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State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

**ANTHONY C. BEILENSON**

California State Assemblyman, 1962-1966  
California State Senator, 1966-1976  
United States Congressman, 1976-1996

August 26, September 3, 8, November 25, 1997  
February 26, March 3, 1998  
Los Angeles, California

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None.

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[Session 4, November 25, 1997]

[Begin Tape 7, Side A]

YATES: When we met last time, which was in September, we talked about the period when you were in the state senate and today I would like to get your observations on a number of general subjects. But first, let me ask you something that occurred to me since we last met. I read a 1981 article in the Los Angeles Times that said that after you became chairman of the state senate Finance Committee you became more conservative about the merit of your work and that you began "to doubt the value of some government programs." Why had your thinking changed?

BEILENSON: I'm trying to recall that quote. But what I do remember is that perhaps for the first time--I would hope not, but in a real way, in a serious way, for the first time--when I became chairman of the senate Finance Committee in 1975 and 1976, because it was my responsibility as

BEILENSON: chairman to ride herd, as it were, on the state budget, I became even more careful and conservative, if that's the right word, about state spending, about the programs in the state, and how they spent their money. We had to stay within a balanced budget. I did feel a personal responsibility to a greater extent than I had before, quite obviously. I think at that time I started looking more carefully than I had on earlier occasions at the individual programs, trying to divine, along with the help of the legislative analyst's office and others there in Sacramento, which programs were working well and deserved continued funding, and which [others] perhaps weren't doing quite so well as had been intended and therefore could be cut back or at least not increased.

I remember thinking to myself at that time or realizing actually at that time that, in terms of my votes on my own committee, I became more conservative. That is, I voted against additions to programs or even starting some new programs more often than did my most conservative Republican colleagues on that committee, who blithely went about as they



always had, as members of legislatures, whether it's state legislatures or Congress, tend to do, unfortunately. They were voting in favor of programs which they knew had constituencies back home. It's hard for any of us, no matter what one's political philosophy, to vote against a popular program, or to vote against increasing a program when there is a lot of pressure on you from providers or users of that program back home in your district. But, as I said, feeling an additional responsibility and a new responsibility, as it were, as chairman of the committee, I found myself casting negative votes on a lot of things that I noticed I was alone in voting against.

YATES: That's interesting.

BEILENSON: Part of it also was philosophical to a certain extent. The longer you're in government, if you're at all thoughtful about these things, the more you look back and try to analyze which of the things you've supported or programs you have seen develop during your years in the legislature have turned out to be successful, and which ones have not. You get some feel, it seems to me, if you're careful about it and

thoughtful about it, about which kinds of programs tend to work well and which ones don't. Which ones spend money efficiently and which ones don't. And you also start wondering out loud often, certainly at first to yourself, about the role of government in a way that you didn't at the outset, trying to figure out--at least for yourself, at least to your own satisfaction--what kinds of things government should be involved in, what kinds of things government is good at, which kinds of things it should stay away from, either because it's not its business or because when it gets involved with it, it doesn't do the job very well. There are some obvious kinds of things, some obvious kinds of areas, and others that are a good deal less obvious. But I started, I think, finding myself taking a far more philosophical and pragmatic bent, if that's the right word, toward a whole series of programs and issues at about this time in my thirteenth and fourteenth years in Sacramento than I had as a younger member of the legislature.

YATES: Right, so that actual experience of being there long enough to see something that you

authored . . .

BEILENSEN: It was a mixture of both. . . . Right.

YATES: And implemented and . . .

BEILENSEN: But not even I myself. . . . Just looking around at all of the various programs that we were involved in, it was a mixture of both experience, having now twelve years or more to look back on, plus the new responsibility of being the lead person, as it were, on the Finance Committee, which had to process all of the spending bills each year that came before the state legislature. The combination of the two, I think, made me more philosophical, more thoughtful, more pragmatic, and I suppose more conservative, certainly with respect to fiscal matters and about what it is that the government can do well.

YATES: Do you think your experience, in terms of having been there a while and making these observations, is typical of most legislators' experiences?

BEILENSEN: I'm sure it's typical of their experiences. Whether or not--and here I don't mean to be immodest--but whether or not the average legislator or member of Congress just continues

blithely along doing what he or she thinks is useful or necessary for his or her reelection is another matter. I was blessed. . . . That's too strong a word.' But I was lucky at that time certainly, as were most of my colleagues as a matter of fact, to represent a district that was fairly secure, in my case a Democratic one, in other cases Democratic or Republican. Most of us were not at risk of losing our next elections if we did the right thing, or if we did the more thoughtful thing, or if we started being a little more careful and picky about which programs we were going to support, and so on. Nonetheless, it's the nature of an elected representative to want to please the people back home, as many as possible. And as I said just a few minutes ago, even my most conservative colleagues, with a very few exceptions . . .

YATES: Right, you said they still vote . . .

BEILENSON: . . . tended to vote for programs which they may well at the outset several years earlier have not even voted to establish, but once they became established and once some group of people back home--voters of theirs,

constituents of theirs--started to rely on it, started to like it, started to know about it, found it very difficult to vote against it. I think, obviously, the longer you're in a legislature if you think about things at all, if you're at all thoughtful, you start coming to some conclusions and thoughts that you didn't have earlier on because you simply didn't have the experience. But whether or not that leads one to change one's vote or to change one's position on matters is another thing. In most cases I think it does not.

YATES: Right. OK. I'd like to ask you now about some general topics relating to California politics. The first thing I wanted to ask you about is campaigning and campaign finance. From your own experience of obviously running for office, how did campaign finance change?

BEILENSEN: Let me say at the outset that we're talking about something which, so long as we're discussing my state legislative days, at least. . . . We're talking about something which is now more than two decades ago at the very end and started fourteen years before that. As you're well aware, the whole issue of

BEILENSON: campaign finance, all of the problems involved in the issues of campaign finance reform, were really somewhat different then, at least in degree. I mean, they were a great deal different in degree. I don't know what people spent to run for Congress in those days. I think it was relatively little. I do know that most of us, in running for state legislative seats, spent a relatively small amount. I don't even remember anymore how much it was, but I think it was no more than a very few tens of thousands of dollars every four years when we ran for reelection to the state senate. Now, I suppose it was not true for those who ran in more marginal or difficult districts. They must have spent \$100,000 or so, but I doubt very much if it was much more than that.

When one talks about the problems of financing campaigns and the whole issue of campaign finance reform, at least in those days, as we discussed, one has to keep in mind that we're talking about quite a different creature than the monster that this has grown into in the interim. It has gotten exponentially larger, both in terms of the

amounts of money involved and the complexities and difficulties and the importance of the issue over the past twenty years, especially in the past five, six, seven, eight years. But back then it really was kind of a small thing. I forgot whether or not we mentioned earlier in our discussion that early in my first year as chairman of the senate Finance Committee, I decided, just on my own, not to accept any more political action committee contributions, or PAC contributions. Since then I've never accepted any, all through my twenty years in Congress as well.

YATES: Why did you decide that at that point?

BEILENSON: Well, I decided at that time because I realized I was feeling. . . . I felt uncomfortable, as chairman of the committee that handled all the major legislation through which all spending bills went, to be in a position where I had accepted any money whatsoever from any special interest. So I cut it out. I stopped. But the point I want to make is that, although I'm pleased that I did it and it's a good thing--and it was an even bigger thing in later years when it meant turning down a lot of money--the

fact of the matter is that it didn't mean an awful lot in reality at that time.

I'm just making up some numbers. I'm trying to recall. . . . I doubt very much that I was offered and accepted prior to that time more than \$3,000 or \$3,500 per election cycle by PACs. You know, the [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters [Chauffeurs, Warehousemen, and Helpers of America] used to give each of us Democrats \$500, and the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations] gave \$500 or \$1,000, and the insurance company people gave. . . . There was a group of them at the time as I recall which gave maybe \$500, and the California Medical Association may have given some small amount. I don't know . . .

YATES: So you're saying that the total from all those different groups might be about \$3,000?

BEILENSEN: Right. For me. In a sense my giving up PAC money at that time meant my giving up about \$3,000, \$3,500 per election cycle. Now, I'm sure some of my colleagues received more money than that, but I doubt very much it was a huge amount. Perhaps it was \$5,000, \$6,000, maybe



as much as \$8,000 or \$10,000. I don't know. Maybe I'm wrong, maybe it was more than that, but I doubt it very much.

YATES: So you're saying that the proportion of that money to the overall cost of the campaign was not that much then.

BEILENSEN: Neither the amount nor the proportion was much, although again, most of us needed to spend very, very little money at that time to get reelected. Most of us didn't need to spend any. Just being the Democratic candidate in a strong Democratic district or a Republican in a strong Republican district was enough. We all spent a little money to send out a couple of mailers or something, but it wasn't anything like what people are used to these days. I mean, it was just a totally different era. In any case . . .

YATES: So you were saying you made that decision . . .

BEILENSEN: So I made that decision back then for those reasons, but the interesting thing to me is that I didn't thereby deny myself a huge amount of money. I like to think that I would have done it under any circumstances, but if I were denying myself \$20,000 or something of that

sort, it would have been perhaps a more difficult decision to make.

YATES: OK.

BEILENSEN: So that the whole issue and the whole problem of campaign finance and the question of campaign finance reform was different then than it is now. I remember--I've gone back over a lot of stuff in the last year or so looking through old speeches and files of my own since I've left Congress--that apparently for me early on in my years in Sacramento, campaign finance reform had already become a big issue. I felt as strongly about it then as I do now. God knows there was much less reason to. I mean, as I said, I don't know how. . . . Whatever kind of subtle corruption or not-so-subtle corruption contributions by special interests bring, and I'm sure they do, it must have been awfully small in those days when we were talking about a \$500 or a \$1,000 contribution tops, but maybe not. In any case, in looking back at my old talks and my old speeches, some of which. . . . I have copies of speeches given to constituents back home and to various places where I was speaking throughout

the state. I spoke at some length and with some passion about campaign finance reform. I can't imagine how strongly I would have spoken out even back then if circumstances had been the same as they are now, because they're much, much worse now, of course, than they were then. But apparently from the very beginning the whole thing bothered me and a few of my colleagues--Arlen Gregorio in the state senate and a number of other members--as well. On one occasion, if I recall correctly, we successfully got a reform bill to the floor only to lose it pretty solidly, pretty strongly on the floor of the senate.

YATES: And which one was this?

BEILENSEN: I don't recall which one it was. We're talking about more than twenty years ago. I'm talking about two or three or four different bills which I had introduced, some by myself and some with others, in various years.

YATES: Well, I have one. . . . I mentioned one off tape to you, which was this campaign finance reform act of 1973 which placed a lid of a hundred dollars on individual contributions. But I also had a note about a 1974 bill

allowing counties and cities regulation of campaign contributions.

BEILENSEN: Was that a bill of mine?

YATES: Yes, those were two that . . .

BEILENSEN: I'm frank to tell you that I don't remember the specifics of almost any of them. I can only assume, and I believe I remember, that I did the same thing then that I did in later years in the Congress. Every couple of years in Congress. . . . Not every couple of years, but on several occasions during my years in Congress I, sometimes alone, usually with a few cosponsors, would introduce a campaign reform bill. We varied it often from year to year--playing with the different provisions, trying to entice additional support by leaving certain things out and putting other things in, trying one way and trying another--simply in an effort to get the issue out on the floor and out for discussion where it clearly could be amended, perhaps could be strengthened, probably not. I mean, I didn't care so much. . . . I did. I would figure out each time what I personally thought was the best way to approach the subject, and what would end up with the most

BEILENSON: real reform, but understanding that if it ever got anywhere it obviously would be changed along the way. It didn't bother me at all because it was simply, as I said, an effort to try to push this issue, which I've so long felt was at the crux, at the core, of many of our problems of representative government. That is, by preventing our government from being as representative of the people back home who elected us, who voted for us, as it should be, and therefore too representative of the people who contributed large amounts of money to our campaigns. I simply wanted in any way I possibly could to try to get this issue before my colleagues and therefore before the public. If it ended up in some form other than the one in which I had introduced it, that would have been fine with me, as long as it was an effective kind of reform. We've never succeeded at all in all of these years, either at the state level or at the congressional level. It may well be that next year or in March of 1998 the leadership of the Congress has promised to take up some bills and something finally perhaps will be voted on and

perhaps even pass. But until this time nothing really has been done.

YATES: What about the Political Reform Act of 1974,<sup>1</sup> which Jerry Brown of course--this was when he was secretary of state--championed and was an initiative. I do want to get your view on the intent of that.

BEILENSEN: [Whispers] Did it pass?

YATES: Yes, it created the Fair Political Practices Commission. It was Prop[osition] 9, [which] tightened limits on campaign contributions and spending, established stricter disclosure requirements, and eventually of course the courts deemed spending limits as unconstitutional. I'm wondering, what about that particular act was effective or not?

BEILENSEN: The answer is no, to a large extent. I think it was not effective, and partially of course because of the constitutional limitations, constitutional obstruction, which was thrown in the way by the U.S. Supreme Court, which of course also has undone, or undid, to a very

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1. Proposition 9 (June 1974).

BEILENSEN: great extent some of the attempted reform at about the same time back in Washington. I must tell you that I don't recall much about the specifics of it at the time back in 1974, nor whether we ourselves tried that year. . . . I guess we did. I guess you just reminded me that we did try that year with a bill of our own.

Anyway, one point is quite obvious and that is, if you can get this kind of issue before the public, the public will support it, even though it doesn't know whether what it's voting on is terribly good or not, or whatever.

It's interesting that you bring that up. I had forgotten it. It's just so obvious. One cannot. . . . At least for the past thirty years one has not been able anywhere almost, certainly not in Sacramento or in Washington, to get a useful campaign finance reform bill through a legislature. A legislature is used to working with the rules as they are, and for all kinds of reasons we can discuss if you want, is not anxious to pass campaign finance reform, thinking among other things that it will give challengers more of an advantage. . . .

Not so much of an advantage, but a better chance of defeating an incumbent than a challenger currently has.

YATES: Why? Because they can't get as much money?

BEILENSEN: Well, for two reasons. It depends, of course, on the bill or the proposed reform. If there are limits to what one can raise, then instead of being able to raise perhaps \$900,000 to your challenger's \$5,000, you might be limited to \$300,000 or whatever the bill would provide for, which therefore clamps down on your spending and gives your challenger a chance. If it provides for matching funds or for easier ways for challengers or for anybody to raise money, then it gives your challenger a chance to pick up money which he or she wouldn't be able to raise absent this kind of thing.

Even though one could often argue that reform, in whatever form, will not hurt incumbents, nevertheless it's hard to sell that to incumbent legislators who, as I said, are used to the system, whatever it is, that they grew up under; they're used to using it and have been successful under it. They're wary, to put it mildly, of any change and of giving a



BEILENSON: better chance to people who might run against them. But that's neither here nor there.

The point I was starting to make is that you cannot get these kinds of things except with huge public pressure applied through pushing by a governor or by a president, or by whatever, which we've not had in either our state or in our nation in recent years. But if you take it to the people as an initiative, for example as happened in 1974, it'll happen. This has happened a couple of times in recent years here in California. In fact, it's what. . . . In 1996, I think two measure passed, one of which took precedence over the other. It's hard for the public to discern which one might be better, which one is good and which one isn't, or whether they're both good or neither is good. Nonetheless, the public will support any kind of campaign finance reform because they can't stand the existing system. They're absolutely right. They're absolutely right. But that's the only way, it seems to me, to get it. It's going to be awfully difficult to get it through a legislative initiative in the Congress itself

unless you have a president out there campaigning for it, which of course would make some difference.

YATES: Then help me understand. . . . What you're saying is that the real bite, so to speak, for something like the Political Reform Act of 1974 is the limits on spending. If that doesn't work, then you're not really getting down to dealing with reform?

BEILENSEN: I think . . .

YATES: Is that right?

BEILENSEN: I'm trying to remember whether the court struck down limits on spending or limits on contributions. I guess it struck down limits on spending, right? I think you're correct about that.

YATES: Yeah. Hold on a second, I'm looking at my notes. I have that spending limits is unconstitutional.

BEILENSEN: Right, but not. . . . But you can limit contributions. You can limit individual contributions to, let's say, \$100. You can limit political action committee contributions to \$1,000, or whatever, but you cannot limit, according to the court twenty-some years

BEILENSEN: ago. . . . We all keep hoping the new court will change that. Perhaps it will one of these days and overthrow that old decision. But you cannot put limits on the amount of spending because that's an infringement, so-called, on free speech or on speech, which I have some real questions about. They equate money with speech and I think it's a false equation.

The bite of any particular political reform act or initiative, or whatever it might be, depends obviously on the provisions of that particular bill.

If you, for example. . . . Let's say we accept the constitutionality, at least for the moment because we have to, of there being no limits on spending. Nonetheless, you can limit contributions. What happens of course is that people. . . . I mean, what has happened at the federal level certainly is that people have found ways around those contribution limits. An individual is only allowed to give \$1,000 in the primary campaign and another \$1,000 in the general campaign to presidential candidates, for example, or to people running for federal office--U.S. senators or members of Congress.

So they find ways around it. The president has and the Republican party has, last year and many previous years. But it keeps getting worse every four years by getting so-called soft money contributions, which are contributions supposedly not to candidates, not the president, not to Mr. [Robert J.] Dole, not to me, not to Senator So-and-so, but to the Democratic party of California, or the Republican national party, or whatever it might be. That party of course then, instead of using the money as it's supposed to under the initiative or under the limits of the current law for party building purposes, so-called, in fact sends it to various campaigns or uses it on behalf of various campaigns, on behalf of the president's campaign, on behalf of Senator So-and-so's campaign, on behalf of Congressman So-and-so's campaign. That certainly is not within the spirit of the law. Perhaps it's within the letter of the law, but in any case it needs to be changed obviously.

YATES: Well, this is tied in somewhat. . . . You mentioned previously or in a previous session that lobbyists maintained close ties with

various senators and exerted a lot of influence behind the scenes. You were talking about the senate versus this . . .

BEILENSEN: I was talking about. . . . Yes. I was also talking about the senate especially in the days before we arrived, or at least in the days before the first year or two we were there, when we overthrew the old guard, as it were, and instituted some real changes. That is, put the Rules Committee, which made the major decisions of committee membership makeup, and where one sent various bills, to which one assigned bills. . . . As long as the Rules Committee was making independent decisions and not decisions dictated by lobbyists, then of course you had to a certain extent broken the real hold over the business of the senate, the procedures there that up to that time had been controlled by various lobbyists.

YATES: Right, I guess one thing that. . . . I'm not sure how this connects exactly, but just a few minutes ago we were talking about the fact that the money contributed by lobbyists was smaller in proportion to what it really cost them in campaigns.

BEILENSEN: Why do they have such a . . .

YATES: Yeah. So where does the influence come in?

BEILENSEN: Well, I'm not sure. I think I know, but I'm not really sure for a number of reasons. Many of the lobbyists were former members of the legislature and simply close friends with these folks. And all of us tend to be. . . . You know, we tend to favor our friends or tend to believe our friends or like our friends or at least grant access to our friends and hear their point of view and want to be able to do what they would like done on behalf of their clients if at all possible, if it doesn't seem to be in contradiction to our own principles or our own beliefs. I think--and here I don't want to make any terribly strong assertions--I do believe that there was some at least modest corruption in those days, more so than now, in the sense that a lot of personal favors were done by lobbyists for their friends in the legislature, especially in the senate. Perhaps moneys paid to them that they were able to use for their own private purposes, as differentiated from campaign purposes. Certainly a lot of favors in terms of gifts or

BEILENSEN: trips or entertainment.

At the very most obvious level--and we were all subjected to this, as a matter of fact, because there were no limits on it at the time I was in the legislature--one could go for lunch virtually every day to one of the luncheons that was being given by various lobbyists or groups of lobbyists and have a free lunch. It did not affect most of us in terms of votes or whatever. It was such a widespread phenomenon that it wasn't deemed or looked upon as a special favor. It was almost looked upon as something which was your due. You could just wander off to lunch at the Senator Hotel or over at the other hotel, which name escapes me at the moment, or one of a number of other watering holes, as they called them, or restaurants in Sacramento within a block or two of the capitol building and have lunch, and say, "Thanks," and leave. The truth of the matter was that nobody really expected or believed that that in and of itself brought a lot of influence.

What it did, obviously, was to bring you in close personal contact with the lobbyists who

BEILENSON: ran the luncheons, or put them on. They would hang around and glad-hand everybody. They became your personal friends, and to that extent you were perhaps subtly corrupted. You certainly felt you owed them enough so that when they came by your office to talk to you about some pending bill you let them in and you talked to them. I think the vast majority of us did not let it do very much more than that.

But the truth of the matter was--it embarrasses me a little bit, looking back from this vantage point--was that we were awfully close personally to an awful lot of these people, even if most of us were pretty good about. . . . Most of us Democrats, for example, were less likely than Republicans to go along with them only because these were mainly business interests, whose position most of us Democrats--again I'm generalizing of course--were less likely to favor or to vote for than most of our Republican colleagues. But I don't think our Republican colleagues were thereby influenced any more by the fact that they had a free lunch at a certain place than we Democrats were. Simply that they were voting their



predilections anyway. But nonetheless it was a very cozy arrangement and one which should not be allowed.

On the other hand, it was a very small, sort of closed society up there of men--almost entirely men in those days--both legislators and lobbyists, of whom there weren't a huge number the way there are now, who found themselves thrown together in what was especially then the even smaller town or city of Sacramento, especially the downtown government area, and just naturally congregated together for sociability both at lunchtime and in the evenings. Often members would leave their families at home and they'd come up for three or four days of the week and just hung out with one another in the evenings. If you went to any of a number of bars the lobbyists would pay for your drinks.

YATES: So you didn't have a problem with that at the time because it seemed to be . . .

BEILENSEN: As I said, it's a bit embarrassing. One should have had a problem with it, but one didn't, including people like me who like to think of themselves, and I like to believe are, fairly

BEILENSEN: incorruptible, at least compared to a lot of other people. As I said, it's not a comfortable feeling looking back on that.

What's also true, and I might as well throw this in just so people now get a little more of a feeling for that era. . . . My first four years in Sacramento, our salary was \$500 a month. We were paid less than our own secretaries were in many cases. We also did not have money to go back and forth home on weekends or once a month, or whenever it is that we did. We did have a car rented for us. If you were within driving distance you had the use of a car. But you didn't have money for an airplane, so if you flew home you had to pay for that out of your own pocket and you only got \$500 a month gross. So what we did. . . . Some of us from Los Angeles, as we may have discussed before, three of us--George Danielson, Charlie Warren, and I--for two or three years running every week drove up and down between Los Angeles and Sacramento. You know, just to save money because we had the free use of a car. So we drove the four hundred miles north. We would leave Sacramento

on Thursday afternoon and get home around midnight or so down in Los Angeles. And on Sunday evenings we'd leave Los Angeles after an early supper and get back up to Sacramento at midnight or one o'clock in the morning after driving seventy, eighty miles an hour up Route 99, which in those days was not even a freeway. I mean, it had a lot of cross streets.

YATES: That sounds dangerous.

BEILENSEN: It was dangerous, although only one member that I can recall was killed driving home in those years.

YATES: But then in '66 of course . . .

BEILENSEN: 'Sixty-six, we had our salaries increased there-after . . .

YATES: Became full-time.

BEILENSEN: Well, we got paid \$16,000 a year, which was more then than it is now. But nonetheless, it was more full-time and I think more families came up there. I'm not trying to excuse any of this, I'm just saying that especially in the early days prior to 1967, prior to the 1966 changes, it was a small, insular world of very, very underpaid, or very low paid, members of the legislature usually away from their

families. The sociability, such as it was, was between members and often lobbyists who would underwrite a couple of drinks in the evening and so on, and nobody thought twice about it. And although obvious, as I said before, there were some subtle kinds of. . . . Corruption is too strong a word perhaps at that time, but certainly some subtle feelings of gratitude toward these people who helped make life a little better for you up there. It was sort of expected and accepted as such, and I don't think people were thinking in terms of "I've got to vote for this guy because every time I need a drink he buys me drinks." Most of us didn't drink anyway, really. I'm kind of overdoing this.

YATES: Was there ever an occasion where you really felt pressure?

BEILENSEN: No. No. But I didn't feel pressure because you kind of set your own standards and your own tone. From the beginning I and many others. . . . You know, it was clear to lobbyists, let's say, or to whomever, pleaders of special interests. . . . They're not all lobbyists there. They're often people from

BEILENSON: back home who come up to Sacramento to urge more financing for some program in which they're interested or for which they're providers. Doctors like Medicare or Medi-Cal programs expanded, because it's more money to them, or nurses. Teachers want more money for education because some of it perhaps will come to them. First of all, they care about education. Secondly, it might also redound to their immediate benefit in terms of higher salaries if the school boards have more money from the state. You set your own tone and your own standards. It becomes clear very quickly what kind of a person you are. There are some members now certainly, but many more in those days I think, who made it very clear at the outset that they were interested in any accommodations they could make with you, and that if you favor them in one way or another they'd repay those favors, if only with just votes, or by introducing legislation, or whatever. There were a good many of us who were quite to the contrary, who were straightforward people, who were open to hearing arguments and suggesting arguments

BEILENSEN: really, and getting information from people on behalf of or opposed to any particular point of view on any particular bill or program, or whatever it might be. Played it just as straight as we possibly could.

So a lobbyist, if he bought me a drink. . . . I'm using myself as an example, but I don't think I had more than two drinks a week at most. I'm not a good example. But he knew that he wasn't. . . . He knew also, I suppose to be utterly frank about it, that I'd be perfectly nice to him when he came to my office if he wanted to talk to me about something. But I would have been anyway and I think he knew that. I was willing to hear out anybody on any position on any bill that was before a committee in which I had a vote, or committee of which I was chairman. It didn't hurt him any that I felt kindly toward him because I could go over and have a meal--along with every other member of the legislature--over at the Senator Hotel luncheon once a week that he and about five other lobbyists put on, but it didn't buy votes or influence. You needed more than that to . . .

YATES: There was no particular occasion that came up where you really felt like somebody tried to pressure you?

BEILENSEN: No. You asked that question and I didn't quite answer it well. It's certainly obvious to professional lobbyists what kind of a person you are. It becomes obvious to them very quickly. They knew perfectly well that if they came to me or any of a number of my other colleagues and suggested such a thing, that they'd be thrown out of our office, that we'd. . . . Even if we'd been inclined to be supportive of their position we'd probably vote against it just to teach them to not ever try to apply any pressure to us in any sense whatsoever. They were welcome to come and talk to us about stuff and to present information and make any arguments they wanted, but beyond that . . .

YATES: That's where it stopped.

BEILENSEN: That's right. Nor could they really apply pressure. I mean, what could they do? In those days special interests were much less well organized than now. They couldn't turn out lots of people to vote against you. They

couldn't withhold a lot of money from your campaign because they never gave you more than \$500, or maybe \$1,000 at most, and most of them didn't give you any money at all. So . . .

YATES: That didn't change then over time up until you left for Congress?

BEILENSEN: Not really.

YATES: How they worked, or money contributions?

BEILENSEN: Not an awful lot. No, I don't think so.

YATES: Not significantly?

BEILENSEN: I don't think so. I think not. Although at the time, it was perfectly obvious that there were a handful or two of our colleagues who were very much in the lobbyists' pockets. It wasn't because they had free lunches. We did too.

YATES: It was beyond that.

BEILENSEN: It was something beyond that. Right. Two or three of them were sent away for bribery or for . . . What's the word?

YATES: Yeah, I'm blanking on the names.

BEILENSEN: Well, I'm not going to mention any names, but in relatively recent years it's happened.

YATES: Right.

BEILENSEN: I think if there had been more vigorous



prosecution back twenty-five years ago they could have found a few more. In fact, I was just recently. . . . I just spent a couple of days, as we were talking earlier, with some older former colleagues of mine, and a Republican, a good friend, who was in the state senate with me, reminded me of something I had forgotten. We decided one day to each write separately a list of those of our colleagues whom we thought were corrupt. We each wrote a short list, we compared them, and we found (a) that we had almost identical lists, and that (b) there were more Democrats on the list than Republicans.

YATES: Really?

BEILENSON: Yes. The reason probably being. . . . First of all, I suggest that it was pretty obvious to all of us who the corrupt ones were. There probably were five or six in the senate and we all knew who they were, more or less, because you could tell from the way they were voting and acting, and who they hung around with all the time, and so on. It was a small group and you could kind of figure this out pretty quickly and pretty easily. But the reason I

think that there were probably more Democrats on it relates to something that we were discussing just five, ten minutes ago. And that is that with a Republican, we're talking mainly about business interests, because those are ones who tend to lobby. I mean, there are some labor interests and there is kind of general. . . . But there are a lot of specific business interests, and the positions that they espouse are probably automatically followed by most Republicans anyway. You know, businesses against labor, or businesses against, let's say, consumers. They would deny that, but it's probably the truth. Whereas you had to buy a Democrat to get him or her--him in those days--to vote for a business interest over what a Democrat you would think ordinarily would vote, against a business interest and for the consumer, or for the working person. They didn't need to buy Republicans. They needed to buy Democrats--these business interests, lobbyists. Most of them of course weren't involved in this kind of thing, but there were some who were.

YATES: That's interesting. I wouldn't have . . .

BEILENSEN: They had the Republicans automatically.

YATES: So they targeted those that would help them?

BEILENSEN: Right. And there were Democratic majorities, even though slight ones often in those days, so they had to pick up two or three Democrats in order to succeed.

YATES: Let me ask you now, just to get your observations. . . . How did financing initiatives fit into the overall discussion, when you talk about campaigns and elections? Do you have any observations on that?

BEILENSEN: Back in those days?

YATES: Yeah.

BEILENSEN: I don't recall at all, frankly. It was probably used as a good excuse, since there was this thing pending statewide, for them not to take up or to take up seriously our own proposal. On the other hand, it was also an opportunity for those of us who were proposing it to suggest that if we were to have reform or changes of our laws, it would be better-- wouldn't it?--if we ourselves, who know more about the system than the public in general, were to reform it, because we have some understanding of the effects it would have on

campaigns and on fund-raising and things of that sort--if it's going to be done at all, and it looks like it may be done by initiative if we don't act. It would be better if we were to put some kind of bill together than to have Jerry Brown come up with some idea of his and go to the public with it and have it accepted there. But we were not successful in selling that point of view.

YATES: OK, let me move on now. . . . I wanted to get some general observations focused on California Democratic politics, obviously, because that's your affiliation, but I want to ask you more generally about California politics. How would you summarize the sixties and seventies in California politics?

BEILENSEN: You're talking about in partisan politics?

YATES: Anything. . . . What stands out to you about that period?

BEILENSEN: Well, what stands out most is the fact that for a number of reasons I'm sure, it was a particularly good time to be in the state legislature, and it was a legislature which was generally agreed, amongst those who cared about and watched such things. . . . It was

undoubtedly the premier state legislature in the country. It was great fun and a great satisfaction. One derived great satisfaction in being a part of it. We had a good speaker for many years in Jesse Unruh, who helped professionalize the legislature. We had good supporting casts, especially the office of the legislative analyst, who at that time was A. Alan Post, who was an extraordinary. . . . Still is an extraordinarily thoughtful and helpful person to have around.

[End Tape 7, Side A]

[Begin Tape 7, Side B]

BEILENSON: We had the advantage in those days of having representatives from the legislative analyst's office available to us in committee meetings whenever we discussed a bill, and most especially when we discussed the budget and its various components. They had prepared a summary of the bill, its potential effects, its potential costs, and so on, and often testified in nonpartisan terms without taking a position, in a sense, although sometimes their position was obvious about the usefulness or the efficacy of a piece of legislation before us.

BEILENSON: So we had a lot of bipartisan or nonpartisan professional guidance and help which we could pay attention to or not as we wished, but which I think played a large role in keeping us on the track and doing--more often than not--the right thing if there was a choice to be made.

In terms of overall politics it was. . . . I'm thinking back. I can only speak about my own years in office, obviously, and there it was divided of course: the final four years--the second four years--of Pat Brown's governorship; all eight years of Mr. Reagan's governorship; and the first two years of Jerry Brown's governorship. So actually, I was there under a Republican governor a couple of years longer than I was under a Democratic governor. But even then. . . . In those days, even during the eight years of Mr. Reagan, and the six years of the two Democratic Governors Brown, it was a far less partisan place than it is now. Politics then, even though obviously there was a decent amount of partisanship, was far less partisan than either the legislature or the Congress or politics in general is now. It was made easier, it was made. . . . It was possible

to be less partisan among other things, if I may pick on the Republicans--I think correctly--in the sense that the majority of our Republican colleagues in those days were pretty moderate, middle-of-the-road people. Their points of view were not all that different from our own--that is from the Democrats--and we were able to work well and closely. I think they found the same with us. There were almost no. . . . I think there were only one or two people in each house whom you would describe as right-wing ideologues at all comparable to the ones which now really are not only in the ascendancy, but in the majority amongst elected Republican members, certainly of the House of Representatives now and I think also of the state legislature, which makes getting along with the Democrats very, very much more difficult. They're now on totally different wavelengths. In those days we were all on different portions of the same wavelength, if that's the right way to describe it.

YATES: Why do you think that that was the environment at that time?

BEILENSON: Well, the Republican ideological right had not

BEILENSEN: developed at that time for reasons of its own, or whatever. In fact, I don't know if this is a good example, but it's an interesting one, come to think of it. In terms of my own abortion bill, abortion now has become a partisan issue, which is ridiculous. It's especially ridiculous when you think in traditionally conservative terms, that, as I used to argue with some success, we're talking about giving an individual person, in this case the woman particularly, a choice, instead of having the government impose a particular point of view upon that woman. Until we succeeded in liberalizing or changing the abortion laws, the rule was that the state, in effect, said to every woman, "You've got to go ahead with your pregnancy no matter what the circumstances," and of course women didn't. They went out and had illegal abortions. But when I appealed to my colleagues that this was not a choice to be made by the state, but by an individual woman and her family and her own clergyman and her own doctor, and anyone else she wanted to. . . . And her husband or her boyfriend, or whomever, whoever she wanted to consult, that was a



BEILENSEN: telling argument in those days. That was the conservative point of view. And I think, although I'm not sure, that I had more Republican votes for liberalizing our abortion laws than I did Democratic votes, or certainly just about as many.

It was not a partisan issue. People who were true conservatives voted for it, in terms of government interference with individual rights or decisions. It's clear. Now, for some reason, our most so-called conservative--not in the traditional sense--Republicans are all against allowing a woman that choice. It's beyond my comprehension. I do understand it, but it's ridiculous, I think, in terms of the philosophy of the thing.

Things were quite different in those days and because of that, among other things, it made being in government a far nicer. . . . I'm grasping for a word, reaching for words which aren't popping into my mind as quickly as they used to. . . . It was a far more enjoyable kind of job than it can possibly be now. We were all working together, basically, to come out with ends that we basically agreed on even

though the means were somewhat different. Even with the other big bill that I was heavily involved with.

YATES: The Welfare . . .

BEILENSEN: The Welfare Reform Act. The Republicans had their own tack on it and so on, but the truth of the matter is that we weren't all that far apart. They had some things that we didn't want and we thought wouldn't work, but we were all working toward the same goals.

YATES: Let me ask you on the same theme of California politics, why were the Republicans able to gain a majority in the legislature in '69 and '70?

BEILENSEN: I don't remember with great specificity. The Democrats had been in office for a while and these things go in cycles. You know, the worm turns. I don't recall a lot, but it must have been true that to a certain extent the 1970s when. . . . When did Mr. Reagan first win?

YATES: 'Sixty-six.

BEILENSEN: 'Sixty-six and then again in '70. Certainly the popularity of Governor Reagan must have helped somewhat.

YATES: But at that point of course his popularity had gone down some . . .

BEILENSON: Down a bit. You're right.

YATES: As a second-term governor.

BEILENSON: It must have had something to do with the lack of popularity and the image of sort of heavy-handedness of the Democratic speaker, Jesse Unruh, even as in recent years the Democrats have run into some trouble because of people's negative perception of Willie Brown when he was speaker, which seems to me to have been a principal reason for the imposition of term limits in recent years in California political history. I mean, I don't know. I don't know. It's just that one party doesn't stay in power forever, and even if the Republican governor wasn't as popular by then as he had been earlier, he won reelection after all in 1970, although by less than one would have expected. People got used to the fact that Republicans could govern as well as Democrats and they voted for some Republicans in the state legislature. I simply don't recall at this point. It was twenty-five years ago.

YATES: Sure.

BEILENSON: More. Thirty almost.

YATES: Let me ask you another question. How did it

impact you as a Democrat?

BEILENSEN: I don't think we changed. Am I correct in recalling that the senate remained in Democratic hands or am I incorrect? Do you remember?

YATES: No, it became. . . . Bob Monagan became speaker.

BEILENSEN: Speaker. We're talking about the senate. Because as I recall . . .

YATES: Oh, right. Yes, that was the assembly.

BEILENSEN: Because here's what I recall . . .

YATES: I'm just wondering overall if it impacted you, whether it was the assembly or the senate . . .

BEILENSEN: Well, the senate would have an impact much more than the assembly.

YATES: Sure.

BEILENSEN: Two things. One, I was, as I recall, chairman of the Health and Welfare Committee from 1969 through 1975--no, '74. Then I became chairman of the Finance Committee. I can only believe that if I remained chairman during those times we must have had a very small Democratic majority even then. I first became chairman under a Republican pro tem, Howard Way. I remained so under Jack Schrade and then in '69

or '70, whatever it was, Jim Mills became president pro tem and I remained. So I think the senate remained, however closely, in Democratic hands. But I'm not sure. The fact that . . .

YATES: I can verify that for you.

BEILENSON: The fact that for a couple of years, at least, Bob Monagan became speaker had no effect at all obviously on any of our workings in the senate and didn't have an awful lot of effect on legislation or whatever that we in the senate, we Democrats even, might have effected. He was, still is, a very sensible, tolerant, bright, middle-of-the-road kind of person, as most of the Republican leadership was in those days, in the assembly especially. Working with him was no more difficult than working with Jesse Unruh. In fact, it was probably easier in some respects because he wasn't quite so heavy-handed or quite so controlling of things as Jesse was.

Nonetheless, the fact that the Republicans were in charge in the assembly undoubtedly meant that any bills that were to be successful that came over from a Democratic-controlled

senate had to be relatively moderated in scope or purpose. But that was the way we usually acted anyway. We were not an ideological senate. We never were able to be because the split was so close. It was usually 21-19 Democratic or something of that sort. There were some conservative Democrats among the Democrats. So we were a pretty middle-of-the-road group of people, and the fact that Monagan was over there instead of Unruh probably made very little difference. It made a lot more difference obviously in the workings of the assembly because they had different chairpeople and chairmen and so on.

YATES: Right. But it didn't last too long either.

BEILENSEN: No, it didn't.

YATES: So the Republican majority. . . . Let me turn to Democratic organizations in California when you were with the state legislature. Could you describe the evolution of the state Democratic organizations during the time you were in the state legislature?

