California State Archives  
State Government Oral History Program  

Oral History Interview  

with  

Hon. Kevin Murray  

Member of the California State Senate from the 26th District, 1998–2006  
Member of the California State Assembly from the 47th District, 1994–1998

May 27, May 28 and May 30, 2021  
All interviews conducted online

By Roger Eardley-Pryor  
Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

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Since 1953 the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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PREFACE

The California State Government Oral History Program was created in 1985 with the passage of AB 2105. Charged with preserving the state's executive and legislative history, the Program conducts oral history interviews with individuals who played significant roles in California state government, including members of the legislature and constitutional officers, agency and department heads, and others involved in shaping public policy. The State Archives oversees and directs the Program's operation, with interviewees selected by an advisory council and the interviews conducted by university-based oral history programs. Over the decades, this collective effort has resulted in hundreds of oral history interviews that document the history of the state's executive and legislative branches, and enhance our understanding of public policy in California. The recordings and finished transcripts of these interviews are housed at the State Archives.
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INTERVIEW HISTORY

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Editing
The interviewer reviewed the verbatim transcript of the interview; edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling; verified proper names; titles, and dates.

Narrator Kevin Murray was sent the edited transcript for approval and returned it with only minor corrections. Interviewer prepared the introductory materials.

Interview Records
The recordings and finished transcripts of the interviews are in The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley. Records relating to the interview are available through the Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library. Master audio and video recordings are deposited in the California State Archives.
BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Kevin Girard Murray was born on March 12, 1960, in Los Angeles, California. He earned a Bachelor of Science in Business Administration from California State University, Northridge in 1981; a Master’s in Business Administration from Loyola Marymount University in 1983; and a Juris Doctor from Loyola Law School in 1987. Murray served as a member of the California State Assembly from the 47th District from 1994-1998, and the California State Senate from the 26th District from 1998-2006, as a representative of the Democratic party. Prior to his election to the California Assembly, Murray worked for the William Morris Agency in Beverly Hills where he provided consulting and management services to artists in the entertainment industry. He also practiced law in the areas of entertainment, real estate, insurance, and dependency. As a Democrat in the California State Assembly from 1994 to 1998, Murray served as Chair of the Transportation Committee and became the first California Assemblymember to serve alongside his father, Hon. Willard H. Murray, Jr. In the California State Senate from 1998 to 2006, Kevin Murray represented the 26th District based in Culver City, California, until he retired due to term limits. As a Senator, Murray was chair of the Appropriations Committee, the Transportation Committee, the Democratic Caucus, and the California Legislative Black Caucus. Murray also served on the California Film Commission. In this interview, Murray discusses his early life, family, and education, as well as his pre-legislative career in the entertainment industry and as a lawyer. Most of Murray's oral history recounts details on several bills he worked on and passed in the California Legislature, while concluding with brief a discussion of his post-legislative life in Los Angeles with his wife and their two children.
Today is Thursday, May 27 in the year 2021. My name is Roger Eardley-Pryor from UC Berkeley's Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library. This is interview session number one with Sen. Kevin Murray for the California State Legislators Project. Kevin, it's great to see you.

You, too.

Thank you very much for joining this oral history today. Can you tell me where you are located today?

I'm located in Los Angeles. It's called View Park, California. It's actually unincorporated LA County.

Okay, and I am up in Santa Rosa, California. We are recording this interview over Zoom amid the ongoing pandemic. Let's start off the interview, Kevin, with me simply asking, what is the date of your birth, and can you tell me a little bit about the family you were born into?

March 12, 1960. I was born in Los Angeles, I grew up in the same neighborhood, View Park, California. I live a few blocks away from my father, where he still lives in the same house with the same phone number that he bought in 1962, so we haven't left our neighborhood very much. My father, when I was born, he was an aerospace engineer, and my mother was a housewife, although I guess unique among African Americans then, they had both attended college. My mother went to the University of Illinois, and my father had—to think East LA College and UCLA, but they both attended college. I think when I was like one or two—you'll have to check the years—my father worked on a campaign for Billy Mills for city council, and then he essentially never looked back and stayed in politics the rest of his life.

And we'll make a note, too, that you and your father were the first ever father-son elected officials to serve in the California legislature.

To serve at the same time, yes, we were. And I think we still remain the only. There are some siblings but no fathers and sons.

That's great. So let me just dive into a little bit more on family work here. You said that your mother was also a college graduate. Where did she come from, or how did she end up in LA?
Murray: She was from Chicago, and I believe she had come to Los Angeles to visit some family that she had here, and they met and soon married.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great. I have a note here that your mother Barbara Murray married your father Willard H. Murray Jr. in 1956, and you were born in 1960?

Murray: Yes.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me a little bit more about your father. I mean, you were just a baby when he entered into politics and remained so his whole career.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: What are some of your memories of growing up in a household that was involved in political action?

Murray: Well, it was interesting in that we got to meet people. So my dad was very—I think he worked for Billy Mills and then somehow worked for Mervyn Dymally. And he did a lot of campaign-related work as I remember during that time. He was always taking me to campaign-type events, so I always met people. I met elected officials, and the main effect that that had on me later in life is that I was not particularly impressed by either meeting elected officials or being one. Once you're around them a lot, it sort of loses its mystery, but that was the main takeaway—that I met a lot of people, but again I'm a toddler, so it wasn't like I was networking. But I met a lot of people, and they were just people that our family associated with. And Democratic politics back then was—a lot revolved around pancake breakfasts and barbecues and so we would—my sister and I would be dragged along to some of those things when we were kids, and we met people that were players in politics then, in Democratic politics at least.

Eardley-Pryor: Before we dive more into that, you mentioned a sister. What's her name and when was she born?

Murray: Her name is Melinda, and she was born in 1964, and we went through this journey together as kids.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Well, you mentioned that your father still lives in the same house that they moved into or your family moved into in the early 1960s in the View Park neighborhood of LA?
Murray: Yes, yes.

Eardley-Pryor: What was that neighborhood like growing up?

Murray: It was great growing up by the way, but he was one of the first Black families on our block. And I think I had mentioned that by the time I was in kindergarten, my whole class was mostly Black. It was a wonderful neighborhood. Los Angeles is different than many cities around the country in that African Americans—there were still restrictive covenants on deeds. And if you were African American, no matter how successful you were even through the stratosphere, with the exception of a handful of entertainers, if you were a doctor, a lawyer, or even an athlete, you probably lived in this neighborhood.

Eardley-Pryor: So this was a kind of up-and-coming, upwardly mobile, Black family neighborhood?

Murray: Well, it was, yeah. I mean it certainly was that, but it was even more so that even if you weren't upwardly mobile, even if you had reached the top, you probably still lived in this neighborhood with a very few exceptions. So Nat King Cole lived in Hancock Park, or Quincy Jones lived in Bel-Air, but beyond a handful of people, you mostly lived in this neighborhood or the adjacent couple of neighborhoods—Baldwin Hills, which many people have heard about and Latera Heights, which also many people have heard about—but it was somewhat the center of upwardly mobile, Black families. And we had a small, modest, two-bedroom house, but we were still in this neighborhood.

Eardley-Pryor: LA politics was certainly changing in that time that your father got involved in it, and with some of those figures you mentioned like Billy Mills, and I believe he even staffed Robert Farrell—

Murray: Yes.

Eardley-Pryor: —but Mervyn Dymally and Julian Dixon, that coalition that helped bring Mayor Tom Bradley into power into Los Angeles as mayor. You mentioned being around the scenes of some of these events. What are the memories you have with different characters, where you were in people's yards with these pancake breakfasts?
Murray: I'm a kid then, but I always thought Jesse Unruh to be an interesting guy just because of his presence in a room. So it's more me running around trying to avoid the adults rather than me actually paying attention to them. That's the basis of my thought that I became less impressed by them because they were just people that we saw on holidays. And they certainly were all nice to me—I was a kid, there was no reason for them not to be—but they were just family friends.

Eardley-Pryor: With the neighborhood going through this incredible burgeoning and growth, it sounds like, and this dynamism that's happening around you, how do you think that shaped your childhood and your experiences of it?

Murray: The one thing I would think that being involved in politics and meeting the people I met, and as you pointed out, wasn't just the political world, wasn't just Black people. It was sort of this coalition that eventually elected Tom Bradley, and Democratic politics, particularly in Los Angeles tended to cross those lines. So I had just exposure, exposure to a type of people and a type of person, some very wealthy, some not so, that I might not otherwise have had exposure to.

Eardley-Pryor: How do you think that exposure shaped you?

Murray: Anybody my age who's done some of the things that I've done would have been in a lot of rooms where they were the only Black person in the room, and so I learned to feel comfortable in that position. It was just exposure, so I saw things and people who I might see on the news the next day if I was a six-year-old watching the news. But you saw people who were involved in the shaping of events and so you did get the perspective that, "hey, that was a person I was just over their house the other day." So you get—did get the perspective that that was all possible. And Los Angeles probably had less Jim Crow effects than many places and so I never felt unwelcome anywhere, so it shaped me from that perspective. Had I grown up in the South or even some of the big cities in the North, there would have been neighborhoods that I thought I didn’t belong or shouldn’t belong or wasn't welcome. And while I wasn't naïve to race, my attitude toward it was I'm here and I'm not bothered by it.

Eardley-Pryor: You shared with me over the phone before we began recording, a memory of being a young child, age eight or so, at the 1968 Chicago Democratic National Convention.
Murray: Oh, yes, so that's another thing. It so happened that my mother was from Chicago and my grandparents lived in Chicago, and I normally went there in the summer for some period of time anyway. So I remember being in Chicago with my parents, and my father was attending the convention, and I was in Chicago, and he would come back from the convention. Ironically, I don't remember him coming home and saying, "Gee, there was a protest." But I do remember, I remember in my bed, he'd come in and kiss me at night after he had come home from the convention. So, I was there in town. I can't say I attended, but I was in Chicago.

Eardley-Pryor: Eight-year-old Kevin Murray was not at the convention?

Murray: No, no. Although in hindsight, I'm saying—want to say to my dad, "Why didn't you take me to at least one little event? I could've gone to something to say I've been there," but no. But I was in town.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great. Well, 1968 is just such a revolutionary year in American history, such a year of strife in a lot of ways: The Vietnam conflict is just raging at that point, Martin Luther King's assassination in the spring, Bobby Kennedy, assassinated in Los Angeles that year. Do you have any memories of these major events going on around you?

Murray: I do. I remember very specifically in April—was it April when Martin Luther King was shot? I remember that. And that was just a big, devastating thing for the African American community in general, so that was all people could talk about. Again, when Bobby Kennedy was shot, my parents were both at the convention in the ballroom. And as I remember the story, someone who was standing next to or near my mother actually got shot with a stray bullet or something. Of course, these memories, it's like a game of telephone, you never know how they are this long, but I do remember that they were at that, in the ballroom at the Cocoanut Grove.

Eardley-Pryor: Man, did that have an impact on your eight-year-old mind?

Murray: Not really other than there was this big event that happened to my—that my parents were involved in. I didn't really understand the import that it was Bobby Kennedy until some years later. Although I remember, I don't know, so in '68, I'm eight years old, so when I'm eleven and I go to seventh grade and we start talking about this stuff in history, I remember asking my mom about it and she telling me the story, but it didn't really have an import then.
I still remember John Kennedy's funeral, and I remember it mostly because it was on every channel and the cartoons that I wanted to watch weren't available, so I was a little bit upset. But I remember watching it for at least a little while on TV.

Eardley-Pryor: Wild. Well—

But the other thing is that politics was—politics and civil rights was something that we talked about not in a very formal way. So it wasn't like my dad came home and we sat down to dinner and talked about this, but just he was involved in it. So part of our normal life was either him talking to me or him talking to my mom and me overhearing that that being—events maybe, you could say, were just a daily part of our household.

Eardley-Pryor: Do you think that had an influence in shaping your political trajectories?

No, frankly, I don’t really think so. I had no interest in going into politics when I was growing up. When I did finally run for office, it was a very opportunistic endeavor. The timing aligned, the seat in my neighborhood came up, and I—the one thing that it did do is, particularly because my dad spent a lot of time on the campaign side, I understood how it worked. And going back to your early question, maybe the most salient thing there was I knew the people that I was going to be asking for their endorsement. Normally, you go to someone and ask them for their endorsement, and they do some due diligence, but these people knew me since I was a kid. As I became a teenager and an adult, they weren't close to me. But they knew me, and they knew my dad, so they knew something about me, something about my character and my trajectory, so that did make it easier. And, again, my exposure with my dad was I knew how to—I knew how campaigns were run, so I could make them relatively efficient. And I learned some tidbits from my dad about what matters and what has impact and watched the way they did things.

The other interesting thing about my dad along with Michael Berman—who I'm sure somebody in your historical archive understands his importance to the process.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me your understanding of that.

So Michael Berman is Howard Berman's brother. So, you know that part of this coalition to elect Tom Bradley included the Westside Jewish community mostly led politically by Howard Berman and Henry Waxman. Howard's
brother Michael was the campaign part of their operation and also the expert in the state at the time for redistricting. So my father, along with Michael and a guy named Bill Below from what was then called Below, Tobe, they were one of the first sets of people to actually use computers to do demography and to do targeting of precincts. So Bill Below was a guy who—I might be wrong about this, but I remember him as being somebody who had formally worked at JPL, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, but we're talking late sixties. He had access to a computer from his home, the thing where you dial up and you put the handset into this receiver and you can connect with the computer. And Below, Tobe and Associates became rather a big place where people used to buy their mailing labels and buy their data sets. But they were some of the first people to put the voter file in databases and find ways to target. And so I saw that happen, and my dad was part of it. And him having been an engineer at the time meant that he understood a lot of how this worked, so I did see that early on.

I did things like in my first campaign, I didn’t open a campaign headquarters until the final month of the election. Why? Because the campaign headquarters soothes your ego because there's a big place with a sign on it and volunteers. I mean, but nothing really happens there until the last month of the election. So I knew how to do things a little faster, a little cheaper, a little more efficient than your average candidate. In fact, on my first campaign, I did not hire a campaign manager. I did it all myself with some help from my dad.

But if I look back on the campaign mail that I did, I'm almost appalled at how bad some of them were [laughs] in hindsight. But I knew how to target. I knew how to get it to the mail house, I knew how to get it printed, I knew how to—I knew the mechanics of it. I can't say I was good at it, but I knew the mechanics of it.

Yeah. So I didn't use a campaign manager. This is ’94, so cell phones had just come out, so I really ran the campaign from a cell phone in my car.

That's amazing. Well, I want to get to that, but I also want to make sure we do some due diligence on your childhood more.
Eardley-Pryor: I have a note that you attended Windsor Hills Elementary—

Murray: Yeah, so I went to Windsor Hills Elementary School, and as I mentioned earlier, we were one of the first Black families on our block, and so I'm two years old when we moved to that house. By the time I was four and a half in kindergarten, the school was almost all Black so that, in that sixties time period, white flight was clearly a major thing. Ironically, these were mostly well-educated parents and so the test scores at this school were really, really high, continued to be really, really high, better than some of the more affluent, white Westside schools. So I had a wonderful elementary school education.

Eardley-Pryor: What kind of impact do you think that white flight had around the community in which your family was building a life?

Murray: Didn't have much impact, and the white flight happened simultaneously with Black influx, so it means that I grew up with a neighborhood of significant types of Black role models. Had I chosen to be a doctor or a dentist, that would not have been out of the norm because I had friends in my class whose parents were doctors and dentists, so it was an easy—so it did give me a sense that I could achieve most of what was considered success then.

Eardley-Pryor: It sounds to me, in a lot of ways, that the family that you are a part of as a young child was really—in some ways, experienced that traditional American dream. What do you think about that?

Murray: Yeah, in certain ways. For instance, I had some great-aunts who became teachers but who attended UCLA in the twenties. So for a Black woman particularly to graduate from UCLA in the twenties was a huge thing.

Eardley-Pryor: On my mother's side, they had—a lot of her relatives had these very subservient jobs; they were pullman porters. So the interesting thing about being a Pullman porter is that it is a very subservient, demeaning job, but you earn good money because it was a tip job. So many of them saved up their money and basically just got off the train at the end, which was in Los Angeles, so some of them just migrated to Los Angeles on that basis. And so they did well, and fortunately for me, they almost all emphasized education. And in fact maybe this is the biggest factor, in my house growing up, it was always assumed that I was going to go to college, like no other option was ever discussed. In fact, even the option of community college was not discussed in our household. It was considered just a given, and while my
mother didn’t really pressure me, she made—let it be known that she expected us to go to graduate school of some kind. You’ll get to this later, but I tried mightily not to go to graduate school, but I failed in that.

Eardley-Pryor: Why do you think that's so important to your mother?

Murray: She wanted her kids to achieve the highest level that they could possibly achieve, and she viewed it as why shouldn't my kids be able to achieve. And she was pretty adamant about that, —and they worked hard to make sure we had opportunities to do that.

Eardley-Pryor: Now, you paint a picture of opportunity being ripe in Los Angeles in the world that you grew up—

Murray: I don’t know about ripe, but in my little microcosm of a world, we—my father was a public servant all his life, so he never made that much money. And we lived in a nice neighborhood, but in a modest house. But my parents did make sure that I had every educational opportunity that I could want. If there was a special summer school or something like that, they figured it out somehow. It wasn't so much Los Angeles, but it was my parents and my friend group of people who had similar-thinking parents who were trying to provide opportunities for their children.

Eardley-Pryor: I have note here that you attended Paul Revere Junior High School?

Murray: Yes. So that's all my mother. So Paul Revere Junior High School. I think she looked and it had the highest—it had the highest test scores in the city at the time, so she said, "This is the school you're going to go to," And she did whatever she needed to do to apply to get me there, and she and my father were successful. So they were really about me finding the best school I could go to. Busing was going on then, and I think my local school would've been Crenshaw High School and then most of the kids in my area were bussed to Westchester for school. But she decided I would go to this school, and she drove me out there every day. School started in seventh grade then, middle school was seven to nine, and I think when I was in ninth grade, there was a bus I could take, but she made that happen through just her will.

Eardley-Pryor: What was that like then for you socially? Your friends are going to a different school, and you're not in the same neighborhood school anymore.

Murray: Yeah, I just created a new friend group. And again maybe this goes back to my upbringing, I was mostly in a class where I was the only African
American, maybe there was one other, and there weren't that many Black kids at the school total. So I think when I was in ninth grade—eighth or ninth grade, a local friend came to the school too, so I had one local friend. And I don’t remember any conflict other than I will tell you I have lots of good friends and people were friendly to me, but I can tell you that—I remember when I was thirteen in eighth grade, I did not get invited to one bar mitzvah or bat mitzvah at Paul Revere Junior High, which was a largely Jewish school. So I don’t remember any particular form—I didn’t feel discriminated against or left out, but in hindsight, nobody ever invited me to a bar mitzvah.

01-00:27:43
Eardley-Pryor: When do you think it dawned on you that the Black experience in other parts of the country, like Chicago for example, where you might have spent summers, or Atlanta or anywhere else in the South, was different from the kind of world that you were living in?

01-00:27:57
Murray: Well, oh, I knew about it all the time because we were always talking about it. We always watched the news, my parents read the paper every day, we knew what was going on. We knew about the march on Washington and Selma, and we knew about all of those stuff—all of those things. But just as a kid, it's somewhat in the abstract unless you see it every day. So I knew that there were people who didn’t live as well as we did, and again—by most measures, we lived relatively modestly. I knew there were other parts of the city that were more dangerous. I remember pretty vividly the Watts riots.

01-00:28:45
Eardley-Pryor: What are your memories of that?

01-00:28:47
Murray: I remember it was happening, I remember that—I don’t know if you know of Sen. Bill Greene who was a close friend of my father's and also followed Mervyn Dymally—he ended up Mervyn Dymally’s—seat. I remember his wife coming from their house to stay at our house on the relatively safe west side. I remember vividly people were getting out of there.

01-00:29:19
Eardley-Pryor: Wow, because you were six years old at the time.

01-00:29:21
Murray: Yeah. Five actually, '65, yeah, five.

01-00:29:27
Eardley-Pryor: Wow.

So I remember that stuff happening. I was aware of it, but I—in fact, I asked my father the other day as I'm looking at some stuff. And he grew up in Los Angeles, born in '31, so he went through the forties and fifties, and I asked him, "Did you ever see whites-only drinking fountain, or when you went to
the movies, did you go to a separate entrance or anything?" And he said, "No, none of that stuff really happened here. You knew where not to go, and if you went into a movie theater, you knew what section to sit in." We didn’t see it as blatantly as in other parts of the country, but we knew what was going on.

We certainly knew that we were Black. If I think back, although I don’t think I noticed it at the time, parents of friends looking sideways at me, you just get a Spidey sense, what I call, just a little feeling, you kind of know what's going on. I had some friends, these school friends who were pretty wealthy people. And a couple of times, I went over there at their houses, but I didn’t feel anything that was overt—like there wasn’t a whole lot of overt experience that I remember from the time.

Eardley-Pryor: You talked about that coalition in Los Angeles that helped elect Mayor Tom Bradley, and that happened while you were in junior high in 1973.

Murray: Yeah, yeah.

Eardley-Pryor: Do you have memories of that with your father's engagement in that whole scene?

Murray: Well, it was ironic because the other thing that happened with my father was he actually was—I don’t think he was actually a deputy mayor, but he was an executive assistant to Mayor Yorty, so it placed him in a weird position when Tom Bradley first ran. So I remember that conflict, but I don’t remember much of its impact or import.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, I also note there that after junior high, you attended again one of the best public schools in Los Angeles, the Palisades High School?

Murray: Yes, yes.

Eardley-Pryor: It seemed to be quite a distance from where your home was again.

Murray: Yeah, it was less than a mile from Paul Revere, but yes. By the time, at that time, (a) I had been used to it and (b) there was a bus, and there were more Black kids going to Palisades so it was much better. I still was in classes mostly with—my classes mostly had white kids, but there were more Black kids around.
Eardley-Pryor: What kind of kid were you? What kind of things were you into as a young man?

Murray: I was into music. I was into sports, but I wasn't a great athlete. I didn’t get a growth spurt until mid-high school. A little bit nerdy, not necessarily cool, but I was friendly with everybody among all the friend groups. I wasn't the most popular kid in class, but I had friends and had fun. Socially, it's very middle of the road, but again, it's about exposure. And going back to the theme, most of what I've achieved—if you think I've achieved anything—is I had enough exposure to think that it was possible. I've been in the entertainment business, I've been in law school, I've done things that people think of as these very hard, difficult things. And I knew lawyers, and I knew politicians and so I didn’t think of it as this mysterious, far-off thing. So, the thing with Palisades is there's a variety of socioeconomic and cultural people that you're going to school with, and some of them are extremely wealthy and successful and some of them moderately so, but you've got exposure to all that, so you knew it was possible.

Eardley-Pryor: Possibility is a big theme I'm sensing from your childhood and you?

Murray: Yeah. So if you have a bunch of friends whose parents are doctors, then it doesn’t seem impossible for you to be a doctor; same thing with lawyers, it just doesn’t seem that hard. Fortunately, I was a relatively decent student, lackadaisical but pretty good at taking tests. So for positive and negative, school came relatively easy, so that's how I became lazy. But it also made me not shy away from going to graduate school. I never thought of law school as being this hard thing that I can't do. I was just like, oh, it's just another thing, and I'll do it. And I'm exaggerating only slightly because I did have a relatively cavalier attitude toward it. So that kind of exposure just framed my thinking.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. You mentioned you were really into music, and of course, you had this career in the music industry. What kind of music were you into then?

