people will identify you that way. Now some people might say, Him being a singer, singing "Elvira"? Isn't that demeaning for a Senator? No, that's part of the problem with the Senators and with the Senate. They think they're you know what? They're too aloof. They don't want to get down and get a little music, you know, and get a little spirit. Shoot! People love that.

Question:

[53:12] I think it'd still work.

Question:

[53:18] Not a whole lot. You know, now, of course, where I'm from it's quite common to run and be elected as a Republican. In fact, most of the Congressmen and Senators in the South now are Republicans. When I ran and was elected, I was only the third Republican - well, actually I was tied with another guy to be the second and third Republicans elected since the 1880s in Mississippi. But now the Mississippi delegation is 5 Republicans, 1 Democrat.

Question:

[54:06] Well, just that you better pay attention to organization. You better know who you are. You better make sure your family is ready to make the sacrifice. You better make sure that you have some contacts where you can build an organization that can help you get elected. But you know the first thing I say to candidates every time I meet with them, is, do your organizational work. Don't get out there and just think you can run it out of your back pocket. And don't try to run your campaign yourself. You're the

candidate. You're not the campaign manager, and they're different.

Question:

[54:42] A guy named Glover Roberts. He had been through some campaigns, he had worked in Washington. And then I had another guy that handled all my media, ran my campaign headquarters who actually became my chief of staff for 17 years, Tom Anderson.

Question:

[55:00] Oh, yeah, one of the things, they both had to - well, they realized and I realized I was not the best fundraiser. So Tommy Anderson kind of took that on as something that he from a staff point really stayed behind and promoted. The other one was the campaign manager had to make sure I understood as time went along that I couldn't micromanage the campaign. And we were good enough friends, he could say, Look, you gotta get out here. Let me do this. You can't be continuing to pore over these lists. You gotta be out there campaigning. And then little things like saying, You shouldn't be driving yourself. You're dangerous and it's a distraction and you could cover more territory if you had somebody to help you. That's the kind of thing a campaign manager has got to be able to do with the candidate, but the most important thing is the candidate needs to have people he trusts, let them do their job and let him be the candidate. Don't try to run it all yourself. You just can't do it.

Question:

[56:14] Well, as time went by, I learned some lessons. I did learn to pace myself better. I pretty much developed a rule: I'd do a breakfast or a dinner. But not both in the same day. I'd always tell them, I will do anything you want me to do between 8 AM and 9, but between 9 PM and 8 AM, I am not going to be drug into some

bar to campaign. So you gotta - I learned very quickly particularly when I got to Congress, you will either manager your schedule or it will manage you. So I laid down ground rules of what I would do, what I would not do and made sure my scheduler understood that. Learned to pace myself. Because as you get older - when you're 32, you got endless energy. You just almost can't be wiped out. But when you're 52, you gotta make sure you know what your body will endure. Because, by the way, particularly if you're - I remember one time, my opponent had set me up. I was running for reelection in 1976 and my opponent set me up in a debate in his hometown, sponsored by the American local women's league or something like that. And I didn't know it, but he had arranged to have a camera to film it. And I had been on the campaign trail and driving myself, so I pull up behind the Civic Center where the event was going to be. I'm exhausted, so I lay down on the seat to take a nap. You know, I slept 30, 40 minutes and I got up and went in for the event, groggy, tired. And I get in there and the auditorium is packed. And we're on the stage and the moderator is a really aggressive woman that I knew was not for me. And I saw that camera sitting over there and I said, Oooh, I have been set up. And I was - now, but as it turned out I got through it okay. He didn't get any film that he could use in a negative way. But that was a low point in my campaign, because I staggered in there unprepared, alone, and exhausted and a set-up deal.

Question:

[58:49] I never really thought about it that way. I actually think it was a charmed campaign and everything went really great. More than it should have probably.

Question:

[59:15] Oh! There's nothing like the first one! The two greatest political victories I ever had were probably my first one because I

mean you know you're kind of taking a big leap to begin with, at the age, running as a Republican and all of that and the victory is so sweet. In fact, I went so long without eating and drank so much coffee that two days after the election and toward the end I had a sour taste in my mouth. And two days after the election when I'd had a couple nights rest and a few good meals, I had the sweetest taste in my mouth. And I said to my wife, You know, I've always heard about the sweet taste of victory, and now I know what it is.

[60:00] The other one, the only other one that would come close, even winning the Senate race, while that was a magic moment, too, the other most magical moment was when I - I actually won the Whip race in the Senate by 1 vote and it was, I was taking on the incumbent, a great guy, Alan Simpson, and wasn't expected to win, wasn't supposed to win. I'd only been in the Senate 4 years and that was a tough you know, exhilarating campaign.

Question:

[61:01] It is. But I just felt like that they were going to give me the benefit of the doubt and they did.

Question:

[61:15] To judge you? It feels good in another way. I mean, it's somewhat demeaning, too, a little bit, because you know you're at the mercy of the whims of the voters on a particular day. And all your foibles by the time you run as many times as I did, they're laid out there, they know the good, the bad and the ugly. You can't help but worry about it a little bit. How are they going to judge you and what do I need to do to get them to judge me in the way I want them to? It's a challenge.

Question:

[61:52] Yeah, I think that came through. I was very idealistic.

And I was so convinced that I was doing the right thing and it was the right thing for me and the right thing for the district and I think that came through. I think people, if you got passion, they sense it.