BEILENSEN: The truth of the matter is that for most legislators, certainly in those days and I suppose probably long before, except in places

BEILENSON: like New York or Chicago or wherever, where there's strong party organizations and party leadership. . . . The party leadership apparently makes decisions as to who is to run in various primaries, as Mayor [Richard J.] Daley and other people used to in Chicago and the Tammany machine used to in New York. For most legislators the party is almost entirely irrelevant. At least in my thirty-four years in office, the situation was such that the party had nothing to do with our elections whatsoever. And because they had nothing to do with our elections, they had virtually no influence on us whatsoever.

I wasn't interested in the. . . . I'm overstating this, but I don't care what the chairman of the Democratic party in California tells me if he tells me anything at all, and I don't remember if he ever told me anything, or spoke to me about any issue whatsoever. He had nothing to do--or she--with my getting elected or my staying in office. The people back home did. I ran my own campaigns. I raised my own money. Only on one occasion in my entire life, during the legislature, the first time I ran

BEILENSON: for reelection to the state assembly, I got a \$250 contribution from the state party. That's the only time I've gotten any money at all from the state party. You know, neither Jesse Unruh nor any of the rest of us paid any attention at all to what the state party was doing or saying, or whatever.

At times, obviously, the party becomes an embarrassment or the party organization becomes an embarrassment. Even as the Democratic conventions sometimes nationwide became an embarrassment to some Democratic office holders because--as with the Republican conventions and Republican parties--the activists and those more on the left in the Democratic group and more on the right in the Republican group are among the activists, and are the ones who either control or certainly make the most noise at party conventions and party gatherings. They are not representative either of the voting public ordinarily nor of the elected legislators of their own party. From my own point of view it's tempting to say, and it's basically true, that party organizations, such as they were, were most of the time irrelevant.



What was relevant, for a short while at least in California, was the volunteer party organizations, so-called CDC or California Democratic Council, which I think. . . . It sprung up before I arrived here. I think it was based on the old Independent Voters of Illinois, which I think was formed about the time Adlai Stevenson was running for governor back there . . .

YATES: Right.

BEILENSEN: And which was largely influential in 1958, the year after I arrived, in getting Pat Brown and Alan Cranston and the whole slew of Democratic--Clair Engle, I guess--elected to the senate. I think it was that year, too. But in successfully electing Democrats statewide, through large numbers of volunteer party workers and precinct workers and so on, volunteer organizations of that sort or of any sort, I think it's fair to say, become less relevant and less effective once they have first succeeded in getting their people elected.

YATES: So I was going to ask you . . .

BEILENSEN: They're much better . . .

YATES: You had mentioned earlier that you thought the CDC had really peaked by the early sixties, I believe, and I did want to ask you what happened to it.

BEILENSON: Look, if you're the party that's out of power and Goodie Knight is governor and Earl Warren was governor and the Republicans are in control and the Democrats are kind of floundering around a bit, then a big statewide volunteer organization is a very useful thing for getting people involved and working, and so on. Especially in those days, when campaign work was done door-to-door and was done by people addressing envelopes and headquarters were. . . . People made a difference where they don't anymore. I mean, a volunteer organization these days would have a much harder time playing an effective role even though to a certain extent, under the Perot circumstances, you know, Ross Perot-type circumstances, perhaps it can. It's going to be a different kind of mass organizations.

It was very effective apparently in '58 in getting Democrats elected. Now you get your guys elected, they're all up there, and in '62

BEILENSON: they got me elected. They were very responsible for getting me elected--the CDC people here in our own district, as we discussed. It was strong in this district. We had a lot of volunteer precinct workers and they made a big difference.

Once anybody gets elected he or she starts feeling differently about the volunteers back home. Some of us continue to like them and believe in them, even though they're sometimes pains in the neck because they're a little too ideological, and they expect more of you or greater purity than it's possible for you to give, or you think they're a little unreasonable about many kinds of things, and they are. Both Republicans and Democrats. But the average incumbent first of all reacts, although he's grateful perhaps to the party faithful in his district who helped get him elected. Only in some cases were they really useful in getting elected. Most of the members were elected without CDC support, or over CDC opposition. The CDC often supported other candidates in the primaries against people who ended up winning, so they had a very distinct

BEILENSON: dislike for the volunteer organization, for CDC, as Jesse Unruh among others did, and his faction up there in the legislature. But, let's say, take Brown and Cranston and Engle and all the statewide people. They're grateful to you, but they're also. . . . Once you're elected your interests are different, your position is different.

You're there representing all of the people. You are trying to be responsive, and responding to pressures from all kinds of people, including independents and Republicans, as well as Democrats. And among many other things, the party faithful who helped get you elected are almost bound, unless you're someone like myself or a few others who sort of kept our ideological purity or whatever, however you want to describe it. . . . I don't mean to be immodest again. I don't consider it necessarily a good trait. I'm just saying, we came from a district which was fairly liberal, and I was fairly liberal, and generally speaking my volunteer friends back here were pleased with my position on matters, although every now and then something I did or some vote

I cast offended them.

You know, after a while the party faithful back home tend to fall off or tend to disagree with or be disappointed--I suppose that's the best word--in the positions taken by some of the people they were instrumental in getting elected. And also, once you're there, you don't need them so much. Pat Brown gets himself reelected. The CDC helped him, but he didn't need their help. And Cranston gets himself reelected, or Clair Engle later gets himself reelected. But they're already the incumbent. They got to be the incumbent because of help amongst . . .

YATES: It's that initial election that takes the most help.

BEILENSON: Sure. So once you get your guys elected, your importance immediately falls away. It's almost like depreciation on a car. The minute you drive the first time. . . . It's not a very good analogy. But, you know, Pat Brown and these other folks didn't need the CDC. If they did their job well, as I think most of them did, and they became pretty popular incumbent office holders for at least four years or a few

years thereafter, they got themselves reelected with some help from CDC, but they didn't need CDC at that time. They needed them maybe to get elected in the first place and then the CDC. . . . I don't mean to be picking on them, but any volunteer group starts feeling. . . . Well, you know, it's obvious to them they're not quite so important as they used to be. They continue for many years to hold their conventions in Fresno or Bakersfield, and they're good fun, and everybody comes to them, and all the office holders come down and pat them on the back and give nice speeches and so on, but the truth of the matter is that once they first succeeded in getting their people elected statewide their importance started to dwindle.

YATES: Let me ask you about Jesse Unruh in the midst of this. He didn't get along with the CDC.

BEILENSEN: He saw them, I guess, as a threat to the sort of insider politics of the legislature and of elected office holders.

YATES: But my understanding is that Unruh did help certain candidates financially. Is this true? Supporting their campaigns.

BEILENSON: I believe it's true. Again, I can only believe and suspect that the help, such as it was, was so much less than it is these days. I mean, if the speaker gave money to a candidate, probably it was \$500 or \$1,000. It probably wasn't an awful lot more than that. He may have encouraged some of his lobbyist friends or some other friends of his to help various candidates whom he wanted to get reelected. He wanted to get them reelected not only because they were friends of his, but because he needed a Democratic majority obviously to maintain his speakership.

YATES: OK. Because you did say really when we first started talking about the influence of the Democratic party and that that really, in terms of supporting candidates, you weren't that concerned about that. It was groups like the CDC that helped you or it sounds like . . .

BEILENSON: The truth of the matter is, once the CDC helped get me elected I didn't need them either. I remained close to them because a lot of them are good personal friends and we saw eye-to-eye philosophically and all that. They were just nice folks and many of them are still my

friends from those days, thirty-five years ago. But I could have been reelected without them very easily, even though they were very helpful in getting me elected the first time. The official party just has never figured . . .

YATES: Into the equation?

BEILENSON: Yes, with almost any of us. As I said, until a few years ago you couldn't run for Congress in Chicago unless the machine picked you. And they were so strong that if they picked you, other office holders there just wouldn't run against you, because it wasn't your time or the mayor hadn't given you the nod. It was true to a certain extent in portions of New York and Kansas City in the old days when [Thomas J.] Pendergast was there and so on. But for much of the country that's not true. It's especially not true, I think it's fair to say, of California, which has for a long time had a nonpartisan tradition, harking back to Hiram Johnson in the early days of this century till whenever. I think you didn't even have Democratic or Republican after your name on the ballot. I'm not sure . . .

YATES: Right, there was cross-filing and that ended in



the . . .

BEILENSEN: And there was cross-filing. Right. So it was quite a different . . .

YATES: The fifties we're talking about, I believe.

BEILENSEN: That was all before I came to California. I don't know much about its history back then. But generally speaking, there was a far less partisan aura about politics in California than I think there was in many other parts of the country.

YATES: OK. Well, let me ask you a few wrap-up questions in terms of finishing up the time you were in the state legislature. What did you like about being in the state legislature?

BEILENSEN: I liked almost everything about it. I did at the time, and looking back I like it at least as well in comparison to everything we've done since. Partly, I was younger then and it was new, and therefore it was exciting.

YATES: When you say you liked everything about it, what specifically do you mean?

BEILENSEN: Well, I love being able to be in public life. I have all my life. I love being able to make a difference. One obvious thing in comparison to most people's life in the state legislature

BEILENSON: and thereafter in Congress, which is true for a good many members of Congress, is that you tend to look back at your days in the state legislature as being, in a sense, more productive and more meaningful than your years in Congress, with some exceptions, because for the most part you were able to make a bigger difference in the state legislature. It was a smaller group. You were able to serve, in my case at least and in many other people's cases, as chairman of a committee for a good many years, to carry bills and get a certain amount of success. I got a lot of bills enacted into law. Almost two hundred of them. Some far more important of course than others.

Being in politics in those days was fun. I don't mean to overstate. It wasn't like a game or anything of that sort, but it was fun. It was a nice job. There was no glamour to it really. You weren't really looked up to, nobody paid much attention to you back in the district so it wasn't that kind of thing. But people didn't look down on politicians in those days nearly so much I think as they do now, nor were they quite so cynical in their view of

BEILENSON: politics. Relations with the public, such as they were--and they were much less in the state legislature than they are in the Congress, where people are far more interested in you even as a new, lowly, unimportant congressman than they ever were with me as a experienced, fairly powerful, and influential member of the state legislature. . . . There was no constituent interest in those days at all. Even when I was chairman of the senate Finance Committee most people were unaware of it. Politics. . . . Not so much politics, but legislating itself was more fun and. . . . Fun again is the wrong word. It was just more satisfying than it is now.

You were dealing with a relatively smaller group of people, most of whom had similar interests to yours, almost all of whom were interested in doing the right thing for the state and for their people back home, and working together quite well and quite closely to effectuate those changes. We were, a good many of us, across party lines, very close friends. I mean, it was almost like a class in high school or even in grade school. There

BEILENSON: were forty of us in the senate and there were eighty of us when we were in the assembly, which are pretty small groups. We had to live and deal with and work with one another day in and day out, year in and year out, and we became very close to these people. Not all of whom you loved or cared about deeply, a few of whom you didn't care for at all and looked down on, but then so did a great majority of your colleagues. But you were close friends with a sizable majority of your colleagues from both parties and with some of the folks in the executive branch of government, whether it was Mr. Reagan and his people or Governor Brown, Pat Brown, Jerry Brown, and his people.

We were all working together, a relatively small group of us Republicans and Democrats--a couple of hundred all told--up there in a small town, Sacramento, running the state. And it was a very nice. . . . It was a good feeling. We were doing on the whole the right things. There was some corruption, but very little of it, and it didn't really affect most of the outcomes. On the whole you felt that you were a part of an important and a useful government

function, which was that of a government of the largest state in the country, and on the whole doing our job relatively well. It therefore gave a great deal of individual satisfaction and meaning to one's life, and I think almost all of us felt that way. The whole aura of politics was a friendly nonpartisan one, which for me at least was the way I preferred it.

YATES: What was the most frustrating or less fulfilling aspect of being in the state legislature?

BEILENSEN: Nothing in particular, I mean, except for the fact that there were some specific efforts one made at legislating that were unsuccessful. One of the things that bothered me--it bothers me almost more now in retrospect than it did then because it's far more important now--was our failure to ever succeed at all with respect to changing the campaign finance system. There were some other bills along the way which I felt badly about losing and so on. But the truth of the matter was for almost all the time I, at least, was there, I was so busy and so involved in so many useful and usually successful efforts to. . . . Sometimes just

simply keeping the processes or the wheels of government or the legislature spinning in the right direction, just getting our work done, getting our job done pretty well on the whole, I think. You know, you had some failures along the way in terms of things that you wanted to do or bills that you wanted to get passed, but none of it ever weighed terribly heavily, I think, on me, or for that matter probably on most of our colleagues. For the most part we were involved, as I've said a couple of times now, in this generally successful process of running the government of the largest state in the nation in quite a decent and successful way.

YATES: What do you feel is the most important accomplishment for you in your time at the state legislature?

BEILENSON: I guess one has to look toward legislation. . . . In a sense it was the abortion bill because it was an important social change. Most importantly and interestingly it is one of those areas, when we were talking earlier today about where the government can be involved usefully and where it's not so useful for the

BEILENSEN: government to be involved. . . . This whole question of legality of abortion is, interestingly, a very simple and obvious example of where action by the government, in terms of changing the law, is very effective, because what we were doing was removing a criminal penalty for a certain particular kind of action. It was against the law to have an abortion, period, with some exceptions that weren't very important. Before our bill changed the law, women could not go out and get a legal abortion with help from a doctor and go into a licensed hospital in California. After the bill was passed they could. It was that simple. We removed a barrier, a criminal barrier, to a certain kind of behavior and therefore simply passing the law made legal and properly performed abortions available to women in California. That was the end of the story.

It's totally unlike, let's say, passing a bill for putting more money in education. I mean, that's a good thing. If we put more money in education teachers probably would get paid more. But whether or not the money gets down to the kids or whether or not it's

BEILENSON: translated into better teaching or whether kids' test scores rise because of it is another matter. And it's totally different, in a sense, from changing the welfare laws, where you're still going to have a horrendous welfare problem no matter how you change the laws. You know, you may be doing it a little bit better, or you may not be, or whatever. And it's different from any number of other things where the outcomes are kind of sloppy and ill-defined. Government is involved in dozens of things and hundreds of programs. Some of them work well, some of them don't. There's money wasted in even the best of them because a lot of money goes to administering it, or to providing some of the. . . . Medi-Cal or Medicare program money goes to the doctors and to the nurses and to the hospitals, and obviously it helps the patients eventually because it pays for some of their cost, but there's a lot of waste involved and there's a lot of abuse and fraud and things of that sort. So there are ups and downs, and there are pluses and minuses.

The beautiful thing, if I may say so, about



something like changing the abortion law, and there are not very many other examples similar to this, is that simply by removing the criminality of a certain action it frees up people, in this case women of the state of California, to have a properly performed, legal abortion. You know it's going to work. I mean, that's it. Two million or three million California women, or perhaps more, have had legal abortions under my bill since then, instead of having to run off to Mexico or to abort themselves by coat hangers or lye or something of that sort. I'm exaggerating because the Supreme Court came along, the U.S. Supreme Court, several years later and legalized abortions in the first trimester especially and the second trimester partially anyhow. But nonetheless . . .

YATES: The result is basically straightforward.

BEILENSON: The result. . . . It was black and white, in a sense. It was an important law and important change in the law in many other respects too.

I like to think that I made a real contribution, as did many of my other colleagues, simply by being hardworking,

BEILENSON: intelligent, incorruptible members of the legislature, by doing our jobs well and decently, and keeping the state in good fiscal as well as other kinds of health, I think, during most of the time that we were there in Sacramento. Better health than it is now, frankly. I think we acted more responsibly than the legislature and the governor do now. It was partly perhaps not their fault. Now there are a lot of monkey wrenches thrown into the thing. Especially, of course, now term limits, but also the greater partisanship and the greater amount of money in politics that there is now than there was then. It certainly was true in Congress in recent years too.

Congress has changed in exactly the same way as the legislature has changed. It used to be more fun to be in Congress. It was when I got there twenty years ago than it is now. We acted in a more responsible and less partisan way then than we do now. Money played a much smaller role then than it does now. And on the whole the actions of the Congress in those days were more responsible and more beneficial to the country than they are now, I think, even as

the state legislature was.

YATES: Let me ask you the flip side of the previous question. What were you unable to accomplish that you would have liked to accomplish?

BEILENSEN: I have few recollections of that other than the big one of finance . . .

YATES: Of reform?

BEILENSEN: Campaign finance reform. My last year, for example, there I was. . . . Because I was leaving for Congress and everybody knew it, I won my primary and so on, I was a lame duck. Therefore, people were less worried about me than they would have been if they knew that I was going to be staying on as chairman of the senate Finance Committee. I lost a couple of bills I'll admit I was upset about. One was a coastal protection act, which really was Alan Sieroty's baby anyway, and which eventually went to the state ballot and was passed. I remember being very angry with Governor . . .

YATES: Brown?

BEILENSEN: Yeah, Governor Jerry Brown, because he vetoed a bill of mine which was trying to rationalize the provision of emergency medical services in California by setting up regional trauma units,

BEILENSEN: which would have made more sense and I think saved a great many more lives than the then existing and still existing lack of a systematic or systemic rationalization of the provision of those services. We still have that situation in California. I guess in Los Angeles and other counties where the county government can contract with any number of hospitals to give emergency medical care, too often there is no major trauma center and people who are injured in automobile accidents are sent off to smallish hospitals which have. . . . Perhaps they're political favorites with the local board of supervisors, and people are not nearly so well treated and fewer are saved than if they'd gone to some place which could properly take care of people. I was angry with the governor for vetoing that. There were some other things too, but nothing that stands out in my mind that therefore I've carried with me all these years as something that I've felt really bad about or been upset or angry about. On the whole, looking back on my own time there, it was a very satisfying, very enjoyable, and very rewarding time.

One of the things that I feel most strongly about, of course, was being part of the successful effort, in our first couple of years when we were elected to the state senate, in overthrowing the control that the lobbyists and special interests had exercised over the senate since time immemorial. It really was quite a different place after we took over. Not that we didn't backslide now and then, and that there wasn't too much influence now and then on some issues. There was and, of course, there now is again. But on the whole, we effected real change there in a very healthy and very constructive way.

YATES: Let me ask you just to sort of finish up here. When did you decide to run for Congress?

BEILENSON: I had no thoughts about running for Congress, no desire to run for Congress at all, and all of a sudden our congressman, Tom Rees, announced that he was going to leave Congress. In fact, we heard it. . . . Let me think out loud for a moment. Our family was driving from New York to Washington, D.C. We were just coming into Washington when we heard on the radio. . . . No, I'm wrong about this. This

goes back, way back. This was back in the sixties. I guess it must have been '66. We heard on the. . . . Or '65. We heard on the radio that Jimmy Roosevelt, our congressman, was going to the U.N. [United Nations].

YATES: And that Rees was running for Congress?

BEILENSON: Well, Rees wasn't all that sure. He was the senator from all of Los Angeles. So as soon as we got to Howard Johnson's [Hotels], which is where we were staying at that time in Washington, I called Tom Rees, had a long talk with him, and he had decided to run for Congress. I was very supportive of that, and he did that. Now, when Tom Rees decided in 1976, early 1976 or the end of 1975, not to run for reelection to Congress, he told me and also he told two other elected officials--Howard [L.] Berman, who was in the assembly, and Alan Sieroty, who was in the assembly--that he was not going to run for reelection. We three talked to one another for a while, for a couple of days or so, and sort of agreed to hold off and keep talking amongst ourselves.

I had no great desire to run for the Congress. I was very happy where I was in the

BEILENSON: legislature. And until that decision. . . .  
Until we had to make a decision, till we were confronted with a decision, it really had not entered my mind. I sensed at the time that I had far more influence in Sacramento than I ever would have in the Congress and, as I said, I was basically happy there, although it was getting a little stale. We'd been there fourteen years, and it was a small town, and we used to run off--my wife and I at least--to San Francisco at least once a month, sometimes more often, to get a little culture in our lives. Go to the Opera House, and things of that sort, and to some plays.

Tom's decision, Tom Rees's decision, to leave Congress forced us to sit down, my wife and I, really--all of our family, but particularly the two of us--and to think this thing through. I remember very specifically that we spent an entire weekend shortly after Tom notified us--and I don't remember, as I said, if it's the end of '75 or the beginning of 1976--at our home in Sacramento going through all the pros and cons of running for Congress, at the end of which time we had

BEILENSON: decided overwhelmingly that we ought to run for Congress. It was interesting to me because we sort of entered this little exercise, as it were, in decision making not really feeling that way at all, because we hadn't thought about it. There was no reason to think about it. A friend of ours was the incumbent in Congress and there was no sense thinking about it. I wasn't going to run for Congress against him. But we were confronted, as I said, with the decision, and we went through all the pros and cons and we came out very strongly in favor of going there.

It was in every respect a fortuitous and a good choice. Not that I didn't have regrets about leaving. I did and I still do, to a certain extent. But we started thinking about it and expressing our feelings about it to one another and to ourselves, and it soon became obvious--I don't remember all of the arguments we came up with or all the factors that led to the decision--that we'd had a wonderful time there for fourteen years, we probably would enjoy it greatly for another two years or three years or four years, but even then things were



BEILENSON: beginning to get a little stale, in terms of even my own position. It was great fun being chairman of the Finance Committee. It would be fun to be chairman for another two years or four years, but there was a sameness to it. We'd been carrying the same bills over and over again. I'd been in charge of processing and carrying the governor's budget now for two years and it would be fun for another couple of years, but after a while it gets a little. . . . It's the same considerations, the same issues are before you each year and it's great fun at first and it gets less exciting, less interesting, less demanding as you do it over and over. You start doing it off the cuff. You've gone through the stuff before. You know the answers, or at least you think you do. It's always fun to be challenged with new issues and new ideas and new challenges of one sort or another, and there were very few challenges left to us in Sacramento in terms of legislation. I'd done everything I wanted to do there, really. I always had some bills I was interested in carrying and so on, but I'd had great . . .

YATES: Nothing was holding you back.

BEILENSEN: No. No. I'd had great fun as chairman of the Health and Welfare Committee for six or seven years, and of the Finance Committee for a couple of years. I would have preferred a couple of more years there, but I wouldn't have wanted. . . . I wouldn't look forward to eight or ten more years there, because I knew the job and I had been on the committee for years, although I'd only been chairman for a couple of years.

Our kids were growing up and Sacramento, which is a wonderful place for kids to grow up in when they were young, once they get to high school and certainly beyond, being in Los Angeles or Washington or New York or some larger city would probably be better for them and for all of us. There were just more intellectual opportunities available elsewhere. Meanwhile we were kind of stuck in Sacramento, which had been wonderful up to that time, but would soon thereafter grow less wonderful, by far. So everything converged very nicely as a matter of fact, even though, as I said, it would have been nice to stay there a couple

more . . .

[End Tape 7, Side B]

[Begin Tape 8, Side A]

YATES:           You were talking about making the decision [to run for Congress].

BEILENSEN:       Yeah. And it turned out, as I said, to be really quite fortuitous. Perhaps a little sooner than we would have preferred. When we were forced to think seriously about it, the decision was really quite clear. We were happy to be able to make the choice at the time and the choice was very clear. Now, meanwhile, while we were thinking about this, unbeknownst to me my friend and colleague Howard Berman had also been thinking about it, which I hadn't realized. I discovered at the end of that long weekend when my wife and I had decided that we'd like to run for Congress that Howard had already secured the endorsements of both the governor, Jerry Brown, and of Mayor [Thomas] Tom Bradley for his race for Congress, because he was thinking seriously about that too.

YATES:           This all occurred within just a couple of days?

BEILENSEN:       Yes. I don't know, he may have made these arrangements a week or so earlier, I'm not

sure. But this is all within a very short period of time, to my surprise.

YATES: How did you feel about that?

BEILENSON: Not good. But I must say that it was sort of the icing on the cake in a sense. We had already decided that we'd like to run--my wife and I, my family and I--with some hesitation, because I was in a very good position there and a position of great responsibility and influence, and whatever. And because we enjoyed it a great deal. I enjoyed it a great deal. But when I found out that there was this potential challenge from Howard, whom I at that time thought well of and still do even more. . . . He's just an absolutely fine, first-class legislator, and good friend. We weren't close personally, but we were friends. We're on the same wavelength as far as politics and things go. The sort of challenge, the potential challenge by Howard got my juices going and made me want even more to get into this thing and to win the challenge. And shortly thereafter--I forgot how long after it was, a couple of weeks perhaps, or a month--Howard bowed out. Among other things he had

apparently taken a poll which he either showed me or told me about, which showed me well ahead of him among Democrats in the district, which is only logical. I had been around longer than he and had represented more of the district than he had. I think I was well thought of throughout most of the district, at least among Democrats.

YATES: So this is a poll that his group conducted?

BEILENSON: I guess he conducted, yeah, among Democratic voters in the congressional district.

He bowed out very nicely, and very graciously, and expressed the hope also, at the time, that when I was elected, if I was elected--and he expected me to be elected--that I would support his special friend [Phillip] Phil Burton for majority leader when I got to the Congress, which I did anyway because I liked him despite some of his defects. He was from California, and I had known him and felt close to him for my first couple of years in the state assembly some years earlier, twelve years earlier.

YATES: Then the endorsements that Berman had managed to garner at that point . . .

BEILENSEN: Never came into play, because he didn't end up running.

YATES: Did he ask them to support you?

BEILENSEN: I don't recall at all, and I don't recall that I used them, or needed them, or anything of that sort.

YATES: So that didn't enter into actually running for office?

BEILENSEN: No, not at all. It was clear to me, and I think it became clear to him, that. . . . I don't mean to say this un-nicely, that the nomination was mine for the asking if I wanted it. Obviously, if he'd contested it and raised money and worked hard at it, it would have been a far more difficult thing than it ended up being. I had no doubts then and I have no doubts now that I would have won it. I think he knew that too, which is one of the reasons he bowed out. Perhaps he was trying to just seem to be in a position where he, with the support of these people and his own fund-raising abilities, would like to discourage a challenge to his running in the primary by me or anybody else, by going out and getting this

kind of support. I think once I had made up my mind to run, I think perhaps he would have bowed out anyway. I'm not sure. I don't know.

YATES: Is there anything else that you can think of that we didn't discuss regarding the state legislative period?

BEILENSEN: I don't think so. Unfortunately, about the time we decided to run for Congress my legislative career more or less ended because I was then a lame duck and . . .

YATES: You ran in mid- . . .

BEILENSEN: Well, I ran in the June primary in 1976.

YATES: So you were in midterm at the senate.

BEILENSEN: No, no. Yeah.

YATES: You were midway through your term.

BEILENSEN: I think I was midterm. I think I had been reelected in 1974, but of course I remained chairman of the committee through 1976 and a member of the state senate through 1976. And in fact, didn't go off to Congress until. . . . I came back and spent a day or so in the legislature, in the state senate, in January of '77 for some reason or other. Maybe a week or a few days before going off to Congress, only

BEILENSON:           because I think Congress went into session  
                          slightly after we did.

[End Tape 8, Side A]



[Session 5, February 26, 1998]

[Begin Tape 9, Side A]

BEILENSON: Good morning, again.

YATES: We were just talking for a minute off tape and I told you I wanted to talk to you about your first election to Congress. But before we do that let me return to something we discussed last time. I had asked you about the impact of the '69-'70 shift of Republicans winning a majority in the state legislature and I had incorrectly referred to Bob Monagan in the assembly. I checked my notes, and in the state senate the Republicans gained a slight majority with twenty-one seats to the Democrats having nineteen seats. So I'll ask you again: What if any impact did that shift have on you as a Democrat?

BEILENSON: It's hard for me to remember, but I think the answer is very little. I think the reason for that answer is that the state senate was in those days quite a nonpartisan body. The real

divisions there, as we've been discussing, were not so much between Democrats and Republicans, but between sort of the old guard and the new guard. And what was relevant, with respect to specific members, was whether they were individual members who represented the people who elected them or whether they were still pretty much in the thrall of or in the control of the lobbyists, who up till very recent times pretty much had free rein in the senate. There was a six-year period there, you remind me looking at our statistics, during which neither party had fewer than nineteen members of the senate. For a couple of years the Democrats had twenty-one members, then it was 20-20. Then it was 21-19 with the Republicans, and then 19-21.

YATES: It was always very close.

BEILENSON: Right. The reality of it is that, as I said, the real divisions within the senate had very little to do with that. As we had discussed last time, as you'll recall, Senator Howard Way. . . . We removed Senator Hugh Burns, who was nominally at least a Democrat, sometime in the spring of 1969, and replaced him with

BEILENSON: Senator Howard Way, who was a moderate Republican. I guess at that time we had a slight Democratic majority, or perhaps it was 20-20. But again, it's unimportant because that isn't the way we were looking at things. We just wanted to, if possible, take over the senate and give it back to the people, as it were. Take it away from the Third House, from the lobbyists.

Either later that year or early in 1970, Senator Jack Schrade, a Republican from San Diego, who was sort of in the old guard group, succeeded by a vote or two in overthrowing Senator Howard Way. Whether or not that came about because the Republicans had gained control of the senate at that point for a year or so, I doubt very much. I recall quite clearly actually, it happened simply for the reason that two of our colleagues, who had joined with us in voting for Way over Burns a year earlier, or several months earlier, had been displeased either with the way they had been treated by our group or had been successfully courted by the lobbyists' group, and their votes were shifted back to the old

guard side. For that short time then, Jack Schrade won and was elected.

But I think it had nothing at all to do with the partisan makeup of the senate. I think that was almost entirely irrelevant at those times. I think it would not have been if there had been twenty-four or twenty-five Democrats or Republicans. I guess that would have indicated that the president pro tem had to be of that particular party, but in the very narrow confines that we were dealing with, nobody had more than twenty-one votes. Neither party had more than twenty-one votes over that six-year period. I think party affiliation was totally irrelevant, and the fact that I was a Democrat was irrelevant to my experience there. What was relevant in any particular time was whether my group, which was the young turk group or the non-lobbyist group, had succeeded, was in power by a vote or two, or whether it was thrown out by a vote or two.

YATES: OK. Let's now return to the period when you were in Congress. Just for the record, I wanted to say before continuing with questions, that in preparing I spent some time reviewing

your papers. You and I talked about that. Your papers are quite extensive so, as such, my questions will tend to focus on broader subjects.

BEILENSON: Have we. . . . Parenthetically, maybe even off the record, did we get me elected to Congress last time? I forgot.

YATES: Yes. I was going to come to that and just remind you what we did talk about last time. Having said that, I was going to ask broader questions, and of course I want to start by asking you about your first election. When we met last time we got through when and why you decided to run for Congress.

BEILENSON: Because I couldn't stand the governor.  
[Laughter]

YATES: Well, it sounded like the timing was right. But you had talked about the fact that Rees . . .

BEILENSON: Yeah, I'd spent enough time in Sacramento, right, and there was an opportunity. But it's not something I had thought of really. I thought I was, and I think I was relatively happy in Sacramento, and I was not looking to leave. There was only the occurrence of the fact that there was an opening in Congress that

we even considered, we even started thinking about it.

YATES: I thought today we could start with the campaign itself.

BEILENSEN: In 1976?

YATES: Yes. And first, I thought we could begin by having you tell me about the Twenty-third Congressional District at that point. I'm thinking about differences in comparison to your state senate district, or any other aspects of it that you think are relevant to talk about.

BEILENSEN: I'm continually being a little embarrassed in response to some of your questions, not remembering quite so much as one thinks one ought to, even at the twenty-one or two years that have gone by since then. It hasn't really been all that long.

Two things stand out. One is that interestingly--and I think this is not true in perhaps any other state--the congressional district is smaller than the state senate district. That is, we had only forty state senators and at that time we had forty-two or three members in the House of Representatives.

We now have fifty-two. And as we gain seats in the House of Representatives in the federal Congress, the U.S. Congress, the congressional seats keep getting smaller and smaller compared to the state senate seats, which remain at the number forty.

YATES: I hadn't thought about that, but that makes sense.

BEILENSON: So it was a somewhat smaller district and largely it was very similar to my existing state senate district. There were differences obviously. It was smaller a little bit, by forty thousand or fifty thousand constituents, but the heart of the old district remained the heart of the new district. So I was seeking election in a district where, by and large, I was fairly well-known, and most of which, probably 80 percent of which, I had already represented in the state senate.

It was largely a Westside district. There was a little bit of the San Fernando Valley, as I recall. I think we went over and hit parts of Encino and Sherman Oaks, sort of the near Valley, and the part of the Valley which is closest demographically to the west side of Los

Angeles, to the Westwood area and Beverly Hills area, and so on. We were talking about relatively high income, high education, relatively moderate to liberal areas, which were not at all dissimilar to what was on the other side of the hills.

YATES: Tell me about the campaign itself.

BEILENSON: The campaign itself, because it was a relatively safe or at least safe-looking Democratic district, consisted, as earlier campaigns usually did, of the Democratic primary. That is, you were in a situation where once you had won the primary you were pretty much home free, although we never took it for granted. We worked hard in the general elections as well. The primary itself, I think it's fair to say, although again we didn't take it for granted at the time, and we raised a modest amount of money and put on a fairly decent-sized campaign, was to speak objectively a fairly foregone conclusion. I mean, I think anyone looking on would have thought that my chances of winning were quite great and there was really very little opportunity for anybody else to succeed in the primary. I currently



represented a good part of the district. I think it's fair to say I was on the whole a well thought of and pretty well-liked representative with no serious downsides, and there was no terribly strong other opponent running. As I recall, there were about four other people in the primary, a couple of whom put on decent-sized campaigns and had little bases of support of their own. But we ended up, as I recall, winning somewhat more than 60 percent of the vote.

YATES: I think so. I actually have it in here somewhere, but . . .

BEILENSON: Which, in a primary, is a relatively large win when there are four other competitors in there. The only potentially strong competitor dropped out before the primary and that was--although he had been thinking seriously about it; we may have talked about this last time--was then assemblyman, now congressman, Howard Berman.

YATES: Yes, you did talk about that.

BEILENSON: He obviously would have been a very strong and a very real contender. But absent his being in the primary, the others were people who had either not held public office or not held high

public office before. There was no reason in the world for me not to have won, which I did without too much trouble.

YATES: How would you compare it to running for the state legislature?

BEILENSON: The state legislature, at least in those days. . . . Let me back up. Running for the state legislature, at least in those days, was really quite a different matter than elections and campaigns that one is used to now. There was very little interest generally. . . . There were two or three things that were different. One, it was a time where there was a good deal less competition in politics, a good deal less money, a good deal less attention paid to it, many fewer special interest groups. You as an average voter were simply an average voter and you were not also at the same time, as you are likely to be now, a member--whether you like it not or even if you know it or not--of one or two or three or more particular interest groups which are in constant communication with representatives, and who are continually telling you about how your representative is voting on issues which they believe you might

BEILENSON: be interested in. I mean, you were just a person living in the area who every couple of years came out and voted.

Generally speaking, there was relatively little in the media. I don't know how to say it, but less than there is now about what was going on in Sacramento. People didn't pay an awful lot of attention to what was going on up there. Once you got yourself elected, if you had a fairly decent seat, as we did--a relatively strong Democratic seat--it was no trouble at all getting reelected.

Although I don't remember anymore how much money we used to spend in those campaigns it was a very, very small amount compared to anything that goes on these days. I think we probably spent \$30,000, \$40,000, \$50,000, or \$60,000 every four years in running for reelection to the state senate. I may be wrong. It may have been a little bit more, but I doubt it. We sent out a couple of brochures and even the cost of mail in those days was much less than it is now.

There was relatively little competition. That is, the competition didn't have much of a

BEILENSON: chance. If you had no Democratic opponents in the primary, which was usually the case, the Republican in the general election usually had not much chance, and everybody knew it and that person had very little money too. So the campaigns passed basically unnoticed. The only things that people noticed in election years were the gubernatorial campaigns or the presidential campaigns or the U.S. Senate campaigns. Our local campaigns, at least for the state legislature, were relatively. . . . As I said, people took very little note of them.

To a modest extent, not a very big one yet, this congressional primary at least. . . . Not the general so much because I think again, being a foregone conclusion, nobody paid an awful lot of attention, and it was a presidential year. Mr. [James E.] Carter was running against Mr. [Gerald R.] Ford [Jr.] in 1976, so people were paying attention to that. But in the primary, there was a modest amount of attention paid only because there were five of us running, and we all sent out some mail, we went around talking, and so on. I suppose

people paid some notice. But again, probably because the papers or any bystanders or political pundits such as there existed in those days or correspondents for the L.A. Times, or whomever, all assumed I would win, I think a relatively small amount of attention was paid to our campaign and to our election. By June it was over and that basically was it.

YATES: So no particular strategy or new strategy at that point?

BEILENSON: No. The only strategy was, on my part at least and it was the obvious one, was simply the fact that I had represented many of these same people, I hoped well and responsibly, for fourteen years. I brought that to their attention. We put out a decent amount of mail, which I recall vividly was not terribly effective in the sense that I tried to cram into it all of the wonderful things [Laughter] that I had done as their representative in Sacramento over the previous years. As you know, I had been very active legislatively. I had introduced a couple of hundred bills. There were a lot of large, important, interesting bills, including the welfare reform

BEILENSON: thing and the family planning bills and the abortion bill, and a whole bunch of consumer legislation and some environmental stuff. If you started talking about all these things in a modest-sized brochure, you end up with a lot of print in a very small area and I'm sure almost nobody read it. It was very impressive I thought, and I wanted to get all this off my chest, and let people know what a great job I'd been doing for them. [Laughter] And in all seriousness, I suppose people may well have glanced at it and it may have reminded them that I had been around for a while, I had been involved in a lot of interesting and important things, which on the whole I think they approved of.

That was basically my campaign: to remind people that I was an experienced legislator whom they liked and who had represented them well--at least that's what I said in my brochures--and asked them for their support. . . . You know, let me have a chance to represent them in Washington.

From the others, I recall very little except that a couple of them put on modest

little campaigns of their own and they were able to raise some money. There was no negative campaigning that I recall. There may have been, but it was nothing serious, nothing that one remembers twenty years later. As I said earlier, it was I think pretty much a bygone conclusion, even though we probably spent \$50,000 or \$60,000 and we did some precinct work, and I worked hard at it. But I don't think the outcome was in doubt.

YATES: What was it like when you first arrived in Washington, D.C., as a new member?

BEILENSON: Well, that's an interesting question and there are two ways to answer that. The first is that in some respects I'm sure it was easier and. . . . Easier is not quite the right word, but sort of more comfortable and easier to accommodate to because I had been a legislator before. That is, I was going from one legislative arena to another legislative arena, so that all of us who were elected to the Congress that year, any year, and every couple of years when people get elected to Congress. . . . I suppose it's true that anywhere from one-half to two-thirds of them

BEILENSON: previously held legislative seats in the state legislatures or at the very least were mayors, or sometimes governors or sometimes on their city councils. But many of them are from state legislatures. For those of us who were, I'm sure it's somewhat less of a change, a shock, or change of scene. It presents fewer difficulties because you're used to at least having been a legislator, having worked with other people, knowing how a legislative process in general works. So it's not a completely different environment in which you find yourself. For people who are totally new to politics, of whom there are plenty of course coming to Congress every couple of years, it's a much stranger and different environment obviously from what they've been used to. It must be stranger than it is for those of us who had had some previous legislative experience.