Murray: At the time, I started playing drums when I was thirteen and I never really got in any—I had a couple of bands but nothing that moved beyond the garage. Aside from the music of the day, whatever was happening, I got. When you're in junior high school and headed to high school, you think you're smarter than everyone, so I got really into jazz fusion, which was the thing that intellectuals got into at the time. So Miles Davis and Chick Corea and people like that and Stanley Clarke or people like them were people that I was enamored with at the time. But I think music is still probably my favorite art form because it is
visceral, like you literally feel it. And the other forms of art, I can tend to appreciate, but it doesn't evoke the same response.

01-00:36:15
Eardley-Pryor: Was music a big thing in your household growing up?

01-00:36:20
Murray: Not really. My parents both loved jazz. My mother, of course, had come from Chicago where the jazz scene in her town when she was growing up in the forties and fifties was pretty exciting. My father grew up a few blocks off the famous Central Avenue where jazz was happening here in Los Angeles, so they were both into that but not really hard into it. They had records, but they weren't always listening to music or anything. In fact, it used to drive me crazy that my father in particular always listened to the news in the car, and it's amazing that now that I've gotten to be sixty years old, I'm listening to the [laughs] news in the car too.

01-00:37:13
Eardley-Pryor: I have that same memory as a child, like, "Dad, anything else, come on."

01-00:37:17
Murray: Yeah, exactly.

01-00:37:19
Eardley-Pryor: I have a note here that the year you graduate from Palisades High School in 1977 is the same year that Alex Haley's *Roots* was put on PBS and became this national phenomena. I'm wondering if there's any kind of research you've done in your family on genealogy, of tracing your own family roots?

01-00:37:38
Murray: No. I believe my sister may have done one of those 23andMe kind of things but no, not really. I think she got a report, which by the way I don’t trust any of them, which says she's x percent from this place in Africa and x percent from that place in Africa. My mother's family, the ones that I know had migrated from Southern Illinois and then there's somebody from Texas and Louisiana on both sides. But no, we haven't really done it like all-the-way-back-to-Africa thing.

01-00:38:17
Eardley-Pryor: Do you always identify as Californian?

01-00:38:19
Murray: Yeah, yeah, I'm definitely a California guy. And, yes I have some relatives from other places, but they (a) are not people that I was ever particularly close to and (b) I just don’t really—I am through and through an—not just California, but I'm through and through an LA person.

01-00:38:40
Eardley-Pryor: Well, you had mentioned while growing up that a four-year university was just an assumption for you in your family.
Murray: Yes, absolutely.

Eardley-Pryor: So towards the end of your senior year, what were you thinking you wanted to do?

Murray: I had no idea. I knew I didn’t want to be a doctor. Eventually, I decided to study accounting for really practical reasons, which was that accounting like engineering at the time was a profession you could pursue with only a four-year degree. So I ended up studying accounting for that very practical reason. There was nothing I was particularly passionate about. I was always a math kind of kid more than a literary kind of kid, but there was nothing I was particularly passionate about. I just knew I needed to go to the next step, and I ended up getting into Cal State Northridge, and I don’t even remember the circumstances, but I got into Cal State Northridge. I had mediocre grades but pretty good test scores, and it so happens that Cal State Northridge had a great accounting school, so—

Eardley-Pryor: That all worked out.

Murray: And as we go through this, most of the things in my life had been relatively opportunistic.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me more what you mean by that.

Murray: Well, so none of it was planned out. There isn't anything I planned to do. All of the things either being in the entertainment business or being a lawyer or going into politics just happened to be opportunities that came up, and going back to our previous conversations, I saw no reason why I couldn’t do them, so very opportunistic. Presumably I prepared myself well enough to take advantage of the opportunities or my parents prepared me, but I never had a grand plan.

Eardley-Pryor: You mentioned studying accounting at Cal State Northridge. What were the other opportunities that you were interested in pursuing there?

Murray: That was kind of it. So I was in a fraternity and by—

Eardley-Pryor: What fraternity?

Murray: Phi Beta Sigma.
Eardley-Pryor: Why did you choose them?

Murray: Because they were the cool fraternity on our campus at the time, again, also opportunistic. And I met them, I liked them, they liked me, we had fun. Of the Black fraternities, they were the one that was most active on campus, so I went for it. And again by chance, one of my fraternity brothers was the concert coordinator for campus entertainment and then I became the assistant concert coordinator and then he went on to do something else so then I became the concert coordinator, so again, completely—I wouldn’t say random but certainly opportunistic.

And then I eventually became the director of all campus entertainment activities including speakers' bureaus and movies and coffeehouse production. So that's how I sort of go into the entertainment business.

Eardley-Pryor: You attended Cal State Northridge—I have the note here—from 1977 to 1981.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: What are some of your memories of the people you brought to campus or acts that you thought were really memorable?

Murray: Well, the most interesting thing one, the biggest one was—well, ironically again my exposure. So the first concerts were rock and roll concerts, which would not have been my taste—I can't even remember the names of acts ironically. That not would have been my taste, but they were what we wanted. I remember Farrakhan came to speak and the guy—ahead of the Anti-Defamation League, the particularly striking one—I can't remember his name—also came to speak, so we had a variety of things. There was periodically some controversy.

The biggest act we had, which actually led to me working at William Morris was George Benson, and it was a great show because Stevie Wonder came. And because we were kind of out of the way in Northridge and not at a big venue in the city, Stevie Wonder came and sat in with George Benson, so it was pretty heady for a nineteen-, twenty-year-old guy and introduced me to George Benson's agent who then helped me get a job at William Morris, so it was again completely opportunistic. I had left school looking to get a job in accounting, which I did for a few months, and then I got a call and I was accepted into the William Morris mailroom program.
Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me about how you leveraged this relationship with Benson's agent into William Morris?

Murray: Well, I just said, "Hey, I'm getting ready to graduate from school, can I do what you do?" And again relevantly random that George Benson happened to be represented by William Morris, which had a very famous and specific training-type program, so, "Hey, can I do that?" And I applied, and it took them a while, and I had to keep—the other thing is I had to keep bugging them. And the other thing is that there was another Black guy in the mailroom who literally got fired a couple of weeks before I started, so my suspicion is they might—maybe always try to keep one. But it was opportunistic for sure because I was—I had gotten a job as an accountant again through a friend who I said, "Hey, do you need an accountant at this place" where he was working and he said, "Yes," so I went to work there. And then I left there within, I don't know, three to six months because the opportunity at William Morris opened up.

Eardley-Pryor: What did you think of accounting as work?

Murray: It was hard. I think it's the best education I could've gotten, but this is pre-Excel, so you're literally writing numbers on a yellow—on a green piece of paper and trying to make them add up across and down. And it was hard because I never got it to work properly.

Eardley-Pryor: You later go on to help pass legislation at the dawn of the internet age in California, and it makes me think about the dawn of the personal computer age.

Murray: Right, right. My father was very interested in computers, and he was using it in politics, so I had exposure. So again our good family friend, Bill Below had worked at JPL and understood computers—was part of the dawn of the computer age, and so technology, computers was something that I had relatively early exposure too. And I remember in junior high actually having a class where we ended up programming and printing out little Fortran cards—where you had to punch the Fortran card and stick it in the machine, so I had relatively early exposure to that. So again, the benefit of going to a school like Paul Revere or Palisades that there were going to be people who had exposure to that. In seventh or eighth grade, I think we had—we didn’t have a big room-size computer but we had some kind of terminal that we could connect, so again exposure and opportunity and timing.

Eardley-Pryor: So you had a computer at your home in the mid-to-late seventies?
Murray: I'm talking about at school in the mid-to-late seventies we had a computer. But our friend Bill Below had a terminal. You had to put the phone into it. He had a terminal at his house, so I knew that that was possible, and when the first reasonably prized personal computers came out, my dad did have one.

Eardley-Pryor: That's wild. But even though you take this job in accounting, it sounds to me like your heart was really set on pursuing a path in the music industry?

Murray: Well, again, I hate to say this, but my heart really wasn't set on anything. Life was generally good, and I was doing this accounting job. My parents had convinced me, and maybe this is why I ended up keep going to school. I started in the MBA program at Loyola at night shortly after graduating from college, so I kind of didn't know.

Eardley-Pryor: Was that about your mom pushing you to go attend grad school, to go Loyola?

Murray: Well, it was partially her but maybe even more my dad. Much like most kids, when you go away to college, you have this place in the house where your mail still comes, and your parents put it on the mantel piece or on the entryway chest or whatever. So MBA program catalogues just kept showing up somehow, and my father, to his credit, he said, "Well, hey, Loyola is right down the street and it's at night, so you can go there. And while you're figuring out whatever it is you really and truly want to do, you might as well get this MBA." And I didn't find school to be hard, so I'm sure if I worked harder, I would've gotten better grades, and I actually got pretty good grades in business school.

But here's another opportunistic story. So he finally convinces me to apply to business school at Loyola, so I say, "Fine," and I grudgingly do it, but I was relatively late in the process. So rather than mailing the application, and it—the MBA program at Loyola had—was only a few years old then, so it's quite a well-respected program now, but it was relatively new. So instead of mailing the application, I drove the application over there, and I dropped it off in the dean's office or at least that was my intention. Whatever time of the day I got there, the dean's secretary wasn't in—she was out. So I walked in the office, and I said, "I want to drop off this application," and so the dean himself came out, and he said, "Well, let me take a look at it." And so he pointed out that I had mediocre grades but pretty high test scores—oh, and I guess I have to back up. My father had convinced me to take the GMAT whenever, sometime in—but I had pretty high test scores, and they were a relatively new program, so he said, "Okay, well, I think we'll probably be able to let you in." So again, completely opportunistic, but had I not driven over there, it might have gotten stuck in a corner somewhere.
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, those kind of personal connections make a difference.

Murray: Yeah, so I just—you know. My father, he knew lots of people in lots of places from his travels, but we didn’t know anybody really there, it just so happened that I personally showed up.

Eardley-Pryor: So you’re attending MBA classes there. I have a note that you completed your degree in ’83.

Murray: Right, so I had started in the William Morris mailroom in ’82, so, yes, I was taking night school during that.

Eardley-Pryor: The mailroom at William Morris has this legacy. There's legendary characterizations about that whole experience from the mailroom on up, and then becoming an agent. Tell me about your experiences.

Murray: You know, again, aside from being the only Black guy around, but I was used to that, so whatever sleights I might have gotten were things I was able to brush off. The greatest impediment was not that I was Black, but it was that I didn’t come from a family who was already in the entertainment business. So normally, people that get those jobs have some sort of family connection to or friendly connection to the entertainment industry. And so I went in there cold, so it took me time to build the relationships with the agents over time. But again after finishing business school, I was in the mailroom and I finished business school, but I wasn’t sure that I was going to make it as an agent, so I ended up going to law school for similar opportunistic reasons.

Eardley-Pryor: It's almost like a plan B or—?

Murray: Yeah, it literally was a plan B. In fact, my father said to me, "If you go to law school, the worst thing that could ever happen to you is you'd have to be a lawyer."


Murray: So that literally was a plan B. And I will say that once finishing business school and then law school, particularly if you're a person of color or a woman, it garners you a certain amount of respect from your colleagues that—it doesn’t complete overcome, but it helps with whatever deficit you might have gotten during that time particularly from race or gender. So that's
why I always advise people to go to law school. It's the best educational thing you could do.

Eardley-Pryor: You're pleased with the opportunities that it afforded you.

Murray: Totally.

Eardley-Pryor: Did you enjoy law school?

Murray: The interesting thing about law school, again going back to my lackadaisical student nature, my focus was more on William Morris than law school. So if I had to go see a show or something, I would blow off law school in a second. And I was able to survive law school and later pass the bar, but it—I found it relatively easy.

Eardley-Pryor: My note is that you finished law school at age twenty-seven in 1987.

Murray: Yes.

Eardley-Pryor: So all this time, you're working your way up through the William Morris agency in the mailroom program.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: You mentioned to me how, in college, you weren’t that interested in rock and roll. What kind of music were you interested in pursuing?

Murray: Well, like any Black kid of the day, I was into the big R&B stars. I was also into jazz and fusion. And from a business standpoint and even from my personal standpoint, I liked rock and roll, but I—like for instance when I was in college, punk rock was coming in, and I had no interest in punk rock, but certainly a lot of my peers at school were into punk rock, so I wasn't necessarily into that. But again going back into the opportunistic thing, when I finished law school, it also had a big impact because it so happens that the men at the time that ran William Morris were mostly lawyers. The people who ran the business were not necessarily agents, they were lawyers who had come up from the administrative side, so they were particularly impressed with me having finished law school.

Eardley-Pryor: And a business degree at that.
Murray: Yeah. Well, it's also one of those things that if you're a Black kid growing up, they tell you—your parents always tell you that you've got to be a bit better in order to succeed. So education was one way to do that that is a neutral arbiter of your skill set. And I was able to pass the bar the first time too so that was a rarity among some group of people so that also meant something.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, I also have a note that just a year after you earned your doctorate, your JD from Loyola Law School, is when your dad is elected to the California Assembly.

Murray: Yes. He had run a couple of times before and didn’t win, and he got elected. Actually what's interesting about that is that I can remember I went up the day before his swearing-in to Sacramento, and I saw his name on the voting board. They had just updated his name, and that was actually more touching to me than seeing my own name up there. It was just seeing his name up there that he's now one of these eighty people who has a vote and his name up there. So that was a particularly proud moment and way more than when I did it.

Eardley-Pryor: Oh, that's a beautiful.

Murray: But, yeah, then he got elected.

Eardley-Pryor: How did that impact your experience or did it?

Murray: Well, the other thing, he ran in a different district, so he ran in the district that included more of Compton than South Central, and the district that I ended up running in where I live now and where I grew up is much more affluent, still contained some South Central and some lower-income areas but more affluent included Century City, included some Cheviot Hills and some West LA areas. So my politics were a little bit different than his by nature of who I am and who my district is, but again it was more exposure to how it worked. So there were people who made their own political decisions, but there were people who I knew to call for endorsements and for help. And I knew the people to talk to at the labor unions, I knew the people to talk to at the—the various supporters, and some of them I had met before, and some of them was because they knew I was my father's son. But it was a very competitive race when I ran, and there were other people who had stronger, bigger endorsements, and more money.

Eardley-Pryor: And when you ran, you were elected in 1994.
Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: Help fill in the space for me between finishing your JD in 1987, working in the William Morris agency during this time, until you ran for elected office in 94.

Murray: So I was working at William Morris and then I left there to kind of hang out a shingle and practice law for a little bit, and I did what everybody in California does, I pitched scripts in television shows and hustled things, and I was doing fine. I also worked in dependency court, which is children's court, and I was doing fine, but I wasn't doing gangbusters. And I was living a nice life, I was in the entertainment business in Los Angeles in my earthly thirties and single at the time, so I was having a lot of fun. I was going to concerts every night, but I wasn't that passionate about it, I wasn’t in love with it. Nothing had really broken big that I was involved in, although I was making a nice living. So then because of term limits, which had been enacted in '88—

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, 1990 is when I see Prop 140 in my notes.

Murray: Yeah, okay, so in '90. The woman Gwen Moore who was in Assembly seat where, in my neighborhood, because of term limits had decided to run for secretary of state, so she wasn't running for reelection. So it was an open seat, it was the neighborhood where I grew up, and I used to get together with my friends and or at least those that were interested in politics and kind of Monday-morning-quarterback things. And I was in this group, and people said, "Well, why don’t you run?" and I said, "Well, I don’t want to run," and they say, "Yeah, you probably wouldn’t win," and I said, "What do you mean I wouldn’t win?" And then I, in that span of fifty minutes, laid out my entire campaign and why I could win, and in so doing convinced myself to actually run.

Eardley-Pryor: That is great. That was the moment.

Murray: Yeah, so again opportunistic. My friend said, "You should run," I said, "I don’t want to." He said, "You wouldn’t win," and that was the thing that sparked me to actually do it. And again, my father had done it, other people who I thought of as less talented than me had done it, so I didn’t consider it a big hurdle. And I remember telling an acquaintance that I was running for the Assembly, and their initial response was, "That's unrealistic," and I think if there's anything to point out is that I had been shown that it wasn't unrealistic, I had seen people do it. I wasn't blind, I knew what the elements were and could do a calculation on whether I could put together those elements and so
the answer ended up being I could. My father ironically was extremely
helpful, but he was not necessarily that supportive when I first decided to run.

Eardley-Pryor: Why not?

Murray: He wasn't sure that I wanted to do it. He wasn't sure that I would work hard
enough to do it. Well, he obviously ended up supporting me, but he was not
my first supporter. [laughs]

Eardley-Pryor: How did that play out for you?

Murray: It didn't. It wasn't normal father-son dynamic. He was like, "Are you sure you
want to do this? Do you really want to do this?" He wasn't sure that I would
do it all and then so I had to do all the things to show him that I could win.
And he needed some other people to tell him that they had seen and heard of
me doing all of the things. It's a frequent thing when you go to—when a
candidate is running, you ask all the basic questions so, "How are you going
to raise the money, who's going to raise the money for you, who's going to be
your campaign manager, what's your path to victory?" So I had to do some
research, and I had to lay all those things out. And the other advantage I have
is it was truly my neighborhood where I had spent all my life, so there were
people who were going to vote for me regardless of my positions on whatever
because they knew me or they knew my sister or my mom, less so my dad
because his politics was in a different part of the city mostly. So I had the
advantage, I had something of a home court advantage, which by the way,
none of my opponents really understood.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. You had a lifetime of investment in that community.

Murray: Yeah. And I'll tell you another little story. There were things, which I learned
from my father. So as everybody's calling around trying to get endorsements, I
don't know if my father suggested this or I suggested this, but Kenny Hahn,
Kenneth Hahn had been the supervisor in Los Angeles County for a very long
time and had retired three, four years ago, and Yvonne Burke had taken his
place. And this is a man who was the epitome of retail politics and constituent
service, just was a beloved man, and was a white man who maintained his seat
in a district that became significantly majority Black, and he was even able to
maintain his seat. But he'd been out of office for a few years and he'd been
sick, so I—somehow my dad and I figured out that we would ask him for his
endorsement. So he's out of office, he's friendly with my dad, so he says—I
mean it's a little more complicated than this, but in the end he says, "Yes, I'll
endorse you." Fact is many people, elderly voters still thought he was still the
supervisor. So it's those kinds of insights that I picked up from my dad.
The other thing that was—the Howard Berman connection was also very important because there were a lot of Black candidates running, but this district also included most of the—outside of Beverly Hills, included most of the Jewish communities in the Los Angeles area. So I had been on a trip to Israel with my father who got invited by the Jewish Federation. So just the fact that I had been there and taken some pictures with some Jewish politicians. I would send out a mail piece with a picture of me and Benny Begin in front of the Israeli flag in the lobby of the Israeli Knesset. So I had stuff like that, that is again opportunistic.

There was a piece of mail that we did, and again I was resisting my father's attempts to do more, but he wanted to do a—design a mail piece for me, and I said no because I was young and full of vinegar and had these great concepts about my positions and what I thought was interesting and what the community needed. And he basically said, "Shut up and let me do this," so I said, "Okay." So the piece was a black-and-white picture, not a four-color, exotic, multifold; it was a four—it was a black-and-white picture on one side of a postcard, and the other side was a letter from my sister saying, "My mother would be sending this, but she's passed recently, and my brother is a good guy, please vote for him." It doesn’t say anything about my position on any issues, and it was the cheapest piece we did in the whole campaign but overwhelmingly the best received.

Eardley-Pryor: How do you know? How did you know it so well received?

Murray: Because we would talk to people, as you're walking around talking to people, they would say, "Oh I love the piece from your sister." So, again, I learned that from my father that positions are important, but people vote because of personal connections. That's why a lot of people say you need to walk precincts because you need to have—when people would answer their door, you need to have a personal connection. That's why retail politics works, that's why somebody like Bill Clinton is as successful as he is making a personal connection with people. And if you have a personal connection with people, they will forgive you some of your policy positions that they may or may not disagree with. And that was something that I knew intrinsically from being around my father and other politicians, which is also something that many younger politicians in my age didn’t understand. They didn’t understand that Mrs. Johnson or Mrs. Lopez or Mrs. Goldsmith, they're the true voters, and they don't always vote on a single-policy position. They want to like you, they want to trust you. So, anyway.

Eardley-Pryor: Did you also walk precincts then?
Murray: I did walk but not very many, I've got to say. I was a strategic guy, but I was lazy in that regard. The other thing is that people didn’t—as much as people like that, people don't always come to their door for an unknown person. So I did walk some precincts but—and it was a great experience in terms of my connection with people because it was always great to see a young parent who then brings their kids to the door and says, "Hey, you should meet this person, they might be your next elected official." So it was that, but I didn't walk a lot I must admit. I did hire people to walk some. [laughs]

Eardley-Pryor: Good strategy, again.

Murray: Yeah.

Eardley-Pryor: Before we dive too deep into some of that legislative work and especially the positions that you've been talking about that were a little different from your father's, I want to set the context as well. I mean LA is such a changing place, always. But especially in that period from the eighties into the nineties, LA was changing a lot. And, of course, a major event in '92, the Los Angeles riots and the Rodney King beating in '91.

Murray: Well, before that, in the eighties, you had the crack epidemic, and you had the war on drugs and you have that.

Eardley-Pryor: And you're involved in the music industry at this time. I mean, what are some of your memories of Los Angeles in the eighties then?

Murray: I was aware and around all of the good things and the bad things that happened during that era, but again none of it really touched me in any significant way. I was in the music business and kind of the sex, drugs, and rock and roll eighties, but never really did any drugs, just wasn't my thing. I never really drank very much, just again there because of—by grace of God, go I—because clearly, I could've made a different decision at some party and have fallen by the wayside. Those things just didn’t interest me. And to this day, I still don’t really drink. I don’t like the feeling of being buzzed, which seems to be the purpose that many people drink. I don’t like that feeling. So again, through chance, I never took too many of that stuff.

Eardley-Pryor: What about 1984, the LA Olympics? It's a huge moment for the city. What are some of your memories of that?
Murray: Watched it on TV, you know. It was a big deal, it was in our city, but this is Los Angeles, we have lots of big deals. We have the Academy Awards every year and the Grammys and the Emmys and having the Rose Bowl and having a big event in our town, and again the Olympics are bigger than most of this, but it didn’t really hit me. I do remember being proud of Rafer Johnson coming in with the torch, and I was proud that it was in my city, but I didn’t attend any events, and I watched it on TV like everyone else.

Eardley-Pryor: Speaking of TV, I'm thinking about the William Morris agency. In the eighties, while you were working there, it was just going gangbusters in part because of its representation of Bill Cosby and *The Cosby Show*.

Murray: Yeah.

Eardley-Pryor: As you described it, it sounds like you were one of the few Black men involved in working your way through the agency during this time when a Black family was the cultural apotheosis of American television. What was that like for you working there?

Murray: And, you know, you would think that it would have an impact, but it never did because the agents at William Morris and all the other agencies would—and by the way, they were all great to me. You would have these little old Jewish men who were great to me, and I had the good fortune of coming in toward the end of the lives of some of the true giants. So you mentioned in your notes to me, Abe Lastfogel. He was still coming to the office when I started in the mailroom. And there were some other people like Sam Weisbord, who was a very famous agent. Norman Brokaw is a guy who was incredibly great to me and is literally the guy that introduced Marilyn Monroe to Joe DiMaggio.

So I had the good fortune of being around some of these guys. But they never viewed it that way because in the agent world, they had been representing Black performers since the beginning of time it seems like. So they had represented Sammy Davis, and they had represented Bill Robinson, and they had represented some of the big stars. They certainly didn’t think they needed a Black agent to represent Black stars, and I had some dealings with the Cosby's office and met him a couple of times, and he was certainly nice to me. And I had no idea what he would later become or what he was doing, but clearly, his was a big seminal show, but at the time William Morris had ten shows on TV. If you pay attention to what's going on in the entertainment business now, TV packaging was a big deal. Some of the guys who were down the hall from me created *The Danny Thomas Show*, created *The Dick Van Dyke Show*, so they had lots of stuff going on. And I don’t want to
minimize the amount of impact that *The Cosby Show* had, but it wasn't enough to make the world different for me.

