

ILOHI Interview with Dave John Day

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Interview by Ben Baumann

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai> and Ben Baumann

MP3 File, Sony

John Day=JD:

Ben Baumann=BB:

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BB: [0:00:00] Okay, so before we begin, I would just like to state for the record that today is August 13, 2021. And my name is Ben Bauman, and I'm here in Indianapolis, Indiana, and I'm speaking via phone with John Day who is also in Indianapolis, Indiana. Is that correct?

JD: Yes.

BB: All right. And we are doing an interview for the Indiana Legislative Oral History Initiative. So just starting off when and where were you born?

JD: Indianapolis, Indiana. 1937.

BB: Okay. And what were your parents' names?

JD: John, I'm sorry, Don, and (unintelligible).

BB: Okay. Where was your family from before Indiana?

JD: My grandparents are from Ireland. And my, on my mother's side. And on my father's side, they're from Indiana.

BB: Okay. What were your parents' occupations? [0:01:00]

JD: My mother worked for Lilly. I think I'm not sure what she did there. I was just a little kid. I didn't know much about it. And my father was a factory worker.

BB: Okay. Did you have any siblings growing up?

JD: Yes, I'm the oldest of six. I have three brothers and two sisters.

BB: Okay. Wow. All right. How would you describe your childhood?

JD: I think it was happy. I was. I played sports. I was active at school. And I seemed to get along, once I had yellow jaundice. And I was heading home for a month. And the whole class came to visit me it was great. I got a lot of candy bars. It was a great day. (Both laugh)

BB: That works. Yeah. Who would you say were the most influential people in your childhood? [0:02:00]

JD: Gosh, I think a lot of people, my teachers and my parents, especially my grandmother, she lived with us and she was very good to me. And I was named after her husband, who came to America in 1916 from Ireland. We had a very close relationship.

BB: Yeah, that's cool. Okay. What understanding if any, did you have about your, your family's political views as a child?

JD: They weren't very active. Like most people they voted, but they didn't go out to rallies and they didn't get active in the party. They were just sort of average citizens. They voted but they weren't active in in party politics at all.

BB: Yeah. Okay. What schools did you attend as a child and teenager?

JD: I went to Holy Cross Grade School on the near east side about four blocks from Tech High School. [0:03:00] I went to Cathedral High School. Graduated from there in 56'.

BB: How would you describe your educational experiences?

JD: Oh, I was kind of a shy kid. But I got along with people and I did okay. I was an average student.

JD: I did better in college than I did in High school. I took college more serious than I did High School.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Did you have any favorite subjects in school?

JD: I liked sociology and government. Those are probably my two favorites. You could tell where I was going with that government stuff.

BB: Yes, that is true. That is true. Yeah. Were you involved in any clubs or sports teams or anything like that?

JD: No, I played in a church basketball league in all four years in high school. That's about it. I worked at a grocery store my last few years in high school.

BB: [0:04:00] Yeah. Okay.

JD: Part time maybe two or three nights a week.

BB: As a child, what views did you have about the state of Indiana?

JD: Not much. I just wanted to play with my friends. I didn't care much about the big picture.

BB: Okay. Where did you end up going to college?

JD: Oh, here in Indianapolis at Marian University. It was Marian College then, now of course university. Then I went to graduate school at IU-Bloomington.

BB: Okay. And what did you major in in college?

JD: Political Science.

BB: Okay. And what was your degree in grad school?

JD: I'm sorry undergraduate school was history and sociology. In grad school it was political science.

BB: Okay, got it. And what did you hope to do after graduating?

JD: Uh teach.

BB: All right. Were you involved in any clubs or organizations in college? [0:05:00]

JD: Yeah, there was kind of a social justice club in Marion and I was kind of involved in that.

BB: Okay, cool. So how would you view your college experiences?

JD: Very favorable. Yeah, I could do a commercial for them.

BB: Yeah. That's usually a good sign. Yeah. What ways did your awareness of politics change as you went through college?