But having said that, it's also quite different from one's legislative experience in California, or anywhere else one comes from. The principal. . . . This is at least true of the House of Representatives. I'm sure it's true of the Senate, U.S. Senate, too, but in a



BEILENSON: different kind of way perhaps. The immediate principal difference between being in the state legislature and being in the House of Representatives is that the latter is so much larger. You've got 434 colleagues, whereas in the state senate I had 39 colleagues. It was a small--as we discussed at some length--relatively small body where you knew everybody else fairly well, were physically close to them all, were aware of almost everything that was going on, were involved yourself in a whole series of different kinds of things, serving on several committees in the state legislature. You could be effectively involved in a lot of different kinds of areas, introduce bills in lots of different jurisdictions, as it were, because you're just one of forty people in the place. And of course, your opportunities of having some authority and responsibility are much greater in a smaller place because probably half the members or a third of the members at least were chairmen of committees. I had been for the previous ten years or so, or nine years, of my ten years in the state senate.

BEILENSON:           So you find yourself coming from a relatively small pond in which you were a big fish, and in my particular case quite a big fish. But it was true of lots of other people. Some of my new colleagues had been speakers back home in their own state legislature and they came from being really big fish to being really little fish, as well, in a very big pond. But it's more than that. It's just that it's a huge place. You go from having served on several committees back home in your state legislature to serving on one or two committees, or a couple of committees-- sometimes three in those days in the Congress-- and of course, being a very junior member of those committees.

          The real difference, I think it's fair to say, comes not so much in the beginning but over time. Even though at the beginning when you're a new person and you expect to play a very minor role in whatever is going on, even as you did when you first came to the state legislature many years ago, even in that smaller pond. . . . The big difference I think, with respect to the House of Representatives,

BEILENSON: is that even after you're there for eight or ten years you're still playing a pretty small role, whereas after eight or ten years in the state legislature, if you're a person of substance and ambition and intelligence, and whatever, you find yourself most likely in a position of some responsibility. That's not true in the House of Representatives. You can be there forever and feel even by the end that you're playing a relatively minor role. You always feel that way to a certain extent because you remain one out of 435 people. Even if you end up as chairman of a major committee where you have a lot of say in that particular committee, your say does not extend beyond that committee at all. You're chairman of one of the eighteen committees, more or less, and you obviously have a lot to do and a lot to say about what it does and doesn't do. But your legislative responsibility and your effectiveness is really relegated and constrained within the jurisdiction--very limited jurisdiction--of that particular committee.

In the state legislature you can roam

BEILENSON: further afield, and especially in the case, for example, when I was chairman of the Finance Committee in the state senate, all of the bills with any importance whatsoever came eventually through our committee. So we had an immense amount of authority and influence.

That takes a lot of getting used to. I remember specifically for all of us, especially those of us who had previous legislative experience, our biggest difficulty was finding a niche or two for ourselves in this huge place back there where you feel that you could make a little bit of difference. In truth, it wasn't. . . . This sounds a little contrary to what I've just been saying. It's not too hard to find some niches, although they are relatively small. You're on a couple of committees, but on each of those committees you serve on. . . . I'm trying to remember how many--I think two or three or four subcommittees. And you quickly find--I did, for example; we'll get back to it perhaps in a moment, although it's nothing of great import--that if you are good about attending your committee meetings, if you've done your

BEILENSON: homework, if you're prepared, you find yourself quite soon being a relatively effective and useful and involved member of that subcommittee. You have some involvement in any legislation that may emerge from that particular subcommittee, simply because you're interested and you're bright and you're contributing.

The big problem, in my opinion, in the Congress--it's become a much bigger problem over the years since I've been there--is that we do not have nearly enough members of the 435 who really understand what their job as legislators is or should consist of. I mean, they're terrific at raising money, getting elected, making noise, communicating, especially these days, sending out mail, and stuff of that sort. But fewer and fewer of them over the years. . . . As the political part has gotten bigger and bigger, and the money part has gotten bigger and bigger, fewer and fewer of them apply themselves in a serious and useful manner to being legislators, to going to committee meetings, to learning the specifics of the various programs and areas

over which their committees have jurisdiction, and to contributing in a meaningful legislative way to doing oversight, which we did a lot of in the state legislature and we don't do nearly enough of in Washington, and to writing legislation in a careful and thoughtful way.

All I'm saying is that for those of us who had some previous experience and were serious legislators and enjoyed being real legislators, you could find areas on whatever committees or subcommittees you find yourself assigned to where you could be of some help, and could do some semi-useful things. Even there the jurisdiction is limited, and you often find yourself on two or three subcommittees which report no legislation at all in the course of a session of Congress.

YATES: Let me return for now to when you first arrived in D.C. How did you go about getting oriented to your new setting?

BEILENSON: Well, again, there were some specific orientation programs there, which I don't recall ever having had, perhaps really didn't need, in Sacramento. Again, because it's such a big place. When we arrived, as I recall, there

were two major sets of orientation sessions. One was given up at Harvard in November or December, right after the election. I did not go to that. Many of us did not. I'm trying to remember why. I think it was simply because it was just difficult to get to and didn't seem necessary or something. There was one in mid-January or shortly thereabout, shortly after Congress had convened, down in Williamsburg, Virginia, about three hours from Washington, over a three or four day weekend, which I and most of my colleagues did attend. It was not so much an orientation actually as a very useful and very interesting and very valuable discussion of different kinds of issues which would be confronting the Congress and so on. Not an awful lot of specific orientation. I don't recall if we had much in the way of orientation as such, but you know we're all grown-ups and it's not hard to find your way . . .

YATES: Perhaps that not the best word . . .

BEILENSON: No, no that is, because one thing that my wife got very heavily involved in several years later, up to just about the present time, till

BEILENSON: a couple of years ago. . . . She was cochair of an orientation for spouses, who really badly needed it, but that's in a more personal way. That's a different kind of subject matter entirely.

Let me move back a bit. When we arrived, for example, we were a large class. Not so large as the class that was elected two years earlier in 1974, but we were a large class. I don't remember. There were seventy-some of us or eighty of us all told from both parties. There was a big turnover that year. There was also, that year when we arrived, a contest in the Democratic. . . . The Democrats, of course, then were still the majority party, the majority side, and had been for a long, long time and seemed as if we would be forever. There was a contest for majority leader between Phil Burton from California and [James C.] Jim Wright [Jr.] from Texas and [Richard W.] Dick Bolling from Missouri. I mention that because these men were out supporting various members in their elections the year before, in the hopes of winning their hearts and their minds, sort of taking them under their wing and sort



BEILENSON: of trying to do for us whatever favors they could, especially in terms of trying to get us onto the committees that we wanted to get onto. To a certain extent, perhaps, that served as part of our orientation, being looked after as it were by those three men and some of their friends and colleagues who sort of were trying to befriend all of us new members, each of whom of course had one vote in the upcoming election for majority leader.

I recall, for example, that Phil Burton, for whom I voted even though I felt very close to Dick Bolling from Missouri--who I ended up being very close to as he was chairman of the Rules Committee that I served on for many years. . . . I felt that I ought to vote for Phil because he was from California and I'd known him a bit from years before when we served. . . . During my first two years in the assembly he was there and then went off to Congress. But I remember, for example, that Phil Burton tried hard with me as with others who were supporting him especially, and with new California members, to get us onto committees that we wanted, without any success

BEILENSON: I may add. But nonetheless. . . .

So you just sort of get thrown into this big pond, this big lake of the House of Representatives, and you find your way. It's all a little strange at first. As I said, more strange I'm sure for those who had not been in a legislature before than it was for those of us who had been. But it was in some respects, by the same token, more difficult for those of us. . . . I remember feeling, and I know some of my colleagues with similar backgrounds felt, that you are. . . . Emasculated is much too strong a word, but where you had had a lot of authority, a lot of power, a lot of say-so, you were in a position now where you had none whatsoever. You had a vote--and there were 434 others, so even your vote didn't count for so much as it used to--but nothing much to say about anything else. It was very difficult for all of us, I think, to accept at first. It's a real downer, in some respects, for anybody coming to the House who had held more political authority back home, either in a legislature or as a governor or as a mayor or somebody who is. . . . It's even harder, interestingly, for

executives, for mayors and for governors, because they were able just to say, "Let's do this," and they would do it. For a legislator, at least . . .

YATES: Right. You were used to working . . .

BEILENSEN: Right, with others, but at least I was able to get my way, often working with others. And here I was, didn't even know. . . . Obviously I couldn't do a thing, except bide my time and find some niches, as everybody tried to.

YATES: How did you go about setting up your office when you got there?

BEILENSEN: That, again. . . . Good question, but it was for someone like me, easy. It was easy because I brought along two or three people who had been with me in Sacramento and wanted to come to Washington. It was easier, because I was taking the place of a predecessor who also was a Democrat, Tom Rees, and I picked up two or three or four of his people who already were there. And here . . .

YATES: That was one question I had. What did you inherit from him? Maybe inherit, again, isn't the right word.

BEILENSEN: No, no. That's a good word. A number of

BEILENSON: people who had worked for him both in Washington and here in Los Angeles wanted to work for me. I took on virtually all of them who did want to. I can't remember how big our offices were in those days, somewhat smaller than they are these days. But there were a few. . . . Probably five or six in each of the offices. I took on a couple of the people who had worked for him in Washington, and one of them actually wanted to move back to California. She came back here and I hired her to run our office back here. There were a couple of others who had worked for him back here and I kept them on and added others.

But it was much easier for me, as it was for other colleagues who found themselves in the same situation, where you brought a few people. . . . Very few people, I think, of my own--just a couple, I think--wanted to come from Sacramento to Washington, because it's quite a change of scene for them. Obviously people with families couldn't do that. So I left behind a lot of my most valuable people. I had to find some new ones. I had a couple of my own and I inherited, as you suggested. . . .

BEILENSON: I had available to me people who had some experience with my predecessor, and we found some additional people. It was really quite easy. I mean, that was not a difficult process.

Again, I can only imagine that somebody who has not been in a legislature before has a far more difficult time. And they tend, I think--the latter kind of people--to make a serious mistake in that they far too often, and quite understandably and naturally, people their office largely with folks who had been helping them in their campaign. They just got elected. A lot of people contributed their time and energy, and most of them--especially in those days--hadn't been paid, and they were bright young people or middle-aged people, whatever, and they wanted jobs in Washington or running your district office back home, whatever, so you tend to give them those jobs, which is perfectly natural. In some cases it works out very well. In many other cases. . . . My experience has been--not so much with my own people, but seeing what's happened with others--that folks who are good for campaign

purposes are not necessarily good for working in a government office.

YATES: Why is that?

BEILENSON: Well, again, I'm generalizing to much too great an extent here, but people who are terribly political, who are good at running campaigns, at turning out propaganda, as it were, at organizing precinct workers or whatever we did in those days, at running a campaign office, are not necessarily the same kind of people whom you want to have with you in Washington to help you with legislative matters. They may have had no experience or background in any of these matters to begin with, or maybe. . . . You almost need a more academic type once you're elected, and a more political type to get you elected.

It's also true, at least it was for me. . . . Now, it's not for many other people. Many colleagues of mine, both in the state and federal legislature, liked to have a lot of political types around in their offices. They feel more comfortable that way, and they can run their campaigns for them again a couple of years later when their campaigns come around.

BEILENSON: I felt quite differently. I wanted people in Washington with me who would be helpful to me legislatively and good in answering the mail, and so on, and writing letters and whatever else we had to do for constituents. And back home here in California, in Los Angeles, who would be good at--because that's our principal purpose here--who would be good at helping constituents, you know, who would be good case workers, help people with Social Security problems, whatever else we're helping them with, or getting their passports and solving their problems with the INS [Immigration and Naturalization Service] or the IRS [Internal Revenue Service] or with whatever other federal agency they had problems. And as you can imagine, that may be quite a different kind of person.

In fact, again I'm generalizing hugely, but I think for example--I hope it doesn't sound sexist or anything--that a mature woman who has had some experience in life, and with a family, and so on, would make, on average, a better constituent aid or case aid person in your district office back home here in Los Angeles,

because she's used to dealing with real problems, and she's sympathetic, and she's empathetic, and so on, rather than an eighteen- or twenty-one-year-old girl, or young woman, or young man who may be good at and love the excitement of the campaign, but won't be good at dealing with elderly people and their problems, or whatever. You know what I mean. And again I'm generalizing, but it tends to be true.

So anyway. . . . I was lucky because I had people with some substantive background and also some experience in case work here in Los Angeles who had worked for Tom Rees, who I took on, and we had no problems at all putting together an office very quickly. Then when I got my committee assignments we just picked up a couple of extra people eventually, who had a little bit of expertise in some of those areas.

YATES: You mentioned how large, of course, the House of Representatives is and I was wondering, initially, how did you get to know your colleagues in the House?

BEILENSON: That's an interesting question. The truth. . . . It takes a long time to get to know them and



BEILENSON: most members don't know all the other members ever. Some of us made a pretty strong point of trying to get friendly with, or at least get to meet, say hello to, and get to know as many of the other members as you possible could. And for me, interestingly, I ended up succeeding in doing that largely because I was on the Rules Committee, before which many other members came. So I got to know and know something about a lot of members, whom other members, those who were just off in their own particular committee somewhere, never got to meet or see or listen to.

But interestingly, almost everybody's closest friends in Congress are other members, men and women, who were in the same class as they. That is, who came the same year they did. You went down to Williamsburg together; your spouse and theirs tended to hang around together a little, at least at the outset; you met together. You know, as freshman members we had meetings of our own for a while. They still do that a bit, not an awful lot. You know, it lasts for a few months during the first year or so. You're thrown together with

and you see a lot of the people who came in with you. I mean, you just tend to. You all have the same. . . . You're all coming there new, and you all meet one another, and get together before Congress is sworn in for some of these sessions, and so on. That's the first group that you're close to and the one to whom you remain closest. By the time I was through, after twenty years, almost all my closest friends who were left still were people who came in with me.

YATES: That's interesting.

BEILENSON: Yeah, it is. The other people you get to know best, certainly most quickly, are the people who serve on the same committees on which you serve. The committees are really quite large, many of them. A few are small, but most of the large policy committees have between thirty-some and fifty-some members. You're talking about a lot of people. The people you get to know next best after your classmates are the other members from your own party of the committees on which you serve. Most especially, again, of the subcommittees on which you serve, because you are with these men

BEILENSON: and women once or twice a week or more, depending on how many times your committees meet. You get to know your chairmen of your committees and your subcommittees pretty well. Then from there you branch out a little bit. If you're kind of bipartisan minded, as the majority of us were, you get to be pretty friendly with some Republicans. You know, folks from across the aisle who are members of your own committee and who, again, came with you. Many of my closest Republican friends are people who were first elected with us in 1976.

In fact, one of the reasons, interestingly, that people tend to leave after a while is that you look around and say, "People I really care most about aren't here anymore--most of them." That's because almost all the people you care about came when you did. You know, they're not people you just met the last year. I mean, you keep making new friends, there are lots of lovely new people being elected all the time, but for whatever reason, you end up not being so close to them as to those who came back to Washington when you did, or came very shortly thereafter. After a while you don't even

remember exactly who came when you did. I don't remember if some people came twenty years ago when I did or eighteen years ago just after I did or twenty-two years ago just before I did. But they've all been with me for a long time back there and these are people I feel very close to. They tend to be more your age. The newer people tend to be younger. Not that there's all that much difference. I was one of the older new people, actually, back then. I think two-thirds of the new members in 1976 were younger than I. I felt kind of old at the time, even though I was only forty-three and a half or something of that sort. Forty-four.

YATES: In all this mix of things, I was wondering what kind of interaction you had with the California Democratic delegation?

BEILENSEN: I neglected to mention. . . . I'm glad you mentioned that. Of course, the other group of people whom you get to know quite well, quite naturally, are other members from your own state. Again, especially members from your own party from your own state. And as you can imagine very quickly once you think about it, it matters a great deal what kind of place you

BEILENSON: come from. Many members come from relatively small states in terms of representation. There are only anywhere from one to four House members from many of these states. They obviously know each other very well. They're obviously thrown close together and they work together more easily, really, across party boundaries even than we do in a big state like California to get something done. If you come from South Dakota and there are two members, one Republican and one Democrat, to the extent you possibly can you work hand in hand trying to get the dams and the farm subsidies and whatever it is. It's in the interest of each of you because you're all the state has. You and the two U.S. Senators.

Coming from a big state and having on average twenty-some members from each party. . . . It was a little bit fewer in those days, I guess. I think we had twenty-three or -four Democrats perhaps and sixteen, seventeen Republicans, but you know, a large number of people from each party. There were a couple of dozen other Democrats from California to begin with, many of whom I had known from

the state legislature, who had been there before, and had come on to Congress. I'd known Henry Waxman from before. I'd known [Augustus F.] Gus Hawkins from before. I'd known Phil Burton from before. They'd all served in the legislature with me. I guess not Gus. Gus had left us just as I was arriving. But there were some others too. And within a very short number of years [Victor H.] Vic Fazio [Jr.], and Julian [C.] Dixon, eventually Howard Berman. . . . A lot of others whom I had served with back in Sacramento came along, so we tended to know one another. But on top of that, of course, were the other dozen, fifteen, eighteen Californians from around the state whom I hadn't known before, and with whom one gets quite close quite quickly.

For me, for those of us from big states, that gave us a big additional chunk of fairly close friends or close associates to begin with, whereas I can only imagine that people from smaller places are a little lonelier at first, perhaps, than some of us were.

YATES: I'd like to come back to the delegation maybe a little bit later, just talking generally about

the effectiveness of the group, since California is . . .

BEILENSEN: The smaller the group the more effective they are. [Laughter]

YATES: Oh really? [Laughter]

BEILENSEN: Well, you know, if there's one of you from Montana, you're in total agreement on issues, if you can get along with your two senators. If there are two or three or four of you, the chances are that you're forced to work together. When there are forty-some of you, and now fifty-two of us, you don't work . . .

YATES: It's harder.

BEILENSEN: It's a good deal harder. Right. It's like getting the whole Congress to work together. I mean, there are more of us than there were in the entire state senate.

YATES: One other thing. During your first term in Congress how did you receive your committee assignments?

BEILENSEN: At that time and you still do, you ask for what you want. They are given. . . . For the past twenty-some years since I was there, they are determined by the Steering and Policy Committee of the Democratic Caucus. The Steering and

BEILENSON: Policy Committee is made up of the leadership. . . . The speaker has a certain number of appointments, and the majority leader, and so on, and by regional representatives. California has its own person on the Steering and Policy Committee, as do other groupings of states around the country. There were twenty-some or thirty members on the Steering and Policy Committee--I'm not sure how many--and they were the ones who made the selections. You asked them through your own representative, basically your own California representative in our case. You let them know about the things you were interested in and that you'd like to be on. To the extent that anybody's able to, they try to please you. I mean, first of all, they want people to serve in areas where they're interested in serving, and they also want people to be grateful to them for having given them what they wanted, not that it necessarily means anything later on, or there's any way that you can even pay them back. But, you know, everybody tries to get along with one another and tries to keep everybody happy and busy and feeling useful.



Everybody wants, if possible, to get on the Appropriations [Committee] or on the Ways and Means Committee. That, obviously, is seldom possible, although there are often one or two new members who are able to get onto one of those committees, which are very plum assignments to begin with. The rest of us just tried to get on a couple of major policy committees that were areas of interest, you know, that involved areas of interest to us.

[End Tape 9, Side A]

[Begin Tape 9, Side B]

YATES: OK, you were just talking about the process for getting committee assignments. Did you get what you asked for?

BEILENSON: No.

YATES: What did you ask for?

BEILENSON: In my particular case I was sort of taken under Phil Burton's wing. I was never that close to him, but I did support him, as I said, in his quest for the majority leadership position. You may recall he lost by one vote to Jim Wright. He was sort of the lead person for those of us, I guess, who were newly elected Democrats from California--I think there were

BEILENSON: only a couple of us that year--for the Steering and Policy Committee. He tried to get me on the Energy and Commerce Committee, which is an important committee which deals with a lot of special interests, and failed to get me on that. He tried to get me on a committee which I wanted very much to get on, which was the Interior [and Insular Affairs] Committee, it's now the Resources Committee, which deals with interior and resource issues. That was a fairly popular committee in those days, I guess still is, especially from the West. Not so much the far West, but the middle. . . . I mean, the mountains West and the plains West. He couldn't get me on that either, so he got me on two other committees mainly because they weren't full. Not that nobody wanted to be on them, but it was easy to get on them. One was Foreign Affairs and one was Judiciary, which was fine with me.

Foreign Affairs especially was very interesting. Not a terribly important committee in the House, only of middling importance. Not nearly so important as Foreign Affairs or Foreign Relations in the Senate

because they have treaty power and approval power and so on, but interesting nonetheless. The Judiciary Committee, which ought to be interesting, but which, at least for the couple of years I was on it, tended not to be only because the subcommittees I was on were dealing with things--copyright law and some other stuff--which I was not terribly interested in. I had served on the Criminal Procedure Committee back in the state legislature and the Judiciary Committee, which dealt with a lot of criminal stuff as well as civil stuff, which was more interesting, just intrinsically, than a lot of the things we dealt with back in Washington.

So for my first term there I was on those two major standing committees. I also got on. . . . I think Phil felt badly about not succeeding in getting me on what I wanted or what he wanted to get me on. I also was for those first two years on a space and technology committee, whatever they called it those days, which was . . .

YATES: Yes. I have that you were on some science and technology subcommittees and . . .

BEILENSON: Well, I was on the Science and Technology Committee, which was really kind of interesting but not my cup of tea really, and on a Select Committee on Population, which I found hugely interesting because it was at that time, and has always been, one of my areas of interest. I think I spent more time on that in particular during my first term in Congress than on any of the other committees because I found it more interesting. We had a series of very interesting hearings because we were looking into worldwide problems of population growth. We had an active chairman in [James H.] Jim Scheuer of New York, a Democrat from New York, who remains a good friend of mine. He and his wife [Emily Scheuer] and my wife and I often have dinner together still. He retired a few years ago.

So those were the committees I was on. Actually, four committees, three standing committees, and a select committee, which no longer exists. Because I was on so many committees, and for two or three of them I was on two or three subcommittees of each, there

was more than enough to keep me busy and more than enough things to go to, committee meetings to go to.

YATES: Let me make a shift here in topics. I was trying to focus on basically the initial period when you got there. Now I want to ask you about some key issues and/or legislation that you were involved in. The first really obvious one is the Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area. I'll mention again that your papers are quite extensive on this, but I do want to get some perspective on it. How did you become author of that piece of legislation? I guess that's the right term. I know it became part of an omnibus package, but you're listed basically as the author.

BEILENSON: There had been, prior to my being elected to Congress, efforts for a good twelve to fifteen years by other legislators and by a lot of people back home here in the area to get the Santa Monica Mountains area or some portion of it into the U.S. national park system in one form or another. Senator John [V.] Tunney worked at it, Congressman Tom Rees had worked

BEILENSON: at it, and some other people as well. I arrived at a very fortuitous time. I had a background and a good deal of interest in environmental matters, and I was approached, immediately upon being elected to Congress, by several groups of private citizens, private people, back here in Los Angeles who had been working on this issue for a long time. They asked if I would be interested in undertaking this new effort. I said I'd be delighted to do so and I introduced a bill to make the Santa Monica Mountains a new unit of the National Park Service.

Basically, people came to me who had been involved in this process before, having worked with Rees, having worked with Tunney, having worked with other legislators with no success up to that time. I introduced a bill. At least one member of my staff worked virtually full-time on that one area back in Washington with me. A couple of women back here in Los Angeles spent a good deal of their time on it.

Very fortuitously, as I started to say, in 1978, I guess the end of our first term in

Washington, a major omnibus park bill<sup>1</sup> authored by Phil Burton, who I think was taking out his frustrations out just having lost so narrowly and sadly as majority leader. . . . He was chairman of the subcommittee of parks--whatever it was called in those days--of the Interior Committee, and was involving himself in a lot of major legislative activity. One of them was this omnibus park bill, and because he succeeded in getting that bill passed and signed by then President Jimmy Carter, sometime I guess in late 1978, we were successful in having our bill, after a lot of work on our part. . . . I'm skipping over a lot of effort, and the resolving of a lot of issues and problems amongst a lot of people, even with the administration itself, which at the outset did not want to include the Santa Monicas in the park system . . .

YATES:           Why not?

BEILENSON:      We succeeded in getting it made part of the

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1. Public Law 95-625, 95th Cong., 2d Sess. (10 November 1978), National Parks and Recreation Act of 1978.

omnibus bill. Well, it's a different kind of park from most parks and most units in the system. It's only in recent years that attention has been paid to urban areas or near-urban areas. When you think of a national park you think of Yosemite [National Park] or Yellowstone [National Park] or something of that sort. You know, the so-called crown jewels of the system. Since our time, in the last twenty years or so, you've had Golden Gate [National Recreation Area], which Phil Burton was working on at that time, up in the San Francisco Area, Santa Monicas here, the Cuyahoga [Valley National Recreation Area] in Valley Park in Ohio, that John [J.] Seiberling, who was chairman of a relevant subcommittee of the Interior Committee, was the author of. I can't think of the name of the one in New York City, but there's one that's sort of spread out narrowly or very thinly around much of the harbor area there. It's not Gateway. . . .

YATES: I could find . . .

BEILENSON: Perhaps it's Gateway National Park [Gateway National Recreation Area]. Whatever. But anyway, these are all areas which are part of



or near to large metropolitan areas, where enormous numbers of people can make use of them, and where the local states or local governments just simply didn't have the resources or the will to create these park areas. So even though one might philosophically feel that the Santa Monicas should have been saved and preserved by the state and/or the county of Los Angeles or the city of Los Angeles, none of those entities had ever done it, although the state, of course, had portions of two or three good-sized state parks in the area. The state had made some effort while we were up there in Sacramento. But anyway, if you wanted to save these areas it was the federal government who was going to save them. So that's why I got involved in this, and how we succeeded eventually, and why the administration and the people in the Interior Department back in Washington finally agreed--I think not terribly happily at first--to include some of these new units in the park system.

YATES: After the passage of that bill, what would you say were the most difficult aspects of trying

to achieve the goals of the legislation?

BEILENSON: Yeah, well, the reason. . . . That's an interesting question. That's a good question, because most people figure if you establish a park, that's it. In this particular case, at least. . . . There are different ways of establishing parks. The easiest way is what we did recently, about three or four years ago, with the big desert parks and so on in California, where you were taking existing federal land, which was not units of the park system as such, and switching them from U.S. Forest [Service], or BLM, Bureau of Land Management, and so on, and making them park lands. You didn't have to switch ownership. It's already owned by the people, by the federal government.

The problem here of course was that you were talking about largely private lands in high-rent areas, where the land was expensive and where there was a lot of growth here in Los Angeles County. The land prices were high, so that establishing the potential boundaries of the park, which we did in the originating legislation. . . . You know, we didn't do

BEILENSON: anything except say, "We'd like to have a park here." From then on, the problem was and has been--very much of a serious problem--getting the funds appropriated each year by the Congress and approved by the president to actually buy lands and put them in the park. We had hoped to do the whole thing in five years. We realized that the cost would be great, we realized that the land prices out here were rising, and we were subject to real competition from real estate development and so on. It was close into the L.A. area, and you know what houses cost out here in the Westside of town and beyond, and what land costs are.

We spent perhaps \$40 million or \$50 million the first two or three years under President Carter, which wasn't nearly so much as we'd hoped to, but it's a lot more than we've gotten since. I mean, in recent years we've gotten. . . . In some years we've gotten no money, some years \$1 million or \$2 million, some years \$3 million or \$4 million or \$5 million. A couple of years we got \$10 million, \$11 million, or \$12 million. What we've been doing ever since, especially the first couple

of good years, when we bought up a decent amount of land, was just scrounging for money back there. Just scraping for money from the appropriations committees to give to the Park Service to buy land for this new national park, which we're trying to create in the most difficult area in the country.

We've had a lot of success. We haven't succeeded nearly so much as we'd have liked, but on the whole, I like to look at the glass as half full rather than half empty. We have, in fact, created a wonderful park here, although there's still some large areas which we have not gotten the money to acquire, which I hope eventually we shall.

YATES: In retrospect, what, if anything, would you have done differently?

BEILENSON: Very little, if anything. I don't know that we could have done anything differently. The problem was, frankly, that two years after we established the park, our old friend and governor Ronald Reagan was elected president. Among other things, aside from cutting back on domestic expenditures, including of course the park system--not just our park, but all park

systems--he also appointed Secretary of [the] Interior James [G.] Watt, who shortly thereafter decided that four or five existing parks that Congress had created, including ours, should be. . . . I can't think of the word that they called it in those days.

YATES: I know what you mean. Taken out of the system.

BEILENSEN: Taken out of the system. OK. So there was no, obviously. . . . Not only was there no support for the park, but there was a strong effort on the part of the reigning administration to get rid of the park entirely. And so we forced--we still had Democratic majorities in the House and the Senate then--we forced on the administration modest amounts of money for this and other parks, so we kept going slowly. Once the Carter administration was gone and we had foes instead of friends in the White House and in the budget bureau, Office of Management and Budget, it started to become a very difficult problem.

YATES: So out of your control really. I mean, there was nothing initially . . .

BEILENSEN: We did as well as we could do, I think.

YATES: Considering the circumstances.

BEILENSEN: Yeah, we were just faced with impossible circumstances, as many other people with their own programs--whatever they may have been--were faced with once the Reagan administration took office.

YATES: Another, I guess park development project is the best way to describe it, you became involved with was the Sepulveda Basin. Now, that's the mid-eighties.

BEILENSEN: Yeah, that was a much smaller thing and in some respects easier.

YATES: How did you get involved in that?

BEILENSEN: That's a good question. It wasn't all that long ago and I'm not sure I remember. I wish I had some old staff member around to remind me. Let me go back for one quick second.

YATES: Sure.

BEILENSEN: The Santa Monicas started, as we discussed, back in '77 upon my first arriving there [in Congress] and has remained a major legislative concern and involvement of mine ever since. I mean, every year we had to go down to the appropriations committees, which are usually run by friends of mine--even now by Republicans who are friends--but nonetheless don't have

BEILENSON: much money available. A sizable little chunk of my time each year was testifying before these committees and just begging and cajoling friends of mine on the appropriations committees to give us some money for our park. Even when we were successful we'd run into serious problems often over in the Senate, because you had to get the same money out of the appropriations committees there and that was a much more difficult matter.

The Santa Monicas, although it was a big legislative achievement, as it were, and took a lot of time during my first sessions back there--the first two years--has remained an ongoing major responsibility of mine, or did remain, all the time I was in the Congress. Sepulveda Basin was, as you suggested, a more recent matter, although I guess we'd been working on it for a good ten or twelve years by the time I left Congress. What we have out there, of course, in the San Fernando Valley is a couple of hundred, three hundred acres overall I guess it is--maybe a little more, I'm not sure at the moment--of flood control district, which is federally owned land, and

controlled, as it were, on behalf of the federal government by the . . .

YATES: Is that the Corps?

BEILENSON: [Army] Corps of Engineers, exactly, which is part of the Department of Defense. They've done a perfectly good job with respect to flood control, which is their principal purpose. But nonetheless, it seemed to me and to a good many other people that we had some very valuable and useful land right out there in the middle of the Valley, which wasn't being put to its best potential use. So what I tried and succeeded in doing over my last ten years or so in the Congress was to acquire modest-sized appropriations from the federal government, which was not difficult to do--it wasn't a lot of money, it was anywhere from \$2 million to \$5 million a year in a few different years, not every single year--to give to the Department of Defense, to the Corps of Engineers, to develop a parkland.

We are deficient in [parkland] to a great extent here in Los Angeles County. In fact, the city of Los Angeles has less park area per capita than I think almost any major city in



the world. I mean, we have nothing except Griffith Park basically, and a few little tiny parks here and there.

YATES: You know, it's funny, I've never thought about it. It's . . .

BEILENSON: Well, there's nothing here. If it weren't for Griffith Park, we'd have nothing.

YATES: But when you realize what other urban areas have . . .

BEILENSON: Oh yes. And we've got millions and millions of people. More all the time, of course. That's one of the reasons there's such a need for the Santa Monicas really. Although it belongs to all the people around the country and a lot of people from outside L.A. use it, it's also very necessary for the people around here to have access to wilderness and some open space and so on.

So anyway, we've attempted with a decent amount of success to turn maybe a hundred acres, or thereabouts, of the Sepulveda Basin into park areas over the past few years. The difficulty there has been that under existing law, moneys which are spent and appropriated. . . . Let me back up. Because

BEILENSON: the park is actually managed by and run by local authorities, specifically the Department of Parks and Recreation here in the city of Los Angeles, the federal requirements are that there has to be matching money or in-kind contributions, either one, from the local entity. So although I had no great trouble frankly, having a lot of friends on the appropriations committees back there, getting \$2 million, \$3 million, \$5 million every couple or three years for the federal contribution, we had a terrible time. . . . Even though we had a friend in Mayor Tom Bradley, and we've had a pretty good friend in very recent years in Mayor [Richard J.] Riordan and a good number of friends on the city council, we also have had a city which has not had a lot of money available, and hasn't really been working all that hard, at least till recently, on establishing recreation areas or enhancing them. We had a terribly difficult time getting the necessary matching funds from the state.

Even though there was always federal money sitting around because of my efforts, we could not move until we finally dredged up or

scratched up, found somehow some matching local money. That's been a very difficult matter and we've not been so successful as we'd have liked to be. There's still federal money there left over from when I was in Congress two or three years ago, waiting to be spent when we can find some local money to match it.

YATES: Why do you think people are so unsupportive?

BEILENSON: It isn't that they're unsupportive. It's just that the system here somehow works differently, or that the city's priorities haven't been all that good. I don't know. I don't mean to fault them, it's just. . . . I don't know how this. . . . It's hard to understand how this city government works, frankly. I find it far more bureaucratic and difficult to work it than I did to work in this huge federal government that people are always complaining about. I mean, there's something to be said for local levels of government, but they've become as large and as bureaucratic as the federal government in my opinion, and as difficult to work with. But, anyway . . .

YATES: Especially when you talk about Los Angeles. A really huge urban area.

BEILENSEN: Yeah. It's a huge place. Anyway, with help from some of the local city councilmen and the mayors we've succeeded in sort of scratching out and establishing really quite a nice park there with a twenty-six-acre lake in the middle of it, which is now--especially on weekends, but also during the week and will continue to be to a much greater extent--very heavily used. We obviously had a dearth of recreational areas in the middle of this city. And of course, at least a third--not a third, but close to 30 percent or so--of the population of the entire city lives out in the San Fernando Valley. It's a huge area which has grown greatly over the past ten years or so, and badly needs these kinds of things. So we've got that. We've just built in the past few months a nice little children's playground there, which I insisted on because we'd seen some. . . . I was inspired by some local regional playgrounds back in Maryland to which on a couple of occasions we'd taken our grandchildren, who live in Baltimore. I took a very personal interest in them and the kind of facilities and. . . . What do you call it? You know . . .

YATES: Are you talking about the . . .

BEILENSEN: I'm talking about the things themselves.

YATES: Yeah.

BEILENSEN: The structures.

YATES: There are now groups who build these things.

BEILENSEN: Right.

YATES: Somebody will design it. There are walk-ways . . .

BEILENSEN: In fact, we made most of them out of wood rather than metal because it's more attractive and all that. So we've built a nice little children's playground. We put in a lot of trees. Already we have a lovely park, and in another few years when the trees mature and some more grass and stuff is put in, it's going to be a beautiful thing right there in the middle of the San Fernando Valley. Something which is very badly needed. So that's been fun.

YATES: Well, now moving. . . . I realize I'm sort of jumping around a little bit. Right now we're focusing on California. More recently, of course, was the Northridge earthquake, which occurred in '94. I think I read that the epicenter actually turned out to be in Reseda.

I believe . . .

BEILENSEN: Yes, it was in our district.

YATES: . . . it was in your district.

BEILENSEN: We never were given credit, but it should have been the Reseda earthquake. The epicenter was in the northern edge of our district. But in any case, by far the majority of the physical damage was done in our district. Not only just up there in Reseda and Northridge, which is just outside our district now--Northridge is--and Canoga Park, but also, as you may recall, after skipping two or three miles there was a huge amount of damage down in Sherman Oaks, which is right in the middle of our district. As a matter of fact, there was also some damage out in Santa Monica to the west of our district. But as you know, it skipped around all over. A good deal more than half of the total damage, I think it's fair to say, was in our own district.

YATES: So how did you work with people on that?

BEILENSEN: Well, that was an immense undertaking, not so much for me. . . . I mean, to be fair about it, although I and my wife too, and even our children to a certain extent, spent a lot of

BEILENSON: time, starting the morning after the earthquake, touring the district and walking around, trying to comfort people, and offer advice and help, and so on. . . . But specifically, especially for our local district office personnel, it was just an immense amount of work, and properly so. Over the next year and a half we had, along with other members of Congress from California. . . . First of all, I spent a huge amount of time in Washington with the representatives of the White House; with FEMA, you know, the Federal Emergency Management Agency; with Leon Panetta, who was a classmate and good friend of mine, and by then was the director of the Office of Management and Budget, which played a very big role in this whole thing; and with Julian Dixon, a congressman from Culver City and places just to the south of us, a longtime good friend and very effective member of Congress who was on the Appropriations Committee and still is. He was sort of the lead person in trying to get the money appropriated by the Congress to alleviate some of the damage that was done out here.

BEILENSEN: So we played a dual role, all of us members, especially the three or four or five of us who represented this general area which had been fairly badly damaged. Henry [A.] Waxman on the Westside to a little bit lesser extent, because there was less damage out there. First of all, and to a lesser extent, we spent a lot of time in Washington gathering support from the administration especially, and then from amongst our colleagues in the Congress, to appropriate what turned out to be a very large amount of money--\$9 billion or more--through FEMA and through the Small Business Administration, to loan money and to make money available to people to rebuild their homes and their businesses and so on. Secondly, and far more intensely really--again, this affected the people who worked in our district office, rather than me so much--helping on a one-to-one basis hundreds upon hundreds of individual families and business people who lived or worked or had their places of business in our district. . . . They helped them through this long and difficult process of getting whatever help was available from the



government--through our efforts back in Washington--to help them rebuild or to reestablish themselves.

We were physically involved in it to a huge extent for the first couple of months or so, myself included. My wife too, as I said, went out and spent a lot of time helping deliver food at some of these Red Cross centers and so on. You know. We became close friends with James Lee Witt, who was--still is--the very effective and really outstanding director of FEMA. He helped them decide where to set up what we call DACs or something. . . . Assistance centers. . . . Something assistance centers. DACs we called them.

YATES: OK.

BEILENSEN: Sorry.

YATES: Disaster?

BEILENSEN: Disaster assistance centers. Thank you very much.

YATES: I'm guessing. We'll have to look that one up.

BEILENSEN: No, that's exactly what they were. D[R]ACs, or disaster [recovery] assistance centers. I think, six, seven, or eight were set up mostly in our area, various parts of the Valley, and a

little bit out to the west too, and there were a couple further east and south, to which people would physically come and at which there were. . . . I mean it was really a huge operation and it was very well. . . . I mean, none of these things could be done that well, but it was as well done as I have ever seen government do its job. We had representatives of the IRS. We had representatives of HUD [Department of Housing and Urban Development]. We had representatives of the local agencies. Everybody who might be involved had their people there and we had lines of people signing in and being sent to the right people to help them with whatever their particular problems were, getting their loans or their help or their food, or whatever it was. I was very proud of our government and especially of all the governmental employees--mostly federal, but not entirely, some state and some local--who for months and months and months serviced our constituents and other people's constituents.