01-01:15:15
Eardley-Pryor: What were the things that you were trying to push? Who were you trying to represent?

01-01:15:19
Murray: Well, mostly, I was in the music side of it. So all of the clients that the company had from Miles Davis to Julio Iglesias to the Motown acts, I got involved in one way or the other. We had a pretty big roster, George Benson, of course as I mentioned earlier. I remember working on The Temptations and Smokey Robinson. We did Prince for a little while. My boss, when I was an assistant, had Miles Davis. I did a Rod Stewart tour or two. So there was a broad array. The way you did it is you had some clients who you spent more time with, but you also had a sales territory. It's almost like selling insurance when you get down to it. You had a sales territory, so you had to go out and sell these artists to promoters around the country. So you had a territory, and you worked on whoever needed to go to that city.

01-01:16:29
Eardley-Pryor: What did you like about it?

01-01:16:29
Murray: But the interesting part was I got to—when they came to LA, I got to go to a lot of shows, so I saw virtually everybody.

01-01:16:40
Eardley-Pryor: Was that your favorite part?

01-01:16:42
Murray: Yeah, I think if you're in your twenties as I was, being backstage at The Rolling Stones is a pretty heady thing, so, yeah, I would say. It's not like I got to hang out with Mick Jagger, but I was there. And so you got to be at some big events and small events, and you got to hang out backstage in some exclusive places. I don't think I was making very much money, but I was having a great lifestyle.

01-01:17:16
Eardley-Pryor: I'm thinking about the period that you're also then starting to becoming more entrepreneurial with your law degree and representing different artists and even working in the child dependency court. It's also around the same time that the West Coast rap scene is developing.

01-01:17:34
Murray: Oh, yeah, that's another big story.

01-01:17:37
Eardley-Pryor: Tell me about that.
Murray: So this is maybe more detailed than whoever is listening to this wants to hear, but I actually, when I was a very young agent, I signed a piano player named Rodney Franklin. So Rodney Franklin was a popular, fusion jazz piano player, but his manager was a guy named Jerry Heller. So I became very friendly with Jerry Heller in representing this guy. Jerry Heller also went on to manage N.W.A. and Dr. Dre, and Dr. Dre's predecessor group called the World Class Wreckin' Cru. And he literally offered me those acts, and at the time William Morris did not want to represent rap acts.

Eardley-Pryor: Wow.

Murray: And by the way, William Morris wasn't unique in that. Black Radio did not want to represent Black acts—I mean rap acts either. So even among educated Black folks, rap was very gauche and lower class. And so KJLH radio here in Los Angeles, as well as its counterpart in the Bay Area not KMEL but one—the other Black station used to actually run ads saying they don’t play rap. So there was a visceral counterreaction to rap before it generally took over the world.

But I got offered those rap acts, but William Morris would not represent rap. And by the way I was not a street kid, so I wasn't the coolest kid to represent rap acts either. But I got offered those acts and I couldn’t represent them. And this is again before anybody knew that they would be big. Dr. Dre was in a group called the World Class Wreckin' Cru, and there was another female group right along with them. And they were big in Los Angeles but hadn't broken across the country. They weren't big enough for me to try and fight the pushback. And then, of course a couple of years later, they took over everything. And even when they were big, I think William Morris would not have represented them.

Eardley-Pryor: That was just a definitive statement on their part?

Murray: Yeah, they just didn’t want to represent rap act. Some of it was anti-Semitic, which of course was a thing for them, and they just thought of it as sort of street, thug music.

Eardley-Pryor: And I'm thinking now, too, you mentioned that your father represented the Compton area where this music was emerging from in some ways in LA.

Murray: Yeah. It's interesting, the mayor—the guy who became mayor of Compton later, Omar Bradley developed a relationship with some of these gangster rap acts. And my father said he met them once but he didn’t really—it didn't
really affect him either. And again, it was a street thing. It was not something that intellectuals and college-aged professionals really, really took part in until much later. Now, everybody my age talks about how much they were into N.W.A. when they first came out, but it's all a lie. They absolutely were not.

01-01:21:40
Eardley-Pryor: That's great. Those are great stories, a great context. I do want to ask your memories about the 1992 LA riots.

01-01:21:50
Murray: So that was interesting because I was an adult, and I remember going to my—with my father to—was there another riot after '92?

01-01:22:16
Eardley-Pryor: No.

01-01:22:16
Murray: Oh, maybe that was Rodney King. But I remember going with my father to a meeting at the First AME Church, but I—again, mostly I'm watching it on TV.

01-01:22:27
Eardley-Pryor: What were your thoughts as it was happening? I mean, here you are, you have, as a child, vague memories of the Watts riots. And then, the '92 LA riot.

01-01:22:36
Murray: It was kind of just as you described. It's sort of here we go again, things have reached their breaking point, and '92 was after the Rodney King verdict, right?

01-01:22:48
Eardley-Pryor: Well, the Rodney King beating happened in '91, and '92 was—yes, the riots were a response to those officers getting off.

01-01:22:56
Murray: So I remember, these are those events like the OJ trial where we're all sitting in front of the TV waiting for the verdict, and you just knew when the verdict came down that things were going to jump off and they did. And much like you have in all areas, there are people who are protesting, some protesting violently and then some people who are just profiteers. And I remember going to First AME Church for a community meeting and try to calm people down and then going back home. It never came very, very close to my house, although I did see some of the stores that we shopped in get looted, but I certainly didn’t feel in any danger. But I was—certainly understood the frustration.

01-01:23:58
Eardley-Pryor: So just a couple of years after that is when you are elected in '94.

01-01:24:01
Murray: Right.
Eardley-Pryor: Did any of the dynamics that are happening in the wake of the LA riots shape your political aspirations?

Murray: No, not really. So there was lots of efforts to bring grocery stores back and there were some rebuild LA efforts. But no, it didn’t really have any direct effect.

Eardley-Pryor: What were the things that you were most interested in? What inspired your campaign? What were the things that you said, "This is why I want to run."

Murray: The core thing was that I grew up in this neighborhood, and I thought I understood what people wanted. I didn’t have a particular political issue that I was running on. It is just that I thought that my positions on all of the issues matched the constituency, so there wasn't a singular thing.

Eardley-Pryor: You described that your father had different politics than you, and he was—

Murray: Well, because his district was different. So I had an affluent—mostly affluent, not all affluent. I certainly had my parts of what would then have been called South Central Los Angeles, but I also had the Jewish community, I also had an Indian community. I also had Cheviot Hills and Westside and parts of Century City and Mar Vista. So, he had different issues. He had a school district that was failing. He had to do a bill where they took over the school district, so where the state took over this Black-run school district, which was tough for him. So his issues were just a little bit different.

Eardley-Pryor: Your father was obviously a role model, I would think, in some ways for you.

Murray: Yeah.

Eardley-Pryor: In other ways, you charted your own path. Who else were the role models for you?

Murray: Oh, you know what, give me a couple of minutes.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah—

Murray: I need to take a little break.
[pause in recording]

01-01:26:03
Eardley-Pryor: Okay, great, go ahead, Kevin, you were talking about—

01-01:26:04
Murray: So the role model. I'd have to think, aside from my father, Mervyn Dymally because Mervyn Dymally was a Black politician who, better than most, understood how to exercise the levers of power and influence and legislation, so he's a tactician. And I tend to gravitate toward people like that. I tend not to gravitate toward people who take an ideological position. I consider myself much more pragmatic. During the course of my career, I viewed myself more as a legislator than a politician. I had very few press conferences, I wasn't seeking out that kind of attention. I wanted to get stuff done. So the people who end up being role models: Mervyn Dymally, Willie Brown is one, Howard Berman and Michael Berman would be another. Jesse Unruh certainly looms large, and he was a mentor to both Willie Brown and Mervyn Dymally so that value. Also Lyndon Johnson, and this is another old funny story.

01-01:27:23
So I was trying to get the endorsement of a paper called the LA Weekly, which I think still exists but was kind of the leftist alternative paper in LA, but widely read. And I said to them that one of my role models was Lyndon Johnson, and they were completely aghast. I mean, when they ended up writing the article, they just beat me up about how could I be so enamored of this backroom politician. And before I even get to that, it just sounded crazy to me that the guy, the white guy from Texas who signed the Voting Rights Act and the Fair Housing Act, why they would be surprised that a Black politician would be enamored of Lyndon Johnson just was appalling to me. Also it's an example of sort of white, left-wing gaze—it's called white gaze these days, I don't remember what we called it then. But they couldn't get past the idea that he was a backroom politician. But I actually respected the backroom politicians because they got stuff done. And you might not agree with their motives, and their motives may have been selfish, but they ended up doing great things for our country and for our state. The kind of people I knew who—I saw who knew how to operate.

01-01:29:03
So once you get elected, you're this person, and you've got one vote, and how do you marshal that into a majority of votes for your legislation or for the issues that you care about? And those are the people that I respected. I was less enamored of the ideologues who gave great speeches but got no bills passed.
You mentioned Willie Brown as a mentor in some ways, and you had two years while he was still speaker of the Assembly, in his historic period as speaker. Share a little bit, if you don’t mind, how Willie was a mentor to you.

Just watching him, just being able to be in the room with him. So we had these weekly caucus meetings and just watching him operate. So here's a guy who absolutely lost the majority and still stayed speaker for a year, so amazing. There just literally was nobody better at tactics and strategy. And he had been the focus of efforts to get rid of him for decades it seems like, and he beat back every one of those. And not only did I watch him with the intent of staying speaker and then essentially manipulate the leadership of the house for even the additional year that he was there not being speaker. But you also figured out how he managed things such that when he didn't have the majority, he still got some Republican votes. And his ability to be able to do that, his ability to understand what motivated people to vote one way or the other, or to do one thing or another. And it also taught me that a lot of what—and frankly it's a little less so these days in politics, but a lot of what he did was personal and not professional.

There was one woman whose daughter seemed to always get in some kind of trouble, and she happened to be a Republican. And he would always help her—help out her daughter because he was the speaker of the entire House. And he tried to do—obviously on policy things and on politics, he was a Democrat, but you had to serve in the House with these other people, and he made friends with them. In fact, you will find that some of them who were his harshest critics politically were people who still loved to grab dinner with him. And so that's one of the major things that I learned, that it really is about personality and personal connection.

You had mentioned just now, and you told me before, you consider yourself more as a legislator rather than a politician. Can you clarify a little bit more about how you see those two things as different?

I didn’t go to every opening, or birthday, or funeral, or everything I was invited to. I was really focused on my legislation and trying to get my legislation passed and signed into law. And I don’t know, maybe it was arrogant, probably I might be a member of Congress now had I done more of those things. But once I was elected, and again, I had the luxury of being elected in an overwhelmingly Democratic district—at some points, it rose to 80 percent Democratic—and it was a neighborhood which I grew up in, so I was not worried about losing my seat. So I didn’t think that I needed to go to every little groundbreaking and grand opening that I got invited to. I did some of those things, but I didn’t do that many of them, and so again, had I spent
more time on the ground, maybe there are some things that I would've gone a different way. But I was focused on actually getting bills and what I thought were big ideas passed.

01-01:33:30
Eardley-Pryor: Well, that seems to me like an opening to ask a little bit more about those big ideas. What were the big ideas that you were excited about?

01-01:33:36
Murray: Well, I was relatively early on identity theft as an issue. I certainly did some bills on "driving while Black." I was a big proponent of increasing urban park space. I was a big proponent of solar energy. You probably have a better understanding of what I did than I do. I'm also one of those people that it's not that interesting to me after I've done it. So it's hard for me to think of what I might have done—which might be interesting, might have been incredibly interesting, and I was incredibly passionate about it at the time, but I don't remember it now that it's over.

01-01:34:25
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Well, I'll go into some details maybe in our next session with some of the specific bills that I'm interested in.

01-01:34:29
Murray: Okay.

01-01:34:30
Eardley-Pryor: But on more kind of the big picture and just the social experience of becoming an Assembly member, what was it like going to Sacramento for you?

01-01:34:39
Murray: Well, (a) I was thirty-four and single, which placed—forgetting about single, I was thirty-four, so I was young. So I was young and Black, and my father was there. My father gave me my space to do whatever it is I wanted to, and people always used to try to connect us in some way like send him to ask for me for my vote or something like that. To his credit, we always resisted that kind of thing. But if you're thirty-four and you have—you're one of eighty people in the state and you have a certain amount of power, it certainly was interesting. And what I loved being a legislator is that if somebody came into my office and said, "Gee, this is the problem I have," I had the power to go try and fix it. So it's been a year or two probably, but it wasn't till recently that I would go to the grocery store and somebody would say, "Hey, are you Kevin Murray? You fix this thing that was affecting my daughter or my son." So I enjoyed doing the not-so-public, interesting, technical fixes of things as much as I did the big ideas.

01-01:36:09
Eardley-Pryor: Tell me about how you listened to which constituents. You have all these different voices and all these different identities to represent in your district. How do you choose the ones that you're going to try to work for?
Murray: Well first, you pick out the ones who are actual constituents and not just interest groups, which happen to be located in your district. So like there are some fights which just go on and on every year. So the optometrists are fighting with the ophthalmologists for whatever the level of their thing is. The nurses are fighting with the doctors because they want to prescribe stuff. So you have to separate out each side's economic interest and then you have to—you've got to pick out constituents where it truly is a constituent problem versus an interest group, or it's an issue group as opposed to an interest group.

Eardley-Pryor: What's the difference there?

Murray: Well, there are people who are really passionate about their issues—say, the Sierra Club—which is different than the economic interest of the bankers and the activists or somebody's business interest. Or during my time there, there's a big fight between cable companies who wanted to start offering phone service and phone companies who wanted to start offering cable service. The overwhelming majority of the fights in Sacramento are those kinds of interest groups. Labor versus business is the obvious one. For instance, I was big on trying to get money for urban parks, and the biggest opponent of urban parks in low-income neighborhoods were environmentalists because they saw that—they saw it as a zero-some gain financially in that they were more interested in saving the red tail finch in the Palm Desert than they were in having Black kids have parks. So you found that, even among your people that you agree with or are on the side of the angels, you find that they also have their same interest. So like in an environmental community, the air-quality people don't necessarily care about money that goes to the water-quality people, or the open-space people, or the endangered-species people. And every dollar you take from one of those places, that other entity might think they should go to them. So we had a big fight when we wanted urban parks for people who wanted more open space. They don't parks that people can actually play in; they want open space that nobody plays in. So there are all those kind of internal fights, and you just have to separate it out where you think you want to be intellectually and where your constituents are.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me about setting up your office. You talked about not even having a campaign headquarters until a month before the election. Tell me about that transition in choosing—

Murray: Well, again, it wasn't that difficult. My chief of staff was a longtime friend who I had gone to elementary school with, who had ended up working in the legislature and helped me on my campaign. And then I just looked around for talented people.
Eardley-Pryor: Well, who—?

Murray: It so happens that during that time, some people did leave for various reasons because of term limits, so there were some talented people who were looking for jobs. That's another thing is I never had staff drive me around. I wanted quality legislative staff who knew how to move stuff and so that's what I strove for.

Eardley-Pryor: How did you find them?

Murray: You get to the Capitol and you start interviewing people and you start asking for recommendations. Willie Brown and some of the senior people were good at recommending who I might want. And it took me a couple of years to really get a crack staff that I thought was really on top of it.

Eardley-Pryor: You mentioned that your chief of staff was an old friend, who was that?

Murray: It was a guy named Joey Hill.

Eardley-Pryor: And you knew Joey from being a kid?

Murray: Yeah. We went to elementary school together. He's a year older than me, but we went to elementary school together.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great, yeah.

Murray: And he was just one of the crew of guys and women who we used to kind of Monday-morning-quarterback politics. So we'd sit at some bar and say, "Gee, this happened or that happened and I would've done this or I would've done that and they should've done this." And he's one of those people that encouraged me to run and helped out on the campaign, so he became my chief of staff.

Eardley-Pryor: When you came into office, this was during Republican Governor Pete Wilson's term as governor.

Murray: Yes.
Eardley-Pryor: And, in fact, he was the governor the whole way through your time in the Assembly.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me about what that's like having a Republican governor as a legislator, as a—

Murray: We still got stuff done. You probably couldn't do that now. And certainly, you had to negotiate things, so you were never going to get him to sign some crazy, left wing piece of legislation. But by today's standards, he was a moderate. So, uh, until he ran for reelection the second time with Prop 187, he was a conservative Republican, but he was pro-choice at the time, he was from San Diego, so he had that sort of San Diego-moderate view of even Republicanism. So you couldn't do crazy stuff or extreme stuff, but you could go to him and negotiate with something that you thought was important to you or your district or your interest. Like for instance, the stuff I did on identity theft, that's a relatively nonpartisan thing, and it was new to the world then. I can't think off the top of my head the bills of mine that he signed, but he certainly signed some. Certainly if we have a Democrat, I would've gotten more things that I proposed signed.

We didn't talk about this yet, but the other thing is that I did—anything that touched the entertainment industry was something that usually came my way, so again relatively nonpartisan. If you're the governor of California, you've got to like and support Hollywood, so. So I was able to get stuff done. I was later able to get some important stuff done with Schwarzenegger, and when Wilson was elected, of course, the legislature was overwhelmingly Democratic, and he also knew that he had to negotiate some things. And this is another time where you would use the speaker, Willie Brown at the time, to help you go in and get stuff from the governor.

Eardley-Pryor: When Willie Brown left office as—or at least left his term as speaker in 1995, this is just a couple of years really into your first term as an Assembly member. How did the Assembly change in your experience?

Murray: Well, it was just a little bit crazy for a year because you had these Republican speakers who even the Republicans hated. Because what we did is, Democrats put together the votes to make the—there was enough Democrats plus the Republican who you wanted to be speaker to get speaker. And so they became speaker with almost all Democratic votes, but then the Republicans hated
them and tried to recall them and throw them out and all sorts of things. So it was just chaotic for that year.

01-01:44:38
Eardley-Pryor: I see in here Doris Allen followed Willie. She was only in office for three months then—

01-01:44:43
Murray: Right. I was one of the people who had to go and tell Doris Allen that she had to step down at some point because they were going to recall her I think. But she was, again, a person that the Republicans had alienated. And so if you walk into someone's office and you say, "We can make you speaker," and you are already hate them anyway because they've been treating you bad—she was a wonderful woman, not necessarily speaker talent, but she was a wonderful woman. But again she was only there for three months because the Republicans did everything they could to get rid of her.

01-01:45:25
Eardley-Pryor: That sounds like there was just a lot of infighting within—

01-01:45:26
Murray: Yeah, there was a recall of Mike Machado as I remember during the period, so all of these. The Republicans, much like they're doing now at the federal government, they wanted to get rid of Willie Brown so badly, and they almost accomplished that electorally. In fact, they did accomplish it electorally, and they were so aghast that he avoided the hangman's noose then or I should say the guillotine—we don’t say hangman's noose anymore—and he avoided the guillotine then that they did everything. That was sort of the rise of the recalls. Before that, nobody did a recall, if someone, particularly someone on the other side of the aisle, you just didn’t do that. That was an extreme measure, but they tried a couple of recalls. I think Paul Horcher who was the main target was one that they did end up getting, but Mike Machado who was a Democrat, they didn't end up getting, and it was just a big chaotic during that period. And then I think Curt Pringle became Speaker. It should have been Brulte, but they didn't count the votes on the day of the vote right, and then it ended up being Pringle.

01-01:46:55
Eardley-Pryor: What do you mean he didn't count the votes, like he wasn't whipping properly?

01-01:46:57
Murray: Well, I would say he wasn't whipping properly. I don’t know that he could have, but he had elected a majority of Republicans, but he didn’t have the votes to get elected Speaker because there were some Republicans who didn’t vote for him. So Paul Horcher voted for Willie Brown, which made the
difference, and he was blamed for not being able to confirm that vote prior to the election.

Eardley-Pryor: I get the sense that you—even as a freshman legislator, you were really involved in upper echelon meetings with the leaders.

Murray: Yeah, I was a little bit lucky in that I was very interested in being operational in the tactical and strategic way that things operated. And I was lucky that to the extent that he could or would, Willie let me into that world. So I got put on the Rules Committee I think my first—shortly after getting elected. So that also let me see the inside of how things worked. That's not quite a leadership position, but it's an interesting position for a freshman. In order to get those positions, you have to show your loyalty to the leadership. You don't get those positions and get to deviate from the caucus position, and so I understood that relatively quickly. I think I was young and I was a lawyer, and so that got me some extra attention from leadership. At that time in the Assembly, it was all about the Speaker, like power was not diluted at all, and when power was diluted, it was diluted because the Speaker gave it to you.

And so that's another lesson I learned from Willie Brown, who was surely the most powerful person in the Assembly. Aside from some very specific events that historians always cite, he very rarely punished people. What you were afraid of with Willie, more than anything else, was not being part of something good that was going on. So if there was a particular policy issue that you were interested in and you could use his help on, or there was something else—on down to when a good office came up or better staff became available, the real sin was you didn't get to participate in any of those things. And Willie was very magnanimous about power. Like he could've controlled the entire legislature, but he almost never carried a bill himself, always dished it out to other members, definitely wanted to take care of members. That's what bought him, for the sake of argument, longevity, because people always knew that he would try and take care of them. And most importantly, they knew that he took care of other people so that if they opposed him, they might be out there on their own.

Eardley-Pryor: How did you internalize that in the choices you made?

Murray: Internalize is the right word. It just became intuitive in the way that I operated. So you try to cajole people, you try to get along with them, you try to have a relationship. I always enjoyed their relationships where if I went down a hall to legislator x and said, "Hey, I really need this, it's important to me in my district," and if it didn't violate any of their policy issues or hurt their district, then they normally said yes. And by the same token, without a
one-on-one exchange, which by the way is illegal, they would do the same, "Hey, this is important to me in my district, I need you on this one," and you want to give that to them, and that was the way it worked.

Currently, it's much more transactional than I think it should be. Term limits probably has a role to do with that because you're not going to build a six or eight- or ten-year relationship with someone during the part of term limits. But it was always more relationship based, and it was also much like when I was at William Morris, the end of an era where some of the old lions of the legislature were still around. So you could do some environmental things, but you couldn't pass an environmental bill unless Byron Sher supported it, just didn't happen. You couldn’t pass a transportation idea you had unless you could convince Quentin Kopp, who was the transportation chair in the Senate, to support it. So there were some lions in their areas who had been chair of those committees for decades or more who you had to learn to coexist with and cooperate with and seek mentorship from if you wanted to operate in those areas.

Eardley-Pryor: What were the ways that you did that?

Murray: You just go to go and talk to people, sometimes big, but you've got to go and talk to people and say, "Hey, this is the idea that I had." Now, if your idea is in opposition to an idea that they had, you just lose and you wait until they leave office. If your idea is tangential, then you run the risk that they're going to take your idea and just take it over, and so you've got to kind of cajole and play with them and make sure that they work with you. And it again goes back to personal relationship, you've just go to convince them.

One good example is I wanted to do a park bond, and my big part of it was urban parks and so I wanted to do the big bond and then make sure that we carved out a part of urban parks. Tom Hayden who clearly had—I don't know, I don’t remember what committee he chaired, but he clearly had great sway over what was going on and in terms of environmental legislation. He also wanted to do a park bond, so I didn’t think that I could beat Tom at this game, so I made a deal. We coauthored the park bond, his name was first, but I got a rather large piece of it to go into something called the Murray-Hayden Urban Parks program, and that was how we worked things out. So I got the main thing that I wanted, and he got to run the park bond. And in the end, Antonio Villaraigosa, who was the Speaker at the time when we were in the Senate, and ended up becoming the Villaraigosa-Hayden Park bond, but I still got my urban parks money. So those kinds of things are the things you did, and again many of them were personal and not ideological.
Eardley-Pryor: What kind of dynamic was there coming from Los Angeles and then representing with the whole state present in the Assembly, this north-south dynamic that's often portrayed?