Question:

[62:09] Yeah, a little bit. Yeah, sure. You get a little bit of the youthful passion sort of calms down. But remember my big races were always when I was still pretty young. I was 46 when I was elected to the Senate, so I was still had a lot of youthful passion and energy and zeal and idealism. Fact I think I kept the idealism. I hope I have it till this day.

Question:

[62:41] Yeah, but I gotta check one thing. This thing has been buzzing up and down. I gotta check it.

[62:59] Okay, I think I'm good for a minute more.

Question:

[63:15] I think - you know the experiences that I had had and where I was and the timing of it and all that I had to consider, it was a pretty much a go all along. But if I didn't think I could have won, if the dynamics were such, if this were a district that was just never going to elect a Republican, that would have been something that I might have backed away. But the main thing is is my wife had said, Now I don't like it here. I don't like Washington. I don't like this. I don't want you to do it. Then I probably wouldn't have. Because she was, she has just been such an important partner. I'm not sure she would have ever done that. At the very worst, she'd have said, I will support you whatever you want to do. But she was more than that. Her attitude was, Let's do it. This will be fun. [Laughs] She's been a great helpmate and a lot of candidates for office, their spouses, man or woman, don't

really get into it, enjoy it and give you the encouragement you need. It was in many ways it was a bizarre time for two young guys in Pascagoula, Mississippi, to be able to have the opportunity to be able to make that play[?]. But that would have been about the only thing that would have deterred me for sure. It was a close decision. I mean, I labored over it. I can remember walking in the woods behind Orleans Village out here in Alexander Village and standing, propping up on a stump and thinking back and forth. And a lot of it was financial. You know, How can I afford to do this? You know, I just didn't have anything. So a little, if she had nudged me much at all, I might not have done it.

Question:

[65:11] No, I think having a family clearly makes a difference, particularly where I'm from. If you're single, we elect single people to office. We had a congressman that was always, never married, Sonny Montgomery, great, great guy. So you can win as a single - but I think clearly if you have a supportive family, you got that campaign picture with you carrying your little baby girl and your little 3-year-old, 4-year-old boy walking aside of you, beautiful wife, I mean. I was blessed with a great family and they were an asset, no question about it.

Question:

[65:52] Go ahead. Well, I'll be interested to see what you come up with.

Question:

[65:59] Oh, isn't he a great guy? He was one of my top advisors and friends in the Senate.

Question:

[66:27] Well, most of them would do it. But I did have a

tremendous experience. I had my low points, too. I didn't have any flubs in my campaigns, but I had a few flubs in my leadership. [Laughs] But you know once you get in top leadership position, people are gunning for you. You know, somebody came down to my state and spent a month trying to drag up dirt on me. Went to the Secretary of State's office to look at all the papers of incorporation, see if I had anything there. Talked to people, see if, oh, Trent Lott, what's he have, does he have any financial problems? Does he have any girlfriends? Kind of nerve-wracking when you know you got somebody down there doing investigative work on you. That was during the Clinton years.

Question:

[67:16] No, well, yeah, one year, 1987. I did get some real encouragement to run for governor and I toyed with it, but in those days the governor of Mississippi could not succeed himself. It was a weak governorship and I just, I thought a lot about it because I had people encourage me to do it, but in the end, I just said, You know, I just don't think you can accomplish as much as I would like to if I were going to do that. Plus I also said, You know, I just, I think my role is legislative rather than executive.

Question:

[67:47] So the end of that year, I was running for the Senate. I labored with the decision, do I run for governor because we have off-year elections in Mississippi. So we had a governor's race in '87. But by October of that year, the governor's race was underway but I made the decision that I was going to run for the Senate to take Stennis's seat. And then in December I think it was, he announced that he would not run again.

Question:

[68:27] Well, I think it does and I think it probably took me some

time, too, but I think there's no question that I - it took me less time and I had more of a sense of how this place worked because I had been there. I had been a staff member for 4 years watching it up close and you know, working for the Chairman of the Rules Committee so I saw every bill that was coming to the floor of the House. In those days, we had 5 or 6 of us in his personal office and he had like 3 staff members on the Rules Committee so I did work for the Rules Committee, too. So I was watching the legislative process very carefully for 4 years so it gave me a quick start.

Question:

[69:20] Oh, well, it's much easier to do things in the Senate. There are fewer of them. You know, the House - I always loved the House, but it's 435 people; it's like an anthill you know in there. But they're young and they're dynamic and they go at it. But if you're in the minority it's tough and you're pretty limited. How many times does a House member actually get a bill that he sponsored on the floor, gets amendments to , you can even offer. Once you get to the Senate, it doesn't take you long to figure out, you can do just about anything you're big enough to take on. If you want to, if you want to get into the defense area, you can get there. If you want to get over into transportation or commerce, you can do that. There's no - I've told members this - they don't like to hear it, but I experienced it. I had more legislative opportunities and more power as a brand new Senator than I did as a 16-year veteran in the leadership in the House.

Question:

[70:43] So where you from:

Question:

[70:53] One of my great friends in the Senate was Judd Gregg.

Smart guy. Really smart guy. Really strategic thinker. We need more like him. I'm going to miss him. But we got - I understand that Kelly Ayotte will be a good one. I hope so.

Question:

[71:12] She's got an interesting background and ran a good campaign, so -

Question:

[71:18] Yeah, she's young but she's got a working husband and I think he was a veteran and she's got children and she was attorney general. Whoo, I don't know how she does it all.

Question:

[71:33] Well, good luck.

[Side talk]

-End of file-