YATES: That must have taken. . . . I think you said it was a year and a half, at least at your district office level, that was impacted by

this.

BEILENSON: Yeah. It was busiest the first six months or so and after that it sort of calmed down. It lessened to a certain extent, but it went on for a long, long time. And actually, the longer it went on the more difficult, in some respects, it became, because you were dealing with people who even after all this time still hadn't been satisfied and were very. . . . You know, had problems dealing with this still, and were angry about it, and quite understandably so. It was very intense and difficult work for the women especially--I guess we had one or two men at the time--in our district office, who, on one occasion, had some help from some mental health people just to tell them. . . . They had a session with them for a couple of hours in our office one afternoon. I wasn't there so I don't know an awful lot about it, other than that they just sort of helped them through it and made them understand, not that they needed it perhaps, their own vulnerability and their own sensitivity that had built up with all of these other people's troubles coming to them.

YATES: That sounds very stressful.

BEILENSON: Yeah, extremely stressful for them. But they did a beautiful job. They did a wonderful job. With very few exceptions, people were enormously appreciative of what our particular people did and, in general, what the government response was. Obviously there were some people who fell outside the boundaries of what the government could in fact do under the law, and were dissatisfied and unhappy about it. But it was a big. . . . It took a vast majority of our office's time that next to last session that I was in Congress.

YATES: Let me shift here again. I want to ask you now about some of the main committees you served on. As you mentioned previously, you served on the Rules Committee and I have down you were named to the Rules Committee in 1978. Explain to me how that came about.

BEILENSON: Assignments to the Rules Committee are not made through the Policy and Steering Committee as the other assignments to standing policy committees are made. It is the leadership's committee. It is the speaker's committee. You are appointed by the speaker. Period. It's his committee, because it regulates the flow of

BEILENSON: legislation in the House and a lot of other things too, which are kind of difficult and complex to explain, but it's very much the speaker's committee. So I was appointed to it by the speaker.

The reason the speaker appointed me was, I believe--the speaker didn't know me awfully well, you know, I was one of the relatively new guys who had come in two years earlier--because the then chairman of the committee, Dick Bolling, Richard Bolling of Missouri, an outstanding member of the House of Representatives and one who wrote a couple of very interesting books about how the House and the Rules Committee work, liked me, wanted me, took me under his wing somewhat, too, about the time we first arrived, and wanted me on his committee. To a certain extent I think Speaker [Thomas P.] Tip O'Neill [Jr.] wanted to keep Dick Bolling happy, and if Bolling wanted. . . . I think a couple of the appointments he made that year were appointments which Bolling asked him to make. We went through an interesting little fracas as it were--it wasn't meant to be that way, at least by me--which I'll tell you

about because for some reason it appears in all of the biographies of Phil Burton.

In 1978 a Californian who had been a member of the Rules Committee for a long time, whose name escapes me at the moment--[Laughter] it will come back in a moment or two--retired from Congress, so there was no longer a Democratic member on the Rules Committee from California. Not that there needed to be. There's nothing in the rules that says so, but we're a big state and California, I guess, came to think that it deserved one. Anyway, our California Democratic delegation used to have morning meetings on Wednesdays in the Capitol Building, and on one occasion, I guess Phil Burton set this up--I was unaware of it--they had decided to suggest another Californian to the speaker to take the place of the. . . . It was [Bernice F.] Bernie Sisk.

YATES: Oh yes.

BEILENSON: Bernie Sisk from up in the San Joaquin Valley. . . . Central Valley. I guess from Modesto or thereabouts. I'm not sure exactly where he came from. Anyway, he was retired from the Congress, he had been on Rules for a

long time, and the California delegation Democrats wanted another Californian on there, which we're not entitled to, but you can make a pretty good point that there were so many of us--twenty-some of us in those days--that we ought to have one perhaps. So unbeknownst to me, at our weekly breakfast meeting one Wednesday morning there was a vote taken, in which it was proposed by Phil Burton or somebody else with Phil's support. . . . He was the big Democratic politician in our caucus.

YATES: When you say weekly breakfast, are you talking about the delegation?

BEILENSON: The Democratic California delegation had a weekly breakfast eight o'clock on Wednesdays. He proposed Jerry [M.] Patterson from Orange County, who was a few years later defeated by [Robert K.] Bob Dornan when Dornan went down there after having served up on the Westside here, on the far Westside. Jerry Patterson had been elected to Congress, I think, two years before I was, perhaps four years--I think it was just two years before I was--and wanted to be on the Rules Committee. He had seniority to me obviously, and I didn't particularly care if

BEILENSEN: I was on it or not, although Bolling had talked to me a few times about whether I'd serve on it if he could get me on it. Anyway, we had this little thing which I walked into the middle of, sort of. They sent off a letter, after voting nineteen to six in favor of Jerry Patterson over me--somebody had nominated me--to suggest to the speaker or to ask the speaker to appoint Jerry Patterson as the California representative, Democratic representative, on the Rules Committee.

The speaker, apparently, was really angry about this. He didn't like at all being told he ought to put anybody on it. It was his committee. It was a very personal committee to the speaker. He had problems with Phil Burton in those days anyway and he knew that this was Phil's thing. So apparently. . . . I just had nothing to do with any of this. I was just an innocent bystander basically. Bolling, meanwhile, had been asking to please put me on along with a couple of other people because there were three or four openings that year. And so both to sort of stiff Burton and the Democrats from California, who he wanted to put



BEILENSON: down and keep in their place, as he felt they were particularly arrogant and out of order in suggesting to him who he [should] put on the committee, he was more than happy, I guess, to keep his friend Bolling happy, and put on somebody whom he thought would be loyal to him. So he appointed me, which I had not asked for. That's how I got on the Rules Committee.

The speaker called me one day at home in the evening. I was home having supper with my wife and children--whatever children were at home still in those days--and picked up the phone; the speaker's on the phone. He says, "Hello, old pal." He says to me. . . . He doesn't know who I am, really. I don't think he could even recognize me then. "Hello, old pal. This is Tip, Tip O'Neill." I said, "Hello, Mr. Speaker. How are you?" He said, "Fine." He said, "I'd like to appoint you to be on the Rules Committee. How would that be, old pal?" I said, "Well, fine, Mr. Speaker. Thank you very much. Of course, I'd like very much to be. Thank you very much, sir," and hung up. He hung up. He said, "Fine." So that's how I got on the Rules Committee.

[Laughter]

YATES: What strikes me about the string of events is that since this was a different way. . . . You know, that the speaker would basically choose the person he wanted to go on there versus the regular route, why did the California [Democratic] delegation take that strategy?

BEILENSON: I don't know. It was foolish of them. Partly because Burton was very much in his heyday, even though he had lost out just barely a couple of years earlier on the majority leadership thing. He was still angling to become speaker someday, and he was a very political animal who was involved with lots of people from lots of different states, but especially here among the California Democratic delegation. I don't think they thought they were that much out of line. I don't think they stopped and thought. They just figured, "We're a big group. We ought to have somebody on the Rules Committee." You could make a pretty good case for that, but I think they would have been far wiser, frankly, not that it ended up making any difference, just writing a nice letter to the speaker saying, "Dear Mr. Speaker, you know

Bernie Sisk is leaving the Rules Committee. We're a big group and we sure hope very much, sir, that you'll put another Californian on to take his place." They could even have said, "And if you do, if you agree with us that it's an important thing to do, we'd like to respectfully suggest that Jerry Patterson would be a good replacement for him." Whatever. Something like that, but they didn't. They wrote what the speaker interpreted to be a relatively arrogant letter. In any case it redounded, in a sense, to my benefit even though I didn't know any of this was going on at the time. [Laughter]

YATES: How did that impact your relationship with the rest of the [Democratic] delegation?

BEILENSON: I don't think it had any impact at all. It didn't bother me that most of my colleagues were voting for Jerry Patterson. He'd been there longer than I and if he wanted to be on it. . . . You know, he had seniority over me. I wasn't asking anybody for any support for it. I was surprised that four or five other members voted for me instead of Jerry Patterson. I don't even remember how my name was. . . . I

think I raised my hand and said, "Forgive me. I didn't know this was happening. I just sort of wandered in here this morning." I didn't always make those breakfasts because they were pretty early. "I just want you to know that I think. . . . I know that Dick Bolling has been talking to the speaker about possibly putting me on. I have no idea if it's going to work, I don't even know if I want it." Whatever. "I just wanted you to know that." So somebody else also nominated me, and five of them plus myself voted for me, and the rest voted for Jerry Patterson. That was fine. That's what happened. They sent off this letter telling the speaker to put Jerry Patterson on. And the speaker said, "The hell with you." He put me on.

YATES: How did you feel about being put on the Rules Committee?

BEILENSON: Well, I did not feel all that great originally. I mean, I loved being a legislator when I was in Sacramento. I mean, I loved carrying legislation and contributing legislation. And the problem with the Rules Committee is that it's a totally different kind of committee from

a policy committee. It does not originate legislation, except the budget act and a few other strange things.

YATES: And my understanding is then you can't serve on another standing committee.

BEILENSON: That's correct. Under the Democratic rules you could not serve on another standing committee. So it meant that I had to not only give up Judiciary and Foreign Affairs, which was all right, although I had enjoyed them, especially Foreign Affairs, but that I couldn't then get on to some more major committee. Actually, the rules are--I think still are with respect to the Democratic Caucus--that there are three so-called exclusive committees. If you're on either Rules or Appropriations or Ways and Means, which are the three big committees, you cannot serve on any other standing committees. So yes, I had to drop my membership in the other two. Those were not great committees, so I wasn't losing out a great deal, but. . . .

As I started to say just now, I enjoy being a legislator. I enjoy going to and participating in and running hearings where you hear testimony from outside people, and so on.

BEILENSON: Rules is not that kind of committee, whereas even Judiciary and Foreign Affairs were. You know, it was kind of fun. You are removed from a major portion of the legislative process. So I wasn't all that happy about it at first, although I thought it was a great coup and a terribly important thing and everybody. . . . The speaker himself said he had been on the Rules Committee years in the past when it was even more important, I think, than it is now. It had more power, in a sense, because it overran the speaker in those days sometimes. It just did what it wanted. But he said he was on the Rules Committee at one point twelve years before he moved up even one seat on it, it was so difficult to get on. So he thought it was a terribly important thing and most people sort of did. Everybody thought it was a real coup for me even though I didn't have a damn thing to do with it.

Just being very personal about it, you asked me how I felt about being on it. I had very mixed feelings because it sort of removed you from the active legislative process and put you in quite a different position. It turns

BEILENSON: out that that didn't. . . . Looking back on it after a few years and since then, it's not bothered me for a couple of interesting reasons. One was that I'd had a lot of opportunity in the fourteen years I was in Sacramento of being a very active legislator and carrying lots of bills and introducing lots of stuff and running a lot of committees. I'm glad I had that experience. It was a wonderful experience. The fact that then after my first two years in the Congress I was doing something else was made more palatable by the fact that I'd had plenty of time to do that kind of thing in earlier years.

But the other interesting aspect of it was that starting very soon thereafter, within my second term on the Rules Committee, we then had Mr. Reagan in office. Almost from then on till now, it's been a much less activist time, which is OK. . . . A much less activist time for the Congress, even if you were someone like myself, who in his earlier, more liberal, more activist years wanted to carry a lot of legislation. The truth of the matter was--looking back--that very little new stuff was done successfully in

BEILENSON: the last fifteen, sixteen years. It was just a different, much less activist time for the Congress. If I had been on some of the committees I would have liked to be on, we would not have been able to have been part of developing much in the way of new programs, spending new moneys, and so on--not that one necessarily wanted to do that--because there has been so much less of that in the last. . . .

The cycle has been quite different. It's going to change again, I think, in the near future. But most of my years in the Congress were down years, or quiet years, or at least less. . . . I'm groping for a word that sort of. . . . Many fewer initiatives were being taken legislatively by the Congress. Nor did we have the money to do in those years what Congress used to in the Great Society times, or in the same times when we were back in the state legislature, which was about the same years as the Great Society in Washington when we were doing a lot of interesting, activist, new stuff. So looking back after a very short time and from this viewpoint right now, too, I realized that I did not miss out on a lot.



BEILENSON:           Meanwhile I grew to enjoy and appreciate my time on Rules and specifically, which we'll get to in a moment or two. . . . The Rules Committee, because it has to wait generally on other committees to produce legislation before we then meet and take up their legislation and send it to the floor with amendments and whatever, is very inactive the first three, four, five months of each year. It waits for the other committees to do their work and to report their bills to the Rules Committee, which we then send to the floor for final passage. That's what got me to ask the speaker, Tip O'Neill, if I could not then serve perhaps on the Intelligence Committee, later on the Budget Committee, to give me something to do the first few months of each year, because I always found myself as a member of the Rules Committee sitting around with absolutely nothing to do, and in a position where I couldn't make any contributions at all to the work of the House. I wanted very much to contribute if I possibly could, seeing among other things--from the vantage of the Rules Committee--that not nearly enough members were

actively involved in legislative work. That is how I first got on the Intelligence Committee. Mainly because. . . . I didn't have any particular interest in that, although it was an interesting subject matter, obviously, but because I wanted to do something instead of sitting around twiddling my thumbs the first four or five months of each year.

YATES: And then you must be very busy though. Right? Once you have . . .

BEILENSON: Once committees start reporting legislation you get to be busy. Not necessarily very busy, but pretty busy. You get very busy toward the end of the year when too much stuff comes out all of a sudden. A lot of stuff has been held in committee that gets popped out toward the end, which is not, of course, the best way of legislating. It never gets hugely busy except for two or three or four weeks of work at various times toward the end of the year, when you're meeting most days.

YATES: During the time you served on the Rules Committee, what would you say . . .

BEILENSON: Eighteen years.

YATES: Yeah, that's quite some time. This is a

summary question, but what would you say were the key issues that you had to deal with?

BEILENSEN: That's a perfectly legitimate question, but the answer to it is that we dealt with every major issue. That was what was fun about it. We dealt with every major issue which came before the Congress in those eighteen years. Early on it was the energy bill, which was during Mr. Carter's time, and a lot of big environmental bills. You know, some of the Alaska lands bills and I don't even begin. . . . All of the tax bills. Every time there was a major tax bill. . . . I mean, everything came to us. All of the big [William P.] Gramm-[Delbert L.] Latta stuff, the budget reconciliation bills, you know, and the budget cutting bills, and the tax cutting bills once Mr. Reagan was. . . . All the 1981 legislation from the Reagan administration came through, and subsequent to that time, all the things that were trying to put Humpty-Dumpty back together again a little bit after the major damage that had been done in 1981.

I don't mean to try to evade your question, but everything. . . . It's hard for me to point

BEILENSON: out anything, but everything. . . . Some years were more interesting than others, but every single year all of the major pieces of legislation, every single one of them, came through the Rules Committee. Most of them proved to be very interesting and very important, and very. . . . Well, interesting times for us. We would sit there for sometimes a day or two at a time listening to anywhere from four or five to as many as sixty or seventy or a hundred different members of the House, because the people who testified before us were House members--not outside people--originally from the committees that reported the bill, but also from other committees who came to us to seek permission to offer amendments on the floor and so on.

We became the point at which. . . . The difficult decisions concerning in what form the tax bill, or whatever the bill might be, appropriations bills, budget bills--budget bills each year became huge matters of contention--would go before the Rules Committee. We decided which alternative budgets would be allowed to be presented on the

floor. We gave the Republicans a budget and we gave the gold standard Republicans like [William E.] Bill Dannemeyer . . .

[End Tape 9, Side B]

[Begin Tape 10, Side A]

BEILENSON: Every year, all of the most important, all of the most contentious legislation came before us. So we had a part to play. Not an originating part--we weren't on the committee which wrote the legislation--but we played a very important role in deciding, with, obviously, a lot of direction from the speaker, although we ended up in many instances making up our minds ourselves if the speaker didn't send any specific instructions, which he often did not.

Actually Tip O'Neill, when he was speaker, asked much less of us than someone, for example, like Jim Wright did later on, who kept his fingers in the pies to a much greater extent than Tip O'Neill did. We made a lot of very major decisions as to what we thought should be allowed to be brought up on the floor based on our understanding of what was necessary to get a bill passed. We couldn't

BEILENSON: deny certain people and certain groups the opportunity to bring their point of view or their slant on a particular issue before the floor, because we wouldn't get approval for the rule or for the overall legislation if they weren't given a chance to do so. We played a very important role in keeping the House together and enabling legislation to get passed.

What's fun about the Rules Committee is, first of all, you get to meet and to know and to hear from huge numbers of members of the House, as I mentioned earlier on in passing. For some of the bills tens, dozens, of members would come up and ask for an amendment which they had concocted to be allowed to be made in order, and so on. We got to meet and hear from all kinds of members of the House who you otherwise never would have come to know or know anything about.

On top of which, of course, you had a very deep understanding, very complex understanding--more than you needed really--of what was involved in each of the pieces of legislation which came before you on the floor.

BEILENSON: A lot of other members would then come to you and ask your opinion about the bill and about amendments which were made in order, because you had already heard in the Rules Committee a lot of testimony from the members, and you understood the issues and you understood what the problems were. Most members had a complex or a deep understanding only of the bills and pieces of legislation which came from committees on which they served, because they had been involved in it, but then there were sixteen other committees out there reporting legislation that they had to vote on, on the floor. Even though you get lots of information from the Democratic Caucus, from other different groups, about what is in the bills and what the bones of contention are and the different issues are, nonetheless you often don't pick up on what the real issues are unless you've actually listened to and talked to the members who are involved.

You felt that you were very much a part of the workings of the House and had a very deep and complete understanding of what was going on and what was not going on, which I think was

true. That, to a great extent, made up for not being on policy committees and, as I said, made up for even more by the fact that you realized as time went on that the policy committees were very limited in what they could be churning out, which you could have been contributing to if you served on them instead of on the Rules Committee.

YATES: Now, you became chair of the Rules Task Force on the Budget Process in 1984.

BEILENSON: Yeah, I was chairman of. . . . Dick Bolling was chairman of the committee. He thought well of me and we were close friends, and we were given. . . . Because the Rules Committee, back in 1974 I guess it was--Bolling himself had been heavily involved in the process--had written the original [Congressional] Budget Act [of 1974], which Congress now operates under, we had always retained jurisdiction, original jurisdiction, over the Budget Act. It remained mainly in the Rules Committee, and also partially in a couple of other committees. So anytime there were to be changes to be made in the Budget Act, those would be reported by the Rules Committee as the committee of original



BEILENSON: jurisdiction. Because there was always and continues to be criticism of the budget process--and there was a lot of it at that particular time, because we were beginning to run large deficits, even though they got even larger thereafter--the chairman, Mr. Bolling, in response to pressure from the speaker and from others, and from the caucus, and because of his own desires, wanted the Rules Committee to take a look at the existing budget process and procedures, and see if we couldn't make them better and strengthen them, make them more effective, efficient, and rational in some respects. He asked me, as someone he had confidence in, to chair that task force. We ran a very interesting series of hearings and seminars for I guess close to two years, in which we heard from a lot of outside witnesses. I mean, mainly people inside the [Capital] Beltway, although there were some academics around the country who cared about the budget process, and a lot of local people who watch carefully from the Heritage Foundation and from Brookings Institution and places like that, and other budget-oriented places, who had feelings

about how the Budget Act ought to be amended.

We made, at the end of our couple of years' time, some proposals to change the budget process, some of which were adopted. Some of the more important ones were not adopted unfortunately, but it was a very interesting process for me to be sort of immersed in the whole budget process, because. . . . Among other things, for me it was fun because it put me in very much the same kind of position--just a very personal response to it--as when I was in the old days back in California on a committee of jurisdiction, original jurisdiction, where we were actually taking testimony and making proposals as to specific changes in law, which I loved doing and which we hadn't had a chance to do generally on the Rules Committee. It kept me busy for a couple of years.

YATES: [Laughter] I can imagine.

You mentioned just a little while ago about getting onto the Intelligence Committee, which I have down also as 1984. I don't know if you want to expand anymore on how you actually got on. You just said that you went to Tip

O'Neill . . .

BEILENSON: I went to Tip O'Neill about a year or so earlier, realizing that I didn't. . . . I thought that for someone who had been an active and I thought useful member--especially of the state legislature--for years, that I wasn't being taking advantage of, if I may say so immodestly. I mean, I am a hardworking and interested person and I was willing--which a lot of members aren't, some are--to put in more time on legislative matters, so I went to him and I said, "I love being on the Rules Committee and serving you on that committee, Mr. Speaker, but. . . ." I explained to him how I had literally nothing to do for the first three, four, or five months of each session, and would like very much to be kept busy. I'd like him to consider putting me on the Intelligence Committee, because that was another committee which he made the appointments to. It was a select committee. It was called the Select Permanent Committee on Intelligence.

YATES: Right.

BEILENSON: Why it's that, I don't know, but it was by his

appointment. So I pestered him about it for a while and. . . . He was fond of me by then and knew me pretty well and so on. He knew I was a hardworking and useful person to have around, and a Democratic loyalist, generally speaking. You know, somebody who wouldn't cause him problems, certainly. Eventually, after one opening went by and he did not appoint me to it and I reminded him of having spoken to him, he said, "Well, the next time there is one I'll put you on it." There was an opportunity in '83 or '84, whatever it was. You just gave the date and I forgot it.

YATES: It's '84.

BEILENSEN: 'Eighty-four. So he put me on at that time.

YATES: What would you say was the most difficult issue you had to deal with when you were on the Intelligence Committee?

BEILENSEN: Well, there's not a lot I can tell you about the Intelligence Committee because both then and now I don't speak of it, to a large extent. But the big, obvious issue, and the difficult one for all of us for a period of time there, was the question of the undercover covert war in Nicaragua, and the aid to the Contras as

against the Sandinistas. Especially, of course, with Mr. Reagan--of course he was already president by then--and the efforts that his administration was making to fund that effort.

The other two. . . . The big covert. . . . There are two kinds of activities really that. . . . We'll talk a little bit more about the Intelligence Committee, because it's very interesting.

YATES: Yeah.

BEILENSEN: And I can talk about it.

YATES: Well, I know there's. . . . I assumed you couldn't talk about a lot of things in great depth, but . . .

BEILENSEN: There are things that one could talk about which people want to know about anyway.

The things the people hear, that the public hears about, or tends to hear about, or at least did in those days, were the covert operations. There were three major ones and they were well-known, even though they weren't all admitted at the time. But they were well-known. They were the Nicaragua involvement down there; the one in Afghanistan, which

BEILENSEN: started in reaction to the Soviet invasion, the date of which also escapes me--it was probably back in '79, I think, when they started--and the long ongoing one in Angola, which was a foolish one, I think.

Your question was what were the most difficult issues we had to deal with, and they were those where there was a minority of us on the Intelligence Committee. . . . There was a majority of us Democrats, but the Republicans usually stood together on it and they usually picked up two or three or four of the Democrats to be supportive of continuing our involvement in these three major undertakings.

I think it's fair to say, and I think it's proper to say, that there was divided opinion that was carried by the Republicans, plus a few Democrats, in favor of continuing aid generally to the Nicaraguan Contras and to the Savimbi forces--whoever we were supporting in those days--in Angola. I think all of us were pretty much united on being helpful to the opposition in Afghanistan, because it was up against the Soviets directly and at least it made some sense at the time, although many of us had some

BEILENSON: real problems and qualms at the time about the people we were supporting. Those concerns have turned out to be very true. We've long since left Afghanistan, but the place is still a disaster, unfortunately, and I'm afraid that we. . . . It wasn't primarily our responsibility. It was the Soviets who were at fault, but nonetheless our response was undertaken in such a way that we strengthened to a greater extent than we should have, I think. . . . I think we should have realized at the time that some very basic Islamic fundamentalist forces have been responsible ever since for keeping the place in really quite sad shape. Those were the big, difficult issues.

Now, at the same time one ought to know and understand and one can say this: that the undercover, covert operations, such as the three major ones I just mentioned--those are the only ones I'll mention specifically--are in fact a very small fraction, or the cost of them, the resources involved in them, is a very small fraction of the overall amount of money which the United States spends each year on

BEILENSEN: intelligence-related activities. First of all, they're all undertaken by the CIA [Central Intelligence Agency]. The CIA itself receives only a modest-sized fraction of the overall intelligence budget, which has been estimated in the newspapers as being between \$28 and \$30 billion a year. I'm not sure what it is these days and I wouldn't say if. . . . I think we're not supposed to say, still, even if it's a public figure, but the Russians always knew and just the American public didn't know. But let's say it's between \$28 and \$30 billion. Only a modest amount of that total amount goes to the CIA, and only a small amount of what goes to the CIA goes to the covert operations. The rest goes to just run the CIA and its thousands of historians, geopoliticians, economists, and everybody else, analysts and so on. A lot goes to the other agencies and a great amount goes to the defense intelligence agencies. They run their own intelligence operations, which mainly have to do with providing information to the armed forces in times of conflict, which is a very understandable and necessary component part of



intelligence operations.

The major part of our work, but the less difficult part, was authorizing and appropriating funds, which was the responsibility of our committee for all of these other intelligence activities of the federal government, these billions of dollars worth of activities. It was mainly a budget function kind of thing, where we would go over all the programs of the intelligence agencies, all the different intelligence agencies including the defense intelligence agencies, and decide how much money ought to be spent each year for those things, as well as the continual fights over whether or not we should continue or should cut back or increase the amounts for these three big then covert operations.

YATES: How did your experience serving on the Intelligence Committee shape your views about all these types of activities, or even talking about intelligence? That's very broad, but you learned a lot obviously.

BEILENSON: Yeah, but what you also learn is, I think, you learn a lot of specific things and I suppose it

BEILENSEN: changes your point of view a little bit on various things, but it doesn't change your overall point of view as to the usefulness or good sense, or lack of it, of being involved in this activity or the other activity, or whatever. I mean, my point of view on intelligence things ended up being very much my point of view--after I learned more, being on the committee and being chairman of the committee--as it did on defense matters. I basically believe that although we were quite correct basically in every respect in standing up. . . . We had no choice but to stand up to the Soviet challenge, however one wanted to interpret it, but I felt there in the intelligence area, after I learned my way around, even as I did in the defense area, that we were overresponding in the sense that we were wasting resources. That's a strong way of putting it, but, you know, spending more than we needed to, than made sense, in all of these areas, as I felt all along during the cold war.

We had this great ironic situation where those of us who were supportive of lower levels of defense and intelligence spending, and

BEILENSON: therefore, compared to the more conservative members of Congress, let's say, in effect had far more faith in our own country and lack of faith in what the Soviets were ever going to be able to accomplish than the so-called patriotic or conservative people, who thought we had to spend all our money to defeat the Soviets. . . . I was never worried about defeating the Soviets. I mean, I didn't think they had a chance from the beginning. I felt far more confident about our own ability to outlast them and to outperform them, as it turns out to have happened--and some of my colleagues agreed obviously--than some of these folks who wanted to throw money hand over fist into this effort.

I don't argue the matter too much. I think we overresponded, but we won and the Soviets aren't there anymore, and that's fine. And if we spent more money than we should have, I'm sorry. We could have used those resources for other things, or we could have kept taxes lower, or whatever it might have been, or kept the deficits down. I'm sorry we didn't, but it's over and done with. But being on the

inside, to a certain extent, in the intelligence area, did not change my feelings about any of this at all.

YATES: OK.

[Interruption]

You were going to finish up talking about the Intelligence Committee.

BEILENSON: There's one general thing I would like to add if I might. There are perfectly valid reasons for people being upset now and then with some of the--especially covert--activities that the government undertakes. People have been angry about that at various times and quite properly so. But, I think it's important for people to understand that the system of legislative oversight of intelligence activities that we have in this country is really quite extraordinary and quite unique. That's redundant, I guess. By statute, the intelligence community, basically the head or the director of the CIA, who is not only head of the CIA but is sort of the lead person of the entire intelligence community, is required. . . . The intelligence community is required to divulge to the members of the

BEILENSON: Senate and the House of Representatives who sit on the intelligence committees of the respective houses all of the major things that are going on, all of the substantive activities that are being undertaken by any of the intelligence agencies. They are also required by law to notify us of any upcoming activity which is intended to be taken up in the near future. That's quite unlike other democracies.

On a couple of occasions, for example, while I served as chairman of the Intelligence Committee, I had the opportunity to act as host to visiting members of legislatures from other countries. On one occasion, I recall, from Great Britain, members of the intelligence committee of the Parliament. Another time a group of parliamentarians from the intelligence oversight committee of the Canadian Parliament who were down visiting in Washington and we were sort of showing them around and so on. They were astonished. It's unbelievable, but they do not know. . . . They have parliamentary forms of government, of course, and we have quite a different form of government. But they basically. . . . They simply ratify whatever it

is that the minister of defense or the minister of intelligence submits in the way of budgets. In fact, I think it was the British who had no idea. . . . The British members of Parliament who voted the appropriations for their intelligence community did not know the amount of money they were appropriating.

YATES: That is surprising.

BEILENSON: Nor. . . . I mean, the only person who knew was the minister, who is also of course a member of Parliament and I guess served as chairman of their committee as well. I'm not sure I'm right about that. They also couldn't believe that we were told secrets. They said, "You know the secrets? You know what the intelligence community is doing?" They were astounded that we knew. We are required to be told. I don't know of any other country in the world where the legislative overseers are required by law and almost without exception have, in fact, been let in on what it is that the intelligence community was doing.

The only real exception was this whole Iran-Contra thing, and when William [J.] Casey served as director of the CIA he clearly did

BEILENSON: not desire to share information with the members of the committee. It was kind of apparent at the time that there was not an awful lot, I guess, we could do about it, or that the then chairman could do about it.

I had the great good fortune that during the two years in which I served as chairman and was basically responsible for ensuring that my fellow committee members were kept up to date on things, that at that time the director of Central Intelligence was the former federal judge William [H.] Webster, who had just come from serving as the head of the FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation], director of the FBI actually. As I said, he was a former federal judge. He believes, believed then, still believes very strongly, in the rule of law, and was just very insistent on telling us things which some of his colleagues at the CIA didn't really want him to share with us. He just thought it was required by law, as it clearly was. He divulged to us an enormous number of sensitive things.

In fact, I took. . . . I started. . . . This doesn't have much to do with what we're

BEILENSON: talking about, perhaps, but I thought it might be of interest in general. My ranking Republican member, the senior Republican member on the committee with me--we had a Democratic majority at the time, obviously--was Henry [J.] Hyde, who is now, much later, Republican chairman of the Judiciary Committee. I started meeting with Director Webster, just with Mr. Hyde and with myself, and he would tell us things and we would then. . . . I would basically decide that some of these things should not be told to the other members of the committee because they were so sensitive, and because I thought there was no real need to tell them. They were required to be informed of any major intelligence undertaking that we were about to undertake or were already involved in, and I didn't prevent any information from getting to them on that. But when he talked to us about specific names or specific problems which I didn't think it was necessary for us to know, then I would stop him from telling us. Not that I was denying Henry Hyde and myself anything that we should know. We got everything we should know, but there



were some specific things that got down to individual levels which I didn't think were necessary to divulge to us, and certainly not to other members of the committee. We kept him from doing it.

Despite the fact that we make some mistakes now and then--everybody does, every government does--Americans should know that we have a system here of oversight of intelligence activities that's quite different. It goes far beyond that of any other democracy in the world, which I find a very comforting thing.

YATES: That is, because of course you deal with the reality that you live with, or whatever, and as Americans I think sometimes people feel like they don't know enough. So it's interesting to hear that . . .

BEILENSON: Yeah, and it doesn't mean that you can successfully control these things. We were not. . . . The minority of us on the committee were unable for a good many years--although later we succeeded--in cutting off funds for the Contras, for example, in Nicaragua, or in keeping the CIA within the president's orders. The CIA only acts when the president orders

them to act. That's the other thing that people always get mixed up with. "The CIA is a rogue elephant." The truth of the matter is, the CIA does nothing unless the president signs a finding, a written finding, which orders them to, let's say, undertake to try to get rid of Saddam Hussein, which is not what they're involved in, I think, at the moment but I don't know. They won't do it unless they are told by the president, so don't. . . . You know, people should know. . . . Don't get mad at the CIA if they do something stupid or foolish or counterproductive. Whoever was president when they started doing this is the one who is responsible, and he is obviously accountable because he is an elected official. But it's an interesting subject and one where, I think, we deserve more credit--I don't mean I, I mean the country in the way that it has set this up--than it is ordinarily given.

YATES: Well, let me ask you about the other major committee you were on, which was the Budget Committee. That was 1990. I know you were also involved in a task force related to the Budget Committee.

BEILENSEN: The reason--let me just interrupt here--that I got on the Budget Committee is the same reason I got on the Intelligence Committee. After six years, you automatically get rotated off the Intelligence Committee. I was allowed to stay on for a seventh year, because I was in the middle of my chairmanship. I spent two years as chairman and then I got off of that. Then I again had nothing to do, you know, and I went to the speaker, who I guess then was Jim Wright. I'm trying to remember. Anyway. . . . No, I guess. . . . I'm sorry. I think at that point the Rules Committee had an appointment, as it were, to the Budget Committee, and I think I was there as a representative of the Rules Committee.

YATES: OK.

BEILENSEN: The Appropriations Committee got somebody on it [the Budget Committee] and somebody else did too. Ways and Means, I guess. I went to the chairman and I said, "You know, now that I'm off the Intelligence Committee I've got nothing to do the first four or five months of each year again, and I'd like to be kept busy." So this is why I went onto the Budget Committee.

Oh, I had a big background, some background, as we discussed earlier by having been on that task force for review and changing of the budget procedures that Chairman Bolling had assigned me to several years earlier.

YATES: Wait, so explain to me what the Budget Committee does.

BEILENSON: The Budget Committee sounds more important than it is. The Budget Committee basically, at the beginning of each year, prepares a budget resolution--it's also being done, of course, over in the Senate and eventually you've got to reconcile the two, the same as you do with any piece of legislation or any joint legislative effort--which sets the parameters of spending and taxes for the coming fiscal year. It does not get down to very specific matters. It'll say, "Defense spending should be no more than \$265 billion, and spending on domestic activities should be such and such a hundred billion dollars." But it does not, or is supposed not to. . . . Sometimes it tries to and sometimes it succeeds in getting down to the specifics and in effect forcing the appropriations committees, who are very careful

BEILENSON: about protecting their own turf, where to spend the money. In other words, you can tell the defense appropriations committee, "You have \$265 billion," or that is what the budget resolution will say that year after it's finally adopted and reconciled with the Senate. Say we end with \$265 billion for defense. It's then left to the defense appropriations subcommittees in the Senate and the House to decide how to spend that \$265 billion, but they're limited to that \$265 billion, because in our overall budget resolution we've decided we will be spending X. . . . I mean, how many billions of dollars all told. Certain amounts will go for defense, certain amounts will go for this, certain amounts will go for international affairs, and so on. So we set the overall outer limits and parameters, but the specific spending and how it's divided up for various programs within those areas is left to the specific spending committees, appropriations committees, if you understand.

But the good thing about it is that for the first time since the budget process was organized back in 1974, you know in general if

BEILENSEN: there's some. . . . You know, you can waive some of the Budget Act and spend a little more money in case of an emergency, like our earthquake. That was money outside the budget process. But at the beginning of the year you know that if the Rules Committee enforces the limits of the budget resolution, which we've been very good about doing the last several years, that X amount of money will be spent and not more, and that taxes will be more or less. . . . You never can guess exactly what taxes will be because sometimes, as in the last couple of years, we've taken a lot more in than we expected to, but we put some parameters on what the Ways and Means Committee can do. It can't cut taxes this year or whatever unless it makes up the money somewhere else by raising some other taxes. Whereas prior to 1974, you didn't know till the end of the year how much. . . . You know, you spend certain amounts of money and certain amounts came in and you totaled up at the end of the year and, "Oh my gosh, we're \$100 million, \$100 billion in debt." Now at least we know we're going to be \$100 billion in debt. We make that conscious

choice and we can start bringing down the deficit, as in fact we succeeded in doing the past three or four or five years, because we have the ability through a budget resolution passed and approved by both houses of Congress at the beginning of the year to set limits on how much spending we're going to do in various areas.

Overall it's been a very beneficial process. It's very complicated. We have the authorization process and we have the appropriations process, then we have the budget process. Especially for an outsider it's very complicated, and for insiders it's complicated too. It's not necessary to understand it completely. It's not a terribly rational or efficient kind of system, but in fact it has worked. It has forced our hand. It has forced us to cut back in spending, it has forced us-- Congress, that is, when I was a member of it-- to make some difficult choices, and it's been a good thing that we had it in place, otherwise we wouldn't have gotten the deficits down the way we have in the last few years.

YATES: One thing that struck me when I was reading the

materials that I did find in your papers was that--and obviously it's very complicated and hard to understand--but that on several occasions, whether they were articles, somebody was interviewing you, or whatever, talking about the budget process and the way the money is allocated, that the average person or the public doesn't really understand how the budget is divided up.

BEILENSEN: Yes, that's true. But the public has never understood and there's no reason in the world why they would. I mean, you know. . . .

YATES: Well, my question is, why do you think people don't really understand how the budget--not the process necessarily, how it works--but how the budget really is laid out?

BEILENSEN: Because unless you're interested enough, and it's not a terribly interesting-looking kind of thing. . . . Unless you look at those little pie charts that are published once a year at the time the budget is submitted or passed, and divided up--there's 22 percent for defense, 28 percent for Social Security--and whatever. . . . I mean, what citizen bothers to see this? You don't think in those terms. I don't blame



BEILENSEN: people for not knowing. What the result is, of course, is that people, because of political propaganda from various sides and whatever, misunderstand where the money is being spent.

People think for example--this is an obvious thing--that a lot of money is spent. . . . People almost think that there's a specific allocation in the budget for waste, fraud, and abuse. People keep saying, "Cut the budget. Get rid of the waste, fraud, and abuse." What that means, if you want to cut the budget and bring it down, you obviously have to cut spending in some area. You've got to cut defense spending or cut spending for national parks or for the FBI or for foreign aid or for welfare, or whatever. Now, there's no such thing as waste, fraud, and abuse. There is waste and fraud in various areas. Not only welfare, but also in the Defense Department and everywhere else I suppose as well.

People think, for example. . . . People hate foreign aid. I don't blame them. We've got unmet problems here at home and who wants to start sending money overseas. But people

BEILENSON: think. . . . The average American, if you ask them, if they just take a guess--and how would they know any different? I mean, it's not their fault--think we spend 10 or 15 percent of our money, of our budget, on foreign aid. Well, the real figure is about two-thirds of 1 percent. People think, "Wow. That's all?"

If you ask people, just ask them right out without their knowing anything, "How much should we spend for foreign aid?" The average person says, "Well, 5 percent is pretty reasonable." Well, we spend less than 1 percent, but everybody thinks we spend too much on foreign aid. They don't know how much we spend. And they don't know that almost all the money we spend on foreign aid is actually money that's spent here in this country. You know, if we send weapons overseas we buy them at Boeing [Company], we create jobs in Washington State, or wherever, or Lockheed [Corporation], or whatever it might be. Or we send farm aid, we send food overseas to starving people. The money is spent here with farmers in the Midwest to buy grain from them to ship overseas to people in Ethiopia or Somalia, or wherever it

might be. It's not just shipped. . . . Money isn't shipped overseas. We spend it here, most of it. Eighty-five percent of our foreign aid money is spent creating, in effect, and underwriting, subsidizing, American jobs. Nobody knows that. It's not their fault that they don't know it. They just hear Republicans and others complaining about foreign aid. We're spending too much. . . .