Murray: Well, it infuriates me to this day because the majority of the votes clearly come from Los Angeles, but when there's a north-south spike, the north almost always wins.

Eardley-Pryor: Why is that?

Murray: I don't know why that is. For a time, you—and my experience was (a) with Willie, and we never messed with Willie on San Francisco-based things, but he also derived a lot of his support from the Black Caucus, which was also largely Southern California. So there was a certain détente there. But Bill Lockyer, when he was the Senate pro tem, used to beat us up pretty bad when there was a conflict. The one I remember is when we needed to rebuild the Bay Bridge, and it was billions and billions and billions of dollars that would've been taken out of the transportation funds that would otherwise be used statewide, and be focused on the Bay Bridge. And those from Southern California said, "Well, you're going to have to eat some of that because that's your geography and you're going to have to pay bigger tolls." And we got some of what we wanted, but they mostly win—the Speakers, except for Unruh have—you had Leo McCarthy, you had Willie, and there was somebody else who was a Bay Area person or a Northern California person. And this is true, by the way, even when David Roberti from Southern California was the pro tem. Somehow, the north always wins, and they have so many fewer votes, and I don't understand why.

Eardley-Pryor: That's just how it is then?

Murray: In fact, one of your fellow academics should do a study just on that. Like how is it that the Bay Area mostly win—oh, and add Burton, John Burton too. The Bay Area mostly wins north-south fights even though clearly most of the votes come from south of the state.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, it does seem like there's a lot of power in the north but for reasons that seem—

Murray: For no reason that I can ascertain, because the numbers—I mean two-thirds of the votes come from south of the Tehachapis in the state. So Los Angeles, I think, accounts for a third on its own roughly. I don't know why the Bay Area always wins, but they do.
Within the Los Angeles Basin itself, is there a sense of basin unity in the Assembly?

You may have struck on the answer. The Bay Area has always been much more unified. You'll find that when you have the numbers—and it ends up having a countervailing effect—when you have the numbers, there is less need for camaraderie on a day-to-day basis. So then, when you really do need the camaraderie, you don't really get it. This also has to do with identity politics. The Latino Caucus for instance, during the rise of the Latino Caucus in the late nineties, early two thousands, they got up to about ten, and they were really close knit, and they were really moving things along, mostly led by Richard Polanco. But once they got numbers enough, then they started having internal fights with each other. So once you got the numbers that you so strive for, then there's enough room for people to start getting into fights with each other. I don't know what it is, but I think unity is probably the bigger thing.

All right, well, I'm looking at our time here, I think this is a good time to pause.

All right, thank you.
Interview 2: May 28, 2021

02-00:00:03
Eardley-Pryor: Today is Friday, May 28 in the year 2021. My name is Roger Eardley-Pryor from the UC Berkeley's Oral History Center. This is interview session number two with Sen. Kevin Murray as a part of our California State Government Oral History Project. Kevin, it's great to see you again.

02-00:00:19
Murray: Great.

02-00:00:19
Eardley-Pryor: Can you remind me where you're located?

02-00:00:21
Murray: I am in Los Angeles.

02-00:00:24
Eardley-Pryor: Right. And I am up in Santa Rosa, California. We are recording over Zoom. For this interview session, I want to dive into some details about your time in the California legislature, where you served from 1994 to 1998 in the Assembly, and then from '98 until 2006 in the Senate.

02-00:00:43
Murray: Right, right.

02-00:00:45
Eardley-Pryor: And then we'll pick up the story as to what happened between that period and today as well by the end of the interview. To start off, I'd love to hear your memories of election night on first knowing that you were going to be coming into the Assembly.

02-00:01:00
Murray: Election night is always heady, and no matter what anybody tells you, particularly on your first try out. You just never know how it's going to end up. In my particular case, there were nine people running, at least two or three others had significant endorsements and or money, and so you just never know. What I'm trying to remember is whether we were ahead all night or we were behind and then came ahead, which would've been pretty heady. But out of nine people, I think I won with the percentage in the 20s, but I was 4 or 5 percent ahead of the next person. So it was a relatively decisive win and that is before they—before the primaries that we have now. So, there was a Democratic primary where only Democrats ran, and then the general election where you ran against people from the other parties. And my district was in the high seventies Democratic, so primary night was the whole shebang. I was thirty-four, it was an exciting thing for sure.

02-00:02:27
Eardley-Pryor: Where were you?
We had a campaign headquarters on—what street was it on—Pico I believe. I can't remember if we rented out a place and had a little election night thing, but I think it was in our headquarters on Pico.

Who were you there to celebrate with?

It ended up mostly being friends and family and then the campaign workers. So it was mostly a campaign-volunteer workers kind of event.

And how did you find some of those people to help join your campaign?

Some were just friends that I had known for a while, some were people who—there's a group of people in just about every area who just always—working on campaigns. They like working on campaigns and so you know them or you run into them throughout campaigns, and they say, "Oh, yeah. I'd like to come help you too." There were a couple of family friends and neighbors. There was a man named Mr. Titus who I remember specifically because he was the father of two of my school friends, and he was just always active and interested in politics, and to this day, maybe he was my most loyal supporter. He's passed away now but his—both his—one of his children is a dentist and one is a superior court judge here in Los Angeles. His kids weren't even people that I was except—ionally close to, but he was part of our community, and he was happy and proud that somebody who he essentially helped raise in the village concept was running for office, and he was incredibly loyal and dedicated.

That's great.

In every district, you're going to find those people who just always are these campaign workers. Without regard to which candidate they pick, you'll find that campaign workers—nobody—few people take an active role in just one campaign. These are people who like politics, like campaigning, and they get involved in the campaigns. And this is all the way from people who do specific technical things to people who just lick envelopes and answer the phones.

I can't help but think that, at the national stage, 1994 is when the Republican takeover of Congress and the [Newt] Gingrich revolution happens. I'm wondering, is there any relationship between what was going on at the national level towards what was going on within the state of California for you?
02-00:05:27
Murray: Well yeah. The Democrats lost the Assembly that year, so there was a significant majority at the—when I—before I ran, and then I thought I was walking into that. And I walked into a legislature where Democrats are in the minority. And that quickly turned around, but that certainly was the case.

02-00:05:53
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, and as you told the story last night in the first interview, that Willie Brown was able to negotiate his own control of the Assembly still.

02-00:06:01
Murray: Yeah, and again, it was based upon personal relationships he had built up over the years with Republicans, and he particularly knew to be nice and friendly to Republicans who were a little bit disgruntled. And I had no idea how he developed a relationship where he got at least one Republican to literally vote for him for Speaker out loud, but he did.

02-00:06:36
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. He tells a great story about that in his own oral history in our archive that he claims that he had like almost ten people lined up. If the Republicans got to the person that would have voted for him, he had another one in the wings that it was ready to go.

02-00:06:50
Murray: Two things, Willie and Mervyn Dymally both, says when you're counting your votes, when you're whipping your vote, you always have to have a handful of people in your pocket in case of the double cross. Because people will change their minds or sometimes they'll just tell you, "I'm with you" and then when the vote comes, they disappear or they're not with you. That was always Willie's philosophy was to have some backups.

02-00:07:23
Eardley-Pryor: When you knew you were headed to Sacramento, what were the committees or the assignments you were most excited and hopeful for?

02-00:07:31
Murray: I wanted the obvious things.

02-00:07:35
Eardley-Pryor: What were those things to you, the obvious things?

02-00:07:38
Murray: I really didn't know. As I said, I wanted to get up there and feel my way out. We ended up in the minority, so the chances of me getting to be a committee chair the first term weren't that great. But I wanted to be on rules committee, which I knew was important, and so I was able to accomplish that. I didn't have a policy area that I thought being the chair would make a difference. So that's the other thing to know is you don't have to be the chairperson of a committee to be a leader in that particular policy area. You have to have a relationship with your committee chair because you need to get stuff done.
And again, I came into an era where some of the older committee chairs who had been chairs for decades and really controlled their policy areas were kind of on the way out.

Eardley-Pryor: And on that—

Murray: I knew I was interested in utilities and commerce, and I knew I wanted to be on the rules committee, and I did get on both of those.

Eardley-Pryor: Where did the interest for utilities and commerce come for you?

Murray: I knew the chair, the chair was my predecessor, and I just knew that it was an interesting area. I could've been on health committee; I wasn't really that passionate about that. The so-called "juice" committee is a governmental organization, which oversees the alcohol and tobacco and lots of things like that. I wasn't really interested in that, but I was interested in utilities and commerce.

Eardley-Pryor: Another question I have is that you made this historic moment possible by now being able to serve with your father, the first and only father-son legislators in California history. Could you share a little bit about what that meant for you and for your father and your relationships?

Murray: It's hard to say. For us, it was something we did, we were proud of it, and then we move on, then we're like, "Okay, now, what are we going to do?" We didn't coordinate our bills or coordinate our policy or anything like that. It was frankly more of a thing for outside people than it was for us. Good to have somebody who's—you're close to and who's an ally, but I had to do my own work, and he had to do his own work. And we didn't necessarily rely on each other for anything other than some advice now and then. We were very proud of it, as was my sister. But then, after the moment, okay, now we're on something else.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Well in terms of getting advice, how did you learn the process of how to write a bill? You told me yesterday about the experience of knowing a little bit of how the mechanics of a campaign works. What about the mechanics of actually being a legislator?

Murray: Again, going back to being a lawyer is good training because you understand the process and what's going on. Interesting to note that I was never a staffer. So I knew how to make an argument, and I knew how to go to people and try to convince them that my argument was right, and that was the most important
thing. And then I relied on staff for the mechanics. I'm not sure that I know still where the bill room in the Capitol is. I never had to physically carry a bill from one place to the other, which is—which in spite of all the technology, there are still things that need to be handed over to the clerk and signed for by someone. So I never got sort of into that weeds, but I knew how to make a proposal. I knew how to—I learned very quickly how to draft up language that I want. Because the other thing is that language that goes into bills, it's not drafted by the legislator or their staff, it's drafted by leg council.

02-00:12:22
Eardley-Pryor: Tell me more about that.

02-00:12:26
Murray: So, you have an idea or you may even have some very specific language that you want, but the draft is actually done by the legislative council. And whether you're a Republican or a Democrat, they are not partisan, and they actually work for both houses, and they actually draft the language because you have to make sure that it doesn't conflict with other things in the law. There's all sorts of technical things, which counsel does. So you basically are spitting out an idea, and you have leg council draft it. Even if you want to change a comma or change a sentence in a specific bill, you still have to send it to leg council. And their product is what actually becomes law.

02-00:13:10
Eardley-Pryor: Oh, that's fascinating. Another question I have for you is in terms of caucus relationship. You eventually become chair of the Black Caucus, this historic Black Caucus in California, what was your interaction with first joining or being associated with the caucus?

02-00:13:29
Murray: Well, I knew all the people in it because my dad had been a member of it. I can't remember what year I actually became chair of the Black Caucus. But the legislature is about relationships, so, and each one of those positions is a lever of, not necessarily power, but certainly a lever of influence. The other thing that happens in—and it happens even in things that I do now. Most organizations that have a committee structure, the chair of the committee is usually just one vote, but they have an outsize level of influence only because the members of the committee tend to defer to the chair. And one of the reasons they do that is that they—when you're on their committee that they're chairing, they want some deference, too. And I think it happens in Congress that way. Even though there's this strict seniority thing, and you may have a different perspective, but you start off with some deference to the chair. So you have to develop relationships with people, and even if you're the chair of a committee and even if people defer to you and you believe that you're all powerful, unless you only do legislation or are concerned about things in that one policy area, you have—you'll be sitting on a committee that someone else is chairing. And so you've got to have some relationships.
At one point, I was chairing transportation and my vice chair was a guy named Tom McClintock, who is a Congressman now, and was considered to be one of the most strident right-wing Republicans in the legislature at the time. But he and I got along great because he knew he didn’t have the votes. I gave him some deference as vice chair because again you’ve got—even if you have the votes, just operating on a day-to-day basis takes some cooperation, even if you're going to win the vote. People—there are ways—and Tom McClintock was an expert in *Robert's Rules of Order* and Mason's rules of order, so if he wanted to be an obstructionist, he certainly could be. And so you just give a person a certain amount of respect and deference. And every now and then, I actually agreed with him on something, and I was not shy about saying, "I agree with that" even though he was a pretty right-wing Republican at the time. I would go and talk to him and say, "Hey, what do you think about this? What are you interested in this?" And again, he knew I had the votes, I knew I had the votes, but it made life a lot easier just talking to a person.

And I think that's what's lost on politics a lot these days is—and I think I mentioned to you at our previous session that Willie Brown rarely had to punish people—clearly had the power to punish people, but he rarely did that. And so when you have the power, the thing is you don't have to exercise it. It's often not necessary to exercise and much easier to have a conversation with someone rather than to have to punish them in some specific way. And sometimes there are things, which you're just absolutely going to vote against, there are things which you're absolutely going to vote for, and then there are things which are kind of on the line. So if somebody across the aisle had something that was not really objectionable, why not give them one every now and then just to—for the sake of camaraderie? So that was my philosophy, and that's how I operated in that regard.

Eardley-Pryor: It speaks to a theme that comes up in this interview, which is the power of relationships in your political career

Murray: Yes. Sometimes, it jumps up and bites you in the behind because you have this relationship and you think someone should respond in a certain way and they don't for selfish reasons or for duplicitous reasons. But I find that it just makes life a lot easier, rather than this is the amount of drama and conflict.

Eardley-Pryor: Can you think of any examples where something like that or a conflict did arise, the relationship sort of soured or surprised you?

Murray: Well, yeah. I can't remember the specific instances, but there are instances where someone didn't understand the nature of relationships. I had a
committee chair once kill one of my bills for no reason that I could ascertain. If somebody had a policy reason or it was bad for their district. And my way of correcting was to—I decided that I was going to try and kill all of their bills. And so we eventually worked it out. That rarely happened. Sometimes, you found someone just didn't understand the nature of relationships, but then they figure it out because then on all the other committees that I was on that oversaw that person's bills, I tried to kill every last one of it. Well, actually, what I did is I sent my chief of staff over there—I think I was in the Senate by this time, and I sent my chief of staff to talk to their chief of staff—and they told him, "Look, he's going to kill every one of your bills. It's not going to be tit for tat, it's going to be every one. So can we work this out or not?" And look, if someone said, "Look, this is just bad for my district, I can't be for it," I accept that as a rational thing, we all have those pressures. I didn't understand the reason this person was killing my bill other than that they were the chair of whatever committee it was, and they could. But it was an important enough bill for me that I had to use the nuclear option, which softened it up, and I think it went through.

02-00:20:40
Eardley-Pryor: Do you mind sharing who this person was?

02-00:20:42
Murray: I actually don't remember which one it was. I just remember this incident because the incident stuck for me more than most. I didn't have to do that often. I mean I never had to do that, I think that was the only time, I never had to do it again. I think it was somebody who was a relatively short—a relative short timer because it wasn't anybody obviously that I had a long relationship with.

02-00:21:10
And I can remember another time, which was a learning experience for me, which is that I don't remember why I changed my mind. But Jim Costa, who's now in Congress, had come to me on some particular bill, and this is in my first few months, and said, "Hey, I need your vote on this," and I think I said yes, and then I changed my mind without telling him. And he just came over to me, and he said, "Look, you can't survive that long doing that kind of stuff," and I got it instantly and apologized and it never happened again. I respected people that kept their word more than anything else. Loyalty and the ability to have a relationship was more important than most policy issues.

02-00:22:03
Eardley-Pryor: Do you happen to remember the policy that you were so adamant about making sure got passed if you can't remember the person?

02-00:22:08
Murray: I truly don't remember what it was. The incident, the gamesmanships seem to stick out more than the other details.
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Well, with regard to the Black Caucus, I'm wondering what's the relationship like between the various caucuses, the Latino Caucus, the Women's Caucus, now the API Caucus?

Murray: It is fluid depending on who has more members at the time. So historically, from the sixties through the seventies through the eighties, there were just one or two or maybe three Latinos, and there were usually six or seven African Americans—four maybe five from Southern California and then Willie who was in San Francisco although not in a Black district, and then there was usually somebody in the East Bay who was Black. And there was always a close relationship because the Latinos and African Americans bonded together.

Once Polanco and the Latino Caucus put together real campaign operations and increased their numbers, all of a sudden, they were at ten, and they had their own power, so they didn't need to be quite as close. There was rarely adversarial operations, but they weren't as close. Most of the causes, the ethnic causes and the Women's Caucus, they mostly operate independently, and where their interests merged then they support each other. Their interests rarely conflict. And, again, I can remember during my time you had Proposition 209, the anti-affirmative action proposition, so there weren't many Asians or API members in the legislature at that time, but that was one of those issues that the API community took a different approach than, say, the Latinos or the African Americans. But there wasn't that much interplay. During my time, most of the Speakers, with the exception of Bob Hertzberg, were of color. So you had Willie, then you had Cruz Bustamante, then you had Bob Hertzberg, and then you had Antonio Villaraigosa, and then I think you—I can't remember who came after Antonio, maybe it was Karen Bass?

Eardley-Pryor: Well, Herb Wesson, too.

Murray: Herb Wesson, Karen Bass, so—

Eardley-Pryor: Fabian Nunez for a long time.

Murray: Yeah, Fabian Nunez, so—and up to Anthony Rendon now. So ethnic concerns, which are generally shared with the exception of affirmative action, tended to always get—and it's California, so they tended to always get their due.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great. Well, let's get into some details about some of the legislative work in the Assembly. Now, I found a really nice bio of yours that was related
to your Senatorial days, and it described your—for yourself, your California Assembly time as being known for your legislative skill and passing landmark legislation in the areas of civil rights, seniors' rights, women's rights, economic development, and transportation.

Murray: Yeah. [laughter] That was the first couple of years where I was on rules committee but not a committee chair. I just did whatever came to mind, whatever my staff brought me, whatever good ideas came to me. The one that stands out the most was identity theft because that was a relatively new and unknown area but seemed interesting to me. I was particularly interested in not being pigeonholed as just a Black legislator. So they think that if you're Black, all you're going to be interested in is civil rights or welfare and stuff like that. And I was for all of those things, but I wanted to make sure and create a mark doing other things. As you see in your narrative, I was supportive of the gay community. I was relatively young, so tech savvy as technology savvy could be around that time, so I paid attention to technology kind of things.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, the rise of the internet seems to be a real strong theme in some of the early work, that you're right there as distributing disks to everyone around the nation.

Murray: Yeah, and I was young, so I was more likely to embrace all of these things than somebody who had gotten elected older. I understood computers to the extent that anyone did then. I'm sure I had a computer, and I'm sure I got one of those early laptops with twenty megabytes of storage that I thought was cutting edge. And I joined—what was it back then—America, Online! or Prodigy, one of those. So, yeah, I was for it. I did understand that it was going to change some things, so I tried—to the extent that the state could regulate anything, I tried to be in the forefront of it.

Eardley-Pryor: Some of the things that really struck me, and these weren't all bills that were successful, but ones that you were engaged in, included trying to make DMV services online.

Murray: Well, once I became chair of transportation, I just wanted things to be more efficient. The DMV was—along with your cable company—was historic, and the phone company, were historically known for having bad customer service and for long lines and long wait times and being really inefficient, so I said, "Hey, here's an efficiency thing. Are there things that you can do online simpler?" And so that was the kind of stuff we did.
One of the bills that was successful and became law in 1995 was AB 1302, Education Technology. And here's what I have about that, is that it ensures that students have access to the "information superhighway," and it created the California school and library information infrastructure trust fund in the state treasury.

Oh, yeah. So that was one where I was particularly—(a) I was interested in it. Once I got into technology, I was also interested in the digital divide, and it just seemed like every student that had some exposure to computers but then of course if there was no wiring in a classroom, you couldn't do that. And so I thought that only for education but also for security purpose, there should be a phone line in every classroom.

And this was in the era where you used the telephone network to get to the internet?

Yes, yes. So we wanted schools to develop technology and to be using technology in their schools. We thought then, as now I think people think of the education system as kind of the great equalizer. So if you were a rich kid in a relatively rich school district, maybe you had computers at home or maybe you had a computer lab, but in smaller districts, in less affluent districts, that kind of technology was one of the main dividing points between the have and the have-nots.

How did the education issues become important to you?

Probably like many ideas, you are sitting around talking with your staff about, "Well, what should we do?" "Well, hey, what about this idea?" I had my ideas that I would want to implement, but I was very much willing to take ideas from staff or willing to take ideas from people that just stopped by the office and said, "What do you think about this?"

Another theme that I saw in some of the earlier Assembly work were bills that protected victims of domestic violence, and I'm wondering where that initiative came from?

I'm sure that the beginning of it was a woman's group came and said, "Hey, this is an issue," and I said, "Gee, sounds like a good issue, let's roll with it," so that's the perfect value. That's what you love about having one of these jobs is somebody stops by your office and said, "Hey, did you know that this was happening?" and you're appalled, and you say, "No, how could that happen? Let's fix that." It's like identity theft. So a nonprofit came down to my office
and said, "Hey, do you know that identity theft is not a crime?" So literally, identity theft was not a crime, and the victim of identity theft was not the individual whose identity is stolen, but the victim was the bank. And so the bank had no interest in pursuing these kinds of issues because they just wrote it off, and the fix to it made credit a little bit harder to get. You had to show more, so you had to do more things. So I just said, "Well, gee, that's crazy that it's not a crime." So there are moments like that.

02-00:32:45  Eardley-Pryor: That's great. And just for a notation point, that became AB 157, the Consumer Protection: Identity Theft Act.

02-00:32:53  Murray: Yes.

02-00:32:53  Eardley-Pryor: It looks like that became law sometime in the '97 or so.

02-00:32:57  Murray: Yes.

02-00:32:59  Eardley-Pryor: That's great. And that's the first identity theft law passed in the nation?

02-00:33:02  Murray: Yes. And again, that's one of those things where someone—and again the great point about with this—in this seat is that literally whatever crazy idea someone comes up with or you come up with, you can say, "All right, I'm going to put this in a bill." And it takes some work to get it through all the various processes, but someone can bring you a problem, and you could say, "That's appalling" and go and try and fix it.

02-00:33:31  Eardley-Pryor: I see also that with regard to protecting women and victims in that line, a restraining act order act in AB 2006 that became law in 1996, you passed the bill that helped protect victims of domestic violence by allowing law enforcement officials to declare at the scene an instant, temporary restraining order.

02-00:33:56  Murray: Yeah. That's the kind of thing where—and this happens in the Capitol all the time. Every sort of interest group has their lobby day, and they come around, and they tell you what is of interest to them, and they describe the issues they go through. And so part of the problem was you'd have somebody who would be in the home with an abuser, and if you didn't have a lawyer and you couldn't properly go through the procedure to get a restraining order, you'd be in danger. So those are a lot of the things where somebody comes to you and says "the rules just don't make sense," and you say, "Okay, let's try and fix that."
Eardley-Pryor: That's great. This is an interesting one to me. I just thought with regard to the stories you've told about the district you came from and your father's work in the sixties building coalitions around Los Angeles, that there is an Assembly resolution that you sponsored to commemorate the forty-seventh anniversary founding of the nation of Israel.