JD: It was during the Kennedy years and like a lot of young people, I was very became very interested in politics. And when Kennedy was doing. Some of my friends joined the Peace Corps. Others join VISTA. And so, it was kind of an activist age. It was people were sort of encouraged to be in politics. And I was part of that, too.

JD: Yeah. That's cool. All right.

BB: So what was your first job out of college?

JD: I taught at Roncalli High School.

BB: Okay. [0:06:00] And was that exactly what you wanted to do was to teach in high school?

JD: Yes.

BB: All right. Cool. And when, if at all, did you get married?

JD: It was late. I was 39 years old and got married. It worked out fine we were married 44 years.

BB: Yeah. Sounds like it. Yeah, that's good.

JD: It was worth the wait.

BB: Yeah, that's great. Did you have any children?

JD: Yes, we have four adult daughters.

BB: All right. And how did your family influence your career?

JD: They're very supportive. And they tried to help whenever they could mailing and things.

BB: Yeah. All right.

JD: Some time they worked the polls (Unintelligible) things like that. [0:07:00]

BB: How did you first become more seriously involved in politics?

JD: I first ran in 68'. At that time in Marion County, we didn't have districts. It was county wide and at large. And so, if an actual ticket did well in Marion County, then that party won the House and Senate seats and the legislature. So I lost the first couple times. And then we had modified districts in 74', a three member districts, single member districts in 91' and 74' we had a three member districts here in Marion County, and I won that year in 74' before and again in 76', and

78' and 80', up to 2010. Before I lost my last election was 2010. Then I retired 2012. I served 36 years. I lost one year 94'. And I came back in 96'.

JD: 18 terms. [0:08:00]

BB: Yeah. That's cool. That's pretty impressive.

JD: Thank you.

BB: What would you say shaped your political outlook?

JD: I think I'm sort of a social justice Democrat, you might say. Things like Roosevelt and Kennedy, and The Great Society, President Johnson. And then on to Barack Obama, I was kind of a mainline Democrat, you'd say, active in social...sponsored bills in the area of social welfare, child welfare, civil liberties, those kind of things.

BB: And, let's see. So, when did you first decide to run for state government?

JD: In 68'. [0:09:00]

BB: Okay. And did your campaign emphasize any particular issue or?

JD: No, not too much. It was just getting to know people and getting involved in the party. Those days the precinct workers were much more influential than they are today. We're kind of a skeleton of what we used to be, but in those days. The Ward Chairman, if they liked you, they really helped you in their ward.

BB: Yeah, okay.

JD: So I sort of got involved getting to know the precinct and the ward leaders, and that seemed to go very well. They were very helpful when I first ran. Then later after I got more established, I was more on my own.

BB: Interesting. Okay. Who was your main opponent for your first election?

JD: I don't even remember. [0:10:00]

BB: Don't remember. You've had so many I guess yeah.

JD: Yeah (Both laugh) to be honest I don't remember.

BB: Let's see what would you say was most important to you as a candidate?

JD: To represent the community and the party well, as well as I could.

BB: Yeah. Okay. So how'd you feel the first day that you are officially elected?

JD: It was very exciting. I couldn't wait to get to the Statehouse.

BB: Yeah, I bet.

JD: In fact, after I got sworn in. I waited about 10 minutes to file the landlord tenant bill.

BB: Oh, wow. Wow, that's cool. Okay, yes,

JD: We got sworn in in November. It's called, like, organization day, you know, we get sworn in and get our committee assignments and so on. [0:11:00] And I waited about 10 minutes to file my first bill.

BB: Oh, my gosh. So yeah, you're, you're ready for business? Yeah. And how did your feelings change with each election? Did you like...were you just as excited as the first time when you got reelected? Or?

JD: I was excited, but a lot more realistic. For example, if you're in the minority, you're it's hard. It's very difficult to get your bill through. You can do it, but it's very difficult. When you're in the majority, you have committees on your side, favorably here. Favorable hearings for your bills, if your party is the majority party. And so, I had to learn to work in a bipartisan way. And I did. Some of my major bills had Republican co-sponsors. For which I was very thankful.