People think that we're spending 15 or 20 percent of our money on welfare. The federal government spends 1 percent of its funding on welfare. The Aid to Families with Dependent Children is 1 percent of the federal budget. It's a lot of money at \$17, \$18 billion a year. It's only 1 percent, but most people think, "Ah, we're probably spending 15 or 20 percent of our money on welfare."

YATES: So why do people's misconceptions continue?

BEILENSON: Because. . . . I don't know. How could you. . . . I suppose the president could educate people if he kept repeating it over and over again. The big money is being spent, obviously, and there's a reason for it, for the deficits having gone on for so long. . . . Once

BEILENSON: we stopped the defense buildup partway through Mr. Reagan's second term, the big money is being spent on programs which people like: mainly Social Security and Medicare, and Medicaid for poorer people and so on. As you know, an increasingly large percentage of all federal spending goes into those so-called entitlement programs, where the money is automatically spent if people are of a certain age, or get sick or whatever. It's mostly for the elderly. That money is just automatically spent, and because it is politically difficult for us to cut back. . . . Not to cut the spending, but to slow the rate of growth of spending in those big, so-called entitlement programs, we leave them alone and the deficit keeps growing.

We keep hacking away at now defense, but also welfare or parks. We couldn't get enough money for any of the parks. But that's chicken feed compared to what these other things cost. Fortunately now, both the president and the Republicans seem to be serious about revamping Social Security, maybe Medicare, over the next two or three or four years. I hope very much

they do it, because that's the secret of whether or not you can keep the federal budget in control. You can cut out all this domestic discretionary spending, so-called, and you'd only touch a very small fraction--7, 8 percent--of all federal spending.

YATES: On this Budget Committee, I saw one of the task forces that you were involved in was also called the [Task Force on the] Budget Process. Does that sound correct?

BEILENSEN: Yeah, but I don't remember very much about it.

YATES: I guess I'm wondering what . . .

BEILENSEN: I guess I was chairman of a subcommittee on budget process . . .

YATES: OK. I'm wondering what . . .

BEILENSEN: . . . which doesn't mean very much. We were divided into subcommittees. The subcommittees almost never met, nor did they have any direct legislative jurisdiction. It was back in the Rules Committee again, which I also served on.

YATES: Right. I'm trying to understand what is the difference between Budget Process . . .

BEILENSEN: There's no real difference.

YATES: OK.

BEILENSEN: It's just that it was the name when I was on

BEILENSON: the Budget Committee of the subcommittee of which I was chairman, which as I said hardly ever met, because there was nothing really for us to do, except a little bit. We took some testimonies throughout the year. Just again for a very personal thing. . . . As I said some minutes ago, one of the main reasons, aside from being interested in the subject matter, was that I wanted something to do. Once I was off the Intelligence Committee I didn't have anything to do the first part of the year, being on the Rules Committee. The interesting thing about the Budget Committee is that it does almost all of its work in the first three or four months of the year, and then virtually ceases to exist. Once it has reported and passed this budget resolution, which then sort of commands or assesses the parameters--as we said earlier--for all the work of the other committees, especially appropriation committees, for the rest of the year the Budget Committee stops meeting. It has done its job. So then, in effect, for me personally, I could come back home to the Rules Committee from the Budget Committee--the Budget Committee having

completed its work--and start picking up the work on the Rules Committee, which later in April, May, June, and thereafter, started getting busy when other committees started reporting their bills, including the appropriations bills from the thirteen appropriations subcommittees.

YATES: Were there any other committees you wanted to comment on?

BEILENSEN: Those were the only ones I was on.

YATES: You're sort of hitting the broad areas on those.

BEILENSEN: Those were the only three I was on. Basically, I was a member of the Rules Committee for eighteen years and as such not. . . . As we said earlier, the rules prevented me from being on any other standing policy committees. Fortunately I had the chance of spending six years, seven years each on Budget and Intelligence Committees, because they were select committees and not so-called standing committees. It was good for me. It was fun for me, kept me busy, gave me some broader fields to get involved in, both of which were important and interesting, and made my years of

service in the House of Representatives a good deal more interesting and varied than they otherwise would have been if I had been simply just on the Rules Committee.

YATES: I want to return to elections because, obviously, elections are going on over . . .

BEILENSON: Every two years.

YATES: . . . this time frame. In particular I wanted to ask you about the 1982 election. How did the Twenty-third Congressional District change after reapportionment?

BEILENSON: Again, it's a little embarrassing to not have all of these facts at the tip of my mind, if that's the proper kind of way to put it. When we started out, when I first ran in Tom Rees's old district in 1977, it was a relatively safe on-paper and in reality Democratic district, which as we discussed earlier didn't take an awful lot of effort or money for a Democrat to win. Once you got past the primary you're in pretty good shape.

The reapportionment of 1981, which of course was what we were running under when I ran for election in 1982, changed a good many congressional districts in California fairly



BEILENSON: radically. Ours less than some, but ours was changed to a fairly decent extent too. Phil Burton, our old friend, was in charge of reapportionment, at least in California. That is, the congressional reapportionment. It had to be passed, actually, by the state legislature, but they more or less said to us Democrats in Congress from California, "Give us your proposed districts and we'll put them in our bill and pass them as such." They were interested in their own districts and preserving their own seats in the state legislature, and they left the congressional ones more or less up to us, so Phil did it. With everyone's agreement, he tried to reapportion in such a way that we could pick up an extra two or three or four Democratic seats. You know, increase our advantage over the Republicans. We also, and I do not recall, but I think we picked up a couple of additional seats for the state after the census. I don't remember how many. Maybe it was two or three. Maybe it was four.

In any case we, through him, tried to create some additional seats. I went to him at

BEILENSON: the beginning of the year and said, "I have an awfully good district and there's no reason why you can't use parts of my district and put it into other districts so we can try to create some other additional Democratic districts in and around the vicinity.

Specifically they were trying to create districts, as I recall, for Howard Berman, who was a very close associate especially of Phil Burton, and for [Meldon E.] Levine. Both of them were good friends of mine. I mean, not close friends, but good friends and both of them were excellent people, turned out to be excellent members of the Congress. So that was done. It's not important anymore. It's been so long ago. I did not approve or like the way that it was done in the sense that they cut portions of my district which I didn't think they needed to, and without asking me about it, or without letting me know exactly how they proposed to do it. I think they dissembled a little bit in terms of. . . . All of this was kind of done in secret, which is kind of the way you had to do it, otherwise everybody would be complaining all the time about the things.

BEILENSON: I thought they went about it a little unfairly, although I was very supportive of what they were trying to do. It ended up being all right, but my district. . . . The long and the short of it is that the district that I was left with to run in, which as I recall was about 60 percent the same as the old district but 40 percent new, at least at the outset on paper looked as if it would be a problem. I mean, not a serious problem. I had a lot of confidence in myself, one of the reasons being that over the years I had made a lot of friends among Republicans, because I'm a less partisan acting or seeming or thinking kind of politician than many others, and I didn't scare Republicans. They didn't worry about me, a lot of them liked me, and voted for me. But it was a much less Democratic, much smaller Democratic majority than the old district was. I lost a lot of portions of the west side of town, here on this side--Westwood area and so on--that I had had for many years, and picked up a lot of additional areas in the Valley, which were much less Democratic and some of them were quite Republican.

So we were a little concerned and we worked very hard in the elections of '82, put on a strong campaign, and luckily it was the off year in which Mr. Reagan. . . . It was the difficult year for the Republicans. Mr. Reagan, of course, had won easily in 1980. Nineteen eighty-two was a good year for Democrats, because of some of the excesses--perceived excesses at least--of the Reagan administration, and the Democrats picked up twenty-six or twenty-seven seats that year. I ended up winning with 60 percent of the vote as I recall. It was a very strong showing for us.

I was never myself that worried about it, but my partisans, my colleagues were. We worked hard, we raised a modest amount of money--I don't remember how much--and we put on a decent campaign and won relatively easily, and for the next several years, next five elections or so, four or five elections, won reelection fairly comfortably, although it was not nearly so comfortable or easy a seat as the old one had been.

YATES: Did you do anything different in your campaigning strategy in that particular

election?

BEILENSEN: Nothing with respect to strategy. I've always been the same kind of person. I've always said the same thing in all parts of the district-- you know, in one part of the district as you say in the other, even though some are much more conservative areas than others--and I'm just me. What we did do was work a good deal harder. We raised more money, although I don't recall now how much money we were spending in those days. It may have been a couple of hundred, \$150,000, \$200,000, which doesn't sound like a lot but was a lot more than we had been used to spending and raising.

I had a hard time raising money. One, because I'm not very good at it. Many of us are not, but I'm particularly not good. The other reason was that I never accepted, while I was in Congress, special interest money. You know, money from PACs or lobbyists, which makes it difficult to raise money even though, to be entirely fair about it, I represented quite a wealthy district or well-off district compared to everybody else's district, so that we had a larger pool of affluent people from whom to ask

BEILENSON: help than most people do who represent downtown areas or inner city areas certainly or even some suburban areas elsewhere in the country or in the state. But I just. . . . In terms of strategy, no, except that we just raised more money and sent out more mailings. That's the only way we could really. . . . As I think we talked about some months ago in the earlier parts of our conversations, in a big urban-suburban area such as this where radio and especially television is prohibitive and wasteful, because it goes to so many people that don't even live in your district, the only productive. . . . I think the most productive use of money is to send mail to people who are actually registered voters in your own district. Even if they throw it away, most of them, at least those who glance at it, will be registered voters in your district. You won't have wasted your money entirely.

So we just spent more than we used to, did more mailings than we used to, did more precinct work than we used to, and ran a bigger headquarters than we used to, maybe more phone calls than we used to. In that sense only.

Was the strategy any different? We just put on a bigger campaign. Compared to what we did later in the next reapportionment, that paled in comparison, as the earlier one paled in comparison.

YATES: I think it's the 1986 election, and that was George Woolverton who was the Republican opponent, I believe . . .

BEILENSEN: Who has supported me in recent years, incidently.

YATES: Oh, has he? I know he was originally a Democrat I believe, and then . . .

BEILENSEN: Yeah, I think he's a pretty moderate guy.

YATES: If I've got the right guy.

BEILENSEN: I think so.

YATES: But what struck me was I think that was one of the years you were listed as an endangered Democrat, and that the GOP was . . .

BEILENSEN: I know.

YATES: And I'm wondering, how true was that?

BEILENSEN: You know, I was of two minds about this whole thing. On the one hand it offended me that anybody ever thought that I wasn't going to be just fine. I got the reputation mainly, I guess, because we didn't raise a lot of money,

BEILENSON: but we didn't really need to either. But not that I didn't enjoy campaigns, I wasn't very good at it. The truth of the matter is that although we didn't raise a lot of money usually until very recent years, compared to colleagues of mine, in fact I enjoyed and worked harder at real campaigning than most of my colleagues. Most of my colleagues raised huge amounts of money and just spent it all with consultants and everything, but we actually. . . . I actually went out, I had town hall meetings, I had coffee hours. Dozens and dozens of coffee hours. Even after I was an incumbent we went door-to-door. I loved being with people and talking to people and arguing and talking issues with people. I loved the challenge of a campaign.

I liked the idea that people thought I was endangered. I didn't try to talk them out of it, because people felt sorry for me and worried about me, and it was easier in sending requests for money to my individual contributors all around in our district to say, "Look, again this year I'm one of the ten targeted people from the Republicans



nationwide," which often was the case. It scared all my friends and they didn't want me to lose and they sent money in. It was very useful that way. But it always sort of offended me underneath that anybody thought I could possibly lose in this district. In fact, we never came close to losing in that district.

One of the reasons we always seemed to be endangered is that, historically at least, Democrats, in order to win in or around the Los Angeles area, needed 57, 58 percent . . .

[Interruption]

[End Tape 10, Side A]

[Begin Tape 10, Side B]

YATES: OK. You were talking about the district and the history in Los Angeles.

BEILENSEN: Well, it's just that we were often thought to be endangered because on paper we seemed to be, because people had always assumed and believed. . . . I guess in the past it was historically true and still remains true for particularly partisan candidates. . . . As I said a few minutes ago, my strength was that I attracted a lot of nonpartisan and Republican support; that's what saved me the last few

BEILENSEN: years actually. But on paper we look to be in danger, because our Democratic registration in the district fell below the 57 or 58 percent which historically was necessary for Democrats in this part of the state to win an election. But we won perfectly handily with 54, 55, 56 percent registration because I picked up a lot of, as I said, independent and Republican votes.

So Republicans always sort of picked on me and targeted us because Republican consultants could go to their clients and say, "Look, we have a chance to defeat Beilenson this year. It's only a 55 percent district and we always win in districts if they're under 57 percent." Of course they didn't in our case, partly because of me, and partly because maybe times have changed. I don't know. So yes, in those days we were often targeted and even more so of course in our last two elections. Then for a good deal better reason, because in truth we had a much more difficult district in those last two elections than we had during most of the 1980s.

YATES: Well, in 1992, which is one of the elections

you're talking about, the district, I know, changed again due to reapportionment. At that point you decided to run in the Twenty-fourth Congressional District instead of the new Twenty-ninth [Congressional] District.

BEILENSEN: Yes.

YATES: Which would have meant that you and Henry Waxman would have been running in the same primary if you'd stayed. So why did you decide to run in the Twenty-fourth District?

BEILENSEN: Well, I'll tell you. Number one, I. . . . This again sounds immodest. Who knows, I may well be wrong. I was convinced, myself internally, that even though Henry Waxman could raise a lot more money than I, that I would defeat him in a primary. I really believe that and I have no idea in the world, of course, if I'm correct or not. I may be way off on that, but I don't think so. I was a popular incumbent who had spent a lot of time talking to people, being out amongst them, much more so in effect than he. He's much better known I think than I because of his position as chairman of the Health Subcommittee [Subcommittee on Health and the Environment] of the major committee

BEILENSON: [Commerce Committee] that he's been on or was on these past few years, was chairman of. I don't mean to take anything at all away from him. He would have had a lot more money probably to spend than I, but I do think we could have defeated him in a primary, and I decided that I didn't want to do that. Even just assuming for purposes of argument that I knew in advance, as if I could know in advance, that I would win the primary, I did not want to defeat him. I also thought that he had--it was clear, really--he had no choice. He had nowhere else to go. That Twenty-ninth District included a lot of his existing district, and it included parts of my existing district. But I thought, clearly, I was one Democrat who would have the best chance of winning in this new Twenty-fourth District.

It was a big change for us and a much bigger change than the 1981 reapportionment had been. Specifically, I was no longer representing for the first time in thirty. . . . I lost. . . . How do I put this so it makes sense? This new district, in which I ran and won in the next two elections, included none of

BEILENSON: the people that I had represented for all of the previous thirty years. That is, I lost all the precincts that I had previously represented for thirty years. On the Westside. . . . I had nothing left on the Westside, on this side of the mountains at all, south of the mountains. I retained the best parts of the Valley--Encino and Sherman Oaks--which I had been representing for ten or twelve years in the Congress and for a couple of years before that in the state senate. But for the people I had represented for thirty years, Beverly Hills, Beverlywood, parts of West Los Angeles. . . . I lost all of those and had nobody left here. I just had the Valley. More importantly and more worrisomely--that's not a word, but more worrisome to us--was that 20 percent of the new district was out in Ventura County. In fact, it was the most conservative part of Ventura County. It was Thousand Oaks, Westlake Village, and Newbury Park, which is a very Republican, very conservative area, more so even than Simi Valley, which is well-known for its conservatism. So we and others had some concern, especially that first time.

BEILENSON: One of the other reasons I wanted to run, decided to run here, aside from the fact that I thought it was the right thing to do and the fairest thing to do, I knew that Henry would win down here in the new Twenty-ninth District. . . . Then I was probably the best, as I said earlier, Democratic candidate to run in this new Twenty-fourth District. First of all, I represented part of it, in parts of the existing Valley part of it, but half of it was new. And being a more moderate, or seen as a more moderate, Democrat than Howard Berman or Henry Waxman--I don't know if that's true or not--I was more acceptable to a lot of Republicans and moderate Democrats perhaps than either one of them might have been.

So it made a lot of sense from the party point of view and from everybody's point of view, and I ended up being very happy that I had made that choice. It was a real challenge and I enjoyed it, and as a matter of fact, although this gets a little ahead of our story, without casting any kind of aspersions at all on the folks I used to represent on the Westside, who I love and who I enjoyed

BEILENSEN: representing very much, I enjoyed those last four years in the Congress more than I had enjoyed earlier years in terms of the people I represented, because it required more of me. I had to go out and win people's hearts and minds in a way I never had to bother to do earlier. [Earlier districts were] strongly Democratic, liberal districts and you could have done nothing and won. I worked hard, but I didn't really need to. Here you needed to work hard, and I enjoyed that, and I loved the people, and we had lots of town meetings.

The other thing I loved about it, although it again isn't what you asked, is that for the first time in my life I was the sole representative in Congress of a few little communities, a few little cities. When you're one of fifteen or sixteen members of Congress from L.A. city and L.A. County you're kind of. . . . You know, you'd like to help the city when it needs something or the county when it needs something, but they have all these other people to call on too. But now I was the representative from. . . . I was the member in Congress for the people of Malibu, people of

Calabasas, the people of Agoura Hills, and the people out in Thousand Oaks, and whenever they had federal problems or whatever, federal agencies, they used me, they needed me. I loved it. For the first time I felt needed by some local communities in terms of their relations with the federal government. We had a wonderful time and a wonderfully close relationship with these local governments, some of which were quite Republican. We didn't see eye to eye on some policies, but as people they were lovely and we worked very well together. It gave an added dimension, a personal dimension, to my work as a congressman, which I had never had before, in which I felt useful and needed by the local people I was representing, in a way that I never had before. It was very interesting and I enjoyed it very much.

YATES: That wouldn't have occurred to me . . .

BEILENSEN: No, it didn't occur to me before, either. All of a sudden I was their guy in Washington, whereas with L.A. County they had lots of guys in Washington. They didn't need me particularly or come to me particularly.



YATES: You mentioned town hall meetings. How else did you go out in this new district running for election?

BEILENSEN: Well, we really worked hard. We thought we had worked hard in some of the earlier elections, but we never did anything like we did these last two elections. And I'll just skip to it for a moment: that especially meant fund-raising. We raised. . . . I don't know that we'd ever raised more than \$150,000 or \$200,000 for an election before. For the election in 1992 we raised just a little over \$700,000. And for our final election in 1994, we raised about \$500,000. I had decided by then I was just not going to raise \$700,000 again. It's too difficult. I don't think it's necessary. We won that first time in 1992 by forty thousand votes. We won by 17 percent. People thought we'd win by 1 percent, but we won by 17 percent. It happened to be a good Democratic year and I got a little overconfident, quite frankly, but I also just hated so much raising that kind of money that I just swore that we would cut it back, and we did by \$200,000. But we still had to raise half a million dollars.

BEILENSON: All I can say is, if I may just say so--it may be of interest to people--however difficult it is to raise the first \$100,000 or \$200,000 or so, you can sort of figure out. . . . Especially when you come from a relatively affluent area, as we do, you can find people eventually, if you keep scrambling around, to raise a couple of hundred thousand dollars over a year, year and a half time period. But if you have to double that or more, if you have to go from \$200,000 to \$500,000, or \$600,000 or \$700,000, I can't tell you how much more difficult it is. You've already asked everybody you know and they've given you \$1000 or \$100 or whatever. What it means is you've got to get that same amount of money once or twice again, from those same people. If you're in a position, as we were, where you had to ask individual people and not lobbyists, not political action committees, it gets after a while to be an awful lot to ask your friends over and over again each year. "Please, I need another. . . . Please, come to another fundraiser. We've got to raise another couple of hundred thousand dollars."

It really. . . . It becomes a different kind of life than it did in the old days when you raised a modest amount of money and you spent your time being a legislator. Now you're spending most of your time raising money and hardly have any time to be a legislator when you get back there. I'm overstating it, but most people spend almost all their time now campaigning and raising money instead of relaxing about that and being a congressman primarily.

YATES: Well, if you have to run for election every two years I've always wondered about that balance.

BEILENSEN: Yeah, I didn't mind that when it was--not necessarily so easy--but when that played a smaller role or you didn't have to raise so much money. I don't mind campaigning. And in fact, when I campaigned I didn't do an awful lot--other than fund-raising--different from what I did in non-campaign years. I came home every month or so and put on a whole bunch of town hall meetings and spoke at groups when they wanted me to speak and sent out newsletters every now and then. You know, trying to stay in touch with the district and

informing people of things and discussing things. The difference between campaign and non-campaign times was that you had to raise money in campaign years, and if you had to raise that kind of money it became an entirely different kind of life all together.

YATES: Now, Tom McClintock was your Republican opponent . . .

BEILENSON: Yes, and a very fortunate opponent in a very fortunate year. He was a very conservative person.

YATES: That was what I was wondering. How strong an opponent was he?

BEILENSON: Well, everyone was worried about him. The press made a big thing of it, we got a lot of coverage, especially out in the new areas because there are a lot of small papers out there. The other interesting thing about this is that no longer were the L.A. Times and to a certain extent the [Van Nuys] Daily News in the Valley, which was a much more conservative paper, the only people covering us. The Times never paid much attention to us. We weren't terribly interesting to them. We were one of a dozen or more congressional races and they had

BEILENSEN: lots of other things to cover. But for the smaller papers out in the Valley and out in Ventura County, it was big stuff, it was interesting, it was their Congress. . . . They all were in this congressional district and people paid a lot more attention to us. We worked very, very hard that first election, and thereafter too, but in this new district we made. . . . I had never in my life been in Thousand Oaks. I'd driven through it on the way to Santa Barbara a couple of times in my life, but I had never been there. We went out there, we made friends there, people reached out to us, we reached out to them, and we put together a wonderful, real campaign there in terms of actual men and women whom we found.

Only a third or thereabouts of the people out there are registered Democrats. Most of them had never been represented in Congress or anywhere else before by a Democrat. They were so delighted at the prospect of having their congressman perhaps be a Democrat, instead of Barry [M.] Goldwater Jr. or Elton [W.] Gallegly, who had represented them just two years earlier, a nice chap, but a conservative

BEILENSON: Republican. I can't tell you how excited they were and how involved many of them became, because for the first time in their lives they thought they had a chance of being represented in Congress by somebody who represented their points of view.

We got a lot of people involved and interested, and it was a wonderful campaign, both of those two campaigns, '92 and '94. I mean, they were like the old days in the early sixties when we first ran, when we had hundreds of people actually involved. You know, campaigns are still. . . . It's still true that campaigns are quite different now than they used to be. We didn't do nearly so much precinct work as we used to; it doesn't make that much sense anymore. We didn't sit around and, generally speaking, have. . . . People didn't spend all their time as they did in the '62 and '64 campaigns, '66 campaigns addressing envelopes for our mailings because they're all done now by machine. It doesn't make sense to do it any other way. But we did have a lot of fund-raisers, and people would do the addressing for the fund-raisers at the

headquarters, and we just had a lot of people involved. We did a lot of precinct work, and we had a large headquarters--you know, a few thousand square feet with a lot of people involved--and it was just a wonderful effort with a lot of people physically involved. A lot of young kids from high schools and so on as well.

In many respects it was the most fun we've had in politics in thirty years, and the campaign part of it became real again, at least in a certain sense. In all those middle years I could have. . . . In effect we sort of did nothing. We sent out a few brochures which I wrote myself and they were all mailed out and we didn't need anybody. You didn't need to raise money, you didn't need much help. And here, all of a sudden, we needed people, we needed money, we needed foot soldiers to a limited extent, and it was great fun. We had telephone banks calling everybody the week or so before, urging them to come out to vote, and that actual day getting them out to vote, and so on. It was great fun.

YATES: How concerned were you about what the outcome

was going to be in that election?

BEILENSEN: Well, in 1992 when everybody was so worried about us. . . . First of all, everything felt good to me. We were lucky, as I started to say and you started to ask, with McClintock. I was able to paint him as an extremist, which he really was. He was an ultra-right-wing person, which obviously did not. . . . That's not this kind of district. It's a relatively moderate district. I mean, it's 50-50 more or less. It certainly could go for Republicans and it almost did the second year, but not to a Republican who is really not a mainstream person.

I just felt very comfortable. Everything just felt fine to me from the beginning, and I'm sure I was a little overconfident, but a number. . . . I remember I appeared at a rally over here on the Westside for some women's groups or something a day or two before [the election], and there were a bunch of people from the press, from the local papers, who were over there. They said they had just come. . . . They had a pool betting on how much I'd win or lose by and they had decided I'd win by half a



BEILENSON: percent. This is against McClintock. I said, "I think I'm going to win by 15 percent." They thought I was out of my mind. I won by 17 percent. We beat him by forty thousand votes.

As I said, he was the perfect opponent, best possible opponent I could have had. He's a nice guy. He's not a bad guy, but he's kind of noisy and a loud right-winger. What better could he be? He's against abortion rights, against everything else that most people are for. And it was a decent Democratic year. That was the year that Mr. Clinton first won. It wasn't strong, but it was an OK year with a decent turnout. Clinton didn't win by much, but he won. We clobbered [McClintock].

I'm perfectly frank to admit that I didn't think I'd have any trouble the next year, 1994. You know, we are maybe getting a tiny bit ahead of ourselves. I only won by thirty-six hundred, thirty-seven hundred votes, which frankly I couldn't believe at the time. I thought, even though it was. . . . It turned out to be a worse year even than we thought. The worst year in memory for Democrats. It was a disaster. We lost about fifty seats. All

BEILENSEN: kinds of friends of mine from very safe seats around the country lost. We couldn't believe it. I mean, half my friends lost their elections that year, people I was close to, which is one of the reasons I didn't want to stay that much. . . . It made it easier to leave a couple of years later.

We barely won, the main reason being that the Democratic turnout was so terribly light. Democrats just didn't vote that year across the board, all the way across the country, and that's what hurt us so badly. But I must admit that I was overconfident. I thought even in a bad year I'd win by fifteen thousand or twenty thousand votes. Quite frankly it was hard for me to accept the fact that I had been this wonderful congressman for all these years and just a couple of years before in this new district . . . I'd won by forty thousand last time, and people weren't angry with me, they liked me, I'd done good work for them, helped a lot of people after the earthquake and everything else. I didn't have any weak spots in a sense. I mean, people were not angry with me or didn't dislike me. I made friends rather

than lost them. Nonetheless, I only won by. . . . You know, I barely won reelection . . .

YATES: Right, I noticed that that was your closest race.

BEILENSEN: Oh, by far. There was never anything like it. Now, that year, I was one of the ten top targeted Democrats in the country and the other nine lost. I was really offended they put me there. I said, "You know, people don't realize I won by forty thousand votes last time." Well, I did win, but I barely hung on this time. Finally the realities and the difficulties of this new district--in a bad year--caught up with us.

YATES: You mentioned the problem of Democrats not coming out to vote that year. But what about your opponent [Richard] Rich Sybert? What was he like in terms of an opponent?

BEILENSEN: I think he was relatively. . . . I don't want to speak too much about him because I don't care for him much personally, but neither does anybody else who knows him well, to be perfectly frank about it, including a lot of Republican activists who knew him well, and

BEILENSON: some people in the Wilson administration, where he had worked for three years up in Sacramento, many of whom were quietly giving me advice and telling me things about him in the hope that I could use them, which I couldn't unfortunately. To his credit. . . . Not to his credit, but what is also true, however, is that he is, compared to Tom McClintock, a pretty moderate Republican. He was OK on abortion rights. It's not clear exactly where he was, but he certainly wasn't against all legalized abortion. He was for more limits than I would be for. Another thing is [that] he could make a plausible case for being a fairly strong environmentalist. At least he certainly said that, whereas McClintock was very straight about the fact that he just didn't believe that the government should be involved in creating parks and other things like that.

He was much more difficult to run against in the sense that you couldn't. . . . He wasn't an easy person to run against, and that obviously helped. I mean, if I had been running again against Tom McClintock it would have been much closer than two years earlier,

again because of the turnout, but I would have won I would guess by ten thousand or fifteen thousand votes. The fact that I had a Republican opponent who was not so offensive to people made it a good deal closer.

It was the turnout more than anything else. It's not the candidate so much. Most people never get to know the candidates or see them. I mean, after a while people learned my name. I was there for years, and they get my newsletters or they meet me at the town hall meetings, a few hundred of them or a few thousand of them. But most people never get to see you or hear you. We're never on television, except on Century Cable every now and then. We're interviewed once or twice a year. But most people don't ever get to see us, or know much about us really.

YATES: You said that you were admittedly maybe overconfident in this next election . . .

BEILENSON: Yeah, but it didn't. . . . I was overconfident in the sense that I would have bet any amount of money that I was going to win by at least ten, fifteen, twenty thousand votes.

YATES: OK. I was wondering if that impacted what you

did in your campaign.

BEILENSEN: No. No, it did not at all. It did not at all. We worked as hard as we possibly could. I worked hugely hard. It clearly was a difficult year. We knew what the problem was in terms of getting people out to vote. We spent more time and effort and money on that, and phoned people, and so on, put more people on the phone banks to try to urge people to come out and vote, because it was clear it was a bad year. It was a disastrous year for the Democrats. The worst in memory. We lost control of the Congress for the first time in forty years. So I got reelected, I went back there, but it wasn't nearly so much fun as it would have been if the Democrats had still been in power.

We spent less money, but I think if I had spent \$700,000 instead of \$500,000 it wouldn't have made a lot of difference, as I said earlier. The crux of the matter is that the Democratic turnout nationwide, and in our district as well, was much, much lower than it ordinarily was. My Republican opponent Rich Sybert got almost the identical number of votes as McClintock had gotten two years earlier. I

got forty thousand fewer votes than I had gotten two years earlier. There basically were forty thousand fewer Democrats voting than two years earlier. Again, I don't take credit away from anybody else or give myself any more credit, but the truth of the matter is that on the whole I was a well-liked, well-thought-of congressman. I had a lot of Republican support, which is what saved me, frankly. I picked up, I think, fifteen thousand or so Republican votes, without which I would have lost.

YATES: Right.

BEILENSON: But people weren't angry with me, I hadn't gotten into any trouble or anything of that sort. I was the same guy I was two years earlier and maybe more so, maybe a little better even, and better known, and had helped a lot of people with their earthquake problems and whatever, through our office.

I don't attribute any of it to either Sybert or me. . . . I don't think it had an awful lot to do with either of us. It had to do with the demography of the election turnout of that particular year, which was very similar

BEILENSEN: to what it was nationwide. It was just a disastrous year for Democrats, because Democrats were turned off with the Congress, and with the president and his failed health care plan, and it was just the worst year in history--in memory. It affected all of us, even a nice little congressman like me.

[Laughter] After a while I didn't take it so personally as I did on election night when I thought, "What is this? These wonderful people I've worked so hard to serve so well and they're not voting for me." They would have, I think, if they'd come out to vote, but they sure didn't come out to vote.

[End Tape 10, Side B]



[Session 6, March 3, 1998]

[Begin Tape 11, Side A]

YATES: Before we continue our discussion, I want to ask you one question that occurred to me since our last session, and that is, at any time did you think of running for the U.S. Senate?

BEILENSEN: Well, I did run for the Senate in 1968. You mean, have I ever thought about it since?

YATES: Yes, after that.

BEILENSEN: I think not. I always would have liked to have been in the United States Senate, if only because it's possible, I think, to do more in a smaller body and to have one's ideas have greater currency and be picked up more and paid more attention to if you're a senator rather than a member of the House of Representatives. That seems, unfortunately, to be the case. I mean, even foolish senators when they say foolish things are quoted in the newspapers, whereas members of the House of Representatives tend to. . . . Unless they are the speaker

BEILENSEN: himself or the minority leader, tend not to be able to get their ideas out there and I've always. . . . The thing I've always been interested in as a politician was to be able to express ideas, and hopefully to encourage people to think about things in different, perhaps better, ways.

So yes. It's been in the back of my mind. . . . It was often in the back of my mind, but I think after 1968, when I did run and came in second in a field of five in the Democratic primary, and had some small taste of what it was like to run in a place as large as California, I don't think I ever thought about it seriously again. The principal attribute of a statewide candidate in California is his ability or her ability to raise money. You learn very quickly that the campaign consists not of an expression of issues or a discussion of issues, or very much in the way of the media's covering you because of what you're saying, but whether or not you can raise an adequate amount of money by sitting yourself down in a windowless room for three or four hours a day, for weeks on end or months on end

BEILENSON: actually--a year or two on end--and calling up people, most of whom you don't even know personally, and asking them for money so that you can buy some television ads for the two or three or four or even eight weeks prior to the election. Ads which themselves, if they are to be effective, won't even discuss the issues that you're most interested in, because people don't pay much attention to those types of ads. They will be ads which are just talking about you as a person or getting your name across or I suppose these days even more probably attacking whoever it is who is running against you, because those seem to be the most effective kinds of ads. So that if one could get there. . . .

The way for me to have gotten to the United States Senate would have been for some friend of mine who is governor to have appointed me in the case of the resignation or death of some incumbent senator. Then, I think, perhaps being there I would have. . . . Hopefully people would have found me attractive or someone whom they enjoyed having as their senator, and I could have won reelection. But

BEILENSEN: I really don't. . . . I think I understood early on that I was not the kind of person who could successfully run for, get elected, to a statewide office in this huge state, if only because, among other things, I just would not have been able to raise the requisite amount of money.

In a smaller state, when you have. . . . Well, any smaller state in terms of population-- a million, two million, or fewer, or even three or four million--you can, by actually physically campaigning and going around from town to town or city to city and getting some coverage on television and local newspapers, and so on, you can really campaign in more of an old-fashioned way. And if you're someone who is an attractive. . . . If your personality and if what you have to say are attractive enough to people, you can win first a primary and then perhaps a general election doing it that way. But in this state, and in a few others, a few of the other very large states, there is no way to get to people. There is no way to get known except via television mainly, and there not by being interviewed or just

appearing now and then on a show, but by being able to raise enough money to put on huge numbers of ads a couple of times an hour for the several weeks or so just prior to the campaign. . . . I mean, to an election. That's what the campaign consists of, and I'm not much good for that sort of thing, I think.

YATES: OK. Well, it just struck me, whether you had thought about it seriously after that--the first time you ran--so that's why I asked.

BEILENSON: That one experience, which I'm glad I had, also taught you, in a more immediate way than you would understand if you were just sitting back and contemplating it, how large this state is and how difficult it is to get your views across. That particular election I ran because I was upset with the war in Vietnam, and I was upset about our lack of response to the problems of poverty in this country. I discovered very quickly that although the couple of hundred people or the few dozens of people, or perhaps every now and then a thousand or so people who came out to hear you speak, would hear what you had to say about these kinds of things, but that's irrelevant in

terms of campaigning in a state of millions of people, because the 99 percent, 99-plus percent of the voting electorate who turn out to vote in June in the primary or November in the general election would never have heard you personally, would never have met you, and most of them would be largely unaware of what it is that you stood for. That's kind of sad.

YATES: We spent the last part of the previous session talking about several key elections during your time in office. But how did running for office change over the years?

BEILENSEN: Well, it changed. . . . The principal change was one of requiring--I'm talking very personally now, but I suppose one can generalize from it to a certain extent too. . . . For me--and for a good many of my colleagues--but for me certainly, the biggest change over the years, and most especially in the most recent years, was the need to raise large amounts of money. Now, that came about, as you know, because I ran in a newly reapportioned district, newly created district starting in 1992, a district which was a difficult one for actually a member of either party to run in,

BEILENSEN: certainly for a Democrat. If I, for example, had been reapportioned into a fairly safe Democratic district, I suppose our elections and campaigns would not have changed very much at all over the years or from prior times. We would have been able to get away with raising little or almost no money in a strongly Democratic district. Being a relatively popular incumbent, certainly among the Democrats, I would have had no real or perhaps any opposition at all in the Democratic primary. I could have gotten myself reelected without any effort at all, as in a certain sense we were able to do all those prior years, although, as we discussed last time, it often seemed--at least on paper and certainly to the Republicans. . . . Because they were getting excited about the possibility of winning in our district and putting a lot of money and effort into it, we had to respond in kind, at least partially. But they were relatively safe districts. I could have spent my whole thirty-some years, I suppose, in politics without having to really confront the realities that a lot of my colleagues have had to confront in

BEILENSEN: recent years.

So to a great extent the change in circumstances came about because of the change in the type of district which I was seeking to represent. It also, I'm sure, came about at least partially because politics in general have changed over the years. Even in marginal, difficult districts, twenty or thirty years ago people weren't spending \$500,000, \$600,000, \$700,000 to either get reelected or to try to unseat an incumbent. The money that was spent in those days was much, much less. I don't know why. It's just something that's slowly built up over the years. I mean, now as then, as also we talked about, in a large urban-suburban area such as Los Angeles and the various parts of Los Angeles, the money is spent almost entirely for mail in any case. We're not even talking about the really large expenditures one needs to buy television ads in a costly market such as that which exists in the Los Angeles area. But even just in terms of the regular costs of mail and running a decent-sized campaign out of a decent-sized campaign office, headquarters, it costs a lot



more these days than it used to. The cost of mailing, for example, costs. . . . The per capita cost of sending out a brochure has more than doubled over the past twenty years, even at the bulk rate mail rate that you often send it. And the cost of labor of affixing labels, for example. The thirty thousand or forty thousand, or eighty thousand labels that are put on to a brochure that's being mailed out, which we used to address by hand at no cost at all through the use of volunteers, is now done by machine. It's not hugely costly. It's the printing of the brochures and most importantly the postage costs which are so great.

YATES: When around do you think the cost really started to go much higher?

BEILENSEN: Well, it's been a gradual but continual increase. I just happened to be looking the other day at the total costs of congressional campaigns nationwide every couple of years over the past decade or so. And every two years when everyone in Congress has to run for reelection or election the first time, those costs have gone up between 10 or 15 percent. It just keeps going up. The more you

spend, the more you're expected to spend next time, the more the person who's challenging you knows he or she has to raise to spend. It just grows on itself.

YATES: Well, you would expect it to keep going up.  
It's not . . .

BEILENSON: I guess so, but it certainly goes up a lot more than the cost of living increases. It's not just a . . .

YATES: So why is that, is the question.

BEILENSON: I don't know. Because I suppose more and more people rely on. . . . For example, in the old days, and I don't mean old, old days--I mean twenty years ago, fifteen years ago--very few members of Congress, very few members of the state legislature when they ran for reelection, for example, employed anyone to help them in their pursuit of office or perhaps they had an office manager. In the old days you could find women who didn't used to work who'd come in and manage your headquarters. Now you can't. And it's nice in many ways, but you have to. . . . In order to keep a headquarters running well these days--which was not the case twenty years ago--you've got to pay somebody or some people

BEILENSEN: to run it. But more than that, both incumbents and those who are challenging incumbents or seeking office for their first time, have come--only because it seems to be the expected way of doing things now--to hiring consultants and hiring people to run their campaigns for them. So first of all, you are having to pay-- I don't know what it costs because we've never really done it in that way or in that sense ourselves--\$50,000 or \$60,000 or \$100,000 to hire a campaign coordinator or a campaign manager, and he or she hires on a couple of extra people, maybe part-time, maybe full-time, but not at great cost. So you've got a nut to crack of maybe \$50,000 to \$100,000 to begin with, just to have some campaign personnel who are running your campaign for you.