Murray: That was pretty interesting because (a), my district included in Los Angeles the primary Jewish parts of town and particularly the Orthodox Jews. So in Los Angeles, there's an area called Pico and Robertson and Pico and Fairfax where a significant concentration of Jewish community is. Except for the district that includes Beverly Hills, I had maybe the highest concentration of Jews in the district. I had been to Israel as a—with my dad once before. As I told you, I—when I was running for office, I significantly campaigned to the Jewish community because I thought they would be a differentiator. The district also included a lot of Korea towns. So while we were all fighting for the African American vote, which was the majority, all these other communities had great import, so I always spent a lot of time trying to make sure I was representing all of those communities also. And I did view them as individual communities. I didn't say, "Oh, I'm the Assemblyman for all people," I wanted to make sure to deal with their specific issues. And so one of the first pieces of legislation I actually ever did was to commemorate the founding of Israel.


Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: It tells the deeper story of that work that you helped to continue.

Murray: Right. And African Americans, the—regardless of who you were or what your base was, you had to do coalition politics. I think, again, you guys have an oral history of Willie Brown, but here's a guy who got elected in a district that was never majority Black. And as you know, we would be going through the details of the San Francisco district that he had, it was never majority Black. It certainly had Black people in it, but it was never majority Black.

Eardley-Pryor: For some of the bills that were not successful, I'm interested in just hearing the things that you were interested in. I noticed some of your early work included bills that seem to increase drug and alcohol penalties.
Trafficking in Schoolyards Act, driving under the influence penalties, controlled substances—some of these things failed in the Senate or in various committees. But I'm just thinking back to yesterday how you said, alcohol and drugs was never part of your life, it was something you were never interested in.

Murray: Yeah, so, but what I was trying to do in most cases, and again I may be wrong on some of the specifics of the bills, but mostly what I was trying to do was equalize methamphetamine and other sort of rural drugs with crack cocaine. So one of the things that was happening at the time was we had these horrible, horrible, big sentences for crack cocaine, but powdered cocaine didn't get the same sentence, methamphetamine didn't get the same sentence. So the Black and Brown drugs had heavier sentences than the White drugs. So I knew that no one was going to let me, at the time, reduce the penalty for crack so the other—the only other thing I could do was increase penalties for the other things. And I didn't get anywhere with them other than the sort of bully pulpit concept of, "Why are rural bikers selling meth getting lower sentences than Black and Brown folks in the inner city who happen to choose crack as opposed to meth? Or why is the wealthy white guy who does—who snorts cocaine getting a lesser penalty than the poor Black guy who smoked crack?"

So that's what I was trying to do there and nobody—the Democrats in general didn't want to increase penalties, and they were probably right about that. But I think we needed to make a statement about the disparity in the sentences for these substances.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great. I think, too, about Pete Wilson as governor supporting California's three-strike law, and just wondering what was your experience underneath the rise of the prison system in California through the eighties but then—?

Murray: I opposed it for the most part. What everybody seems to forget about three strikes, which was a bad idea to begin with and also just these crazy drug sentencing laws we have, is that little old ladies in the inner city supported Pete. So there was a lot of people who now are for criminal justice reform who in the eighties, the drug epidemic was so bad and the violence was associated with the drug epidemic was so bad that there are a lot of people that supported these increased sentencing things. And increasing sentences was the very easiest thing to do. So whenever some horrible thing would happen in some community, somebody would say, "Let's increase the penalty for that," which was an easy thing to do. With the exception of the ones that I did, you're almost always going to get votes for that because who wants to oppose an increased sentence for a pedophile? No one wants to be on the side of pedophiles or drug dealers or anything like that, so those are always easy things to do. They're not necessarily the right thing to do, but they're the easiest thing to do.
And Pete Wilson was a master at finding issues for which he could say he was a champion and you were on the wrong side. So you can say that with 187, you can say that with Proposition 209, affirmative action, 187 was anti-immigrant, you could say that with three strikes and drug sentencing. He always wanted to make these big, bold statements and if you were against them, then you were pro crime. It wasn't that you were against three strikes, you were pro crime. He was one of the first people to fashion those kind of bright-line distinctions. And ironically before doing all of this stuff, he was a pretty moderate Republican, a pro-choice Republican from San Diego. That's about as moderate a Republican as you can get. But then he went further to the right as he was looking to run for president I believe—I mean (a) to get reelected, and (b) to run for president.

One of the things I also wanted to ask about is a bill that didn't quite—that got held up in Assembly appropriations, which was going to be AB 2062, Death Benefits for Medical Workers and Public Safety Workers. It was trying to get healthcare protections for people who got HIV, who were infected with HIV at work.

I did some HIV work in the early days, and I did some general work that would be for the gay community. I was lucky enough to be supported by the gay Democratic club in my area, and so I asked them, "What are your issues?" And so I did one of the first—not—maybe not the first but one of the first bills on domestic partnership, and I did single-parent adoption because again I had worked in the foster care system in the past and so this health protection for frontline workers seemed like an obvious thing to do. And particularly then, nobody knew—we certainly didn't know as much as we do now about AIDS and there were no treatments and so if you were a frontline worker and you got exposed to this, (a) it might have been a death sentence, but it was certainly financially—you can never go back to work again because nobody would let you come back to work if you were infected. And we needed your family to get some death benefits.

I know that AIDS became a political boon in some ways for Willie Brown, too, helping California really invest in research around it.

Totally. I mean, he was from San Francisco, ground zero of not AIDS but the AIDS activist movement, particularly on the West Coast. So many of the most strident AIDS activists were in his district, so he was definitely a leader in that regard.

Was there any relationship between your work on behalf of HIV infected people and Willie Brown's concerns about these issues?
Murray: Not particularly. I was responding to my own constituents.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. There's also a time in—

Murray: Oh, I'm sorry. And the other thing that was happening then was African Americans—and African American, straight, Black women were also rising in terms of AIDS exposure. And Black people who contracted HIV were not getting the same kind of attention as white people who contracted HIV. The funding was definitely skewed to a relatively affluent, West Hollywood-type gay person at the time and less for what was going on in the inner city. So, that also played a role.

Eardley-Pryor: With regard to the legislation that you tried to make happen on behalf of the gay community, I'm just thinking back in the mid-to-late nineties, this is certainly a long time before gay marriage becomes a popular issue. Where did your interest and ability to support the gay community arise from for you?

Murray: Well, constituents, friends, people I knew, people I had worked with. I'm sure part of it is being Black, you understand what it's like to be discriminated against. And I also had the relative freedom because I was in an overwhelmingly Democratic district that I grew up in, so I wasn't worried that if I took some position that I might get voted out of office. And the Black community, the Black church is a big political hammer, and they clearly did not at the time support laws that were pro-gay or pro-HIV, and so. By the way, size of Assembly districts at just under 500,000 people and the fact that it was overwhelmingly Democratic gave me a certain amount of freedom to do things like that and not have to worry about what the pushback might be.

Eardley-Pryor: You mentioned the Black church here, and something we didn't talk about yesterday was any kind of religious affiliations you had growing up.

Murray: I was a Methodist, but I was not a particularly active churchgoing person. I used to go and take my grandmother to church on most Sundays because I spent the weekends at her house often, but I was not a particularly active church member.

Eardley-Pryor: Did the Black church play a role in your community in terms of your legislation?

Murray: No, not in a direct sense on a policy basis. The big Black churches in Los Angeles are also active developers of senior housing and affordable housing
and medical clinics and things like that, so the big churches have nonprofit arms that provide service to the community. So I did try and get money in the budget or through legislation for various church-affiliated organizations but had nothing to do necessarily with the church other than that they were significant organizations providing service to my constituents.

Eardley-Pryor: I'm looking at AB 45 on domestic violence, which became law in 1997, and this allows judges to set bail at an amount necessary to protect the victim and the victim's family from further abuse and require interested parties to receive a copy of domestic violence restraining orders. This was sponsored by the Los Angeles District Attorney's Office, and just knowing that your sister was a lawyer working there—

Murray: Yeah, no, this had, I think, very little to do with her and just the district attorney's lobbyist had this bill that they thought made sense, and they were looking around for people that might carry it, and I thought it made sense.

Eardley-Pryor: Were there any times were your sister did have a role to play in things that you were—

Murray: No, not really. If the DA had a thing that she also agreed with, she might call me up and say, "Hey, I agree with this," but no, she never really played that role. She's a pure courtroom DA, so she—at least at the time, she was not personally in policy stuff.

Eardley-Pryor: There's another bill that I thought was really interesting that was successful. It was AB 51 with regard to crimes in places of worship. And it adds places of worship to hate crime bills.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: What's the story behind that?

Murray: Just that I represented an area where particularly this is a time when there were a bunch of arson incidents in Jewish temples in Los Angeles. So that was an attempt to support the Jewish community and try and make it a—raise the penalties for people who would burn churches or temples. But at that time, there was I think a few different arson incidents of Jewish temples in Los Angeles or defacing, things like that, so we wanted to make sure that—and again that's one of those things where intuitively we'd say, "Well, yeah, that's a hate crime." Before this if someone just went and lit fire to a church without saying something, it wasn't necessarily a hate crime.
Eardley-Pryor: There seem to be some legislation too that you were successful in passing like AB 195 about money laundering. And I'm wondering what your relationship was with that, especially coming from an accounting background. This became Chapter 578 in 1997.

Murray: I'm trying to remember that one.

Eardley-Pryor: This one expands the definitions of money laundering by preventing the use of cashier's checks made out to fictitious payees. It classified private couriers in entities that title transfers of property as financial institutions that could then become subject to prosecution for money laundering. And there were some other bills that I saw related to money laundering that you were trying to push forward.

Murray: Those were probably things that some interest be it the banks or the Western Union-type places that probably came to me and said, "Hey, this is a loophole, and we should close this loophole," and I probably said, "Yes, you're right, that makes sense."

Eardley-Pryor: There was an Assembly— I don't even know what this is — and ACA, an Assembly—?

Murray: Constitutional Amendment.

Eardley-Pryor: Okay. So this was with regard to the gas tax, it became Proposition 2 in the November 1998 ballot. The amendment protects against using transportation funds beyond their intended use. It required.—

Murray: Oh yeah, that was a pretty important thing, and I might have led a pretty decent size group of legislators who—one of the things that started happening is as we—as gas became—as vehicles became more efficient, we were getting less revenue from the gas tax. Whenever you tried to say, "Well, we should raise the gas tax to improve our roads and bridges and whatnot, people would say, "Well, it's always getting stolen by some legislative maneuver." So this was to try and make sure that any gas taxes were in—I hate to use the Al Gore phrase but—in a lockbox that—so that it couldn't be stolen for some other purposes. So, yeah, that was pretty important, and it helped us lead to a general transportation policy where we really leave those monies in their particular trust funds. Because whenever there's billions of dollars in a trust fund, somebody is either going to try to steal it or at least borrow it to do whatever their thing is that they're interested in at that time.
Eardley-Pryor: And by this time, you're on the transportation committee in the Assembly?

Murray: Yes.

Eardley-Pryor: What was your experience like on that committee?

Murray: It actually was great because transportation has some regional conflicts but very few partisan conflicts. With the exception of taxes, everybody is for more roads and nice roads and smooth roads and make sure our bridges don't fall down and make sure our trains run on time and for—there might be some conflicts on the level of spending for public transportation. It's an infrastructure-based thing and pretty much everybody wants it in their district. So there were very few partisan issues so that made it almost a pure policy thing, and which I enjoyed.

Eardley-Pryor: With that gas tax on Proposition 2 in 1998, you mentioned leading a coalition. Can you tell me a little bit about how that happened for you or who you remember?

Murray: I don't remember specifically who was in it, but everybody started to say, "Look, if we're going to have gas taxes and tell the public it's for transportation, we ought to make sure that's the only reason they could be used for." And over the years, good staffers and good lawyers have figured out how to use various pots of money that are supposed to be restricted for some other purpose. There was particularly a certain amount of skepticism on the behalf of anybody who was proposing a tax of any kind that it would be used outside. So that was a relatively easy coalition to build, but when I say a coalition, I just mean that everybody thought that made sense.

Eardley-Pryor: It does make sense. We'll get into some discussion about the recording industry during your time in the Senate, but there was an Assembly bill that you passed, it was Assembly Bill 298 that became law in 1997 with regard to bootleg recordings.

Murray: Right. So that was of course, (a) I'd had a background in the entertainment business. So the entertainment business was one of these businesses that everybody saw but nobody understood, so people just naturally came to me with most things that were entertainment business related. And that was the beginning of the rise of—this is before Napster and things like that, but the rise of CD counterfeiting. So all of the record companies and motion picture companies were worried that their CDs and DVDs would be counterfeited. And if you were around back then, you could go to any swap meeting and get
a bootleg of something. So I was certainly supportive of preventing that so that the movie companies, the record companies would get the money and pass that on to the artist.

02-00:56:56
Eardley-Pryor: Gosh, I grew up in Ohio and my memory of Los Angeles, the first time I ever went was around 1995 on a spring break. I remember going to a swap meet, and all I did was find CDs.

02-00:57:08
Murray: Yeah, exactly. So that's what that was about.

02-00:57:11
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, that's great. Another piece of legislation that I want to talk about that I was just interested in was that Assembly resolution with regard to Black History Month in 1997 that you were a sponsor of. Was that something that tended to be done each year?

02-00:57:27
Murray: I don't think so. Is that all it did?

02-00:57:30
Eardley-Pryor: It said it proclaims February as Black History Month, and I just thought, "Gosh, that seems like a weird thing." A year earlier, in 1996, Bill Clinton had a presidential proclamation claiming Black History Month.

02-00:57:44
Murray: It probably was one of those things, and I'm guessing here, that like half the holidays we have are not official holidays. Like somebody proclaimed it Black History Month, and nobody officially ever did anything. So I think that was probably just, hey, by the way, we don't have a—we have apple month and months for birds, specific birds, but this wasn't on the books, so we put it on the books.

02-00:58:24
Eardley-Pryor: That's great. Also, there's an Assembly Joint Resolution 24 that became part of law in 1997 that was claiming or declaring Black Music Month for the month of June, and I just wonder—

02-00:58:40
Murray: So that's another one of those. Black Music Month had been probably a marketing strategy of the record companies for decades, and it just had never been officially done. If you are in the music business and you read the music business trades, June is the month where they—you see all the ads for new Black music and things like that, and that is particularly the time when Black music was really done by a separate department than the other parts of music in a record company. So I'm sure that had been the case for decades, but again, it was one of those thing that was never officially acknowledged.
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, to put it into state law then. Before we wrap up the time in the Assembly and move on to your time in the Senate, there's a few other bills that were unsuccessful—they either got held up in the Senate or some committee—that I thought was really interesting, and I'd love to hear you talk about. Some of these go back to uses of the internet. There was an attempt that you had in 1997 to have DMV services put online, which you talked about.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: But the other one was also about making a digital electoral system. This would have been AB 44.

Murray: Oh, yeah, so again, this was the early days of technology. And did it get held? Did it say it got held in appropriations, or did it get held in the policy committee?

Eardley-Pryor: The digital electoral system was vetoed in 1997.

Murray: Oh, so that means that I got it through, and the governor wasn't for it.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, and what it would've done is it would've allowed people to register to vote online, to sign a petition online, and to vote via the internet in 1997.

Murray: Right, so that was an idea of what do we—what can we do to make it easier for people to vote? We now have this great internet thing, what can we do? And my suspicion is it was partisan. I don't remember the specific circumstances, but there were always people along the way who said, "Oh, it'll be fraudulent." In '97, was that still Pete Wilson? Yeah, so he probably said to be used by immigrants to fraudulently register, that kind of thing. There was all these, in my view, irrational concerns about fraud.

Eardley-Pryor: That's just so forward thinking. I mean, here we are in 2021 and there's still ongoing debate on voting by mail, and you were trying to pass legislation to vote over the internet in 1997.

Murray: Right, and that's what one of those things that I don't think we had any kind of nonprofit that came to us. We just wanted to do that. I think it was embarked by the various voting rights organizations but, yeah, we were—we wanted people to be able to vote technologically.
Eardley-Pryor: Were there other folks in the Assembly that you could look to for those kind of internet-related issues, or were there other Assembly members that you—?

Murray: There were other Assembly people who were interested in the internet. Debra Bowen was one at the time who also did some technology-related bills. But I was mostly out there on my own for most of the technology kind of stuff because people just weren't that into it. And in my first year, again still a bunch of older people, I was maybe the youngest person in the legislature at that time and so people hadn't really embraced technology. I mean they had barely embraced cell phones. In fact, I'm trying to remember, it was a big deal for me to get like a cell phone, an Assembly cell phone.

Eardley-Pryor: Do you remember what your experience was with that in the mid-nineties?

Murray: Yeah. I didn't have a cell phone, but I had a car phone when I got elected, and then I quickly moved to a cell phone. But I was always one of those people who was upgrading my cellphone for whatever. You know how they get smaller and smaller and smaller and smaller? So that was the experience. And then what would happen is I'd get some new smaller phone—which, in hindsight, is not even close to doing any of the things that we do with phones now—and people would say, "Gee, where did you get that phone?" I'm not the only one that would do this, but then all of a sudden, everybody would have one of these devices.

Eardley-Pryor: You had mentioned that you had tried to pass certain legislation about domestic partnerships and adoption, that in some ways would benefit the gay couples and gay community and also for children in foster care.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: We never really got into it yesterday, about how you began doing that kind of lawyering work before you become an Assembly member.

Murray: Oh, it's very simple. I think I mentioned that my dad once said, "What's the worst thing that could happen to you? You might have to be a lawyer." So I decided at some point to leave William Morris, and I became a lawyer. I hung out a shingle, and while I was trying to do all these other entertainment-related law things, I said, I need a backup to help make a living. So I got on the panel for dependency court, which is children's court. And a panel, they have it at criminal court too, is where the state or the county has to provide legal representation for people, and so you're on a list and they call your name and you get this work. So I did it purely as an income-generating thing to bolster
my law practice. I did come to have some feelings for my clients. I mostly represented the children, although sometimes I also represented the parents, and so I understood the foster care system. So much like carrying music stuff, people would come to me with something that I understood even more than I was particularly passionate about it as a policy thing. But I understood it, and I had some sympathy for kids that make it through foster care.

It's still the case that the overwhelming majority of foster kids, when they age out, fail, end up homeless. So I always thought it was a horrible thing that we take these kids out of homes and then we become their parents and we are really bad parents, the government is, society is. So I always had great sympathy for the foster care kids.

There's a couple other pieces [of legislation] that didn't get through that I think are important for us to talk about in light of what you did as a Senator. One of them would have been AB 1264, California Traffic Stops Statistics Act that was vetoed by Pete Wilson in 1998. It would've required the Department of Justice to provide, in its annual report on criminal justice, to include specified statistics regarding all motorist stopped by law enforcement officers.

Yeah, so that's the beginnings of the famous Driving While Black.

When did it begin for you?

Well, it happened to me. I can't remember what was the impetus for that specific bill, but it certainly happened to me, and it was becoming an issue. So we—and the idea was when you went to cops and you said, "Hey, this is a problem," they would say, "Oh, that really doesn't happen," or "It happens very rarely," or "All our cops don't see color," or something like that. Obviously, these days in the context of what's going on in 2021, we know that not to be the case. But so we said, "Okay, then let's get some data." And Pete Wilson vetoed the bill because all the police unions and the police organizations said, "It's just going to be fodder for people to sue us."

Funny little story is I did—I proposed roughly the same bill once Gray Davis became governor, and Gray Davis had agreed to sign the bill. I had worked with all the law enforcement agencies, and I convinced them that this was not—a true fact-gathering thing and it wasn't to be the basis for law suits, and I had promised that to Governor Davis. And then the people who were working with us on it, the ACLU in San Francisco without telling me, decided to sue the California Highway Patrol. So then the governor said, "Hey, you said this was not supposed to be for lawsuits," and he refused to sign the bill. So then, we took some amendments and got him to sign it, but it
was certainly a watered-down bill, but it goes to show you what outside activities can do to a bill in the middle of negotiations.

Because I see there was another attempt to have a traffic stops information bill that was held up in front of the appropriations, but then there was eventually a Senate bill that you sponsored that you did get through.

Yeah, and it was vastly watered down. I can't remember the exact lines, but I remember there was massive water down, and it was watered down specifically because, while we were moving it toward the governor's office, the ACLU actually sued the California Highway Patrol.

Wow, so, yeah, I just found it here in my notes. In 2000, it became law as SB 1102 Racial Profiling: Post Law Enforcement Training. It looks to me like this one, it defined racial profiling and made it illegal, but it required officers to go through expanded training and protocol—

Yeah, so it ended up being—because what you had said—what law enforcement would say is, "the statistics are only used to sue us and they're skewed and they're not accurate," but it was frankly an easier hurdle to get them to agree to some training. So it became a training thing as opposed to a statistics bill, and I really wanted both, but I could not get the statistics because everybody just thought it was going to be used as a basis for a lawsuit, which turned out to be true, but earlier than it should have.

Gosh, that's wild. I'm thinking about today, in the context of today, and the response to the nation's sudden realization about its terrible race relations with police training, as opposed to what your effort was is to create evidence.

Yes, exactly. And I would have gotten the evidence except that my partners in advocacy, the ACLU, for their own reasons decided to sue the California Highway Patrol before the governor was ready to sign the bill.

Wow. Gosh, that's interesting background story. There's one other bill as an Assembly member that I'm interested in talking about before we move into more of the Senate time, and that's AB 1387 Solar Electric Systems Financing Program. This was in 1998, which I think is really early in my mind that a bill would've supported financing for solar energy. It would've established what was called the Solar Electric Systems Financing Program as a part of the California Infrastructure and Economic Development Bank to provide financing for the purchase of specific solar electric power systems. This was
held up in the Senate appropriations, so you got it through the Assembly. Can you tell me a little bit about where your interest in solar—

02-01:11:33
Murray: I don't know where it came from, but early on, I just believed—as certainly the environmental advocacy and people had talked about climate change in the environment—but I just saw solar as a relatively easy way to solve some of these problems early on. I mean the solar technology, the great thing about solar is that it's been around like forever, so the technology that's in an actual solar panel hasn't changed that much. In fact, I frankly wish we would do more development in terms of efficiency of the panels, but it worked. It already worked. It wasn't like a pie-in-the-sky, Jetsons kind of technology. We already knew it worked, and it was more expensive because it wasn't being broadly used, and so this was an attempt to try and jumpstart the economics of the solar industry.

02-01:12:37
Eardley-Pryor: In 1998. I mean, what you eventually—and we'll talk about this, but in 2006, you are able to help pass—

02-01:12:45
Murray: Yeah. Yeah, I was going to say, eventually, we were able to get something done on solar in working with Governor Schwarzenegger. Everybody was concerned about the cost and so the Republicans hated the cost and then even in 2006, the labor community, I got stuck between—we'll get to this later, but I got stuck between a rock and a hard place with the labor community said it should all be built with union labor, so I was never going to get a Republican governor to agree to the union labor, so we just got stuck. But eventually, we did get it through, through a couple of different avenues. Like you said, it's one of those things that I might have read an article in *Scientific American* or something, and I was like, "Why aren't we doing more of this?"

02-01:13:42
Murray: I did a bill, also, to have solar put on state buildings, but I—and I got Jim Brulte who was the Republican leader in the Senate at the time to join me in that, but he wasn't willing to make us do it. He was willing to have it—have the bureaucrats decide that they want to do it if they met certain parameters. The fallacy there was that the bearcats [bureaucrats] didn't want to do it because they didn't believe in it either. One of the things I learned is it's not the whole "may versus shall" when you're drafting a piece of legislation that becomes important.

02-01:14:23
Eardley-Pryor: Tell me more what you mean by that.