We had to ourselves. . . . In each of our last two campaigns when we were faced with the necessity of raising so much money, we hired one woman to help us raise money. In one case with some success, the other case with not very much success at all. But nonetheless, that was an additional, fairly substantial cost. Then, of course, just as we've been discussing, as

BEILENSON: campaigns become more competitive--that is within a competitive district at least--you simply know that you're going to be faced with the expenditure of a lot more money on the part of the person who is seeking to unseat you, in our particular case, than ever happened before. So you yourself have got to be prepared to raise a half a million dollars or thereabout, and send out \$300,000 worth of mail instead of \$100,000 worth of mail. It just sort of grows on itself.

But it's only really true, or only needs to be true, in competitive districts. One of the things that is strange to me was to find so many of my colleagues nervous about their chances for reelection when, in fact, they represented really quite safe districts. And each year they would. . . . In fact, it turned out that they did very, very well, except for the one year in 1994 where an awful lot of people did very poorly and many lost, because there was just this huge outpouring of Republican voters and a huge staying at home of Democratic voters. Frankly, I don't think spending more money on anybody's part that year

would have made an awful lot of difference. We may have discussed before--I don't recall--but there was one year several years ago, maybe eight or so years ago, without telling anybody I tried the experiment of spending virtually no money at all on a reelection campaign. We were in our old. . . . Not our very old district, but our moderate, next to last district. It was fairly clear to me from the experience we'd had in the previous couple of reelection campaigns that there was just no real way of losing it, so long as I continued to work hard and stay out of trouble and be a decent congressman. We spent virtually no money in that reelection campaign, and did just about as well as we'd done before or after. It really made no difference.

YATES: Do you remember which election that was?

BEILENSON: No, I don't, but I could look it up very quickly. It was somewhere around '86 or '88 or something of that sort. You realize very quickly, at least in a fairly safe district, that you're going to win. I mean, you know you're going to win, and if you raise and spend \$300,000 instead of \$100,000, I suppose you

might win by a couple of thousand votes additionally. I don't know. It's hard to know. You really can't do a test case. You have no control. . . . You can't have a control the way you do with trying medicines and placebos and things of that sort. You know, see how you would have done if you hadn't spent the money and how you did having spent the money. But I doubt very much that the difference would be very great.

YATES: How do you think the cost of campaigning these days impacts who will run?

BEILENSEN: Well, that's the big problem. That's the major issue, so far as I am concerned. And of course we see it right now, speaking in early March of 1998. You see a gubernatorial campaign in California among the Democrats, for example, in which two of the three major candidates are people who have great wealth themselves, and are prepared to spend a lot of their own money. And one could only guess that one of these people will probably be successful, at least in winning the primary, running against our incumbent lieutenant governor [Gray Davis], who is not an exciting candidate, but at least has

BEILENSON: held a lot of offices over the past ten or fifteen years, and sort of has had a decent amount of experience at the statewide level. He may or may not do well in the primary--it is really quite hard to tell at this point--but he will be greatly outspent, I suppose, over the next three or four months prior to the primary, and may well end up third. As I said, it's hard to tell, but most people don't know who the lieutenant governor is, and I suppose if he doesn't have the money to spend in a competitive way over the next few months, that he may just fall by the wayside.

But it's also true. . . . That's a little more understandable running for governor. The principal reason I think that Dianne Feinstein, our incumbent senator who apparently would like very much to be governor--I think she'd prefer being head of the executive branch, having had some experience as mayor of San Francisco, than being one of a hundred U.S. senators--decided finally not to run was because she too would have had to raise an awful lot of money to compete with these. . . . You know, at least with one of these other heavily spending

BEILENSON: candidates in the primary. She just four years or so ago went through the very same process herself when Michael Huffington ran against her. That's as indicative of a campaign and its results as you could ask for. She was an incumbent, a very popular U.S. senator, had just been elected for the first time two years earlier to a two year seat so she had to run for reelection very quickly. She was well-liked. I mean, she's a moderate Democrat, she was well-liked by Republicans and by business people. I didn't have a Republican friend at the time who wasn't voting for her, because she was inoffensive to them and pretty moderate in her point of view, and so on. [She was] running against a person who had been in the House of Representatives for two years, had very little experience, had no record at all even in the House in that short period of time, as is understandable, but who ended up spending \$20-some million, perhaps \$28 million of his own, and lost to her by about a hundred thousand votes. I mean, lost to a popular incumbent senator who had really nobody angry with her, nobody who disapproved of her, and



BEILENSEN: yet the large amount of money that he spent made it not only competitive, but if he had been running against anybody who was not quite so popular as she, would have won. Even though everybody acknowledged that he was an inadequate candidate, somebody with very little experience, who is not a charismatic person, who did not put on a particularly good campaign except that he spent an awful lot of money. He may well have won even under these circumstances, except there was this modest brouhaha about him or [his] wife or his family having at one time employed a nanny who was here illegally, which got him into some trouble. Otherwise he might have unseated Dianne Feinstein.

It's just outrageous. And it isn't because I'm a Democrat or whatever. It's just outrageous that that kind of thing can happen simply because people spend money. Well, it's obvious on a statewide level that that's what is needed now: either having your own money, or having the ability to raise a lot of money, which not everybody has. As a former member of the House of Representatives it gets a little

BEILENSON: closer to home when you start noticing that this is happening more and more with respect to little congressional races--which are no big deals; it's not like running for senator or governor of some big state--where a larger and larger percentage of our members or those running for office for the House of Representatives are themselves people who are fairly well off. You don't have to have a huge amount of money, although I guess this is a huge amount of money to some people, but an awful lot of them spend or lend to their own campaigns, hoping to get it repaid eventually, half a million or a million dollars or thereabouts. That's a lot of money. It's not the \$20 or \$30 million that you have to spend in a statewide campaign in a big state, but it's still a lot of money.

I've come to believe. . . . It's not a question of belief, but one comes to recognize that probably the single most important--it's a terrible thing to have to say and I hate to hear myself say it--the most important attribute of a candidate for Congress is the ability to either have or raise a sizable

BEILENSEN: amount of money to get elected. If you're lucky you have in such a person also someone who cares about issues, who's good, who's thoughtful, who will make a good legislator, but that's not what's necessary. That's not the requisite, the prerequisite, to getting elected. You've got to get yourself elected first before you can be thoughtful and wise and legislate. And as I said, if you're lucky, you have somebody who has both some money or the ability to raise money, and who also will make a good legislator eventually.

But for all of us who were first elected to office thirty, forty, twenty-some years ago, that's really a shocking realization to face up to, because all of us. . . . Some of us were better than others, some of us were brighter than others, some of us were more idealistic than others, whatever, but nonetheless, if you wanted to be in public office and to serve as a public servant, you just went out with your friends, put together a modest little campaign apparatus, raised relatively few thousands of dollars and you were competitive. With a little luck you might win and have a decent

BEILENSON: career in politics, but that's not true anymore, in most cases. There are still some areas, I suppose, and some districts, that are not terribly competitive. But even there, because of the involvement of the nationwide parties and the state parties and, for example, the Democratic--at the House of Representatives level, the congressional level--the Democratic DCCC, which is the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, or on the other side the Republican Congressional Campaign Committee. . . . They go around all through the country trying to find candidates, and promising them money and helping raise the money and so on, so that it's a very different process. I'm sure it ends up with very different kinds of people than used to be the case.

Let me just say one more thing from personal experience. When we decided to retire. . . . When I decided to retire two, three years, a couple of years ago, and people were thinking about running, an awful lot of people who would have been, I think, eager to seek a seat in Congress for all the right kinds

of reasons--you know, because they were thoughtful, interested people who cared about current events and public issues and so on--were deterred from running because they had had very little experience, or they had had a little experience that wasn't all that successful, in raising money. They were just aware of the fact that they were going to somehow. . . . That in order to survive the Democratic primary even, to run against a Republican in a seat where winning the Democratic primary was not necessarily, you know, going to lead to victory in November, because it's a fairly close district now as you're aware. . . . They were deterred from running because they realized that they just didn't have the stomach for or realized they didn't have the ability to raise the let's say \$200,000, \$250,000--not a huge amount but it's a lot of money--to run in the Democratic primary in June of that year. And that's sad, I think.

YATES: You hear the term "negative campaigning" a lot, and I was wondering. . . . Your opinion. . . . When and why did negative campaigning come about?

BEILENSEN: Well, again, I generalize a lot from our own experience, and our own experience, I suppose, is somewhat atypical, or at least not terribly typical of what goes on in many other places, most especially because things like negative campaigning and lots of other types of campaigning that one reads about and learns about and hears about is usually, I think, an expression of concern, and a description of--most typically--campaigns that are carried on, on television. To begin with, television ads are apparently by far the most effective kinds of ads, especially if one has enough money to keep repeating these things, because people don't even have to be paying much attention. They're sitting there watching their television or having supper or something, and the stuff comes through. Unlike a brochure, for example, which is what--as we've discussed--we have to rely on. . . . Who knows if anybody even reads what they get in the mail? They'll glance at it, perhaps, and see a nice picture of yourself and a few nice words about yourself, or perhaps a few negative words about your opponent, and then toss the things away. People aren't going

BEILENSON: to pay much attention. But meanwhile, if it comes at them on the television set time after time over a period of some days or weeks, it slowly sinks into their little brains whether they're paying attention or not. And that, obviously, is the most effective kind of thing.

We are told, we have been told. . . . I've never used polls, I've never gone to use a pollster or anything, but it was of interest to me because over the last few years, the Democratic campaign people in Washington would put on little seminars for Democratic incumbents, to try to bring those of us who were first elected many years ago kind of up-to-date and into the modern world in terms of campaigning. We were still doing things the old-fashioned way and they were afraid we'd be beaten by people who hired consultants, spent a lot of money, and, you know, did the right kind of ads. We'd get wiped out, as many of our colleagues in fact were, by people using more up-to-date methods of campaigning. But among the things I remember their telling us time after time was that if you're going to be spending money on advertising, which, of

BEILENSEN: course, everyone does in one way or another, that you are wasting your money--I mean, this is specific--you're wasting your money doing positive advertising, at least to the extent that you're just simply talking about your own attributes. It's a waste of \$20,000 or \$25,000 of your campaign money if you use it to send out a brochure to all the voters in the district saying, "Vote to reelect Congressman Beilenson. He's a man of great integrity and principle, and he has represented us well for the past X number of years." I mean, it's not exciting, it's not interesting, on top of which people don't believe it, unless they happen to know you. People don't believe any of this stuff anymore, apparently. Or at least, they don't believe good things about politicians.

Now, parenthetically, a little caveat. . . . I do think to a certain extent, our sending out a lot of that kind of mail over a long period of time did slowly have its effect, because we kept saying I was--I mean, I'm arguing against the main argument here, but let me just go off tangentially just for this moment--we would often say. . . . After my name we'd have,



BEILENSEN: "independence," "integrity," you know. And interestingly, that got through to people over like ten or fifteen years, because people would say to me even if they hadn't met me before, "You know, I'm so glad to meet you. I've heard so much about you. I know you're a man of independence and integrity," [Laughter] and things like. . . . They didn't know that the message had come from me perhaps, over and over again, but it did sink in over all the years.

But in terms of a particular campaign, people don't pay attention to that. People pay attention to negative ads. People hate negative ads, but they notice them. Now, I had a couple of other instances where a couple of colleagues of mine in Congress were in very difficult reelection bids. One, in fact, lost his. The other just won by--this is back in 1992 or 1990--the other one just survived by a very few thousand votes and quit the next year, because he saw the end coming. But they had consultants, and they had media people, and they did polling. They did tracking polls, which are continual polling day after day after day of the people in a particular media market.

BEILENSON: And they were running ads, and their opponent was running ads. Their pollsters would tell them, as people were running negative ads, attack ads on them, that their. . . . They would start the campaign and 80, 75 percent of the people thought they were good congressmen, and they had no problems with them, and as the attack ads against them kept going on day after day after day, their poll numbers kept going down, even though people will tell you--and they believe it, and it's the truth--they hate people knocking other people. They hate people saying bad things about other people. They hate these horrible things saying your congressman is a liar or a cheater or he refuses to vote for the death penalty or he's for abortion or against abortion or whatever it might be. Nonetheless, it takes. I mean, it works. And day after day, every day, they would drop by one or two percentage points. So they'd come to my friends, my colleagues, and say, "The only way you can survive is to run negative ads against the guy who's running against you." And they, on principle, didn't want to do so, but both of them finally-

BEILENSON: because they wanted to keep their seats-- started to do so, about three or four weeks prior to the election. The minute they started doing it, their numbers started going up and the other guy's started going down. I mean, you could just see it. It was just proven to them that if they did just regular nice ads about themselves, you know, just sort of general kinds of commercials, trying to remind people of what good congressmen they had been and how much disaster aid they had brought them and how many roads they had built and how well and how long they had served them, it made no difference. But the minute they started attacking their opponents. . . . For stupid things. . . .

I remember one of their opponents was a state senator, and had gotten into a little bit of a problem because he had used his state-rented car for some personal purposes. You know, like his wife had borrowed it to drive to work or to the grocery store. I mean, that kind of picky kind of thing. Not that it wasn't wrong. It was, but nonetheless, not terribly. . . . It wasn't a big thing. I mean,

it wasn't like they had committed a murder or something. But the minute they started--and they were embarrassed to do so--running ads, you know, "Senator So-and-so is running against our wonderful congressman, but he let his wife use his state-owned car to go to the market," every day their tracking poll would show [Laughter] that the state senator who was running against them started to drop in the polls. The minute they started running these ads. So of course they kept running them.

It is proven, whether anybody likes it or not--most politicians don't like it, the public hates it--that they are effective. Now, they are effective in television ads, and I suspect--I don't know--that mailed-out stuff is much less effective pro or con, or positive or negative, that it makes much less difference, but there's no question that negative television advertising works. And because that's the case, that's what people are going to use even if they hate it, even if they hate doing it.

YATES: That's a vicious cycle.

BEILENSON: It's almost stupid . . . Right. And it's

almost stupid to do anything else. It's a waste of your campaign resources--limited as they are--and of your friends' money that they've given to you to run for reelection, if you don't use it for these horrible things.

YATES: Were there ever times . . .

BEILENSEN: That's a sad and terrible truth.

YATES: Were there ever times in your own campaigns when you felt that an opponent kind of hit you below the belt with negative campaigning?

BEILENSEN: I'm sure there were times, and if I thought about it. . . . I should have thought about it, perhaps, a bit before talking about this today. The truth of the matter is, when you're talking about running against an incumbent, and especially running against me, if I may say so, because I. . . . I'm trying to be modest about this, but perhaps more than some other people, I voted my conscience. Even now and then when I knew that a particular vote could and probably would be used against me, if I thought it was right, I would do it anyway, even though I knew it could be misconstrued or taken out of context. So I was a bigger and a better target, an easier target than other people.

BEILENSEN: But, forgetting about me for the moment. . . . Any incumbent--in Congress, for example--in the course of each term in office votes several hundred, perhaps a thousand or more times, and it is no trick at all for any opponent, someone who's running against you, to pick five, six, twelve. . . . There's probably an unlimited number of votes that you've cast or things that you've said that they can use against you, especially if it's taken out of context. But sometimes it doesn't even have to be taken out of context. In fact, they have a problem in that they have so much material that they could. . . . Because you have a record, especially a voting record, there's so much they can use against you that they often foolishly will scatter their shots, and attack you for this and attack you for that and attack you for fifteen different things, all of which may be perfectly correct, but because they haven't homed in on a couple of big issues, it loses its effectiveness. They learn after a while just to pick on a couple of things and repeat them over and over again. They don't have to hit you below the belt. Perfectly

BEILENSEN: legitimately, they can complain of or can talk about and put their own spin on votes that I have cast.

For example, here's just an obvious example off the top of my head. I vote every year, just about every year, in favor of foreign aid because I believe in it. You know, we spend a tiny fraction, less than 1 percent of our budget on foreign aid, as we've talked about in one of our earlier discussions. Most of that money is actually spent here in the United States to subsidize U.S. businesses and U.S. farmers and so on. And I just believe that it's necessary for us to have a modest foreign aid budget if we're to retain our leadership status in the world, which all of us want, I think, want us to have. So OK, I vote for foreign aid. But meanwhile, foreign aid, of course, is a very unpopular thing. It's perfectly legitimate and not hitting below the belt if someone who runs against me says, you know, sends out a brochure or runs an ad saying, "Our Congressman, Tony Beilenson, who should be looking after the unmet needs of our people here at home. . . . Many of us don't

BEILENSEN: have health insurance. Many of us don't have jobs after the downsizing of the military, especially out in the San Fernando Valley" and so on, you know. Or, "[He] should be spending, should be voting in support of education for our children because there is not enough good enough public education. Instead [he] voted last year to spend \$15 billion on aid to foreign nations." Now, that's semilegitimate. . . . I mean, that's not lying. That's not really hitting below the belt. That's not saying, on the other hand, that this was less than 1 percent of the budget, that the money was mostly spent in this country, that the reason for it was, as all of us agree, the U.S. has to continue to play a leadership role. You know, there are reasons for my having done that, and although \$15, \$16 billion is a lot of money, it's a tiny fraction of the \$1.3, \$1.6 trillion that we spent in our budget that year, and so on.

So that's. . . We're just sitting ducks. If you're a responsible incumbent and cast responsible, or try to cast responsible votes, there are just any number of things that you



can get us on. Nonetheless, even having said that, many challengers, of course, do a lot of negative advertising against incumbent members. I don't think we really have suffered very much that I could complain about myself, because I'm just. . . . As I said, it's just too easy to attack most members, and certainly myself, in terms of just a perfectly legitimate although not terribly. . . . You know, putting their own spin on a discussion or a reminder to people of how I voted on things.

I was just going to say something else.

YATES: Well, if it comes to you. I guess, here's the other side of the coin. Was there ever a time when you used negative campaigning?

BEILENSON: Yes, there was, and I must say I'm not at all proud of it. In our last two. . . . And then, again, perhaps I shouldn't have said "yes" quite so readily. But looking back, even at the time, I was not terribly happy with a couple of things that I was persuaded finally to do in our last couple of campaigns. In our next to last campaign, which was against Tom McClintock, an incumbent state assemblyman who was really a far right--still is--

BEILENSON: ideologue. . . . He's kind of like a Barry [M.] Goldwater [Sr.] was thirty-some years ago. It's just almost too easy to run against him. His position on so many things was just so extreme that. . . . And for the first time, I guess the first time in my life--the only time in my life--I ran against somebody who himself had a record. I mean, it was wonderful. I could talk about his votes. I could talk about what he said or he wrote as a state assemblyman. It was kind of a fair campaign and a very good one, because we could. . . . I mean, I stood for certain things, and he stood for certain things, and it wasn't just saying what you stood for, or commenting on the other person. He talked about my record, and I talked about his record, and it was, in a sense, a very legitimate campaign, one which we won, as you'll recall, overwhelmingly. I beat him by 17 percent. I beat him by more than forty thousand votes in what was supposed to be a very close district.

We painted him as--and I think it was fair to do--as an extremist, so that moderate Republicans, as in fact they did believe, felt

BEILENSON: that he was beyond the pale and voted for a more moderate Democrat rather than a more extreme Republican. That's why we won by so much. We won an awful lot of Republican votes that year back in 1992. We used the word "extremist" on a few occasions in our brochures, and I wasn't all that happy in doing so, but you know, I think it was a legitimate thing to do because he was. I mean, he really was. He just had some ridiculous positions on things.

Now, unfortunately, I think, we continued that a little bit in the 1994 campaign. And looking back, we did a couple of brochures that, you know, perhaps we shouldn't have done. At that time--I also must admit--we were working with a couple of people, one of whom managed our campaign full-time, although we always did our. . . . My wife and I and our friends always made the decisions, really, and did most of the stuff ourselves. We spent very little money on that kind of help. But we had somebody, for example, doing some of our mailing campaigns, preparing some of our brochures, with whom I was really basically in

BEILENSON: disagreement about a lot of things. My wife and I spent a lot of time fighting him and what he was proposing, and in fact kind of toned down an awful lot of the stuff that he had prepared. But in a process like that, where he comes to you toward the end of the campaign where you have to get your mail out all prepared to the printer the next week or so, because there's only three weeks before the end of the campaign. . . . [That was] a fix we got into which really wasn't quite our fault, but which we were very resentful of. We were presented with a whole lot of campaign material which should have been prepared earlier but came to us quite late, and [we] had to decide on several pieces all at once in a very short period of time. We were unhappy with a lot of the stuff that had been prepared because we didn't like the tone of it or the tenor of it, or because we thought it was a little unfair or too negative. We won some of the battles and lost some of the battles, so that a couple of pieces went out that in retrospect I wasn't all that proud of or all that happy about. I mean, I don't think we went beyond the pale there

either. I don't think it was really unfair, either. It's just that. . . . In fact, I don't. . . . It was not unfair. We did not say anything that was not completely true, and that I thought wasn't really quite relevant. I just did not enjoy campaigning that way. But it may well have been necessary. It may well have, you know, made some difference. Again, impossible to tell. Again, the reason we had such a close campaign in 1994, I suspect very strongly, had nothing whatsoever to do with the money we spent or how we spent it, or how our opponent spent his money, but simply the fact that that was a terrible year for Democrats, and . . . .

YATES: The turnout was so bad that year.

BEILENSEN: The turnout, especially the Democratic side, was so bad that I survived only because we made a lot of friends over the prior years amongst Republicans, and picked up a sizable number of Republican votes. Otherwise, I would have been voted out in 1992 also.

YATES: What if any role does the press play in campaigning?

BEILENSEN: Well, I suppose it plays a decent role in some

BEILENSEN: places. It plays a tiny role here. Again, our own experience is, of course, just reflective of our own circumstances. We are here in Los Angeles County, and in my own case, you know, a fraction of about 20 percent, a little over 20 percent of our most recent district went into Ventura County, where in truth, interestingly, the local press played a larger role. There are a couple, two or three, newspapers out there at the far end of the district which everybody out in Thousand Oaks and Westlake Village and those places actually read, paid some attention to. But here, in the major part of the district and certainly in the old district, the only newspapers were, at least in recent years, the Los Angeles Times and the Daily News out in the Valley. Daily News is more of a local paper, perhaps, or at least a lot of people in the Valley read it, and I guess they pay some attention to some of the political commentary in it. But neither the Times nor the Daily News--especially, of course, the Times which sees itself and is, of course, a national paper--has very much news at all about local politics. I mean, it just

BEILENSEN: doesn't. It covers national and international affairs to a great extent, as does the Daily News, and every now and then they'll have an article about the local congressional race. There was a lot of comment back in 1992 when McClintock and I were running against each other because it was a new district, and because we were quite different in our approach to things. So there were a decent number of articles. Whether or not people paid much attention to them, I don't know. I know that all of our friends read them carefully, and they were worried whenever something not so nice was said about me, or they were all gleeful if something bad was said about my opponent, but I doubt very much that more than a very few thousand people out of the half a million or so in the district read these articles and paid much attention to them. I don't think they had any real effect on the campaign.

If you were, again, in an area where you use a lot of television--in Bakersfield or Fresno or some smaller places--then I'm sure that, you know, local comment and the media

would make some difference, but I really think that an article now and then in the L.A. Times or the Daily News in the Valley makes very, very little difference, even as do their endorsements, frankly. The Times always endorsed me. The Daily News always endorsed against me. I suppose it makes a tiny bit of difference, but probably no more than a few hundred votes or a thousand, two thousand votes. Not that that wouldn't be important in a close race, but generally speaking, I don't think they play a role, a real role.

[End Tape 11, Side A]

[Begin Tape 11, Side B]

YATES: OK, go ahead.

BEILENSEN: Interestingly, and I suppose obviously, if one thinks about it for even a moment or so, our experience here in Los Angeles is very similar to the experience of colleagues of mine, or former colleagues of mine, for example from New York or Chicago or other large urban areas. They get no coverage in the New York Times, except now and then if there's an open seat, there will be an article every once in a while in the Metro section, talking about the people



who are seeking such and such a seat. But you just. . . . Your local media, if you're in a big media market, pays no attention at all to a congressional seat. But even beyond that, when you think about it seriously, that's true even of statewide campaigns. I mean, there's a modest amount in the Los Angeles Times about U.S. Senate campaigns, and about people who are running in the democratic primary, but not an awful lot. You know, there will be an article now and then about how much money each one has raised, but their positions on issues or things of that sort are not covered ordinarily in the Los Angeles Times, or in any of the other big papers in the state of California. So with the exception of a gubernatorial race. . . . Even there it's somewhat similar. With the exception of a presidential race, there's not an awful lot of ongoing, in-depth coverage of politics these days, especially in the big newspapers.

YATES: OK. Let's return to the topic of campaign finance. Previously you spoke about how difficult it is to change the way campaigns are financed, but at various points when you were

in the House you proposed legislation to reform campaign finance. And I was wondering, what did you hope to accomplish?

BEILENSON: Well, we hoped to accomplish what I and some colleagues of mine had hoped to accomplish in all of our many previous efforts when we were in the state legislature, where looking back we would have had, I suppose, a better chance of succeeding--because it's a smaller arena in which we were operating than in the Congress--at somehow cutting this cord between, this increasingly important connection between, money coming from special interests and running campaigns. Looking back. . . . It's interesting. I felt strongly about this thirty years ago when I was in the state legislature, although to be frank about it, there was much less reason to worry about it at that particular time. People who took special interest money in those days got, as I think we discussed once before, perhaps a handful of thousands of dollars, a few thousand dollars, every time one ran for reelection, from special interests. Not very much from any of them. A few hundred dollars, maybe \$500, or \$1000. And

BEILENSON: of course, as the years have gone by, that's changed radically.

Colleagues of mine, for example, on the House Banking Committee. . . . I mean, now it's an obvious connection. Now the problems are obvious. They weren't so obvious twenty or thirty years ago, both because people didn't spend so much money on their campaigns and because there wasn't nearly such a large influx or amount of special interest money, which has come to play a larger and larger role as time goes on. The more money you have to spend to get elected or to get reelected. . . . I mean, if you have to spend a half a million dollars instead of \$100,000, when you think about it, quite obviously you get to the point where even if you want and would prefer to raise money from just individual interested people back home in your district, it becomes more and more difficult, perhaps impossible, to do so. You might be able to raise \$50,000 or a \$100,000 in some districts from people back home. We were always able to raise more because we came from a very affluent district, and I'd been around for a long time. But if you have to raise a

BEILENSON: half a million dollars in most districts you can't do it. I mean, you just can't do it.

If you know. . . . I'm just taking the side of the Democrats for a moment, for example. You're a Democratic incumbent. You know the Republican party has more money or is able to raise more money for all kinds of reasons than you and your party. So even if you're in a district which in most ordinary times you would win reelection in by a modest number of votes, you know that just spending your usual \$100,000 or so may not be enough. You know that two or three weeks before the November elections there may start being ads appearing on local television, or in the paper, or wherever it might be, or mailings being churned out on behalf of or by your Republican opponent to the tune of \$300,000 or \$400,000 or \$500,000 worth. So in order to protect yourself--over the years people have learned that they're blindsided the last few weeks of an election by an opponent who some way or other has acquired the use of a lot of money in the campaign--so in order to protect yourself, you yourself decide, "I'm not only going to spend \$100,000

BEILENSON: this year. I'm going to spend \$300,000. Even if my opponent spends more, at least I'll be able to compete somewhat."

Now, you cannot raise \$300,000 from people in your district back home who like you and think you're a good congressman, and so on. So you accept some money from the national party if they have some available, from the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and you raise money from special interests, from people who are used to working with you or who hang around and watch the committees on which you serve, and want nothing more than to ingratiate themselves with you, because they figure you'll probably get yourself reelected and if it's with their help so much the better. You'll feel even more kindly toward them when they approach you as a member of Congress, as a member of the Banking Committee or as a member of the Housing Committee or a member of the Ways and Means Committee, if they were able to have helped you in your last campaign. And as much as you would prefer not to, you just think, "I can't sit there with only \$100,000 and get clobbered and run over at the last

BEILENSEN: minute. I'd better raise an extra couple of hundred thousand. If my friends in the banking community or my friends in the real estate community or my friends in the labor union community are willing to help me, that's great. I'd rather not take money from them, but I don't have a choice anymore. I'm just stuck."

I mean, that's basically what the situation is. So the money does come from them, and then of course it just puts you in a position where, even if you don't want to be in that position, bills come up for a vote, issues are decided in committee often, sometimes on the floor of the House or of the Senate, where these people have an interest and where you find yourself, unwittingly really, and unwillingly, thinking first not in terms of, "Is this vote, is this bill, is this amendment, good for the country, good for California, good for the people back home I represent in southern California?" Often the first thing you think is, "Is this vote one which will please or offend the people who helped me out with a big contribution last year, and to whom I'll want to go back and ask for help again in next November's election?"

BEILENSON: You're forced to think this way because people are approaching you.

Lobbyists from the groups that have supported you or supported you last year in November when you had a tough reelection campaign, and came through and helped you, will also come by. They don't twist your arm. It's not as bad as the public thinks. They come by and they say, "Look, this is an important vote for us." Say they represent the banks and let's say there's a big. . . . It's not even black and white as to which is right and which is wrong. It's often between various economic interests. Maybe the bank is against the insurance companies because the banks may be supporting a bill that's in your committee which gives them the ability to sell insurance, which independent insurance agents are very much opposed to because it will hurt them in their business. But the banks helped you out last year, and you're sitting on the Banking Committee, and they come by and say, "Congressman, this is an important vote for us. If you can help us please do." They don't say anything more than that. They don't tell you,

BEILENSON: "We gave you. . . ." Remind you, "We gave you \$5,000 last year and five of the other banks also gave you \$5,000 from their political action committees." They don't have to. They know you remember that and they know you feel kindly toward them. And you know that it may not affect your constituency even, one way or the other. It may, it may not. Both sides will argue that it does. The banks will argue that, "We will cut costs to your constituents because we will be competing with the insurance companies, and therefore the cost of insurance will go down." The insurance people will say, "Possibly the costs will go down a little, but you're going to have some young person at the bank who knows nothing about insurance selling you insurance, whereas we have practiced agents who have had a lot of experience in the field and a lot of knowledge, and who have been spending their lives as insurance agents, who can guide you." They're both right, in terms of what kind of insurance you should buy to cover yourself properly.

That's the kind of problem that you often face, but because the banks helped you out so



much last year, and because you can't figure out which one is right--maybe nobody's right particularly, who knows?--you cast a vote for the banks.

YATES: So what did you think you would accomplish by . . .

BEILENSON: Well, what you do, of course . . .

YATES: . . . bringing up campaign reform?

BEILENSON: Of course, campaign reform can mean any number of things, but basically for me it means cutting the connection as much as possible. . . . If possible, denying the ability of candidates to get money from recognizable or identifiable special interests. So that the money you get is either from just individuals--who obviously have an interest in one thing or another but you don't think of them in those terms, you think of them as your friends and fellow Democrats back home--or from public moneys, or even from the party, because even though the party gets money from the various lobbyists and then sends it on to you, all you know is that you're getting money from the Democratic party. You don't know that the banks. . . . I mean, nobody has a claim on you, as it were. The

BEILENSON: banks can argue with the Democratic party, "Look, we helped you and you guys produce some votes for us." That is a problem and it's one that ought to be solved. But, the banks can't come to you and say, "The money you got was from me because we gave it to the Democratic National Committee," or something of that sort.

So the trick, if possible, is to (a) reduce the amount of money that's necessary in campaigns by making available--and there are all kinds of alternative ways--making available free time on television, or reduced cost of television, or newspaper ads, or things of that sort. Or (b) making alternative sources of money available. Namely, public financing of one kind or another, such as we have in presidential primaries now and have had for twenty, twenty-two years or so. It's worked fairly well, except people are finding their ways around that now too, as you know, with so-called soft money and independent advertising, so that members of a legislature have not accepted money from and do not feel indebted to identifiable private interests, which leads to their consideration of the interests of these

BEILENSON: interests before or equal to or often in a superior way to that of thinking about the people back home.

If you were reliant on. . . . If your chances of success for reelection are reliant on continued support from five or six or seven different interest groups or interest areas, whether it's the unions, the banks, the insurance companies, the real estate people, oil companies--you know, it could be good, bad, indifferent, whatever it is, but identifiable interests--then every time there's a vote that affects their interests you're going to be concerned about how they will view your vote and your position. You don't want to offend them. If possible, you want to please them and keep them happy, both because they helped you, and you want them to help you again next year because your running always again next year--it's always within two years you're running for reelection--and because you feel kindly toward them, and because you probably agree with them more or less. I mean, you're not. . . . Your position is not antithetical to theirs. They're pretty reasonable. In fact, most

BEILENSON: people's positions are pretty reasonable if you look at it from their point of view. But what happens is, and it happens unwittingly often, you start thinking in terms of these people and worrying about pleasing them, or at least not displeasing them, because you know you need to go to them again next summer to prepare for your next campaign, your next reelection campaign next year.

What should be in your mind, and what fortunately was able to be in my mind, and the minds of about a dozen of my colleagues who, like myself, took no money from special interests. . . . The only things I ever worried about were, "Is this a good vote?" I mean, is it good, as I said earlier, for the country, for the people I represent, for southern California, to the extent that you could find an identifiable interest back home. And of course, at that time, perfectly properly I suppose, you worry about, "Will this offend people back home?" Let's say it's a death penalty vote or abortion or foreign aid or whatever. There are lots of votes, and that is perfectly proper to worry about whether it will

offend people, whether it can be used against you in the next campaign by your opponent. But that's a different thing: worrying about pleasing or serving or doing something of value or not to the people back home, whom you were elected by and whom you're supposed to represent, than worrying about some special interests who made your victory last year possible.

YATES: Let me rephrase my question because I'm not sure I asked it the best way, which is, when we talked before about campaign finance when you were in the state legislature, I believe you said that public pressure is really the only way to change campaign finance, or the way campaigns are financed. I know you personally made the decision not to accept special interest moneys. I guess my question is, knowing that when you were in Congress you were a proponent of campaign finance . . .

BEILENSON: Before . . .

YATES: What did you. . . . Well, while you were in Congress what did you hope to accomplish, knowing that you thought that public pressure was really the way that things were going to

come about, not internally? That was what I'm trying to get at.

BEILENSEN: No, it's a perfectly legitimate question. Let me try to answer it. I'm not sure I'm answering it as well as you'd like. It became more and more apparent as time went on--I suppose perhaps it should have been apparent from the very beginning--that hopeful as we were, it just was not going to transpire that a legislature itself was going to reform campaign laws, for a lot of obvious reasons. The more you think about it the more obvious they become. First of all, everybody is an incumbent. You're talking about incumbents and they are voting to change a system. It's a system which they're comfortable with even if they don't like it, or at least they are used to, or at least they are successful under. I mean, we all succeeded in getting elected under the existing system, or lack of system, which is probably a better way of calling it. Therefore, even though many of us, perhaps even a majority of us, don't like the system or don't like the excesses or the problems, it is a system we've lived with and succeeded under,

BEILENSEN: and one which is difficult. . . . Even if you were able to change it any way you wanted it, it's not all that obvious. It's a little more complicated than perhaps the public is often led to believe, as to how one would go about changing it in the best possible manner.

But in any case, it's tough to sell to a group of incumbents that they should change the law, because it would obviously put them at less of an advantage than they currently are at. The minute you think, for example, of public financing, and you think back. . . . "Gee, a real jerk ran against me two years ago. I clobbered him and one of the reasons I did was because he was a jerk, but the other one was that he really wasn't able to raise much money, and deservedly so. He was a fool. He really had no business running for Congress. Maybe he should have run for the state assembly or something and tried that out first." Now, under a campaign finance law, such as I've supported all my life, this guy probably would have been given \$200,000 with which to campaign. And you start thinking. . . . I accept that. That comes with the territory if

BEILENSEN: you're going to change things and have some public financing. But it's perfectly legitimate and reasonable to think, "Why in God's name should we be, in effect, making available \$200,000 to any jerk who wins the other party's primary to run against incumbents, even if that person is really not a qualified candidate?" Well, of course, it's not up to us to make that decision. That's the answer to that. But you start thinking. . . .

One of the ways that shows your bona fides as a potential candidate, or as a candidate and as a potential office holder, is your ability to appeal to people. Among those things that you have to appeal to them to is your ability to raise money from them. If you're just a silly fool, just putting his name on the ballot, and obviously [appear] even to other Republicans or to other Democrats as someone who shouldn't be in office, you're not going to raise a lot of money. Why under a campaign finance change should we be shoveling out a couple of hundred thousand dollars to this person to run?

Anyway, for a lot of reasons it becomes



BEILENSEN: more and more obvious that it's not going to happen. And because of the difference of opinion among legislators--I'm going a little farther afield here. . . . The truth of the matter is that we all have different experiences running for election in different districts in different parts of the country. You know, as we discussed at great length, I have a certain set of experiences in campaigning which, among many other things, has to do with the fact that our campaigns are largely made up of volunteer precinct workers and largely of mail. Most of my colleagues do a lot of TV. Now, when you try to design a campaign. . . . You know, in finance reform, it matters what kind of a campaign you're talking about: whether you need a lot of money for television or if you're doing mailings and things of that sort. It just comes out differently.

But anyway, the long and the short of it is that it's become more and more obvious that the Congress by itself is not going to succeed in reforming these laws, and you need some public pressure. Now, you don't get public pressure,

BEILENSEN: in my opinion, except when a relatively popular chief executive, in this case of course the president, campaigns loudly and convincingly for such change. I happen to think that because nobody quite knows--that is, in terms of the public, nor should they be expected to know--exactly what campaign finance reform is or what form it should take, everybody's for it. Again, I think quite naturally and quite properly, because they can't stand the existing system for some of the reasons we've just talked about. It's like welfare reform. Everybody's for it. How can you be against it? How can you be against any kind of reform? So if you have a president, whether it's a Mr. Reagan, or a Mr. Clinton, or somebody else who is good about getting the message out, it seems to me that such a person could succeed in forcing the Congress through the pressure of public feeling, which they can whip up successfully as the president of the country and with their access to. . . . By appealing over the heads of the Congress to the voters, to the electorate, they could succeed in getting some kind of campaign finance reform

enacted. It's not going to happen without that.

It doesn't mean that as individual members of the Congress, for example, we shouldn't have tried. I'm glad we did, and we got the discussion that much further in various proposals that we put forward every couple of years or so, but we got nowhere at all with it. And as you're well aware, just very recently, at the end of February of this year, 1998, the Senate through the use of a filibuster killed off, at least for the moment and perhaps for the rest of this term of Congress, a bipartisan effort--mainly a Democratic one but somewhat bipartisan--to do away with soft money and some of the other obvious problems. The president supported that effort, but not in a serious manner, in my opinion. Not in a way that he spoke out generally to the public, in a convincing or adequate manner.

YATES: OK.

BEILENSEN: That's the only way it's going to finally happen, I think.

YATES: OK, so it sounds like from what I'm hearing, because you believe strongly in it and were a

proponent for it, you focused some attention on it . . .

BEILENSON: Yes, exactly.

YATES: . . . brought attention to it, but you didn't expect something dramatic to happen at that point.

BEILENSON: Well, to be fair or to be truthful about it, we kept hoping something would happen. We kept hoping we could come up with some. . . . Especially when the Democrats had a fairly sizable majority back in the eighties, mid- and late eighties, we were in hopes of getting some bill out of committee. You know, if you ever got it out of committee and onto the floor, again, the chances were fairly decent that you might succeed, because it's hard to vote against such a thing. Because, again, the next year your opponent would say, "When Congressman So-and-so had an opportunity to reform our hideous campaign spending problems, he or she voted against the only bill that was available to do something." So people are afraid to vote against reform, if you could ever get such a bill out of committee. But we never succeeded in getting such a bill out of committee. I

think we were proper to try. We were correct in trying and there were a good number of us among the House Democrats especially, and a few House Republicans, who were anxious or serious about it, but we never did quite succeed.

YATES: OK.

BEILENSON: Let me just add one last addendum. One could talk at length about this, I mean at too great length about this, obviously. Part of the reason was that we couldn't get support from our own leadership. And part of the reason for that was that the leadership always-- unfortunately--almost always is hesitant to do anything which will offend any of the members of the caucus. Some Democratic members for example--to be very specific about it--were against any kind of campaign finance reform, for reasons we needn't go into now. But especially because they couldn't run campaigns without a lot of special interest money. They just can't. I don't blame them. They come from inner-city districts, for example, where they can't raise more than \$5000 or \$10,000 from their constituents. They've got to get it from lobbyists or from unions or whatever. And

they fear, and properly so--I'm sure I would have the same position they do if I represented such an area--that without some alternative means of getting money. . . . Or perhaps they fear that they can't survive under a change of circumstances at all. Anyway, they are very much against campaign reform in most of its forms. So the Democratic leadership--the speaker, when he was a Democrat, and the majority leader, and the whip--in order to safeguard or to protect some of the members of our caucus, saw to it that such reform bills did not succeed and get out of committee for a vote.

YATES: Well, let me shift here a little bit. Previously we talked about the California Democratic delegation briefly, and I was wondering if you would summarize how effective was the Democratic delegation, perhaps within the context of the delegation as a whole.

BEILENSEN: That's an issue which people often raise publicly--pundits of one sort or another--and often critically, often deriding the California congressional delegation in general. Because there are so many of us, one would think that

we would have perhaps more power than in fact we do, or more ability to get things done than in fact we do.

YATES: You did mention, I think, previously, that that's one of the problems, that there are so many people.

BEILENSEN: Well, one of the problems is that there are so many people, but there's a greater problem beyond that, and that is that our state is made up of so many kinds of peoples and interests and areas. I mean, it's perfectly obvious to anybody living in California really, and they should understand this, although people from other places looking at us think perhaps we're all the same. But of course we're not. We're a little nation here. We're the seventh or eighth largest economy in the world. There are only six or seven countries whose economies are larger than ours. And we are farmers, large farmers, as a matter of fact, and we are workers and we are farmworkers and we are service industries and we are financial people and we are people who care a lot about the environment, more than perhaps in other areas of the country. All these things cut in

BEILENSON: different ways. We're like a sizable nation here, with a huge number of people and a lot of interests, many of which differ with one another and cut different ways. And it's reflected, obviously, in our representation in the Congress. We've got at the moment fifty-two members, and I think--although I'm not sure--about twenty-six of them are Democrats and twenty-six are Republicans. But anyway it's very close.

If you just take a moment to think about it, it is more likely, for example, that the Republicans and the Democrats in the California delegation in general would represent differing points of view, philosophical points of view. Now, there are some things now and then that affect more or less all Californians, or all of California. And in such instances, which are few and far between I think, we tend, as Californians, to all vote together, just to represent the interests of our own districts. If there are ways, for example, of allocating and spending highway funds that will come out better to a place like California--as compared to some of the older states back in the East or



BEILENSON: the Midwest or the more urban states, although of course we're very urban ourselves--then we will, all of us or most of us, vote that way. If there are problems dealing with water, which obviously is a necessity in terms of getting water from other areas, from other states as a matter of fact, to keep things going, especially in southern California, we may--all of us from southern California at least, Republicans as well Democrats--vote together.

But when you think about it, there's no real reason why the California delegation should be acting in concert much of the time. Much of the time we're voting on whatever issues there are out there that have a partisan tinge to them of one sort or another, or a philosophical aspect to them of one sort or another. The more conservative members of our delegation--those, generally speaking, who are Republican--will vote one way and the Democrats will vote another way. We're a lot of microcosms--if that's the right way of putting it--of the whole country. Every now and then when there is something that concerns California in general, we will, just out of

obvious reasons, tend to vote together.

YATES: So lack of cohesiveness hasn't been necessarily a problem?

BEILENSON: Sometimes it turns out to be a problem, but I think it's fair to say, yes, that there is no reason to believe that we should be walking in lockstep, or voting in concert, an awful lot of the time. When you think about it, and think about the different kinds of populations that we represent, there's just no reason to expect that. And again, I'm just saying for about the third time, on those occasions when it's clearly in the interest, in general, of the state to do certain things or to vote a certain way, we do it.

That doesn't mean that we couldn't work better together than we have. That doesn't mean that we shouldn't try harder. I mean, some of us have been advocates for years--with no success at all--of having a luncheon once a week or once or twice a month with all the Republican and Democratic members, just to sort of talk about things that may be of mutual interest. We tried at some times to do it, with a little bit of success, but we tend to

come together only when there's an issue where it's obvious we should be coming together.

YATES: You're talking about the whole. . . . The Republicans and the Democrats.

BEILENSEN: Republicans and the Democrats. Exactly. I don't know. I guess from the outside it doesn't look good, but when you sit for a moment and think about it, there is no reason why we should be acting an awful lot differently than we have, in fact, acted. We act in our own self-interest, we act<sup>a</sup> in the interest of the people we represent, and if those interests. . . . If and when those interests are statewide, we act together.

YATES: On to yet a broader level, give me your assessment of the speakers in the House of Representatives during the time you were in Congress.

BEILENSEN: I'd be happy to. Interestingly they were really all quite different types of people. I've served under four speakers. For the first good many years under Tip O'Neill. All of these things have a lot of different aspects to it. It's really interesting when you start thinking about it. From the outside, I guess

BEILENSON: at least to the average voter or certainly to Republicans around the country, he seemed to be sort of typical of the old-time politician. You know, kind of heavy-handed, maybe like a political boss or something of that sort. The truth of the matter was really quite different. He had many of the instincts of the old-time politicians. He cared about local politics, he cared about taking care of people, he cared about covering all of your bases at home. He had a big heart, and he basically was sort of a [Franklin D. Roosevelt] FDR type, if that's the proper way of. . . . Or, you know, the old-type liberal Democratic politician who perhaps, with a little hindsight now, was a little too bighearted in terms of how easily or how quickly one would come to support almost any program that might spend money to help poor people and things of that sort. His heart was very much in helping people who needed help, which I personally find attractive and like very much. I found him a very attractive, very warm, and lovely human being.

What's of interest to me. . . . What I found was of interest to friends of mine back

BEILENSEN: home when they asked me to talk about what it was like in Congress was that he was not at all a strong-arming person. He did not ask much, and my great criticism of him was that he did not ask enough of the Democratic Caucus, that is, the Democratic members of the House of Representatives, to stick together and do certain things that he thought we ought to do. He tended to let people just go. . . . I mean, if you said to him, "Mr. Speaker, I'd love to. . . ." To the extent he even ever asked you for help or for support--and he seldom did that. . . . He didn't like to bother people. He didn't like to ask things of people, because he felt, as they all do to a too great extent I think, that we are all supposed to look out for our own districts. That's nice in one respect, but it also means that the party in power doesn't have an awful lot of influence over its own people and isn't as cohesive as it ought to be, and therefore has a harder time getting things done, unlike in a parliamentary system, where you're expected to support your party or the government falls.

So if every now and then Tip O'Neill would

BEILENSON: ask you to cast a vote with the party in doing such a thing, if you just said to him, "I'd love to, Mr. Speaker, as you know, but the folks back home are just half crazy about this issue and I just really can't afford to vote this way," he'd say, "Oh, that's OK, don't worry about it." I mean, he really did not lean on you at all, and because of that there were times when we lost a number of votes when we had the majority, and when he would have liked and many of us would have liked, for example, to counter some of Mr. Reagan's initiatives, which the speaker was very much opposed to, and I think quite properly. We did not exert enough. . . . He did not, the leadership did not, exert enough pressure on some Democrats to come along with us.

Now, they may also have been quite correct in the sense that they simply wouldn't have been able to. Mr. Reagan, for example--to take that particular example--was very popular at the time, and he was very popular back home. Even though the local congressman was a Democrat, Mr. Reagan may have also won in that district, and it would have been political

BEILENSON: suicide or at least politically difficult for even a Democratic member of Congress to have voted against a presidential Republican initiative, a Reagan initiative.

So we lost a lot of big votes that the speaker was very upset about, and many of us more moderate and liberal Democrats were very upset about too. But the truth. . . . Again, his personality was such that he did not ask much of other people. He did not lead as much as I personally wished he would have, and I think he would have been more successful in his opposition, for example, to Mr. Reagan if he had played a little more active role.

The next speaker we had was Jim Wright, whose mistakes were made in the opposite direction, who tried more than he should have, in my opinion, to control what went on in the House in a fairly heavy-handed and obviously ham-handed way. Now, on the one side, most of us appreciated the effort he was making in trying to pull Democrats together and to get certain things done. And in fact, in the beginning of his term as speaker before he fell, obviously, and got into trouble, he was

BEILENSEN: fairly successful in doing some things, although they were relatively easy things to do. There was a transportation bill, a highway spending bill, and some other things which I think any speaker could have succeeded in getting through. But I liked. . . . Many of us liked the fact that he was sort of more involved than was the previous speaker, Tip O'Neill, in making sure bills got out of committee and got to the floor in an appropriate period of time, and that the Democrats stuck together and voted these things out, although he was never really tested in difficult circumstances because most of the bills he succeeded in getting out, or we succeeded in passing when he was speaker, were things that it wasn't all that difficult to get done. But he was a little heavy-handed about it too. There are ways of being a leader and trying to ensure that certain things get done as speaker that are not offensive to the people you are dealing with: sort of an encouragement and a reminder from them, just in taking an interest in what was going on. O'Neill did not do enough of [this] and Wright did not so much



BEILENSON: in that manner as simply giving orders, which offended a lot of people and turned a lot of people off.

Eventually, we ended up with [Thomas S.] Tom Foley, who in many respects was as capable, and certainly as bright and as likeable, a person as one could possibly imagine, a man of great dignity and charm, and one whom everybody was very, very fond of, but who again, like Tip O'Neill, was just unwilling for whatever reason to exert the kind of leadership, even in a nice, modest, inoffensive kind of way--which I think is perfectly proper, legitimate, and can be done in a successful way--that one would hope a speaker would do. I mean, we could not get him to lead in an awful lot of areas where it was just so obvious to some of us that some changes were necessary, that reform of the rules of the House were necessary. He would not buck any of the major chairmen of the committees. And without his support, we just couldn't get certain reforms and certain things done.

Among other things, I think we learned, as some of us predicted--although we didn't know

BEILENSEN: quite how bad the results would be . . . I think it's fair to say that our failure to act in a lot of areas in 1992, 1993, 1994 led to the devastating defeat of Democrats and the loss of our majority in 1994, and Tom Foley's loss of his own seat. He was a very popular guy back home. He lost by a couple of thousand votes that year. Nobody expected him to do that. We were just seen as a party that refused to move, that refused to respond to what people back home wanted us to do. Part of that could be laid very directly at his feet. He would not help those of us--and there were a good many of us amongst the Democrats--who wanted to move us, or wanted us to move, in certain useful ways and directions. He wouldn't let it happen and we all suffered because of it. He more than others.

Then you've got the interesting case of [Newton L.] Newt Gingrich, who now I think may have settled down into being the kind of speaker one ought to be. I mean, he kind of overstated, overdid his. . . . He kind of overdid it at first, got kind of overexcited about himself and the possibilities for himself

BEILENSON: and his self-importance and saw to it that a lot of legislation was passed under the so-called "Contract with America" in his first term of office, his first year in office. Most of that stuff ran into trouble, fortunately, over in the Senate, which even though it was controlled by the Republicans, I guess they were aghast, among other things, at the speed at which some of the stuff was passed and the carelessness with which some of the legislation was written. Some of it wasn't even heard in committee. It just popped out of committee without even having any hearings, which is not the way to do it. I think he has settled down a little bit more and is doing things a little bit more rationally and responsibly now, at the insistence in some cases of some of his own committee chairmen.

In some respects, I think Gingrich is running the speakership better than most of the Democrats that I served under did. He at least lets his chairmen know that certain things are expected of them, that the Republican Caucus expects certain bills to get out on the floor sometime in the course of the year so they can

be voted on, because they've made those promises and he sees to it that it happens. That's what a speaker is for, in my opinion. If you do in a way that's not too ham-handed, or too obvious, or too. . . . You know, that's a little. . . . What's the word I'm seeking? Whatever.

YATES: Even-handed?

BEILENSON: Not so much even-handed, but in kind of a not too obvious, a little subtle way. Where you can encourage people and let them know that certain things are expected, and, "You can do it in your own way, Mr. Chairman, but we've got to have a reform bill of this area or an environmental bill or an anti-regulation bill passed and on the floor by July so we can get it out and send it over to the Senate in time for it to be acted on, so the president can either sign it or veto it and we have an issue there." At least he sees to it that it happens. And I think, frankly, that that's the proper role of a speaker, because otherwise were just a bunch of 435 men and women who do nothing but look after our own interests. We do whatever we think is necessary to get

BEILENSON: ourselves reelected. We don't want to offend anybody back home. We'd just as soon do nothing. I'm speaking not so much for myself but for people in general. I mean, just as soon not vote even, because every time you vote you're giving your opponent a shot at you for talking about how you should have voted, or at least to those constituents who could be offended by what you did.

If you're really there, and if your majority is there, whether it's Republican or Democratic, to make a difference in the country, in the direction of the government, then you have just got to grab the bull by the horns now and then and do something. You don't have to do it foolishly or outrageously or make a lot of noise about it, but you've got to steer things. With the exception of Jim Wright, who kept too tight a hand on the reins and pushed too strong and too obviously, and Gingrich, who did it that way too much in his first year of office . . . It may be that Gingrich has been more successful in the last year or so in reaching the right kind of way of going about exerting leadership in the House of

Representatives.

YATES: How did things change in the House after the 1994 election when the Republicans gained the majority?

BEILENSON: Well, you're asking a Democrat, of course, and the first and most obvious thing is that--I suppose it should be obvious to anybody on the outside too--it's not nearly so much fun. That's the wrong word really, but it's not nearly so satisfying or rewarding to be in the minority, as our Republican friends all these years have been telling us. If you were chairman of a committee, you're no longer chairman. You're the ranking minority member. You don't have the say-so, you don't hire the staff, you don't make the decisions as to which bills are going to be heard and which bills will be passed. You don't have control over the House. On the Rules Committee, on which I served, instead of being the number two person among the nine member Democratic majority, as I was in 1993-1994, in 1995 and 1996 I was the second most senior Democrat of the four Democrats on the committee, and there were nine Republicans sitting where we used to be sitting

BEILENSON: over on the other side of the table who were controlling everything. And although I and my Democratic colleagues tried to contribute thoughtful suggestions as to how the rules should be changed and what should be done about particular bills that were before us, obviously they were done in accordance with what the now Republican leadership wanted done, and we were just rolled over as we used to roll over the Republicans.

After a couple of years of that you realize, "Who wants to sit around here forever and have people respect your position and think you're probably right, but they're not going to do it because the Republican leadership wants them to do something else?" So as much as they like you, or think you may be correct about something, they're not going to do it. They've got their. . . . That's understandable. That was true, of course, of a lot of other Democrats on a lot of other committees. So it's not. . . . The experience of serving in a legislature is much less rewarding or satisfying, to put it mildly, if you're in the minority. Especially if you suspect that

BEILENSEN: you're going to be in a minority for a long period of time. Having had that experience finally ourselves, as Democrats, now, for many of us for the first time. . . . Although I served for a couple of years under Republican majorities in the state legislature, it was different back there, as we've discussed; it was less partisan and it was less important whether you were a Democrat or a Republican. I wonder at the staying ability of a lot of our Republican colleagues all these years, in the forty years or so in Congress when they were always in the minority. Now, it doesn't mean that in the minority you can't play a useful role. There are some committees where the minority and the majority work very closely together, especially on the appropriations committee, and they take care of each others' needs, and so on. But in some other areas, and especially on the Rules Committee, which as we've discussed is very much the creature of the leadership, of the speaker particularly, the minority simply does not have a say, and I suppose that's correct.

The other respect of course. . . . It



BEILENSEN: changed in a lot of respects and I alluded to one of them, the most important one to me, just a short while ago. When the Republicans first took over, in their excitement and kind of overwhelming frenzy that followed, and their quite understandable desire to act quickly and strongly, convincingly--and they campaigned on this so-called "Contract with America"--they wanted to turn out all this legislation in the first hundred days or so. That's quite understandable. But they did it, I think, in a very irresponsible and offensive way. They had the votes, they could have done anything they wanted, and what they should have done, of course, was to have spent a modest amount of time and carefully think through what their proposals were, and send them to the floor in the proper manner. They did not do that. They rushed a lot of things to consideration, some of which, as I just mentioned a short while ago, a few minutes ago, didn't even have the benefit of hearings. I think that is just totally outrageous, because the whole legislative process is one where one should work carefully and conservatively and

BEILENSON: cautiously--and the Republicans themselves should have known that even better than Democrats--so that the end product is carefully thought out and is sensible. And the whole committee process, the hearing process, is one that is designed to do just that.

There is no way in the world. . . . I mean, you have a good idea, or what you think is a good idea to change legislation. It may be a good idea, and the whole thrust of it may be correct, but that doesn't mean that you shouldn't subject it to some kind of outside, not so much criticism but comment, because in the course of hearings you get outside testimony from expert witnesses and so on, and you learn a lot about the realities of what you're proposing. And although the principle involved may be quite correct and the eventual outcome will come out exactly as you wish, there are ways of going about this, and there are ways of drafting legislation, quite obviously, that are better and more sensible and more thoughtful than other ways. If you do it too quickly and without much forethought, you're likely to do as we've too often done in

the past and as the Republicans have often quite correctly criticized the Democrats for, come up with all kinds of problems that were unforeseen, hadn't been thought of. And if you'd taken more time, and studied the problem a little more carefully, and still that same year you would have passed legislation--it would have been a couple of months later--you would have done something which was more thoughtful and more workable and more sensible than what you came out with. So they sent out a lot of real junk.

[End Tape 11, Side B]

[Begin Tape 12, Side A]

YATES: OK. Sorry, you were saying?

BEILENSON: And there were a lot of peripheral problems involved. The Republicans had a lot of new members, many of whom had had no legislative experience, didn't understand actually what a legislature should do, and what its function in the whole governmental process is, that is, to play a relatively conservative role. It's interesting and I think ironic, because we're talking about very conservative Republicans, who were acting in a very radical manner. But,

BEILENSEN: I would have given the. . . . I would have hoped very much, and many of my Republican colleagues on the Rules Committee felt very much the same way--"We're a little shamefaced about this whole thing and upset about it," but they had to go along with their leadership--that we all wished that we could slow the process down. They had the votes to do anything they wanted. They would have eventually done it, but they would have done it in a far more thoughtful and useful manner.

Meanwhile, we also had the situation where, as I started to say, we had a lot of new members. Almost all of them were Republicans that year--only a dozen new Democratic members--whose first experience as legislators was in this very atypical way. You know, just coming up with an idea and putting it in a bill and sending it out to the floor and voting on it--that's not a useful way for somebody to act--instead of being taught, as it were, the proper ropes, the ropes of a proper legislative process.

Upon their coming to the Congress, they all took part in this sort of frenzied outpouring

BEILENSEN: or output of not well-thought-out legislation. When the speaker later, and other Republicans, tried to slow them down, or when the whole process, actually, worked to slow them down because of running into problems in the Senate, and the fact of course that we had a Democratic president, which one can be grateful for--that we had a divided government at that particular time. . . . They still haven't. . . . They are still impatient in a way that grows out of the fact that they don't understand yet what the function of a legislature is in this whole process: to think things through and to slow things down and to work them through before they're finally sent off to be enacted into law, if the president, in fact, will sign them.

I guess they're learning, and things have slowed down a lot for a lot of these reasons, because there are these built-in checks and balances, not only between the president and the Congress, and also, of course, between the public and the Congress, because they ran into a lot of problems later on in 1995 in their first year when they tried to undo environmental laws and so on, where they just

ran into huge firewalls of protest from an angered public. I started to say there are checks and balances between the chief executive--I mean the presidency, the executive branch--and the legislative branch, but also between the Senate and the House. The Senate, of course, is even a more slow-moving body than the House, and I must say that for once in my legislative career, it was good to have a slow-moving Senate with the ability to use a filibuster to slow things down, something which I had never believed in before.

YATES: Let me ask you a question comparable to the one I asked you about the speakers, and that is, what is your assessment of the presidents who were in office when you were a member of Congress?

BEILENSON: Yeah, that too is interesting when one thinks about it. Let's see, we started with Jimmy. . . . I came the same time President Carter came. I was very fond of him. I was very impressed with him, as were most of our colleagues, to the extent that he was an immensely bright person. He was as bright a person as I've ever met. I mean, I was. . . .

BEILENSEN: There was a time when everybody was working. . . . At least for the first couple of years when things were going along fairly well, the first couple of years of his presidency, where there were good relations between the new speaker, Tip O'Neill, and the president. I, and I guess most of my Democratic colleagues, found ourselves over at the White House fairly frequently as members of committees, whatever, talking to the president personally in a group--not one on one--about various matters. I remember being so hugely impressed at one instance when a whole group of us were over there--I guess with the Foreign Affairs Committee, which I served on at the time--and he spoke without notes for about forty-five minutes about the intricacies of some foreign policy problems and about nuclear problems and, you know, nuclear armaments and so on, and arms control. A very impressive performance. The man is extremely bright. He also, with a little hindsight, and perhaps it was obvious partway through his term, was not a terribly successful president, because he lacked other attributes that it's important to have as

BEILENSON: president.

Mr. Reagan was quite the opposite kind of person, you know. Not that he wasn't so bright, but he certainly was not aware of the many specifics of matters, and couldn't for a moment come down and argue, even one on one or with a caucus, about a particular piece of legislation or even just the generalities of proposed pieces of legislation. But nonetheless, was in his own way a very successful president, by singling out specific matters and speaking to them and swaying the public. I mean, not that he. . . . I give him a lot less credit than other people did because he was dealing with what were politically popular issues that it was easy to appeal to the public on.

I would have given him a lot more credit as a great communicator, so-called, if he had been asked to sway the public or to bring the public along on some difficult matters like raising taxes or slowing the rate of growth of Social Security or Medicare. He was asking people to cut taxes and spend more, mainly on defense. I mean, who was against that? If you could have



BEILENSON: your taxes cut and have all these programs you care about get more money, who's going to say no except a few responsible Democrats, those of us who thought we were just doing foolish things?

Anyway, Mr. Carter was obviously a good person, obviously a hugely intelligent person, and obviously someone who never got on top of the job of running the presidency properly. You know, a lot of problems, one of which is I suppose he probably concentrated too much on detail himself, and didn't see the larger picture. Not that he didn't, but he didn't express it in a way that people understood that he did. He also was surrounded, unfortunately, by people he brought along from Georgia, who were themselves inexperienced in the ways of Washington.

Washington is a very big and a very difficult place, and unless you're very flexible and open to change, almost nothing that you may have previously done prepares you for the job of president, to begin with, but also just to work in this big lake that is Washington politics. I won't go into it, but

BEILENSON: obviously it's a hugely complex problem. You're dealing with a large and an often difficult Congress with its own interests. You're dealing with a vast constituency nationwide. You're dealing with a very difficult media and continual attention, and so on. And it's just. . . . It's a tough job. You know, it's a tough job to do well. It's almost beyond anyone's means these days. It certainly was beyond his. And of course, he ran into some serious trouble that was not of his own making. The inflation brought about by the high cost of energy through the problems in the Middle East, not that he handled it all that well. And of course, finally the thing that crowned it all was this taking of the hostages in Tehran, which he didn't handle very well either, which the press didn't handle very well, and the whole thing became impossible.

But, you couldn't help but like him. You couldn't help but admire him. And I think it's fairly obvious to people in all the years since his presidency, he is in many respects one of our most admirable ex-presidents. He obviously is a person whose heart is in the right place

BEILENSON: and has the right values and does the right things and isn't out there to make a lot of money, but tries to live a--in his particular case--a very Christian life, you know. He and his wife both are very admirable human beings, but he wasn't prepared for the presidency. He might well have grown into it in a perfectly adequate manner if he hadn't run into these serious problems, the energy problems and the hostage problems, which made it all but impossible for almost anybody to get out of. But he's someone I'm very fond of and always have been very fond of.

Mr. Reagan was the next one. He too, of course, was somebody you're fond of in quite a different way, because he's a nice person. You know, there's nothing un-nice about him. In fact, I used to get in trouble with some of my more partisan constituents back here when I would describe him as a nice person. They'd get very angry and I understood why, because he may well have been nice, but he was proposing policies which they and I very strongly believed were not nice at all, in terms of their effects on the American people, and which

BEILENSEN: I strongly opposed. I voted against his tax cuts. I voted against his budget cuts. Not very many of us did, as a matter of fact, and for all kinds of reasons.

I had known him, of course, much better, not well but much better--this was a much smaller arena back in California, as we discussed before--and I was amazed at how successful a president he was. One of the great differences between his presidency and his. . . . Well, there were a couple of big differences, but I suppose they led mainly from the fact that. . . . I mean, he was both a popular governor and a popular president. As governor, he got very little done, I think, in terms of moving, changing the direction of the government. He got some things done. He got welfare reform done, but as we discussed, it wasn't really that big a deal, and it really didn't change things all that much. As president, he changed the course of the government radically. He was successful, as a good performer on television, in appealing directly to the people and over the heads of the members of Congress. I think that comes

BEILENSEN: from the position, you know, thinking about it a little bit. A president. . . . As I said, he was a popular governor, but people aren't all that interested in state issues, I think, except maybe of course they're happy to go along and reform welfare. Who doesn't want to get rid of all the welfare cheats or reform welfare? So he talked about that, and he had some success in it. But I think a president, simply because of the importance of the office and the interest in the issues that a president deals with. . . . There's just a much greater interest and it has a much greater personal effect on constituents back home, in this case back home being the whole country. It's just easier for a president to get on television and say, "Look, we've got to cut the size of the government, or we've got to. . . ." You know, he said at the same time that we have to increase defense spending in order to stand up to the Russians or the Soviets, who were getting ahead of us, or whatever the issue might be. The nation responds, and writes to its congressmen or calls its congressional offices. It's much harder, I think, for a

BEILENSON: governor--even though it was the same person, it was Ronald Reagan--to appeal to the people of California about various issues as governor. I mean, you don't get on television that often. People aren't that interested. The issues aren't that important, whatever it might be. So he was able to be a much more effective communicator to the people who elected him to office as president than he was as governor, and he had issues which people were more excited about or got more, you know, upset, excited or upset about.

There was another reason, although I'm not sure. . . . It relates to this first one. He didn't get an awful lot done, I think, in terms of changing the direction of the government when he was governor of California, because we had a less partisan legislature at the time. We had a lot of moderate Republicans who were in positions of power, and when they took over for a few years--they won both in the assembly and in the senate--they tended to be people who felt very much the way many of us Democrats, more moderate to liberal Democrats, did about what government should be doing. And we

BEILENSON: refused--we as a legislature, including Republican leaders in the legislature--refused to be pushed around by then Governor Reagan. He was too radical for many of our important Republican members of the legislature, especially in the assembly. People like Bob Monagan and Jack Veneman and Bill Bagley, and some of the others, Hugh Flournoy in the old days. I mean, these were people who were mainstream Republicans in the ways that Republicans used to be mainstream, and unfortunately no longer very often are, who control the Republican positions of power in the legislature. They just didn't agree with this new, more radical governor.

When he got to be president, things had changed a bit. Many more Republicans, you know, were coming from the right wing of the Republican party and were only too eager to follow this person. And of course his huge popularity and his ability to, as we've discussed earlier just some minutes ago. . . . He was elected by large majorities in districts where even Democrats were elected to Congress, and certainly in districts where moderate

BEILENSON: Republicans were elected, so it was difficult or perhaps impossible politically for moderate Republicans not to go along with him and not get wiped out in their next primary by angry, more conservative Republicans who said, "Look, you didn't even support our president, Mr. Reagan." And of course, a lot of the more conservative Democrats who came from districts where he got 70 percent of the vote didn't want to run against or be criticized by Republican opponents a year or two later when they ran for reelection by some Republican who said, "Look, you didn't support our fine president, Mr. Reagan, when he was proposing to secure our country against the Soviet threat or to cut taxes." You know, who doesn't want to go along with a popular president who wants to cut taxes? It takes a bit of gumption, it seems to me, even though it's self-serving for me to say so, for us to have voted against his cutting taxes by 25 percent. It's tough to come home to anybody--Democrat or Republican--who says, "For God's sake, why didn't you support the president and cut our taxes by 25 percent?" No politician likes to be in that position, but a



BEILENSON: lot of us put ourselves in that position because we thought it was an irresponsible thing to do. So Reagan came at just the right time, and brought just the right constituency, and he was terribly effective at selling his point of view.

Mr. [George H.W.] Bush was somebody whom I'm very fond of, if only perhaps that we have the same kind of background. I mean, he went to Andover, which I went to. I forgot if we talked about this before or not, but on one occasion when he went up there on the two hundredth anniversary of the prep school, he took along myself and another member from Florida who also graduated from Andover, although some years after he did. He's a very friendly guy. He had come originally from the House of Representatives. He had a lot of friends left there, particularly [Daniel D.] Dan Rostenkowski, who was the Democratic chairman of the Ways and Means Committee. But he was. . . . You know, he understood. He had been around Washington forever and understood the process, is a friendly person, is not an ideologue, and found it very easy and

BEILENSON: comfortable to get along well with the members of the legislature. He knew everybody, most people's names. He knew who I was. Well, one of the reasons he knew who I was--as a Democrat, whom he ordinarily might not know--is because I was chairman for a couple of those years of the Intelligence Committee, and he saw me in that position a bit. I was always over there a lot just prior to the Persian Gulf War, as were some of the other chairmen, all of whom at that time, of course, were Democrats. So he was someone who was easy to be with, who was not offensive ideologically the way Mr. Reagan was. He was a perfectly friendly and kindly person, and who liked to get along with people, and as I said, because he was not an ideologue was easy to be with.

He was not a terribly effective president either, except in foreign affairs perhaps, but who really didn't have--as was often commented upon at the time--much of a vision for the country itself, and who once the Persian Gulf War was over, and we should have been turning back and starting to pay more attention to some of the unmet needs here at home, really wasn't

BEILENSON:     terribly interested in them, wasn't thinking about them, didn't really have much of an agenda at all for that sort of thing. Because of that, I think, it was the principal reason he lost to then governor Bill Clinton in 1992. People were starting to cast about, worry about what was going on here at home. Here you had a Democrat who was--a Democratic candidate once he got past the primaries and was nominated--who was talking about doing all kinds of things to create jobs and to improve education and so on, which were things which were on people's minds, whereas your incumbent president, Mr. Bush, wasn't talking very strongly about these, speaking out very strongly about these things at all.

          He's a nice man and somebody who I was not worried about ever doing anything wrong or terrible or dangerous. As a matter of fact, thinking back now that I'm saying this, it's also true to a great extent, and I'm sure the country felt that way too, about Mr. Reagan. Here's a guy who was really a pretty far right-wing ideologue, saying all kinds of fairly outrageous things about the Soviets and the

BEILENSON: evil empire and so on, but at the same time was clearly a kindly person, or at least not a person like even Mr. Nixon. . . . Maybe it's the wrong thing to say about Mr. Nixon, because he was a very responsible person when it came to public affairs, but he was also an insecure and strange man personally who might have--if he had been a right-wing ideologue, which he wasn't, fortunately--might have struck back at the Soviets if he got too upset about something. He wasn't that. . . . He was a moderate and a sensible person in foreign affairs and on domestic relations, domestic issues too.

You could sense--and I think the country sensed--that Mr. Reagan, extreme as he might have been in some of his positions, especially if one disagreed with him, was not a frightening person, really, at least with respect to dealing with the Soviets and some other overseas threats, especially if they were real people. He didn't hesitate to get involved down in Central America where it wasn't going to hurt us all that much. But he clearly wouldn't have done anything foolish or

BEILENSON: crazy, I think, with respect to the Soviets. And Mr. Bush was clearly the same kind of person.

Mr. Clinton, finally, who is the fourth president under whom I served for my last four years of the Congress. . . . And he too is. . . . I mean, these are interesting people. He is the most impressive, in many respects, of all of them in terms of his intelligence. He would come--again, in total contrast to Mr. Reagan especially, but also to Mr. Bush. . . . He would come down to the Democratic Caucus--there would be a couple of hundred Democratic members of the House of Representatives there--and argue and talk about legislative initiatives and so on, and know more about most of the bills than most of us did, except for perhaps the chairman of the committee or the authors of the bills themselves, you know, committees that were dealing with these things. He knew a huge amount. He knows a huge amount of the particulars and of the specifics. Unlike Mr. Carter, he is much better at the overall view. And unlike Mr. Carter, much better sort of politically at knowing how to talk about these

BEILENSEN: things, and present these things to the public at large, so that politically it made sense as well as in terms of the issues themselves.

He, in terms of his personal strengths, really was in a position to be just an enormously impressive and effective president. His failings from the beginning were those which his archenemies were quick to point out. I mean, unfortunately they were right, and I hate to say this, but it's true to a certain extent. There is some core there lacking. He is. . . . It's obvious, I guess, and it's understandable to a certain extent. I mean, here's a guy. . . . Even as the recent TV series on Mr. Reagan reminded one that he had an alcoholic father and a lot of his. . . . He was a lonely kid and he sort of blocked out certain things. I mean, things he didn't want to think about weren't there. When he became president, if he wanted to believe certain things, he believed them even if they clearly weren't correct. You know, that was his way of fending, and he looked down on certain people with failings because he was reacting from his childhood experiences with his alcoholic

father. I'm overgeneralizing a bit, but it's true. Here's a man who clearly wants nothing more than to please everybody, to be liked by everybody.

YATES: Clinton, you're talking about now.

BEILENSEN: Yes, excuse me. I'm talking about President Clinton now, who lost his father before he was. . . . Never knew his own father, who had a stepfather who. . . . I mean, you think about it. Gosh, I don't know how I would have turned out if I had never known my father. If I had had a mother who in some respects was kind of a nice person but who liked nothing more apparently than to be a little bit irresponsible, spend her time at the racetrack, not have. . . . I don't know, enjoy life. If I had had a stepfather who was abusive to my mother and not terribly affectionate toward me or caring about me or my siblings, my personality would be somewhat different from what it is now, too. He obviously is a creature of his childhood and of his upbringing, and it's hard not to have a lot of sympathy for that.

I mean, he is so bright and so confident,

BEILENSEN: and his heart basically--from my point of view, again as a Democrat--in terms of positions on things, his heart's in the right place. He wants to do the right kinds of things, and at the same time, I've found myself, as someone who was in agreement with his positions largely, just getting hugely angry because he'll back down on something because he can't say no to someone else, or he wants to get something done and compromises more than he should. Or, when you get right down to it, doesn't have quite the same core values or basic principles that I think I have or some of my colleagues have or some of the country has. I'm not talking about his personal behavior either, because that's an additional, very real problem, which is just startling and offensive to me and to many people who basically, you know, are very supportive of him, or want to be supportive of him or who agree with him very much about issues. We feel the same way about almost all major issues, but I find myself angry with him, and offended by his refusal to speak out strongly about a lot major issues that I think are terribly important, and



BEILENSEN: his. . . .

For example, even though he's picked up on some issues--crime, jobs, education--well, who can fault anybody for doing that? I've always felt that those are the three basic issues that people care most about. If you have a job, if you have some feeling of personal safety, you don't have to worry about your kids or your wife or yourself walking the streets in the evening, or driving to work in the daytime, and if there are decent public schools nearby that your kids could go to. . . . I mean, those are the basic necessities of life that anybody wants, and that you really want to ask of your government to make available to you. And at the same time. . . . And that's all he talks about: those kinds of issues, real issues that mean something to people. And that's the reason. . . . And of course, we've had a lot of success economically, partly his fault and partly not, partly because of what he and the Congress did and partly just because of the cycle of things and what's happening elsewhere in the world. But we're in fairly good shape economically, and people have jobs on the

BEILENSON: whole. . . . That's why he's so terribly popular.

But when you think about it seriously, crime and education especially are not federal issues. At least, they never were. And even now, with his talking about them all the time, I doubt that the federal government contributes more than 3 or 4 percent to the anti-crime efforts of the country, nor should it. Traditionally, it's been left up to local district attorneys and sheriffs and people of that sort, and police. And education. . . . The federal government contributes maybe 6 percent of the money for public education, nor should it contribute more in my opinion, and education should basically be, continue to be, as it always has in the past, run by local school boards and by local colleges and state universities, whoever else is involved. But just a little bit of talking about it and a little bit of extra effort and money that the federal government is spending at his behest pleases people and keeps him very popular. One shouldn't argue about that, but at the same time he's failing to give the same kind of

BEILENSON: leadership to some more difficult and long-term problems that don't affect people so obviously or so directly, and wouldn't be so pleasing to them.

Again, he is doing things for people that they want done. Now, that's both what government ought to do and what it sometimes perhaps ought not to do. The Republicans, to a certain extent, are right. I mean, the federal government shouldn't be--perhaps--putting so much more money into education, or putting so much more money into child care. We need child care. Should the federal government be providing it? I don't know. Maybe it should because nobody else does or can, but you know, these are kind of marginal issues but very popular ones. I wouldn't mind so much his spending so much time on these things if at the same time he were taking some time and using up some political capital at trying to educate the public about some other things that should be done.

Now, his recent steps, for example, at talking seriously or trying to involve the Republicans in Congress in talking seriously

BEILENSON: about what to do long term about Social Security, and eventually about Medicare, are things which I give him credit for. These are basic important issues which have to be dealt with, and which we haven't been serious enough about in the past. And, of course, the fact that he's undermined his own credibility to a certain extent by his personal behavior, or at least the alleged personal behavior. But clearly, you know, he's a different kind of person than many of us would prefer to have in a president, in terms of some of his interests. [Laughter] You know, it makes it all that much more difficult.

But he is. . . . It's hard not to like him a lot. He's, again, somebody who knows everybody by name. I mean, from the very beginning he's known not only me, as a more senior member--not a terribly important one perhaps of the House--but he knew everybody else. It's lovely having the president know you and caring about you and being nice to you and so on, in a way that. . . .