02-01:14:25
Murray: Well, if you put it in a piece of legislation that the department of general services for instance "may do x, y, and z," they may do it, they may not do it, and it'll depend upon the whims of whoever the department head is. And one
of the things that bureaucrats definitely had is inertia. Most of them really don't want to do anything different than the way they've been doing it. And they're all great people, and they provide a great service for the state, and some of them are very experienced, but they're not usually trying to innovate. So you often have to make sure that—and there's often serious negotiations over the difference between the word *may* and the word *shall*. If you're a legislator and you want something done, you need to have the word *shall*. That's a very important word in legislation so that people—there's no interpretation of whether or not they should or have to do this. If it says shall, then you've got to do it.

Eardley-Pryor: One last question I have for you before we take up a pause here I think, is you mentioned yesterday in the wake of Willie Brown no longer being the Speaker, there was this kind of chaotic time of Republican leadership for about a year and a half, and then Cruz Bustamante becomes the Speaker in 1996, at the end of 1996. I'm wondering what was that transition like? I mean, you were in the Assembly during that time under Cruz's control of the Assembly.

Murray: Well, it was significant. And Cruz rose largely because he was the choice of the Latino Caucus, which had become—I don't know, there were ten or twelve Latinos in the house then or in the Assembly, I might be exaggerating. But he had base of members, and he was able to use that and collect the votes to be the Democratic choice for Speaker. So it was a big, big deal for Latinos all around the state. In their mind, they had finally gotten their due based upon their numbers. You started to see staffing levels of people of color, particularly Latinos, increase significantly. So it was a relatively good and productive time.

Eardley-Pryor: What do you remember about his leadership of the Assembly?

Murray: Nothing very specific. I mean, he was a Speaker, and he exercised Speaker-type control. One of the great things I think he did is, much like his predecessors, Willie in particular, he let members of the legislature pursue the things that they wanted to pursue. Willie Brown is always remembered as a members' Speaker, so he didn't try to drive the policy agenda in too many ways; although I think he did probably have things that were specific to him in his district. He [Cruz Bustamante] came from an agricultural district in Fresno as I remember, so he was able to protect his district. But I think he let people do what they needed to do.

Eardley-Pryor: That great. Do you mind if we take a break here for just a bit?
Murray: No, in fact, give me five minutes or so.

Eardley-Pryor: Perfect.

[pause in recording]

Eardley-Pryor: So, Kevin, in 1998 you're elected to the California Senate District 26, which from the look on the map, is pretty much the entire best part of Los Angeles.

Murray: That's what I always thought.

Eardley-Pryor: I mean, Hollywood, Beverly Hills, Brentwood, Pacific Palisades, Santa Monica.

Murray: Not really much of Beverly Hills, but it sort of skirted around Beverly Hills, but certainly Hancock Park and West LA and Cheviot Hills and Century City, Silver Lake.

Eardley-Pryor: Manhattan Beach, Redondo, down Palos Verdes, I mean it's the whole coastline.

Murray: Well, it wasn't quite that far south, but yes, it came—it had a little bit of—in fact, I don't think it actually touched the coast in very many places, but it did go south to get in. It's like it stopped where Inglewood started. So Inglewood south was someone else, but that's maybe what it is now? But when I had it, it didn't go that quite far south, but it included Silver Lake and Hancock Park and Hollywood and places like that.

Eardley-Pryor: Pretty nice, yeah. I was looking at a different map then, but from what it is now. Tell me a little bit about what the decision to run for Senate was for you.

Murray: Well, there was term limits, so I would have been termed out. The Senator who preceded me in that seat, she was termed out, so it was an open seat. So I ran against someone who was in the adjacent Assembly district, a woman named Marguerite Archie-Hudson, and there were some other people in the race too. And I won by ten points; it was a pretty big win.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me about election night then again. Where were you and who were you with?
So it was roughly the same group of people. And I think it was even at the same place, campaign headquarters on Pico that I found. And again, the way I viewed these election nights is they're great and you're happy and fun and then you're on to like, okay, what's next? So it was a big deal, but I didn't savor it for too long. It's sort of like, okay, let's get to work now.

Was the experience in an Assembly campaign versus a Senate campaign different?

Not really, just bigger, more people. I had more exposure to and more access to additional forms of contributions and financing and campaign staff and things like that. So it certainly was maybe a more professional campaign. I had a campaign manager, I had a campaign accountant, I had all of the infrastructure that I probably didn't have the first time. And then I had access to institutional funders of campaigns like labor unions and things like that. So it was much more institutional than my first sort of guerilla campaign, I'll call it.

Well, to build on that idea of institutions, how is the institution of the Assembly different in your experience than the institution of the California Senate?

The Senate is much more collegial and formal. For instance, you must wear a suit and tie on the Senate floor, or a jacket and tie. Even though most people did, that was don't not the rule when I was in the Assembly. It is expected to be much more deliberative and collegial in the Assembly, which can get a little rough and tumble.

Did you find that to be the case, that it was more?

Yeah, yeah, yeah I did. It [the Senate] was more collegial. People in the Assembly, (a) there's more of them, and (b) they can be a little bit more aggressive. There is a lot more happening or decided behind the scenes. The [Senate as an] institution is smaller. and the committees are smaller, so there might be eight people on a committee or five or seven, as opposed to twelve or fourteen in an Assembly committee. So you really have to go and convince three or four of your colleagues to be with you, as opposed to ten or twelve. So I like the atmosphere in the Senate, and even with people who you didn't agree with, much more collegial. Now, of course, this is the rise of the really strident and really arch conservative Republicans epitomized by a guy from Orange County whose name began with an H, and now I can't remember his name. And the Ahmanson family sort of pushed a bunch of—helped get
elected a bunch of really, really far-right politicians in California. So aside from them who were very strident in their policy views, it was much more collegial.

Eardley-Pryor: You mentioned the difference in committees, what were the committees that you were hoping to become part of in the Senate?

Murray: My first term there, I think I chaired elections and reapportionment for a while, but I expected to end up on—on chairing transportation.

Eardley-Pryor: Because of your experience in the Assembly?

Murray: Yeah. I mean, I expected that that was where I was going to end up, and that was where I was moving toward.

Eardley-Pryor: I have a note that you also eventually served in the appropriations committee in the Senate.

Murray: Yeah, so I eventually chaired the appropriations committee.

Eardley-Pryor: What was that experience like?

Murray: If there's a committee you want to have in the legislature, it's appropriations. Pretty much every piece of legislation goes through there, so I enjoyed that very much.

Eardley-Pryor: How did you use that position?

Murray: Maybe I'm overstating it, it certainly is a very powerful committee, but it is also one of those where you are less chairing the committee for yourself and more chairing it for the caucus and/or the pro tem. I mean so in the end, you're the kind of the place—all these bills get through policy committees and have policy debates and then it gets to the place where it's really somewhat of a group-leadership decision as to what gets funded out of appropriations. So all these bills go into a hopper and then we say, "Okay, there's x amount of money to be spent," all these bills cost something, almost all of them, and then we decide what's going to get funded or not. So getting to be at the table there is certainly important. But you're not making a decision solely by yourself, but it is certainly an influential position. And to the extent that almost every bill goes through appropriations or everybody has bills that end up in
appropriations, I made pretty sure that most of the bills that I wanted got through other committees, so. So that's kind of what you'd use that for.

02-01:26:01
Eardley-Pryor: A little bit of horse trading?

02-01:26:03
Murray: Well, you can't really horse trade, but you can just say, "Look, I want this," because you know they have to come to you at some point to say what they want. In fact, there's a formal process where if they have six bills that end up coming through appropriations, they have to prioritize them. So they have to come to you and say—because usually everybody has a great idea, they put all these bills through, and they're all good ideas, but they all cost some money. So they're all costing this much money, and we have this much money to appropriate for these purposes. And so everybody has got to prioritize, and they've got to come and tell you what they want and so there's—it's almost a formal process. So they know they have to come and plead their case to you, so they usually figure out that better to let your bills get through.

02-01:27:06
Eardley-Pryor: That seems like a pretty sweet spot to be in for you.

02-01:27:08
Murray: Yes. I wanted to be in that spot actually two years before that when Don Perata first became the pro tem, but for all sorts of reasons that he had, he gave it to someone else but eventually came back to me.

02-01:27:28
Eardley-Pryor: Was there a story on how you did become chair?

02-01:27:31
Murray: No, there's more of a story about how I didn't become chair. When Don Perata was running for pro tem, I was one of the first people who supported him for pro tem, so I was his, I think, maybe very first vote. And normally, when you're the very first vote, you kind of get what you want because people appreciate your loyalty. But one of the things that also happens is sometimes in order to be successful and get the votes to be pro tem, you have to give away important things to the people that come on last. So your first vote is important, but your last vote is equally as important. So I was this first vote, and Carole Migden who had wanted to be—who was chair of appropriations in the Assembly also wanted to be, and then she was last to come on. In fact, I think at one point, she wanted to be pro tem herself, so that's why she ended up being last. So what happens when you're someone's close ally, you're the one they come to and says, "Hey, I know I promised you this, but I might have to use it for another purpose," and that's what happened. And when you're in the inner circle, so to speak, you have to be magnanimous and gracious and say, "kay." But eventually, she left the committee or lost the committee, and I was given the committee.
Eardley-Pryor: It leads to a question for me about the role of the Senate pro tem versus the role of the Assembly Speaker. Is it a similar kind of position in the Senate?

Murray: It depends upon the person. So John Burton was known to be—and Bill Lockyer were known to exercise power pretty aggressively. Roberti, before them—I think it was Roberti—was a little bit less so. All of the power is vested in the Speaker in the Assembly. In the Senate it is vested in the rules committee, which the pro tem chairs, but they almost always do what the pro tem wants to do because the pro tem would never appoint them to that committee if they wouldn’t. So it has a different process, but it is exercised in much the same way. Although the Senate pro tem even more collaborates with the committee chairs than even in the Assembly because the Assembly, the Speaker is the all-powerful. Once you're elected Speaker, the rules give you almost every particular power, the power to appoint committees, the power to assign staff, things like that. Now, all those powers are in the rules committee, so it's a different process but similar effect.

Eardley-Pryor: Before we dive right into the details of certain legislation that you are trying to work through and did get through, I want to transition to ask a little bit about personal life. I have a note that in 1999, you met your wife Janice?

Murray: Oh, yes I met my wife in Washington, DC, at the Congressional Black Caucus Conference they have every year. We met in September, we were engaged by February, and married by the next September.

Eardley-Pryor: You knew what you wanted there, you both did.

Murray: Yeah. I was thirty-nine when I met her, it was certainly time.

Eardley-Pryor: Tell me a little bit about her background.

Murray: She's from Washington, DC, also a lawyer. She had worked in Congress and at the White House and on the Hill when I met her. She was a lawyer of the FCC, and she decided to marry me and move to Los Angeles.

Eardley-Pryor: How did your life change with regard to being married and then—? I ask that in the context of being a legislator in particular.

Murray: Well, we were both in our late thirties, so we each had our own ways of operating, so me traveling wasn't really that much of a burden. I think it was
difficult in the early months, in the early parts of our marriage, because she was moving to a new city and then I'm traveling to Sacramento. But it really changed when we had our first child because then, rather than going up on Monday and coming back on Thursday like I did, I would go up and back a lot during the week to spend more time at home.

And your daughter was born in 2001 I believe?

Yeah. She was born in November, so after the session ended in—and I took time off. We had the winter break, so I took time off. But when we finished the next year or during times where I was home more often, I could very much feel the difference in how she reacted to me when I was gone for an extended period of time or when I was there every day, so I started spending more time. I'd go up on Mondays, sometimes come back and Monday night and go back Tuesday, or I had arranged my committees where I had a day off, so I would definitely go up and back more and worked out of the district office more often.

Did becoming a husband and a father change your interests in legislation at all?

Not really. I don't think I became maybe more interested in children's issues or anything like that. For instance, it does certainly give you a different perspective. So on, I don't know, education or Head Start or things like that, gives you a just different perspective because you're in it. Tax law, one of the major things that happens that tax law affects married people. But even in the past, I had done things like domestic partnership things. So knowing that if some—if your partner gets hurt, that you can be the one to help make some of the decisions as opposed to default them to their parents, which is what gay people had to do is be completely left out of their processes. So all those things do take on a more significant importance but not that much more. I mean they were always the right things to do.

What's the relationship between being a Senator and member of the Assembly?

It's similar. Because the Senate is a smaller, theoretically each Senator has more power and influence but you're still—you still have to go over there and get them to vote for your bills the way that they do, so. I know that the committee chairs in the Senate committee have, I don't know, maybe a little bit more influence because the committee is smaller and they can maybe control it a little more closely. It's hard in the Assembly to get something passed over the objections of the chair. It's virtually impossible in the Senate because
there aren't just—there just aren't enough people to go to try and get your voice heard if the chair just really doesn't agree with you. But they're all complaining about each other. The Senate people thinks the Assembly people are crazy, and the Assembly people think the Senate people are crazy and curmudgeonly.

02-01:36:23
Eardley-Pryor: Are they both right?

02-01:36:24
Murray: Yeah, they are both right.

02-01:36:29
Eardley-Pryor: I note that some of the themes from your time in the Assembly are echoed and then reverberated in your time in the Senate, the interest in solar energy in the Senate, the bill on the digital divide. Some of the things that really grow during your time as a Senator include an interest that we talked about in the first interview with urban parks and in conservation.

02-01:36:49
Murray: Yes.

02-01:36:50
Eardley-Pryor: Where did that—?

02-01:36:51
Murray: I still consider urban parks along with solar energy to be one of my biggest accomplishments.

02-01:36:59 r
Eardley-Pryor: Where did your interests in these environmental concerns come from?

02-01:37:02
Murray: Again, it's just in talking to people. So Los Angeles was considered to be "a park-poor area," but urban communities were even more park poor. And the environmentalists had risen up to be open-space, clean-air people, so they weren't interested in open space that people could actually use. They would buy—and there was a big disparity in the money going to things like the Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy or the Lake Tahoe Conservancy versus urban parks where people could actually use, and I define that as a place that a kid on his bicycle could get to, so not a mountain top that we're trying to preserve and make pristine. And I thankfully was able to get support from some of my colleagues for this, but the biggest people who were an impediment were environmentalists. They finally agreed because they had to, to do some urban parks, and then they would try and get you sneakily with the definition of what an urban park was, like make it include places on the banks of a river. So it really wasn't an urban park; it was really just the way for them to suck up some money.
So one of the things is the environmental community had really good staff, and they were good at doing sneaky stuff to get what they wanted. And in fact, one of the great things, which I thank Antonio Villaraigosa for, is we would end up fighting this battle with the environmentalist when we were doing the park bond. I can't remember what year it was, but I think it was called the Villaraigosa-Hayden Park Bond. And I finally convinced Villaraigosa, and it wasn't hard to convince him, I said, "We've just got to stop playing around with these people because they're just—they want all the money to go for their things and none to go to urban parks." So we finally just said, "If we don't get urban parks, there's just not going to be a park bond," and thank God, for Antonio [Villaraigosa] who was the Speaker at the time, but he literally said, "Look, if we don't do this, then we're not going to do a park bond at all," and so they finally had to come around. So we ended up with some money and something called Roberti-Roos—I think it was Roberti-Roos—but there was Roberti thing and then we created the Murray-Hayden Urban Parks Program, and we put hundreds of millions of dollars into that. [The Villaraigosa-Keeley Act, otherwise called the Safe Neighborhood Parks, Clean Water, Clean Air, and Coastal Protection Bond Act of 2000, included the Murray-Hayden Urban Parks and Youth Service Program of the Department of Parks and Recreation, which provided grant funding for capital projects, including parks, park facilities, environmental enhancement projects, youth centers, and environmental youth service centers that are within immediate proximity of a neighborhood that has been identified by the Department as having a critical lack of parks and/or open space and/or deteriorated park facilities that are in an area of significant poverty and unemployment, and have a shortage of services for youth.]

We created something called Baldwin Hills Conservancy, which is another. Santa Monica Mountains Conservancy had been getting this money automatically every year, as did the Lake Tahoe Conservancy, and there might have been a couple of others. And I had a staffer who was my chief of staff at the time, Anne Baker, who had worked for some of the leading environmentalists in the legislature. And she said one day, "Well, all the other people would just create a conservancy," and so we created the first conservancy that was designed to acquire land and build urban parks. And we created the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, and it bought something called the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook, which is this beautiful piece of property they saved from development. That concept is one of the things I'm most proud of.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, I'm looking here, and it was SB 1625 the Baldwin Hills Conservancy, the two square miles of Baldwin Hills Parklands were the last undeveloped, open space in the entire LA urban area.

Murray: Right. And it's in Baldwin Hills, it is in an urban community, and one of the things that had been the problem is that we were buying lands like in Malibu
to keep people from building there, but we weren't really making it enticing for people to use because we're always trying to keep it pristine. And so the Baldwin Hills Conservancies had kind of a mix of that; there are hiking trails for people to use but also some open space.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, yeah, and I have a note here that with SB 259, you expanded the conservancy as well.

Murray: Yes, yeah. And, again, that was because you're talking about how the money gets split up, money was automatically going to these conservancies, which is one of the reasons we created one. But that conservancy still fights a battle every budget year of what it should get compared to the other ones.

Eardley-Pryor: I note here you talking about the creation of urban parks to have spaces where kids can play basketball and ride their bikes and do whatever there versus just having open land preserved. And I see SB 359, the State Urban Parks and Healthy Communities Act that became law in 2001 does create those kind of urban parks you're talking about.

Murray: Yeah, yeah.

Eardley-Pryor: Who were the people or the organizations that you were working with? If groups like the Sierra Club were really focused on open land and saving these spaces, who were the people that you were working with to create the urban parks?

Murray: Mostly community members. We got very little institutional support from your classic environmental institutions. We really had to browbeat them into it, and I would even go so far as they—they weren't quite racist, but they just didn't care about the health of urban communities, so they just didn't care. And by the way, I think I mentioned in our earlier session, they also didn't care about other environmental organizations. So if there's a pot of money, the air-quality people don't care about the water-quality people who don't care about the open-resource, open-space people, so that was what I—was somewhat eye-opening. They certainly did not care at all about environmental justice until very later. The people who were pushing environmental justice were just as bad as Republicans to them because they didn't support.

I remember it had nothing to do with parks, but in urban communities, there's usually some industrial facility that becomes a toxic-attractive nuisance. So you have kids riding their bikes or playing in these toxic yards and to clean them up was very expensive, and so we tried to think of what we could do to
make it less expensive and could you create standards that were less expensive and a little bit lower maybe but were still protective of? And they would oppose those things in spite of the fact that while you're opposing them, nothing is getting done, and kids are getting exposed to toxic chemicals, but they didn't care. So they were very strident in what they thought was the right thing to do, and they didn't care that it affected minority or low-income communities different, which was a bit eye-opening that the people who we think are the most left in the world could also be the most low-key racists. And they also had little respect for the legislative abilities of people or color, so they always thought they could pull a fast one.

02-01:45:35
Eardley-Pryor: Can you think of an example?

02-01:45:38
Murray: In the urban parks, they would come in and they would say, "Okay, we'll give you x amount of a million dollars for urban parks," and then when you going to the definition of urban parks, you find out that it includes everything that they were advocating for. Same thing happened with the environmental justice that I was working on with Senator Martha Escutia, they would try and do definitions that they thought they could get past us. It just so happens that both Martha and I are both lawyers, so we read this stuff, and we'd say, "No, we're not doing this" and then they were always surprised that we wouldn't want to do that. And we literally had to say to them on a number of occasions, going back to what we—I talked about earlier, "If you don't do this, we're not going to do any of the other stuff that you are interested in. Even though I agree and support what the stuff is, if you can't incorporate what we need, then we're not doing any of it." And that's the only way some of this stuff got done, and I was always appalled at how both tone deaf and disinterested the environmental community was on how any of these things affected people of color.

02-01:47:00
Eardley-Pryor: Are there particular organizations that you felt were more strident?

02-01:47:02
Murray: All of them, all of them, the Sierra Club, the League of Conservation Voters, they all did that because they all had very smart people, and they were experienced at manipulating legislation to their ends. And in a Democratic place like California, they mostly were able to do that, but they just did—and before me—before my time rather, not necessarily me—African American legislators, they were focused on other things. They're focused on civil rights. To give great thanks to my predecessors, they had to fight for civil rights and affirmative action and all of these things. And I've got the luxury of being able to expand beyond core bread-and-butter issues into things like the environment or the internet or anything like that. My predecessors needed, needed to focus and getting rid of Jim Crow laws and making sure that restrictive covenants were not still on deeds and making sure that there
were—even after affirmative action, but making sure that there were jobs and contracting and things like that that were evenly spread around. So they had to do those core things. And I had what I consider the luxury of being able to go beyond that. So there weren't that many people of color who were pursuing being environmental initiatives, and so—

Eardley-Pryor: Can you remember when environmental justice became an issue that rose to your attention?

Murray: Probably as I was coming into the Senate. Even that and I got into that sort of tangentially through Martha Escutia because we both recognized that we had these sites in our district and the environmental folks were uninterested in us finding a solution to our problem that didn't meet their needs. So to them, they're worried about what the cleanup standards are for some particular toxic chemical without regard to whether or not it would actually get cleaned up. And we had to deal with the realities of the ground—on the ground in our districts, and so they didn't care about that. And they were used to generally getting support from African American legislators because, hey, we're relatively liberal and we're for the environment, and they were not used to having to give us anything in exchange or to be part of it.

And with the exception of the Speaker, the chair of the relevant committees that their legislation had to go through was usually somebody who was environmentally friendly. I forget who it was in the Assembly prior to me being there, but Byron Sher was sort of the godfather of the environmental community and then you had Tom Hayden and so they were used to dealing with them. But Tom Hayden, by the way, was a great ally on the urban parks issue, like got it instantly and was willing to fight with us for it.

In fact, I'll give you another example. Tom Hayden had a hearing in some environmental things, and we were talking about urban parks. And some little old man who was probably the president of his Sierra Club chapter, we talked about urban parks, and he literally said this. He said, "Well, they can just get on buses on go to the Santa Monica Mountains," literally said that. So that is the example of the tone deafness and this was an otherwise liberal, well-thinking, well-intentioned, a solid liberal Democratic vote but just could not understand nor care really about the needs of people in the inner city. And I think that's probably the best example of the thinking of the environmental community—and by the way, still thinks that way, I mean it's probably still mostly that way. Yes, environmental justice has gotten some more attention but certainly not much more in urban parks. In fact, the Murray-Hayden program still exists and—although I have been trying very hard, in the last few years, I've been trying to convince people to put some money back into it.
Eardley-Pryor: Those are great stories. I wanted to ask if there's anything else to share with regard to SB 1102, the racial profiling law that was passed in 2000.

Murray: No, I think the main gist of it is that it would've been a much tougher bill except my—the people—again, this is another thing. The people who were supposed to be my partners, even though I told them that the biggest problem the governor had was that it might be used for lawsuits, while we're talking about it just decided to sue the CHP without telling me. I still will never forgive the ACLU for that because we would have gotten a stronger bill and then they had the audacity to oppose the watered-down bill saying it didn't go far enough, like it's totally your fault.

Eardley-Pryor: Was there any understanding about the people you were working with in the ACLU of—?

Murray: Well, there wasn't really an understanding, but it goes to a thing, which we find now where—and I don't know if the listeners or the readers of this are going to take umbrage at this, but it's kind of this well-meaning, white liberal who thinks they know what's best for Black people. And by way this—all the people involved in this were not necessarily whites or I'm not trying to—somebody is going to come up and say, "Oh, no, we had these other people." But they thought that their strategy of suing people was more important than getting this legislation passed or they didn't care, which is mostly what you find happen is people who even want to the right thing and care about people of color don't actually ask the people of color what they want or need.

Eardley-Pryor: What was your involvement in the Black Caucus when you became a Senator? How did things change for you with regard to the caucus?

Murray: Oh, I don't think it changed at all. It was two-house caucus and didn't really change much.