Of all the presidents, the only one who had no idea who any of us were was Mr. Reagan,

basically, or who most of us were. All the others were really pretty good about knowing us personally. You know, it may sound silly from an outside point of view, but if you're president and you want to be effective and you want your presidency to be successful, a large part of it is getting along well with the Congress, and your personal relations with the members, relationships with the members of Congress, are terribly important. If it's a president you care about and you know cares about you personally, at least knows you, and tries to help you out now and then, you're more willing, obviously, to give him a vote now and then on something that he cares about. That's just human nature.

YATES: Right.

BEILENSON: So these have been interesting people to know, and for the most part, they've all been really quite nice people.

YATES: Well, it's interesting. You have two Democrats and two Republicans, and just to hear something about what they're like as individuals is, I think, interesting, because it does reflect how they deal with policy issues and some other

things.

[Interruption]

OK, we took a break. We had just finished talking about the various presidents who were in office while you were in Congress, and so next along the sort of same theme of U.S. politics, I wanted to ask you, during the time when you were in office, how did the role of the media and reporting on politics change?

BEILENSON: Again, obviously, my experience is limited, and my response to all of these questions of course is mainly in terms of that limited experience. I don't recall at the moment whether we've talked about this before or not, because I spoke to someone in the not too distant past about this, to the effect that if you were the person involved, if you were the person being interviewed or being reported on or whatever, you discover early on that the vast majority of so-called professionals in the media do not do a very good job of reporting fairly on what you are saying or doing. Not out of bias or anything of that sort, but perhaps it's just out of lack of competence. This was first brought to my attention on several occasions in

BEILENSEN: the state legislature, where I did play a major role as the author of the abortion bill most specifically. With respect to the media, at least, I got more media attention at the time when I was the chairman of the senate Health and Welfare Committee and ended up, as we discussed earlier at some length, being the author of then Governor Reagan's Welfare Reform Act and being interviewed about it. The specific thing I recall most clearly--and I think we probably did talk about it, so we can always strike this if it's totally redundant; perhaps you should stop me if you remember my saying it--we had made this very strong bipartisan effort to prepare a welfare reform bill while the governor was out campaigning on his. When we reported out our bill, which had taken a lot of suggestions--we incorporated a lot of suggestions of my Republican colleagues as well as myself and my own staff and the Democrats in the committee--we were attacked publicly by the governor for having produced a partisan bill, and at that time he introduced his own alternative bill. That was the way it was all reported, even though I myself was

BEILENSEN: interviewed at some length and tried to point out that we had proceeded, in fact, in a very bipartisan, very nonpartisan manner. It's not terribly important.

Unless you have somebody who gives a little bit of background and who quotes you in context, it just doesn't come out right, and you're never really quite--obviously--so aware of this as when you were the person involved yourself. On the one hand, people can quote you, and I've often been misquoted in a good paper such as the Los Angeles Times where one would expect better, but only because the particular reporter is someone who is relatively new, or didn't have much background or much understanding of the thing. I've often been, I started to say, simply misquoted. I mean, words were put in my mouth that I never said, because I've never said those words. People will ask me. . . . People will ask you a question, for example, and you'll respond, "Yes," or whatever, and then they will turn that into not just a "yes," but because they don't want to quote their own question, they will say, "Congressman Beilenson said such and



BEILENSEN: such and such and such and such and such," which clearly was not true. I just responded, "Yes," to a question from them. But because they only wanted not to quote themselves but only me, they would turn it around.

There are other times, more understandably, where you would be quoted correctly. I mean, those were your words, but they either make no sense or make a different kind of sense, because they were taken out of context, or because the previous or the subsequent sentence was not included. It's very obvious when you're involved in something that that could be the case. Now, the public doesn't ever know that, doesn't ever think that, and you can't really complain in some respects because that's exactly what you said, but it was only after five minutes of, or even one minute of, sort of putting the thing in context, explaining the alternatives, and then showing where you came down. But that's not showing your thinking. That is quoting you specifically, but you'll notice when somebody. . . .

You learn very quickly that a truly professional person will not mess you up that

BEILENSON: way. I mean, it comes out right somehow, in my experience, with a couple of reporters in the Los Angeles Times, with whom I've had good experience over the years and also who know their way around, so they've got enough background to be able to put this thing in the proper kind of context, where I'm always comfortable talking to them, and whatever it is that they end up publishing about you or quoting from you, even if you'd wished they had included some other things too, or wish they hadn't included this, at least they've got it right, you know. It's true what they say, at least in that limited sense.

I've also had the same experience with a couple of reporters with whom I've spoken on a number of occasions from the New York Times. The difference is just really outstanding. Their article is written in such a way that the general public gets the proper view or a balanced view of what the issue is, what the questions are, and of your position on it, or at least your quotation makes some sense in respect to what it is they were specifically talking about. I'm going on at some length

BEILENSEN: here, but only to show that. . . .

I can assure you that--and I suppose one can empathize a little bit if you've not been in that position--it is the easiest thing in the world to. . . . What's the word I'm groping for? To sort of mischaracterize or let you, using your own words, mischaracterize your position or your feelings about a particular matter. That's particularly true if you're sort of a--as I like to think of myself and most of my colleagues--a relatively rational, thoughtful, careful person, and not some demagogue who says outrageous things and those outrageous things are quoted, and that's good enough, probably for him and for the public. It's not possible for a thoughtful, rational person to give much of a point of view in one or two sentences, but nobody can quote you at any greater length. So you're almost bound to be taken a little bit out of context, or at least not in a balanced sense.

Especially through the print media, which I happen to care about and believe in more deeply than television, because I like the idea of people sitting quietly in the morning with

BEILENSON: their newspapers, and reading through things and being able to mull over questions and issues, rather than getting stuff just thrown at them in eight and a half or twelve-second segments from television. At least in the print media, it often comes out that way.

Now, with respect to. . . . The best thing in many respects is a television or a radio interview--if the whole thing is shown. The most comfortable thing is to be on a panel or to be interviewed by somebody on television, and the five minutes you're on, or the ten minutes you're on, are all broadcast, so someone can see that you're a thoughtful, rational person, and can measure your various comments in terms of or in relation to other things you've just said, or to what you say just a moment or two later. It all makes sense that way. It's the same at my town hall meetings. I'm talking as a rational creature, and people understand what I'm talking about and put it into a proper kind of context. If, for example, however, you're being interviewed on television--it doesn't happen to me very often, obviously, but to better-known people

BEILENSEN: and certainly to presidents and governors and people of that sort--again, only a half a minute at most of it, perhaps, is shown in the evening news, and it matters which half, which thirty seconds of the interview, even if it's just a stand-up interview as the president is walking away from the White House or walking to the helicopter or something, is given. If you ran the whole two or three minutes of the interview, it might all make sense and put everything in some kind of context, but if you just pick up a couple of sentences or so, no matter who it's from, no matter how thoughtful that person is or how thoughtfully he or she is expressing themselves, it doesn't come out complete.

So the whole problem of media coverage of things--and I know this isn't exactly, entirely what your question was getting at--but even totally responsible media coverage of issues and personalities, unless you're very professional and thoughtful and careful and knowledgeable, doesn't come out right. Now, if one says--as I'm sure you were suggesting as well--that the media goes far beyond that these

days, that it becomes entertainment rather than knowledge to a certain extent, that's certainly true at the moment with respect to things going on in Washington with the president, and whatever. But also because I guess the media, television especially, especially now with the advent of all the cable channels--we don't just have the three major networks--you know, just the dissemination of news is quite different from what it was.

YATES: Yeah, the proliferation is amazing.

BEILENSON: Sure, sure. And the fact that you don't have Walter Cronkite anymore, and two or three other fairly well-established and dignified and responsible--if I may say so--anchors or commentators, but people competing, as it were, for the public's attention just even in the dissemination of news, it becomes to a certain extent, as I was saying, an entertainment medium as well as an information medium, or perhaps that more than anything else. Apparently the need to entertain people in order to capture their attention and to retain your audience. . . . Not all audiences, obviously. Some certain limited number of

BEILENSEN: people read the New York Times or the Los Angeles Times, or some other major paper every day, and they watch either CNN [Cable News Network] just for some news or one of the major networks for some relatively mainstream stuff. But too much, I think, the whole business looks at what it's doing and its product as entertainment, or at least has that at the back of its mind as much as simply, you know, passing on the news. And of course, you'll run into the problem of--especially people who have a political ax to grind--some of the smaller stations and certainly a lot of the radio programs, and certainly the call-in programs, where some of the commentators reveal ideology of their own. They're fun to listen to if you agree with them I guess, or even if you don't agree with them, but they are not unbiased disseminators of the news.

The whole thing becomes a strange mix, and people, on the whole, obviously know what they're getting. They understand that this person has got his own point of view, or not. And it depends on what they're seeking, what they want. Most people don't seek out--

probably never have--just some dry news about things, but there's a small percentage of people who do. Most people don't pay close attention to these things anyway, so maybe it's not tragic, but it certainly is not moving in a direction that any serious member of the government or serious student or person who is seriously concerned about public affairs and public issues finds very enjoyable or finds very encouraging.

YATES: Well, another topic. What do you think about term limits?

BEILENSON: Term limits is, in my opinion, a very black and white issue, and one on which I have stronger feelings than perhaps any other. I mean, on most public issues, most of us who are public officials--not so many perhaps now, unfortunately, as in the past--are pretty tolerant of other people's points of view. We all come from different backgrounds and different environments, and whatever. We represent different kinds of communities, and we have different feelings about different issues. Even though I feel strongly about, for example, a woman's right to choose to have an



BEILENSON: abortion or not, I understand where people come from if they're on the other side of that issue. And on the death penalty--just reaching out for some obvious issues--or whatever else one might talk about. Because those are substantive issues dealing with human lives and so on, and people's point of view about things.

To a very real extent, I think it's fair to say that term limits is a procedural kind of issue, at least to begin with, and one which the general public . . . And I don't mean in any way to look down on them or to be paternalistic or anything, or condescending or anything, but there's no reason in the world why most of the public should have any kind of sophisticated understanding of this issue or the effects of term limits on legislators. If it's just thrown at you as just a general member of the public. . . . You know, "We can't get rid of these terrible guys in the legislature or the Congress. They are there forever and they're all being financed by special interests, and some of them are terribly arrogant and offensive to us. We ought to put limits on their terms in office

BEILENSON: and make sure that we have new blood there all the time, and people who are close to the people back home." On the surface, on the face of it, it makes all the sense in the world, or at least a lot of sense. It's perfectly understandable why people would vote for it. In fact, it's kind of difficult to understand why term limits in California only passed by a very modest vote. The first one was, I think, 52 to 48 percent. But in my opinion, and obviously my position is colored by the fact that I've been a member of the legislature, one legislature or another, for those thirty-four years, I see no good side to term limits, and so many downsides to it that I don't. . . . As I said, I feel so strongly about this that I don't admit of its being good in any way at all, for all kinds of obvious reasons, and for the ones that are always cited.

First of all, it's an issue whose time has sort of come and gone. Back ten years ago or twelve years ago, when people started talking about term limits, it was far more true than now that people were not being turned out of office, for whatever reasons. By the time this

BEILENSEN: came to kind of a head in the Congress the last two, three, or four years, we were dealing with a House of Representatives, for example, that was about 80 percent new. I mean, 80 percent of the members had first arrived starting about 1990. When I left a couple of years ago, I was fifty-second in seniority. I had been there twenty years, but there was almost nobody left who had been there before me, before I arrived. And if I were still there, I'd be about twenty-something in seniority. So people are leaving. It's turning over. It's a totally new group of people, unfortunately, in my opinion. We've lost a lot of very valuable people and gained a lot of not such good people. So it's much less of a necessity.

As I said, it's an issue whose time has sort of come and gone. It's no longer a time where you would need such a thing. If, in fact, you needed to have a big turnover, there's more and more turnover all the time, and there will continue to be, in my opinion, even without this. But there are millions of. . . . There are several major reasons why I just think it's an unwise kind of thing. I

BEILENSON: think anyone who is a student of politics here in California can see it just right off the bat, if you see the difference in the quality of the state legislature now compared to what it was just several years ago. I don't know anybody who deals up there. . . . Some old lobbyist friends of mine, some newspaper people who are good friends of mine, and some other just onlookers who say that the quality of the legislature just doesn't begin to compare to the quality of the legislature in the old days, even some of the bad old days. To begin with, none of us, whether you're a Republican or a Democrat. . . . Those of us who served for decent lengths of time in the state or in the Congress, you wouldn't have had any of us for more than six years or maybe even eight years at the most. You know, pick out the U.S. senator or the congressman or woman or the state senator or the assemblyperson whom you admire the most, no matter what your politics are, that person has probably been around for a while and served you effectively and well and honestly for . . .

[End Tape 12, Side A]

[Begin Tape 12, Side B]

YATES: Go ahead. Sorry, the tape just ended. You were saying about term limits . . .

BEILENSEN: You know, if you're lucky enough to find someone, as I always used to say with a little smile to my town hall groups and so on, who has represented you all these years honestly and well and has worked hard and has looked out for your interests and voted pretty much the way that you liked and whom you're comfortable with and whom you believe in and--as I've said--you have no doubt as to his integrity or his independence, why shouldn't you have the right to keep that person, instead of having him automatically thrown out of office and a whole bunch of people run. There may be no one in that new group who compares to the person you had before. You have every right in the world to have represent you whomever you want, and if you've found somebody who's good, keep him or her. You shouldn't be automatically denied by a constitutional change the ability to have that person. It's also true. . . .

Again, if this is something that you're talking [about] to a group of people, you can

BEILENSON:     sway them, persuade them--not all of them, but many of them. . . . You know, look at whatever job or vocation that you're in. If you're a good person, if you're hardworking and intelligent, whatever, over the course of time, no matter how good you may be at the beginning, you get better. You gain experience, you gain knowledge. You just get better. You're a doctor who may have been a terrific doctor when he got out or she got out of medical school, but after six or eight years is a much better one, because they've had that much more experience with real life and with real patients, and have learned things, and so on. It's exactly the same in the legislature. Or a fireman or a policeman or a teacher. You know, you can be a wonderful teacher just out of school, but after you've worked with kids for a good many years, you're probably twice the teacher, if you're a good teacher. And it's true of people in the legislature. I mean, I was a good little legislator from the beginning, I think, but I was a far more effective, thoughtful, sensible, intelligent legislator after several years than I was at

BEILENSEN: the beginning. And in fact, for people in my own district, Republicans especially and independents, I also got more conservative, or more moderate over the years, so that should have pleased them, too.

We're there in the Congress dealing with a trillion and a half dollar budget. You need people who have been around the course a few times, who know which government agencies and departments do good jobs, which programs are valuable, which ones are not valuable, which ones ought to continue to be funded, which ones should not be. It takes some time before you can figure this all out and sort it all out and find out whom you can trust and whom you can't trust. If you're a new member of the legislature, just as you're starting to get on top of your job after a few years--it does take a few years--you're automatically out.

You can't attract people who want to make a career of politics, which may sound good to you at first, but in fact, you're just pulling in people who are going to be there for a few years and then out they go. While they're there they are looking for someplace else to

BEILENSON: move to because they know they can't stay very long, so they're looking for a job in some industry or some interest that's meanwhile funding their campaigns, or coming before them for favors in the legislature.

And there are a lot of other arguments, too. Perhaps the other--one of the most convincing ones--is that if there is a continual turnover so there's nobody there in the legislature, which is accountable to the people back home in a way everybody else is not, all of the historical knowledge, the institutional memory, resides not in elected officials who are close to and accountable to the people back home, but in the hands, literally, of the lobbyists who stick around--they stay around forever--and the staff and the bureaucrats up there. As I tried. . . . As I used to tell people at my town hall meetings or in my other meetings back home here in the district, I said, "You know, if you write me a letter or call me, you can bet your bottom dollar I'll get back to you, because I want to please people. I feel responsible to you, and I don't want to offend you because I hope



BEILENSEN: you'll vote for me again, or whatever. And also, it's my job." I said, "If I didn't pay attention to you and you started writing to staff or to bureaucrats, do you think they'd care? They don't come from your district. They don't live here. They don't know you. You can't get at them at a town hall meeting like you're here with me. You can't vote against them. They pay no attention. They just go ahead and do whatever they want." You've got to have people who are close to you who are there, who are actually running things. You don't end up running things if you're just there for two, three, four, a couple of terms and then you're out, and somebody else is in. I mean, you can't get your arms around problems or questions. It may be obvious to you--you're nodding your head--but you know, to the public, you've got to talk to them about it. If you have a chance to explain it all, I think you can turn people around on it.

But in any case, the obvious results up in Sacramento have been disastrous. When we're lucky--even though it looks stupid--we're lucky that someone who, after their six years are up

BEILENSEN: in the state assembly, runs for the state senate, because at least we have somebody who's an experienced legislator over in the senate. But of course, you know, their term may not end up at a time when another senate term. . . . I mean, his term in the assembly may not be up at a time when the seat in the senate opens up, and then you've lost these people. What's the sense of finding good young men and women who are excited about public service, you get them elected, and before you know it they're on their way out, and then you've got to start all over. It doesn't make any sense at all.

Fortunately, by the very narrowest of votes, 5 to 4, the U.S. Supreme Court about a year and a half ago held that state initiatives cannot impose term limits on congressional representatives, which has to be a matter under the federal constitution, in the U.S. Constitution. But, of course, we're still stuck with it in this and a couple of dozen other states.

YATES: On the state level.

BEILENSEN: Right. It's tragic, I think, and I hope very much that some day people will come to see the

light and change it back.

YATES: Let me return to your last term in office. Why did you decide to retire from public office when you did?

BEILENSEN: I think it was just a question of time. Although our experience in Washington was somewhat different from what it was in Sacramento, as we've discussed, what it all boiled down to was that I had served in one legislative office or another for thirty-four years, and I suspect that whatever job one does. . . . It's a job as well as however else one might describe it. It's something I loved and believed in very much and I'm terribly grateful that I had the opportunity to serve people and to represent them. It was fun for me, and it was the kind of thing I think I was good at. And it was rewarding and a useful kind of life to have led, I think. Nonetheless, no matter what you do, there comes a time--and you know it when it happens--when there's a certain repetitiveness, a certain sameness about it, where it doesn't have the same not so much excitement, but interest or whatever, as it had at the beginning or earlier

BEILENSEN: on. I think in many respects I did at least as good a job, I hasten to say, toward the end as I did earlier on, maybe a better job. Perhaps we talked about that once before. The challenge of representing this newer, more difficult, more conservative district was one which I both enjoyed and which forced me, even--but I was glad to accept the challenge--forced me to work even harder at being a good representative than perhaps I had been pushed to do before, because in the earlier years and the earlier districts, in terms of survival, I didn't have to do anything at all. Just being the incumbent Democrat was enough to survive, whereas here I had to work hard at it, and I enjoyed that. It made my last few years particularly rewarding and satisfying and enjoyable. Also, because I had a lot of new constituents, we made a lot of new friends. It was kind of a time of renewal, which was a very nice way to end instead of just being, you know, thirty-four years and the exact same people to represent, where there were no new challenges or whatever. There were plenty of challenges, and it was fun.

BEILENSEN: But nonetheless, the work in Washington itself became very repetitive and very much the same. You started noticing that every time you went to the floor to vote, it was something you had voted on eight times before. Twice the year before, twice the year before that, whatever. You knew nothing very much was going to come of it. You look around, and you discover that many of the people you cared most about were no longer there. You know, most of the people you're closest to are the people who were elected when you were first elected. And over an eighteen, twenty year period, most of them have left: they've lost, they've died, they've retired, they've run for another office, whatever. You know, there are only maybe 10 percent of them who are left. For me, of course, and for some of my Democratic colleagues especially after 1994, we served for the first time in a long time, and the first time in Washington in recent memory, in a House, in a legislature, that was run by the Republicans. And for all the reasons we've discussed earlier today, it's not so much fun being in the minority as in the majority. So

BEILENSON: if you already are getting to the point--I guess this is a good way of putting it. . . . When you're already sort of getting to the point, because it's twenty years now in the House of Representatives, where you probably will start thinking about when one ought to leave or when would be a good time to leave, you're given an additional push, I think it's fair to say, by the fact that all of a sudden after all these years . . . Not only you're a little bored by the thing--if that's the right way of putting it--or at least there are fewer new challenges or new interests, and you're getting tired of the same old subject matter and the same old kinds of votes, but on top of that is added the fact that your party is no longer in the majority, so that whatever ability you had before to help lead or to help push the House of Representatives in what you think are the right directions, you no longer have that because you're in the minority party. That just adds to the reasons, in a very important way, that suggest that perhaps you ought to leave.

I had postulated for myself when we made

BEILENSEN: this decision--I keep saying "we" because my wife and I obviously, and the rest of the family to a more modest extent but they're off on their own basically and grown up now, made the decision jointly--I postulated just for purposes of argument, I just imagined--because there was a chance of its happening but not too great a chance, that the Democrats would regain control of the House in 1996--if I should run for reelection. And I decided that even if we were the majority party again--which there was some chance of occurring, and we only lost by about ten seats behind the Republicans--that still the time had come for me to leave. There was so much a sameness of the place, and it was a Congress that just wasn't all that exciting to me or all that interesting. We weren't dealing--nor was the president, nor was the administration--with issues which are of that much concern. And I didn't feel that I was part of a government, nor would I feel even if we were again in a slight majority in the House, would I be part of a government that was sort of moving in the right or the interesting directions that would be useful or fun for me

BEILENSEN: to try to be part of, or to try to help along.  
But I think it's just. . . .

The fact is that it's obvious, becomes obvious to you after a while if it doesn't in the beginning, especially in a big place like the House with 435 members, that whether or not you're there, it makes--it's hard to admit--not all that much difference. You know, one's being there as a good member, one assumes one has been a good member or hopes one has been. It's important when you add it all up that there are more good members than bad members. The more thoughtful and decent people who are there, the better it is for the whole institution, for the country. But nonetheless, specifically in terms of my being there or not probably doesn't make a lot of difference, especially, of course, if I can be succeeded by a Democrat.

The final reason that I made the choice when I did was that I felt that I wanted very much to be succeeded by a Democrat. I didn't want us to lose this district, which is a difficult enough district as it is. I thought that if I left in a year when my successor



would be chosen at the same time the president was running for reelection, there would be a bigger turnout, and there would be a better chance of a Democrat succeeding me than in an off-year election. It turns out, actually, not to have been the case. That is, a Democrat was chosen to succeed me, but interestingly, the turnout was not any bigger than it was two years earlier when I almost lost, although the makeup of that turnout--as I think we discussed earlier at one point--was quite different. The Democrats tended to come back out in 1996 and vote, and it was the Republicans who stayed at home, which was just the opposite of 1994, when we had such a hard time getting reelected.

YATES: What did you like best about serving in Congress?

BEILENSEN: Well, I'm trying to answer that properly--I mean correctly--because serving in Congress was, as we've discussed, quite different really in many respects, similar in some others, from serving in the state legislature. I loved being a legislator from the beginning. I did much more legislation, as we've discussed, in the state legislature than I was able to do in

BEILENSON: the Congress. And for no other reason than that I didn't serve on legislative committees but on the Rules Committee mainly, except for my work in Intelligence and Budget Committees. So although I sort of felt. . . . Although I was continuing on and being a legislator, the truth of the matter is that I wasn't at least in the same way that I had been when I was able to be a legislator in the state legislature, where it was a smaller group, and where I was able to serve as chairman of policy committees and could get my way on a lot of major issues.

The whole--for many of us, not all of us, and not so much these days unfortunately as in the past--the whole process of serving on a legislative body is one which some of us liked very much and are very comfortable with, and I think it's a good thing, frankly. To a certain extent I guess outsiders would claim that we get too co-opted in a sense--if that's the right word, or there's another word that I'm trying to find and not succeeding in finding--in working with other people, people whose points of view are not always exactly the same as your own, some radically different, some

BEILENSEN: only partially different. But for anyone who likes other human beings and is interested in issues and respects other people's points of view, there is nothing more rewarding and more fun in some respects, too--especially as part of a process, a public process of determining the fate of legislation and the direction of a government, whether it's a state government or a federal government--of working with other kinds of like-minded, public-spirited, interesting, well-educated, caring men and women, even if their views are much or somewhat different from your own, of working together with them and trying to resolve problems and come out with results that make some sense, and are helpful to the people of your state or the people of your country. It's a very satisfying kind of experience, and especially if you like other people and enjoy working with them, as most of us do, not all of us. . . . I mean, it's interesting. In the old days, Congress was. . . . There is a certain get along and go along kind of feeling which in some respects is proper to condemn or criticize, but basically still is a way in which, on the whole, the

BEILENSEN: right things get done. Not that there isn't some wastage and some foolishness and some pork barreling or whatever, but mainly you're going in the right direction. You're working together with other people of differing views to try to figure out what's best for your country or for your state.

That whole process of being thrown in with these men and women, for me and for many of my colleagues, was just wonderful. It's very much--I've tried to explain to constituents and friends--it's very much like being in school almost. Or let me put it this way: when session's over, and you come back again in January to a new session, it's like coming back to school in the fall after you've all sort of been home for summer vacation, and you haven't seen most of your friends all summer long, and it's wonderful to see them again. It's great to be back with them and to work with them again. It's just like it used to be to come back to school and see your old friends again. Then every couple of years, when you come back some of your old friends are missing. You know, it's like in the old days. They

BEILENSON: graduated. They went off to college or something. Or you all graduated from college and went off in different directions, and you never see them again. It's really sad. You know, you've lost your good friends from Nebraska or Montana or Alabama or New York State or even northern California, who have retired or have been defeated, and that's the end of them. You hope to see them again sometime. Sometimes you do, and sometimes you don't.

It's a very personal kind of thing, and it may not sound great, perhaps, to an outsider, but in truth, the fact that we were human beings who cared for one another and were fond of one another, even if we often disagreed with one another, made for a wonderful kind of milieu in which to work. You're forced to work with them and to work out your differences with these people, in the course of which you make a lot of very deep and lasting friendships, just as often with members of the opposite party as with your own. At least in our case, my wife and I were always surprised in looking back to realize that we had more close friends in the

state senate among some of the Republican couples, members and their spouses--wives, I guess, in those days entirely--and that's true too in the House of Representatives, as we had amongst Democrats, people whose political positions and feelings about issues are somewhat different from our own, but who are lovely human beings, and whom we became very close to.

So you enjoy all that, and at the same time you enjoy very much the ability to make whatever contribution you're able to, depending on the circumstances and the extent of your authority or leadership or whatever, to directing the outcome of discussions and eventually legislation, and positions on issues of public interest and concern.

YATES: What was the least fulfilling aspect of being in office?

BEILENSON: Well, the least fulfilling. . . . The worst part of being in office for almost every member, it was no different for me, was--especially in the latter years, the later years--was having to raise so much money. For all kinds of reasons: One, you weren't able to

BEILENSON: just sort of--not so much relax--but ignore other things and work hard at being a legislator and doing your job, the thing that you wanted to do, that you were elected to do. I don't mean just writing legislation, but also representing the people back home and coming back and talking to them and writing your newsletters and just sort of staying in touch with people, you know, being a conduit between them and their government. That's what your job is, and that's what we ran to do. But as it became for me and for 20, 25 percent of my colleagues who represented relatively marginal or difficult districts which could go either way in many election years, a major fraction of your time and effort had to go to raising money. It wasn't so much true for me, because even though we had to raise a lot more money, I compartmentalized it to a great extent. We did it only in campaign years. We did it through a series of fund-raisers. But you know, it was not fun, and it took away from the pleasure of the job. I don't mean to say the job was just a fun job, but you know, my job. . . . What I wanted to do was to be a representative of the

BEILENSON: people, and a contributor to government and to policies, the definition of governmental policies and outcomes and so on. I loved and didn't mind at all running for reelection and campaigning, mainly because it meant, at least at the outset, going out and talking about issues and my positions, and explaining my votes and talking about what's going on in Washington. I loved doing that, sort of in a teaching kind of way. I mean, being a teacher almost. Just--without speaking down to people--just sort of explaining what we were doing and getting questions from people, and often learning an awful lot from the people back home just from listening carefully to their points of view and to their questions. But when an awful lot--as I said, it wasn't quite so true for me, but it's true of a lot of people these days, more and more--a lot of people come to Congress and never settle in and become real congresspeople or real legislators, [because] from the moment they're elected, they worry about reelection back home. They're coming home all the time. They're raising money all the time. They run out of their



BEILENSON: office to make phone calls for money back in Washington or back here, you know, back home wherever they are. They don't settle in and work together with other men and women in solving national problems.

So, as I said, it's a different life. It's a different kind of job and a much less appealing one, I think, than it used to be. And for me, I guess, certainly the money-raising aspects in my case. . . . As we've discussed before, since I didn't take special interest money I got money from personal, individual people. Almost every one of them was or became, at least, our personal friends. So what it was for me was a continual asking of personal friends for financial assistance to get me reelected, and that's a hard thing to do. You know, you can do it for a certain period of time, and after four years of doing it, in these more difficult last four years, time after time--not just every couple of years, but almost every year or twice a year in election years, or three times instead of just once as we were able to get away with doing before--it made it a far less nice existence

than it used to be.

That, you know, combined with everything else, I guess, all these things together led to the decision to stop, to retire. It's hard to know when to retire. You don't want to stay too long. You don't want to stay, you know, beyond when you should. And if you do get out in time, I suppose it's also often the case where you feel that you're still at the height of your powers and your influence and whatever, and you certainly could have done a really good job for another two or four or six or even eight or ten years. Who knows? But that's a much better feeling, I think, than the one that too many of my colleagues probably have, because they obviously have stayed on longer than they should have.

YATES: What do you think is your most important accomplishment while you were in Congress?

BEILENSEN: Well, as we've discussed at length, not being in a position to get a lot of legislation passed that I had myself originated, in one respect. . . . I guess the easy and obvious answer is having authored the bill--one of the few bills that I was able to author--to get the

Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area established. It is a wonderful thing, and I'm very pleased and proud about it. I suppose that's one of the first things I would respond with. Again, if I had been in an area, on policy committees and had gotten various things, specific things done in my name, I could refer to a bunch of them. Our [African] Elephant [Conservation] Act of 1988 is something that's very close to my heart, because I'm more responsible--as we may have discussed earlier perhaps--than any other human being in the world for having saved thus far, in having given us an opportunity to save the African elephant. I loved it. It was not the world's most important thing but something I care deeply about. I loved having been able to create this park out in the San Fernando Valley.

YATES: This is the Sepulveda Basin?

BEILENSON: Yeah. Out in the Sepulveda Basin. Any little tangible. . . . Any tangible thing or any tangible piece of legislation you're able to do, you take great pride in. And obviously if you go back to the times in the state

legislature, that's even easier to quantify because there are, again, specific things that I was the author of. And most important, obviously, was the [Therapeutic] Abortion [Act] and [Welfare] Reform Act.

YATES: We did. . . . I asked you those questions at that point, too.

BEILENSON: No, I know. I understand. It's hard. It's up to others to judge to a certain extent, and it's hard to be modest about this, too, although I don't mean to be immodest. What I feel best about in some respects. . . . I'm not sure this is directly in response to your question, and again this is a bit self-serving, but I hope it's true, I think it's true. I was able to serve all this time, thirty-four years in total, and the twenty years that you just asked about in Congress, in such a manner as I think and I do believe that the vast majority of my constituents, even those who didn't vote for me, were respectful of and appreciative of. They know that I was, or at least tried to be, intellectually honest about things; that I've tried to be fair about things; that I exercised my own best judgment in terms of what I thought

was good for the folks who had elected me to office in the first place; that I wasn't corrupted even subtly by or influenced--I hope--by special interest money, especially since I didn't accept any myself in running our campaigns. I think people appreciated that. And I just. . . . To the extent that my service in government gave people trust or faith or good feelings about their government, or its responsiveness and its honesty--or at least the part of it that I had some personal control over--is something which I'm most proud of and pleased about.

YATES: OK. That's the question . . .

BEILENSON: The thing that--conversely--troubles me most is that so many people, for perfectly obvious and I suppose understandable reasons, for the last number of years, although I think it was true in the past too. . . . Frankly, looking back historically, things were even worse in many respects in lots of different earlier times in our country's history. But to the extent that people have less faith in government or less trust in government now than they may have had ten, twenty, or thirty years ago--they probably

do have somewhat less--is terribly troublesome to me, if only because I have some understanding, I think, and some experience in how government can do a good job and a responsible job and an effective and honest job. I just hate people dropping out of the system or not voting because they feel it makes no difference or believing that all politicians are corrupt, which is far from the case, of course. In fact, people are far less corrupt, politics is a far less corrupt business than it was at any time in the past. You know, it becomes less and less corrupt as we go along. It becomes corrupted, in a different sense, through these things we've been talking about at length, the influence of money and so on, both in terms of campaigns and votes. But in terms of personal benefits to individual legislators, it's a very clean thing.

YATES: We have a short historical memory. I mean . . .

BEILENSON: Yeah. You know, we are not given money to put in our own pockets. The corruption that one is concerned about is the one that leads members to vote in support of the interests that have been giving them money, rather than of the

voters back home. But it's just to keep them in office so they can raise more money and campaign successfully the next time around. It's not money that sends their own kids to college or buys groceries for them. People are always startled by the fact that the vast majority of members of Congress almost all come out after years of service with less money, personal money, than they had before. They've taken. . . . We get a decent salary, quite obviously, but a great majority of us, I think, could make more money on the outside, especially if you were a lawyer or whatever. You could make two, three, or four times as much money. And there is a vast sacrifice involved in terms of your own personal well-being, financial well-being, in serving the public. That's one of the reasons we have a hard time getting people to serve these days. A lot of people won't even serve as judges because they make much less money than they make as individual lawyers. The public doesn't accept or understand this, but it's true.

YATES: While you were in Congress, what were you unable to accomplish that you would have liked

to accomplish?

BEILENSEN: Well, again, I had to change my sights. I had to change my objectives once I got there, and once I settled into the areas that I ended up in. Most specifically, again, for eighteen of the twenty years in the Rules Committee, where there was little I could accomplish in terms of specific, tangible things, other than to make a contribution to the running of the place in such a way that it was a more open, more democratic with a small "d" and a more sensible legislature. And you know, I think I made some decent contributions along those lines. As we discussed on earlier occasions, again, it was nice having the opportunity, on the Budget Committee but especially on the Intelligence Committee for a few years, and especially my two years as chairman, to have had a chance again to effect some tangible results.

One likes to think that one's having been there. . . . I mean, I think it's fair to say, and I think if you asked any of my Republican as well as Democratic colleagues if the Congress were a better place for my having served there, they'd quite probably tell you



yes, every one of them would tell you yes. I was a good person, and they were pleased to serve with me, and they thought well of me, as I did of most of them. And all of us pulling together and contributing together made it a better place than it otherwise would have been. I think in my own little way, and it's not really possible to quantify. . . . I'd like to think that I made a decent amount of difference, and educated, just by example--that sounds terribly immodest, doesn't it?--others as to how one can serve in a responsible and proper way as a legislator.

YATES: Well, you left office at the end of 1996. How have you adjusted to being out of office?

BEILENSON: The adjustment has been very easy. I was sure. . . . In fact, looking back and equating it to a certain extent--I guess wrongfully--with the change from state legislator to federal legislator, where that transition was very difficult for me, as I think we've mentioned. . . . It turned out to be [difficult] for a great many of my other colleagues, who had come from positions of some authority and responsibility and leadership in

BEILENSON: their states, and then found themselves as one of 435 members of the House of Representatives. They had a very difficult time adjusting. I did too. I figured it would be the same here, leaving Congress and no longer being in office and having given up whatever powers or at least trappings of office, or however you might describe it, that one had.

I must say--I'm delighted it's turned out this way of course, but I would not have, I think, predicted it--from the moment I left, first of all I had absolutely no regrets at all. I look back with pride and happiness at my opportunity to have served all these years, and I loved it, as you know. But no regrets at all about having left, none whatsoever. I don't miss the place at all, even though I loved being there when I was there. And there's been no kind of--what's the word I'm groping for--talking about a transition, but sort of a decompression, where it takes some time for you to get used to not having an office and not having people working for you and having to arrange for your own airplane tickets or whatever, or whatever it is that one

BEILENSEN: finds when one is no longer in office. It's been fine. We've loved it. We've had a wonderful life this past year and a fraction, spending time on family and each other and on private matters that we spent plenty of time on before, but have more time for now.

But partially and unhappily, you know, when you think about it, it's also because the whole tenor of the job and what it's like to be in politics these days is something which-- especially if you've been in it for a good many years--is something which you're likely to miss a good deal less, for example, than if you had left it some time ago when it was more fun to be there.

And I'm sure it's fair to say. . . . I'm sure it's true that it's much easier to leave not having lost, but having made the choice yourself. It's been difficult for some of my colleagues who have lost elections, especially when they've served their people well and then were thrown out, for example, in this upset year of 1994. [They] had a hard time adjusting to that and accepting that, feeling very offended and outraged by it. And I understand

BEILENSEN: that very completely. I'm glad I was able to leave under my own terms, as it were, though I don't think of it in those terms, but. . . . No, it's been surprisingly, a bit to me and to some of my friends, it's been. . . . There's been no downside to it at all. I don't miss it at all. I've had no regrets at all. We've had a wonderful different kind of time since, and looking back, I'm very glad I made the choice at that time.

I could have gone on, perhaps forever. Who knows? Maybe I would have lost an election somewhere along the line, but that was part of it, too. You know, I figured I could have gotten myself elected and pestered everybody for more money every couple of years, and stayed there for a good many more years, but you're sort of spinning your wheels to a certain extent. You've done it. You've done the best you could, and as I said just a very short while ago, it became very much the same kind of thing.

I love. . . . The only thing I really miss is the personal interaction with my constituents. And most especially, the single

BEILENSEN: thing I miss, to be specific, if I can point out a specific thing, are my town hall meetings. I just loved them. I loved coming out to these elementary school auditoriums out in the Valley, and out in Ventura County, and having anywhere from eighty to two hundred or sometimes, every now and then, even as many as three hundred men and women and young people--mainly older people--come out on a Saturday morning or a Saturday afternoon, and I'd talk for half an hour about what's going on and answer questions for a couple of hours. I loved that. I loved talking about the issues. I loved listening to these people and trying to keep them happy about their country, or at least fairly satisfied, and at least make them feel good about the fact that they had a representative in me who was out there, available to them, whom they could yell at or criticize or question or simply talk to, so that they at least felt they had a connection to their federal government, which is three thousand miles away in Washington. I loved that. The only thing I wish I could do now would be to continue to have some forum where I

could come back home and talk to people, just to discuss the issues of the day with them and answer their questions and so on. Not as their congressman, but just as somebody who continues to have an interest in these sorts of things. I wish I could share my points of view and my feelings about what's going on back there with some of the people back here.

YATES: Well, those are the questions I had. Before closing, is there anything you would like to add that we haven't discussed?

BEILENSEN: Oh, I don't know. Not off the top of my head. I've talked too much as it has been, but it's been fun. I appreciate this opportunity of having talked about these kinds of things, because obviously one's life has a certain amount of meaning to oneself, and to the extent you're able to share some of your feelings with other people, if anyone's interested, it's a satisfaction. I appreciate very much your giving me the chance to do that.

YATES: Well, I've enjoyed it too, so thank you very much.

[End Tape 12, Side B]