Eardley-Pryor: I have a note of—speaking of things that echo from your Assembly time up through the Senate time, is SB 77, HIV Workers' Compensation Death Benefits that extended the statute of limitation on death benefit claims for HIV-related diseases became law in 1999.

Murray: Yeah, that follows the theme of wanting to make sure people, particularly workers were taken care of.
Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Another theme was legislation revolving around your work as an entertainment executive or an entertainment agent and lawyer. In 2001 and 2002, you held hearings in the Senate on the recording industry—

Murray: Oh, yeah, so—it's now 7:00, do you—are you available again tomorrow or Sunday?

Eardley-Pryor: I can do tomorrow night. How does that sound for you?

Murray: Depending on what time it is, I'm sure that works for me. I mean, we probably have, what, an hour more?

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, or maybe not even that. Let's pause here and talk about that, and we'll figure out the time for it again

Murray: Okay.
Today is Sunday, May 30 in the year 2021. My name is Roger Eardley-Pryor from UC Berkeley's Oral History Center of The Bancroft Library. This is interview session number three with Sen. Kevin Murray as a part of the California Government Project. Kevin, remind me where you're located today.

I'm in Los Angeles.

Great, and I'm up in Santa Rosa. We are recording this over Zoom during the pandemic. The last session that we ended with the other day, Kevin, I was just about to lead a line of inquiry about your work in the California Senate around the recording industry and some of the bills you were trying to pass there on behalf of artists in particular. You held a series of hearings in 2001 and 2002 around that. Can you tell me where this came from and how the hearings evolved?

Well, I had always been one of the people in the legislature that had come from the entertainment industry and therefore understood it better than some. Whenever there was a bill about privacy or something that the entertainment industry was interested in, I tended to carry it. In this particular instance, there was a growing artist rights movement particularly around something called the seven-year rule. And California had a quirky part of its code wherein the maximum contract you can have for a personal services contract is seven years. In California, there is an exemption, an exception for recording artists. So recording artists' contracts can go for much longer than that, and in fact, there actually is no limit. And in many cases, they did go for decades even though they started out as five-year contracts or seven-year contracts, and then they keep getting extended for various reasons. So there became a growing artist rights movement around the state on that basis. Recording artists were particularly interested in that and so we held some hearings regarding the way California deals with recording artists.

Now, I know in the past you carried some of these other bills that related to the entertainment industry. Sometimes when the recording industry association was on board in saying, "We like this." But this sounds to me like you're on the other side of this.

This clearly placed me on the other side with the artist as opposed to the companies. There were some people from the recording industry who were upset with me and maybe still are upset with me.
Eardley-Pryor: How did that play out for you then?

Murray: Well, it played out the same. In the end, I sided with the artist. We didn’t necessarily get the bill that we wanted, but we did get some benefits in the long run, but I certainly don’t have any regrets about siding with the artist. Ironically when we were doing it, it was also the beginning of Napster and things like that, so the recording industry felt that they were getting hit by a double whammy. On one side, there were these pirates, and on the other side, there were artists, and I certainly can understand that. Of course since then, we’re in the streaming world and people are promoting their music independently and so the world has changed, so changed for the better many people both artists and record companies thing, but it did place me on the other side of the industry. Up until then, the industry and the artist were aligned in most of the issues that I pursued, chiefly piracy, but on this case they, differed.

And it was a pretty interesting hearing. The list of attendees was pretty interesting. I think we had Paula Abdul, and we had the Eagles, and we had the Dixie Chicks, and we had—lots of people came to testify on this issue, including Stevie Nicks who always the one that was—Stevie Nicks and Carole King. One of the interesting anecdotes is that Stevie Nicks who as a member of Fleetwood Mac had the bestselling album ever in history. But as a solo artist, after sixteen years, she was still under contract even with her negotiating leverage, so that just shows you the power of these contracts. And I don’t begrudge the record companies. In the recording industry, the record companies take a big risk in the very beginning, and they take a big risk on lots of people who will never be successful and never pay off their investment, and then when artists get big, they want to make sure that they can participate in that for as long as possible.

From the artists' standpoint, when they are relatively new, they sign a pretty onerous—or, at least at that time, they signed pretty onerous contracts. And so when they do get big, they want to be able to either renegotiate that contract or be free of a contract so that they can negotiate for their actual economic value at the time. So there certainly was conflict there and you are—you have correctly pointed out that I had supported the recording industry all up until this divergence, and I chose the artist.

Eardley-Pryor: Wow. I have a note that there were two different bills that you were really trying to get through as a result of these hearings. One was called SB 1034 about the accounting practices, and that this would have the ability to do an audit on their own.
Murray: Right. So I think we were successful in that one. We weren’t successful in getting rid of the seven-year rule.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. And there was something that that would've have changed the California Labor law or Labor Code, is that—?

Murray: Yeah, it's in the labor code that you can't put somebody under contract for more than seven years, and it goes back to a couple of very famous cases. One was a motion picture case and the—some years ago, some decades before, somehow, the recording industry which was not that active a participant in Sacramento most of the time, got an exemption, sort of a last-minute, late-night exemption to this rule. And as far as I understand it, it still exists today.

Eardley-Pryor: Why do you think that bill that wasn't successful? Bill 246, why do you think that that one didn't get through whereas the other one about the auditing did get through?

Murray: The big deal was the seven-year rule. So they were able to keep the seven-year rule, and I think the record companies thought that that was more important. The audits they were sort of willing to have that. They all give up audits by contract anyway, but this gave a few more rights to the artists but it wasn't—the big price would've been the seven-year rule.

Eardley-Pryor: How did your experience working—?

Murray: Which, by the way, New York doesn’t have. So if you signed a contract in New York, you are subject to the seven-year rule or you are subject to something.

Eardley-Pryor: Huh. That probably leads to more business going to New York at least in the recording industry.

Murray: The reality is you would think there would be some more forum shopping, but people signed wherever they are, and it's either LA or New York, and that's what happens. Everybody is so hungry to get the deal done that they do it under all sorts of different rubrics.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, I was wondering, how did your experience in William Morris agency actually representing this art shaped your work on these issues?
Murray: Well, it's just that (a) I understood the accounting principles that were involved, and (b) I understood musicians and artists and managers, and I had some relationships with them, so I'm sure that did color my view. As a lawyer and as an agent, I was an artist representative, so in the end, I side with the artist.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great. I see there's another bill that happened, it became law in 2002, and that's SB 1356, Film California First?

Murray: Oh, yeah, so as part of my general view of the entertainment business, we were trying to stop what was called runaway production. So there were lots of—California, Los Angeles in particular had been the home of the movie industry for decades and decades and decades; in fact, it was founded here. And other states recognized that there was revenue to be associated not necessarily from the movies themselves but from the shooting of the movies. A movie is not just these expensive directors or actors, but it's catering people. It's all the various crafts that go into making a movie, it's hotel rooms, it's travel, it's—so it generates some revenue for a locality. First Canada and then other states started offering various kinds of tax incentives for people to shoot their movies in other states. So there was a handful of bills that I did over the years to try and combat that. I was the Assembly representative on the California Film Commission for some time too, so I—anything that was movie, TV, or film, or internet, I tried to be somewhere around.

Eardley-Pryor: In your position as a Senator representing these major industries from LA in the state Capitol, how did that play out in any kind of fun ways in your personal life?

Murray: Well, even more specifically. So in my district weren't so many—Paramount, and a little piece of—a corner of Universal Studios, so it didn't really. I mean, I actually prided myself on dealing with their business issues and dealing with their issues as an industry. And I really wasn't the "give me free tickets to a thing" or show up at some event. The reality is, before I got elected and I was in the entertainment business, I had gone to award shows, I had done those things. So I prided myself on not being the asker of perks. The legislature did a couple of times—not because of my work—but just the legislature in general periodically, we got invited to the Oscars, so I did get to go to the Oscars and some other award shows. But frankly, I had done that stuff before, so it wasn't a big deal, and I did not want to be the guy—by the way, different than some of my successors who dealt with the entertainment district—who was always asking to go to some event.
Eardley-Pryor: Of those events that you did go to, either in your youth or the time as a legislator, are there any fun stories that come out of that?

Murray: They are always fun to go to go because you're sitting next to celebrities or you're seeing them at the bar and things like that. Award shows are actually particularly boring to attend because it's—if the show starts at 5:00, you are required for TV purposes to be in your seats at 4:00, and you're just sitting there for an hour with nothing going on. And then they take these long breaks—not long break, but they take these breaks for commercials, and you have to sit there, it's not like you can move around. So they actually tend to be very long and very boring. And the performances when you're in the room are not as exciting as they feel on TV because the sound is not as good in the room as if you were going to like a real concert. So they are a great experience, but they're not all they're cracked up to be.

Eardley-Pryor: I'm just thinking about how the hearings that we were talking about, that you held on the recording industry, happened in—began in 2001, and that's also the same year as 9/11. And so I'm wondering, do you have memories from that experience or the rise of the war on terror that shaped your life?

Murray: No. I mean, I remember 9/11, and I remember us shutting down the Capitol and being concerned about security. And I remember planes were shut down, so I literally had to drive home to my wife on September eleventh. So my daughter—my wife was then—she was born in November—so seven or eight months' pregnant, so I had to drive home to get back to my wife. But it didn't have any direct effect on my legislative activities other than logistics.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, speaking of logistics, what was your situation in Sacramento? I know once your daughter was born, you started coming back a lot more but—

Murray: I had an apartment there, a really small, single apartment near downtown. When I first went up there, I rented this nice house and then figured out that I was rarely there, so I never got the benefit of it. And then I downsized to a smaller, little condo, which I also came to the conclusion I didn’t even need that. So then I ended up moving closer to downtown in a single apartment.

Eardley-Pryor: And how does that map to other legislators that you were friends with?

Murray: Probably the biggest mistake I made—that my predecessors made, I don’t know if that was the same for people—is I didn’t buy a condo or a house or anything like that, which I would have—which would have appreciated in value because the Sacramento real estate market was doing very well then.
But it ran the gamut from people like me who got the smallest, cheapest thing they could find, to people—some people moved their families to Sacramento. I am much more of an LA person, and so I never wanted to move to Sacramento. I really liked LA and where I lived and my district.

Eardley-Pryor: We've talked in the past about some of your tech-oriented legislation, and you just mentioned internet piracy as one of the ones. And that indeed became SB 1506, internet piracy in 2004, making it a crime to record anything electronically. But there's a few other ones too, on computer spyware, making sure that you couldn't have any kind of unauthorized spyware put on someone?

Murray: Yeah. I think I just tried to be on the cutting edge of what was going on in the internet. Spyware and spam were one of those things that were becoming discouraged. And now thirty years later, they continue to evolve and be a big problem for people. But, yeah, we saw that early that people were going on the internet and stuff was getting downloaded. And those permissions that most people don’t read, you didn’t even use to get that back in the nineties and two thousands. So we try to be on the cutting edge of what was going on in in the internet in order to protect consumers. Most of the tech industry had the attitude that we're smarter than you and we've created all this wonderful stuff and you should just leave us alone. And remember, Google used to have the famous saying of "do no harm," and of course being the cynical legislator that I was, I didn’t trust any of that, so we thought we'd do some legislation.

Eardley-Pryor: I know that, in terms of women's issues, which you have represented in the past as well, I see some themes around prenatal screening and genetic testing and ensuring privacy from insurers with DNA test.

Murray: Yeah. As DNA testing was coming about and genetic testing was coming about for very good reasons, to help detect diseases and to help women know what's going on with them in their pregnancies, there was this big risk that you would be denied insurance or you would discriminated against if this information was widely known, so we tried to protect against that. Certainly, I supported women's issues, but frankly more, I was interested in the cutting-edge technology and what are the downsides of these things, which are otherwise very positive things. And we have the same problems again today with DNA and artificial intelligence. Particularly with artificial intelligence if your data sets aren't broad enough, they are particularly discriminatory. I still make the complaint sometimes when I go into a restroom that has one of those automatic faucets, sometimes it doesn’t really recognize my skin as being a hand. So these things are very real issues and continue to be issues as technology evolves.
Eardley-Pryor: That's great. I want to ask, too, about your experience during the blackouts and brownouts in the [2000-2001 California] energy crisis. What was either your personal or your legislative experience of that?

Murray: We all suffered through them and—but my personal experience is not any unique as any other one. But I will say we ended up with the energy crisis for a very simple reason at that one Republican legislator, or maybe most of the Republican legislators and one Democrat, were upset that in Texas and or Arizona, they paid a couple of cents less than California did for energy. They got a majority of the legislature to open up the energy markets to competition thinking that that would drive prices down, and what it did—what it actually did is it made us vulnerable to price gouging. So the energy crisis of that time was really an artificial thing that was created by some people in a trading room in Texas. And it literally was all about, "hey, why are they paying a couple of cents less than us, so then let's open it up to competition." Again, that sort of flies in the face of why you have a utility. You have a utility for a stable source, and when you open it up to competition, then your sources aren't stable. I think it created a political crisis in that obviously power and energy are one of the biggest things that the state regulates in order to have some stability both in your personal life and for businesses, and it caused Gray Davis to get a recall.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, and I knew you were on some of the cutting edge with regard to technology around solar energy and trying to get that was financed.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: I see a bill that was labeled SBX2-82, solar energy systems that became a law in 2001 during a second extraordinary session. And what this bill did is it required solar energy equipment to be installed in all state buildings.

Murray: Right. That was a bill that I partnered with Jim Brulte who was the Republican leader. What I really wanted to do was actually say that they have to put this solar on state buildings. What I ended up getting was they have to put solar on state buildings with some conditions, and so I think I talked in one of our previous sessions about the bureaucrats getting to create a formula about why—when they do it. So that's another one of those that I wanted to be stronger, but it was worth it to get some Republican leadership supporting it.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, and what's the story with the extraordinary session?
Murray: I don’t remember, but I’m sure it was just a tactic. I’m sure that we were having an extraordinary session, and I saw an opportunity to push something through. A lot of what you do in the legislature in terms of when you introduce something, what you call it, who do you work with are all tactical and strategic decisions.

Eardley-Pryor: And where do you think you learned how to be so strategic? How did that come to you?

Murray: That's actually a very good question. I don’t remember anybody sitting down and walking through it with me. Particularly at that time, there was a lot of great institutional memory among the staff about how to structure things, and then I think I just picked it up along the way. You have to seek opportunities and along with some very good staff folks, you just pick those things up.

Eardley-Pryor: You had mentioned with regard to the energy crisis that Gray Davis was recalled in 2003. What's your experience of that whole endeavor?

Murray: Well, I, of course, was a supporter of Gray Davis, and while I don’t think he handled this energy crisis well, he didn’t have the tools to handle it well, because admittedly the legislature had created this new rubric for energy, which just didn’t work and which allowed us to get taken advantage of. And so I think it was a little unfair to him. I don’t think he could have changed the outcome of the energy crisis, but he certainly could have communicated better maybe with the public about it. But it is really a problem that was not of his doing. Although I suspect he probably signed some of the bills that created this marketplace for energy. But a lot of the experts in the legislature and in the administration were saying, "Yeah, this, this should save us money," but we gave up stability for that, and it turned out to be a bad choice.

Eardley-Pryor: What are you memories with the recall and then suddenly this wave of people all deciding to run for governor?

Murray: Well, it is opportunistic. So 99.9 percent of them were actually running because just to get themselves more attention. I mean, you had porn stars and other crazy people essentially deciding to run for governor—and by the way even in a regular election, you always get some crazies. But in a special—in a recall where there's very low turnout, if you can generate a little bit of a base, you could win. It worked for Schwarzenegger. I do not think if Schwarzenegger had run for the first time at least in a straight-up election as a Republican he would've had a chance to win. But the uniqueness of a recall election allows people—and remember, Schwarzenegger won because of
name ID. So when someone has that 99.9 percent name ID, people who turn out for recall elections, they will tend to go with the most popular person, particularly if they're mad at the person that's in there. So if you look at the entire list of people who were running to replace Gray Davis, once you vote yes, you want to recall the governor, then you have this long list of people and there might have been people who had more experience with Schwarzenegger but then nobody knew who they were. Nobody knew their name even if they were experienced legislators. Did Cruz Bustamante—? I think Cruz Bustamante, there might have been a Democrat who put their name on the ballot just in case, but the public didn’t know who they were, but they all knew who Schwarzenegger was, so people took a shot at it.

A lot of people took the vote as a laugh like "I'm voting for the porn star, that's my statement." So it was an odd time, but I had general confidence in our—I don’t know about your system, but it all tends to work out. Someone was asking me not that long ago what I think about all the craziness, and it all tends to work out.

Eardley-Pryor: You mean with regard to today and the recalls of Newsom?

Well, no. I'm even going about the [US] presidential election, and with the recall, all these things tend to work themselves out, and there's chaos and then the system sort of rights itself, and continues chugging along for better or worse.

Eardley-Pryor: How did Sacramento change when Schwarzenegger did win the governorship?

Well, there was kind of a honeymoon period, because if you're going to have a Republican and you're a Democrat, he's the Republican you want. He was prochoice, and he was relatively liberal on a lot of issues, he was conservative when it came to economic issues as our many Democrats. And there was a great honeymoon period, and then he moved far to the right, which is where I think he blew it.

Eardley-Pryor: Is there a moment that stands out for you?

There were a set of initiatives that were relatively right winged that he supported, and I think that screwed him up. He could have been a great governor because he was so popular as a person that, to his credit, he wasn't afraid of doing anything. He could've bought the system and done what he thought was the right thing, and he moved far to the right and started
following the Republican line and that lost him. Because as a person, he was certainly a pro-business guy, but on social issues, he was a pretty good and decent guy. So moving to the right politically, which I don’t know if he did on his own or he had advisors, sort of hurt him in the long run for his legacy.

Eardley-Pryor: Did you notice that within the legislature, within the Senate or within the Assembly, that there was a turning point where they should—?

Murray: Yeah. When he did those initiatives, everyone said, "Okay, we thought we had somebody different, but he is really a right-wing Republican just like all these other folks," which really wasn't true, but he certainly was taking that tack. Now, he got reelected so, but he started following the tenets of the core of the Republican party, which not only in the legislature but in the state was on the downward slope. So I think he made a bad decision that way, but he's Arnold Schwarzenegger, I mean there's not much he couldn't survive.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, only California, I suppose.

Murray: He was fun. He had a nice little tent, it's been written about, his cigar tent. So he was a fun guy to hang out with.

Eardley-Pryor: Right on. Do you have memories of being together in the governor's mansion or in the smoking tent outside?

Murray: Yeah. I went down in the smoking tent a few times, so yeah, he was fun. I never went to the governor's mansion, but he was a decent guy to hang out with, and we worked very—he had some Democrats on his staff—

Eardley-Pryor: Susan Kennedy in particular.

Murray: Susan Kennedy and Bonnie—I can't remember Bonnie's last name but Bonnie who I—Bonnie Reiss, who has since passed away, but who I worked on the solar—the solar stuff with. He had some good people there. And again, having Susan Kennedy there shows that he could've been in the right place, but he moved to the right.

Eardley-Pryor: And one of the things that I think historically, looking back at Schwarzenegger, his governorship was, in some ways, saved by some of these environmental initiatives that he helped under his watch. And you were involved in some of those as well.
Murray: Yes.

Eardley-Pryor: The longer history of the California Solar Initiative and the Million Solar Roofs program, and then what became SB 1 for solar energy that you helped pass in 2006, or became law in 2006. That, again, is the same year that AB 32 and the climate solutions act.

Murray: Right. We did a lot of that. In fact, the great story about SB 1, which shows some idiocy on behalf of Democrats, is I had been pursuing solar for a while. The governor also was a pro-environmental person, so we literally had this aha moment of, okay, let's work together on this. I'm for doing this, and he embraced it, and we started discussions. And of course I would have, as I have in the past, said, "Okay, make—" I would've said something like, "Make all new homes solar." He, as a Republican, wouldn't go that far, and probably he was correct in that and so we agreed on the tax credit, an incentive based kind of thing. And one of the things that I must say the governor believes in, just because of who he is and the confidence he has in himself, is he wants to take a big swing. He doesn't want to do incremental things, so that's how he came up with a Million Solar Roofs.

And the great story about that is we worked on this together, and it would've been even a more bipartisan joint thing except the original SB 1 had all of the tax credit stuff in it and would've been a joint thing, and Democrats would've gotten more credit for it. Except that the labor community, because Schwarzenegger was a Republican, he was never going to do a bill that mandated that the roofs had to be installed by labor—by organized labor electricians. So the electricians pulled a lot of votes off of the bill such that in its original incarnation, it actually didn't pass, and Schwarzenegger was able to mandate—through the PUC, mandate many of the provisions. And so the organized labor movement, at the time thinking that they were supporting their members, they turned a pretty big Democratic initiative into something that Schwarzenegger was able to do through the PUC [California's Public Utilities Commission]. So that's another one of those things that we could've taken much more credit even than we got for the original bill.

And then there were obviously a number of parts of it that had to be done through legislation, so eventually, we were able to get SB 1 done. But only after some of the things, Governor Schwarzenegger said, "I'm just not going to talk to these labor people anymore, and I'm just going to mandate these things in through the PUC." But it's one of those instances where the labor movement and the other constituencies on the Democratic side overplayed their hand.
Eardley-Pryor: Well, one of the things I noted, too, was when the California Public Utilities Commission, when the PUC got involved, they don’t have the authority to control municipal districts, which includes the utilities of Sacramento and the massive LA [Department of] Water and Power.

Murray: Right. So in almost all PUC legislation, anything that has to do with utilities, there is a local control aspect that most legislators are relatively unanimous on, so they will always exempt the municipal utilities. Although I think we found other ways to put pressure on the big ones to embrace some kind of tax credit and solar encouragement. So in LA and in other places, you get—if you have a municipal utility, there are various incentives. We had to put much pressure on them, and it's one of those things where you have to leverage things that they want or they're interested in to get them to do the right thing. In some cases, they had local mayors who were pro solar, so it wasn't that difficult, but yes, you do have to exempt the municipal utilities. And I will say that just last year, we had an event with Governor Schwarzenegger where we actually installed the millionth solar roof, so there actually has been a million solar roofs.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great. One of the more innovative things it seemed from that initiative that you and the governor helped get forward with the help of the PUC and that SB 1 was the declining incentives for the solar industry over time. So that it almost forced them to become more muscular and economic.

Murray: Yeah. Well, that was the general concept is you don’t want to subsidize this forever; although I think the subsidy has been extend. But the idea was you subsidize something and then it reaches an economy of scale and then the cost goes down, so you don’t need to subsidy as much. So that clearly was a significant part of it.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Well, I know that that SB 1 came towards the end of your time in the Senate.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: Are there any other bills that we haven't talked about that you want to make sure we get on the record?

Murray: I can't really think of one. I’m just thinking about what are the things that I was most proud of. So I'm most proud of SB 1 and what solar energy has done. I'm also proud generally of my urban parks view, and we delivered hundreds of millions of dollars for urban parks. On a local level, the creation
of the Baldwin Hills Conservancy and the purchase of something called the Stocker Trail and the Baldwin Hills Scenic Overlook. I don’t know if those were bills, but they were more budget-related things I'm very proud of. I think we were relatively cutting edge in the nineties to be looking at things in the internet. So I think of it more as—more in categories than I do in specific pieces of legislation, although SB 1 was obviously one big one. To the point you made a little earlier, a lot of the things you get done are tactical and strategic and things that you may get as part of the budget or as part of someone else's bill, things like that. I'm more focused on the categories of things that I pursue than anything else.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah, really cutting edge with the technology and internet-related things, and frankly the Driving While Black legislation is pretty significant.

Murray: Yes, and that would be the other that you have to bring up because again that was very early in the days of people being concerned about that.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, I know that 2006 is when term limits come into effect for you, and so I want to ask you just generally about the impact of term limits in part because you were in the Assembly when the first wave of term limits sort of hit.

Murray: I think term limits is a horrible thing, but I probably would not have had the ability to run for the legislature were it not for term limits. So the person whose seat that I ran for, was not term limited but chose not to run for secretary of state because they would've had a term limit the next session. So I would not have been able to run nor would I think I would've moved up into various leadership positions as fast, but you certainly lost institutional memory, you certainly—one somebody got in the legislature, the first week, they're already looking for what their next office is going to be. So obviously since then, we've extended term limits so that somebody has twelve years instead of six years if they so choose to stay in the Assembly. But my thought is elections are built-in term limits so you—if you're doing a good job, you should be able to stay there. So that was my general view of it. It was a great benefit to me in the beginning, but then of course, I had to leave, so I certainly enjoyed the job and had I—and were there not term limits, I would likely have stayed.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, I'm wondering too about—I mean you did, you left under term limits, and your father as well.

Murray: Right, and remember, the bill that—the initiative that created term limits also took away the pension that legislators used to get. So (a) no long term pension. It used to be if you were there for a certain period of time, you ended
up with lifetime health care in that, and that wasn't just special for legislators but public employees tended to have good benefits. But legislators not only did we not get a pension, we weren't even allowed to invest in the public employee retirement system and put our own money into it. So it had that even greater negative effect. Other than the fact that I think they've reduced the salary not that long ago and things like that, there's this strange phenomenon where people tend to like their own representatives, but they hate politics, and they hate the legislature as a whole, so, But I certainly enjoyed my time there.

Eardley-Pryor: You saw the transition happen, and you talked here about the lack of institutional knowledge, but you've also talked about the role that staffers play in basically granting that institutional knowledge.

Murray: Well so, yes, and it goes back to you being the historian on short notice. It goes back to a time that really is the result of Jesse Unruh. There used to be a time where all the staff belonged to the administration, and Jess Unruh created an infrastructure and a staff so that he would be able to compete effectively with governors on policy issues. And the staff has a significant effect. I mean, (a) those are the people that really make the place run. Like getting a bill drafted and put in is really something that staffers do. And some of it is very technical, and there are a lot of rules and statutes about when you put something in, when you're first able to present it to a committee, how long it has to stay in that committee, how long it has to be available for people to make public comment, all of those things. And staffers really make the place run. They also are the institutional memory and sometimes the intellectual repository in a particular area. A senior staff person, particularly those who work on committees who staff a legislator with respect to the committee that they chair are really experts in those fields. And sometimes it's very technical. Particularly health care and how it is funded and how it works and the interplay between insurance companies and nonprofits and hospitals and doctors, it's a very complicated rubrics and setup. So kudos to all of those staffers who have become experts in those areas.

And the same thing, I chair the transportation, right? The very complicated way that we fund various transportation things certainly required somebody to be able to pay attention to that and understand the nuances. And the California codes is volumes and volumes and volumes and volumes. And again, I've talked about leg council, you could often come up with an idea and amend one code and unintentionally affect all sorts of other thing, which is why almost every big piece of legislation has some cleanup legislation the next year for—to fix the unintended consequences.
Eardley-Pryor: I guess what I'm thinking about is, with the role that staffers play in providing institutional memory and some of this expertise, I think the argument on behalf of term limits is that you get new legislators with new ideas to come in. What do you think about that argument?

Murray: No, I don't think that works. But in the end, you need legislators to be the editor. I think staff make things happen, and sometimes in my case, I would admit some of my good ideas were ideas that bubble up from discussions with staffers. But in the end, the legislator has to decide to make the play, the legislators want to take the heat from the public or from their colleagues about pursuing stuff. As much as I praise the staffers, I have also complained that some legislators over the years have let their staffers drive policy more than the legislature. So in the Senate, it's particularly more subject to that. If you have longtime staffers that tend to make decisions for their members, you tend to have less dynamics that way. So it's a double-edged sword, but I certainly would put my finger on the scale on the side of having good institutional memory in staffers. The reality is there's just too much going on in a state like California that you just can't be an expert in everything as a legislator. So you need people to advise you and to rely on for their advice and judgment, but you also need somebody that's got to be where the buck stops.

Eardley-Pryor: When you were coming close to term limits—

Murray: Oh, I'm sorry, the other thing that I would say term limits did is it made interest groups more important.

Eardley-Pryor: How so?

Murray: Because once you lose the institutional memory of the staff and the institutional memory of the members, then that void gets filled by a lobbyist and interest groups, labor, business. So they have taken a greater role and maybe have greater influence than they used to.

Eardley-Pryor: And you saw that happen over time?

Murray: Oh yeah, yeah. For instance, you have things where labor unions now if they disagree with some members, they might send ads into that member's district as punishment, not necessarily even during an election, or take out billboards. But when you had institutional memory and you had strong committee chairs and strong Speakers, no one would have dared do anything like that. So now, you have various interest groups doing what I think is overstepping their powers.
Eardley-Pryor: Do you think there's a solution?

Murray: No, not really. Again, I have general optimism. I think things will eventually always find their equilibrium.

Eardley-Pryor: As 2006 was approaching and you were coming to the point of your term limits coming up, what were your thoughts as to what you wanted to do next, either politically or not politically?

Murray: I had no idea. I had run for Congress and lost by just a little bit, and I have no idea. And it ended up that I went back to the William Morris agency, but again relatively opportunistic. I happen to talk to somebody randomly on one day, and they said, "Hey, why not—why don’t you come back here?" And I was like, "Oh, okay that sounds like an interesting idea," and it eventually worked out.

Eardley-Pryor: Wow. So well, take me back to the Congressional run.

Murray: So in the year 2000, I believe, Congressman Julian Dixon who was my Congressman and who I had known for a number of years died, and so it was an open seat, and again, a lot of people ran. The eventual winner was a woman named Diane Watson who had been a longtime legislator who had been my predecessor in the Senate seat, and a guy named Nate Holden ran who had also been a Senator and a city councilman. And then what really hurt me in the election was there was about six or seven people who are also young, professional African American, and they got probably just enough votes to keep me from winning. You know each of them got 500, 600 votes, and I think I lost by 2000 votes.

Eardley-Pryor: So that kind of split the vote for you?

Murray: Yeah, they certainly took votes away from me. So they were all in my age range and professionals. And so in any election, you can always get a couple of hundred friends to vote for you, so you get 200, 500, and four, five of those, it starts to eat into a margin.

Eardley-Pryor: How did you take that loss? What did you do with that?
Murray: I was disappointed but I—this was in 2000, so I still had six more years of eligibility for the legislature, so I wasn't out of a job, I wasn't out of politics. The downside was almost nonexistent, so I just went back to my job.

Eardley-Pryor: With the rest of the six-year term that you knew you had in Sacramento, did you think about other opportunities like lieutenant governor or secretary of state or anything?

Murray: No. All of those, particularly with the rise of the internet, which is countervailing to what we've been talking, the amount of scrutiny and vitriol and the amount of money that you have to raise started to grow exponentially, so it just wasn't really worth it. I thought locally I was a pretty good politician and could get elected to many things, but the amount of work and resources you have to put together to run statewide just didn’t seem to be worth it.

Eardley-Pryor: Locally, did you think about anything?

Murray: And the opposite was I wasn't interested in city council issues. I was interested in what issues I thought—and maybe in too arrogant a way, I thought—were sort of big cutting-edge issues. And the reality is that as a city council person, you deal with—even in the Los Angeles City Council, you deal with barking dogs and all sorts of other things.

Eardley-Pryor: So you made this transition back to William Morris agency.

Murray: Right.

Eardley-Pryor: Bring me up from the time that your term ended in 2006 through the next few years.

Murray: I went back to William Morris and then I stayed for a few years. Then William Morris was sold to a company called Endeavor, it became William Morris Endeavor. I was doing a lot of marketing and corporate consulting, and there was no need for that work at the new company so then I left and was consulting and practicing law a little bit, going back to my father's admonition of "if you go become a lawyer, that's the worst thing that could ever happen to you." So I did a little bit of that, and was doing fine. And then I was offered the opportunity to be the CEO of a place called the Weingart Center Association, which serves homeless people in downtown Los Angeles, and again opportunistic, just kind of came about. And when I took the job, homelessness was not the thing that it is now, not that it wasn't a problem, but
it certainly wasn't viewed by the public in the same way. If you went around trying to raise money for homeless issues, people would say, "No, I'm into children or education or breast cancer or prostate cancer or lung disease," and no one really thought of homeless. My timing was good again. Now, of course, everybody thinks about it, and it's garnering significant funding, and so now for ten years, I've been doing that.

Eardley-Pryor: Well, tell me about that world. How has homelessness in LA changed in the ten years that you've been involved at Weingart?

Murray: Oh, it's become more pervasive and it's become—there's been some legal changes, which allow people to have more stuff on the streets. So whereas when I was growing up, probably when you were growing up, every family had somebody who didn't really make it or had some troubles, and maybe they were living with Grandma or in the basement or they couch surfed among their siblings or relatives. So now, those people are out in the street because they've been allowed now in Los Angeles to have a tent and to keep property and essentially establish roots on the sidewalk. So part of the issues are policy oriented and part of the issues are just economics. So we have economic inequality, which is bad as it's ever been.

Particularly the tech world, has seen people make huge amounts of money concentrated in one places. We lost middle-class jobs, so you can't really feed a family on what we think of as middle-class jobs anymore. So that has made the folks at the bottom much more pervasive in terms of numbers. And I think economic inequality is maybe our biggest challenge. If you look at all the societies ever, actually, the ones that went down all went down because of economic inequality. So the Roman Empire fell largely because of economic inequality. There was a small number of people at the top and a larger number of people at the bottom who eventually got fed up with their lives as compared to what they saw in leadership. French Revolution, same thing. Middle East, the same thing. You can look at unrest in a lot of places and relate that to unemployment numbers. I would say that in the Middle East conflicts, Syria, Jordan, it's unemployment that really drives people's unrest. So if you go all around, you'll find that economic inequality has generally been a significant factor because—and the same thing here with the Occupy Wall Street some years—a few years ago. If you have a job and a decent job, you don't have time to go out and protest in a very simple, practical way.

I do think we are spending a lot of time on the wrong thing, which is that we're spending a lot of time trying to raise the minimum wage, which I support. But you're not supposed to be able to feed a family working at a fast-food restaurant; that's supposed to be an entry-level job. So instead of trying to create middle-class jobs, we're trying to make entry-level jobs pay enough
for you to support a family, so I think we're focused on the wrong thing. Again that's part of the labor movement, taking on those things and focused on the wrong thing, at least in my view.

03-00:57:55
Eardley-Pryor: Share with me the ways that your experience as a legislator has played out for you in the year since you've left work in Sacramento.

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Murray: It's like what I mentioned about having a law degree. Having this experience (a) just lets—it's—to the extent that I run an organization that is largely funded by the government, it just gave me some understanding about how this type of funding happens. It let me know what motivates and interests other elected officials. To the extent that the government touches every one of our lives at multiple touchpoints, understanding those touchpoints and how to not necessarily manipulate them but understanding them and using them is something that I have some front-row experience at.

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Murray: Oh yeah, so again after leaving the legislature, this solar company came to me and asked to be on their board, so it was a great, fun run for the time that it existed. It still exists, but it is not the same company that it was when I joined it, but certainly was an interesting concept.

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Eardley-Pryor: Also with 2008 around the time you began that, it's also the time that the United States elects Barack Obama as president.

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Murray: Right.

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Eardley-Pryor: What was your experience of that and your reflection on it now that it's happened?

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Murray: Well, it's funny because he and I were state legislators, state Senators around the same time. Obviously, he's been a successful two-term president now but you—at one point, you look at him and you say, "Gee, I was in this—he was in the same place as me in 2000 or whatever." But of course it was a place of pride for every African American. I had the good fortune to meet him a few times, and I was a relatively early supporter of his. There were a lot of African Americans who's continued to support Hillary in the primary—Hillary Clinton. And one of the reasons I didn't support Hillary Clinton is that I didn't think that I could ever have known her or meet her and have a relationship with her. I had met her when she—when Bill Clinton was president, but she
didn’t have the same retail politics view that Bill had, so it was hard to get through her inner circle. And Barack was new and fresh and open to meeting new people, so it was great.

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Eardley-Pryor: What are some of your memories of those meetings?

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Murray: They were all in group settings. We never actually hung out or anything like that but it's—I met him when he was running for Senate and then I met him later once he was president, and you're meeting a guy who's—you're meeting the president. I had met Clinton, I had met Al Gore, I had met—that started when I was a kid, I met Hubert Humphrey when he was vice president. So again as much as it's very nice to meet those kind of people, I was not overwhelmed by it. Having said that, I have pictures of me and him hung up on my walls, which I'm very proud of. But frankly, the Bill Clinton presidency was even more interesting because he had people on his staff who made it their business to talk to state legislators like me and make sure we—if we needed anything from the federal government, that they were a conduit. So he was very, very big on that kind of retail politics and relationship building.

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Barack Obama to his credit was—not that Bill Clinton wasn't an intellectual—but he was much more of focused on the intellect and the policy that he was doing and less on relationships. That wasn't his strong suit even though obviously he was a great public speaker and a great leader in that regard. Bill Clinton did it one-on-one, which is just very interesting. I've never seen anyone who could do it one-on-one the way Bill Clinton could do. If you walked a rope line, Bill Clinton will shake your hand and focus on you like you're the only person in the world. It's somewhat amazing how he's able to do it. Barack Obama, inspiring in a different way, but certainly being African American, you just got to love Barack Obama. There’ve been comedians who joke about this, but he also had a perfect wife and a great family, and no way would he have survived if he had done any of the things that some of the other presidents have done, even some of the—even forgetting about Donald Trump, he never would've survived any of that stuff. But the Black guy just would not have been allowed to be the adulterer; it just wouldn’t have happened. So he was the right guy at the right time and did a great job.

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Eardley-Pryor: The Trump administration comes in next, right?

03-01:03:57
Murray: Right.

03-01:03:57
Eardley-Pryor: The Trump era and the horror of that, the wildness of that, the chaos that it was. Do you think Obama's presidency changed anything in American culture or American politics broadly?
One of the things he did is people just had to accept that a Black guy could do this job and could do other jobs—other CEO kinds of jobs, which wasn't—among the greater community out there wasn't a widely held belief. The amount of white support, particularly white women and young people that Barack Obama was able to get, sort of changed the perception. Just the fact that he had the job and got elected to the job and got reelected to the job if he had no other policy wins that—just that fact would've changed people's perception. Unfortunately, the bitter partisan divide has lessened the effect of the Affordable Care Act because it's a big deal. It's like creating Social Security. The controversy has made it get less important than I think it really should be. Millions, tens of millions of people now have preventive health care that protects them in case they get sick, and that is such a huge deal. If he did nothing else, that would solidify him for a century.

What was your experience of the Trump era?

Just bemusement. It just seemed like idiocy. I'm used to people obfuscating. So particularly politicians, you're trying to sell something, you might exaggerate a little bit, you might obfuscate something that might look a little negative to you. But rarely do people straight up lie, and rarely do they lie about things that are easily verifiable, but on the other hand, rarely do they survive lies. And that was what really struck me is the idea that he would lie and everybody knew he would lie, even his supporters, and be willing to overlook it. How could the Christian right be for somebody like Donald Trump given that his pronouncements, his lifestyle. Nothing says Christian in his life? So that was a little bit eye-opening.

Although and this would be a surprising opinion, some of it starts with Bill Clinton. So if you remember Gary Hart got caught with a woman sitting on his lap, and he literally got out of the race. Bill Clinton had scandal after scandal after scandal and put his head down and kept going. And I think that was really the first of, "hey, I could survive these scandals, and if you just keep at it, you can survive them." And remember when, even at the hint of scandal, people used to resign? And as long as you're willing to take the negative hits, you can keep going is kind of what came out of the Trump era.

Share with me your experience of the historic year of 2020, from the pandemic through the racial reckoning that is moving through the country.

Well, of course, I run an operation that serves homeless people, so we're essential service, and we never stopped, so to me, I still had to go to work every day. But the world certainly changed, and people stayed home, and it affected them, and I think it's a little too soon to say how it affected you
because it's not quite over. So we're on the way out of it, and you'll see people—here where we are on May thirtieth, the beginning of summer, you're seeing people start to go out to restaurants and people starting to travel and things like that. I was at the airport not that long ago, and the plane was packed. And people do wear their mask, but they're not quite social distancing in many cases, so I think people are—there's some pent-up demand.

Ironically, if you worked in the service industry and you lost your job, then the pandemic was horrible. But if you had a job that you could do from home, you came out great because you're spending less money on stuff. You can't go out to dinner, you can't spend money on all the disposable things that you used to spend on. So a lot of people who were able to keep their jobs did better. The stock market did great, the economy boomed throughout the entire time even though some businesses, particularly restaurants and others—the concert business for instance, went to zero. But the other interesting thing for me is I work on homelessness, so I still had a job but had I still been at William Morris, the whole entertainment business was shut down. So who would've thought I'd be better right off working in homelessness than working in the entertainment business? So again opportunistic and somewhat kismet related.

Eardley-Pryor: Yeah. Share with me your experience or impressions of the racial experiences that are happening in the United States in the wake of George Floyd's murder, the rise of Black Lives Matter, the marches, the protests throughout the summer last year.

Murray: Well, I think white people finally understood the things that Black folks go through. It's been very hard for the white population generally to understand that discrimination still happens on a daily basis. And I used to tell people, and to this day, no matter how successful you are even if you are in positions of power, people—you still get these little sleights every day. So obviously, George Floyd was bigger than a slight, but people could—because of video and because of the internet, people clearly understood. Because in the past, something like this would happen, say the Rodney King beating, then there would always be some testimony about how he was a criminal or how he was—you don’t know what happened before the video. But even if you go back to Rodney King, four or five people hitting him dozens and dozens of times, you didn’t need that to subdue a person. But people saw this video where someone just put their knee on a guy's neck, and there was the realization and the acceptance that this just doesn’t happen to white people. We don’t know of any instances of this happening with white people. I'm sure there are officer-involved shootings of white people, but rarely did they happen in the back or rarely is someone just detained. Like you never hear of the white guy dying in custody, you just don’t hear of that. That just doesn’t seem to happen. And until now, we were always—or not we, but the society,
the cops, or whoever, was always able to explain it away. And this was something that they couldn’t do.

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The great thing about the Black Lives Matter movement is all the white people who joined it. I'm a little concerned now that we're sort of going to lose the momentum. So there's already backlash and there was—and there has been backlash about why are we focused on this. And I'm really encouraged to see all of the young people who are out there. Although I think what we still lack is we don’t have a civil rights leader. We have George Floyd, and we have an issue, and we have some icons, we've always had icons, but there isn't a real leader. There's no Martin Luther King or Malcolm X even if you disagree with his politics. There's no singular leader who is quite that influential. Maybe Maxine Waters is the closest I can think of. You have Al Sharpton, but he's become a TV personality more than a civil rights leader.

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The Occupy Wall Street Movement morphed into—not morphed into, but had an effect on the Black Lives Matter movement where the idea that it's a movement and doesn’t have a leader began to be a popular thing. And I'm just a believer that you need a leader. You need someone to drive strategy, you need someone to drive tactics if you ever want to get something done. And I think that the void here is that a singular leader hasn't emerged. Although you do have people like Stacey Abrams who are political leaders, and the question is whether political leaders can morph into moral leaders and movement leaders. But the leaders of Black Lives Matter in particular didn’t want to have a singular leader, and I think that's a tactical mistake.

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Eardley-Pryor: I'd like to think about some summary questions to bring towards a conclusion. Before we get into that, is there anything else that you wanted to talk about?

03-01:15:17

Murray: No, I think we've done well.

03-01:15:20

Eardley-Pryor: Great. Well, you talked about some of the things that you're most proud of from your time in office, some of the bills. Are there particular memories, experiences not directly related to a legislation that really stand out to you that you are really pleased that you were able to a part of?

03-01:15:36

Murray: I certainly met interesting people along the way, but again I considered myself more of a legislator. So I focused more on the legislation that I got done and think of my—as people start to think about their legacy, I really enjoyed that process and getting that done more than anything else. I like to think of myself as (a) a good legislator, and (b) a good person at developing relationships so that I could do that. One of my skills, I would like to think, is the tactics and the strategy, which is less the technical part of it and more being able—I think
If you ask people about me, they will tell you that I am generally able to separate the wheat from the chaff and get to the point relatively quickly. And maybe that developed having to go through hundreds of bills in a day and trying to ascertain what they do. But I would really focus on the legislation.

Eardley-Pryor: Do you think—let me change that. In what ways do you think your service in Sacramento changed you?

Murray: I mean just that one thing that it helped me develop—I think I always had it because I always had a certain impatience, but I think I was able to get to the point of things a little faster. I probably developed a little bit more patience because you're having to deal with 119 other personalities in trying to do things. I don't know that it changed me in any particular way. I think it maybe helped me to use some of the things that I already had or enhanced them or maybe they had more value in the legislature, but I don't think it changed me.

Eardley-Pryor: A couple of questions in thinking about hopes: We've spoken about some of the racial issues that are happening today and your engagement in some civil rights legislation and your leadership at the Black Caucus in Sacramento. What are your hopes for the future of the Black Caucus?

Murray: My hope is that it continues to grow. We live in a world now where A, people are forced into inner cities, so there's been a diaspora of African Americans and so now they are in suburban areas. And hopefully, you can get African Americans elected in non-African American seats. Willie Brown famously did not represent an African American seat, and we have some others in the legislature now who don't represent majority African American districts. But if there's something I hope continues that trend I hope continues that people can see African Americans as worthy of representing all sides of people.

Eardley-Pryor: Democrats have had the super majority in Sacramento now for quite some time. What are your hopes for the Democratic party in California?

Murray: I think we have to stop fighting with each other. So the progressives have become very strident and dogmatic. And nothing wrong with being a progressive, but when you get to the point that you're a progressive and you think the other Democrats are not worthy, which is where we are now. Bernie Sanders supporters famously said that they don't know if they'll support Biden. So there is a dogmatic approach that the progressives have that they think everybody else is not a good Democrat or not a good liberal, and I think that is destructive.
We're supposed to be the "let everybody speak and all voices be heard," and we started to stifle internal descent if in case somebody differs with the progressive line. And what they failed to realize is that (a) progressives probably make up—real progressives—probably make up, about 20 percent of the vote. And that the way you keep a majority in Congress or in the legislature is the middle-of-the-road, moderate swing districts. Harold Ford who was a Congressman and represented a Memphis district. You don’t get elected in Tennessee if you're anti-gun. But our folks would say that you are not worthy, and I would say we have that with the progressive wing in Congress where it's not so much that they take the positions that they take, which they are entitled to and which many of them I agree with. It's their derision for people who don’t necessarily go as far as they're willing to go. I think that's destructive to the Democratic party. And you can see how we won an election pretty handily and lost Congressional seats because of this progressive view that we're trying to sell to places in the country where it just doesn’t fly.

Eardley-Pryor: What would your advice be to a young person just beginning in politics or considering engaging in politics?

Murray: Just go do it. I get asked this a lot actually. As in life, 75 percent, maybe 90 is just showing up. So the reality is elected officials, politicians, people in government, they want help, they need help, they want supporters, they need supporters. Just go and be supporter of someone who you agree with and volunteer, and I can assure you that just being there, you'll get noticed and snapped up by someone who wants you to ride the ride with them. Just show up.

Eardley-Pryor: That's great, Kevin. Is there anything else you'd like to add before we wrap up today?

Murray: No. It's been fun.

Eardley-Pryor: It's been a pleasure. Thank you so much.

Murray: Thanks, talk to you later.

[End of Interview]