BB: Yeah. Okay. That makes sense.

JD: That's fair to say, is not so true today. And I think that's regrettable. Most of the candidates. I'm sorry for the officeholders, and for the public good.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. Did your campaign strategies change over the course of your political career? [0:12:00]

JD: Not a lot. I knocked on a lot of doors. I did. I went to a lot of neighborhood meetings that never change, but it was effective. That's how you learned about what's going on in the district.

BB: And what were you thinking when you walked into the state house for your first day in office?

JD: Gosh I hadn't thought much about that. I was anxious to get started. I was looking forward to it a lot. Sort of like a new kid, you know, and, like making the baseball team or the basketball team. You're anxious for first game to get started.

BB: Yeah. Sure. What were your expectations for the legislative process? And was it more or less what you expected?

JD: I didn't have any expectation, because I didn't know I was so new. So I didn't have any preconceived notions, like, we're gonna get this done in 10 days, [0:13:00] we're gonna do so and so or were going to have such a such budget done by the 1st of March. I was so new, I didn't really have any expectations.

BB: Yeah, that makes sense. So how did you learn the ins and outs of state politics?

JD: Talking to older members, and just trying to keep your eyes and ears open, and talk to people that you respected.

BB: So, did you have any political mentors and the Indiana General Assembly?

JD: Oh, yeah, a couple a fellow named Dick Doyle of South Bend, who has since died. A great guy. He had cancer. He, we sat a couple of seats apart, and he really helped me out a lot. And others helped out too, but one of the first ones was Dick Doyle of South Bend. Really great guy.

BB: Okay. How did you know the needs and wants of your constituents? [0:14:00]

JD: Like I said, going to neighborhood meetings, going door to door, and then we issued actually when I was first elected. We used to do surveys, before the session started, we (Unintelligible) these surveys and do 8 or 10 things and say what do the people think about these issues? They were important we should pursue, we gave them a chance to write in what they felt we should do to, so we try to keep in contact by mail and by neighborhood meeting, things like that.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Can you describe the what the regular interactions were like between members of the General Assembly?

JD: I see mostly respectful and cooperative. There are always a few hot dogs, you know, they don't get much done. People that are serious and respectful and have a team attitude, they get more done. [0:15:00]

BB: What were the interactions like between Democrats and Republicans?

JD: We had our differences, especially on the budget. That was always a big fight. But on some things, like, you know, if you're a city guy like I am, you tended to talk to people from Gary and South Bend and Evansville, Fort Wayne, and sort of have some common interest that way. And if you're a country boy, it's the same thing with signing other country boys or country girls. Yeah. And work with people that have similar interests.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. That makes total sense. What were the differences between the House and the Senate?

JD: We used to joke we should make fun the Senate, we called them the House of Lords. We thought they were a bunch of stuff shirts. And that's not true. That's not fair, but that was kind of our common attitude for a while.

BB: Yeah. That is funny. Yeah, [0:16:00] I've heard that a lot of former members of the House and Senate kind of yeah, joking about each other a little bit.

JD: Yeah, but again, we work together like on my landlord tenant bill, I had a guy in Bloomington, who worked with my sponsor over there, because he had a lot of tenant issues in his district. As did I in my district, so we find out a common interest and work together.

BB: How complex was it to get a bill passed?

JD: Not easy. And then you had to learn alternative ways. For example, if you're gonna get a hearing, you might change it a little bit and offer it to another bill. And that's, that took some learning, and it took some time to learn all that. To know that there's more than one way to get a bill passed, or your issue, heard and test whether by an amendment are going with someone else. [0:17:00] Say, you and I had similar bills, we might become co-sponsors of that deal and work together.

BB: Yeah. So, I guess there's a lot of different sort of strategies at play to try and get a bill passed and.

JD: Yes, it has a lot to do with the personal relationships. I think you have to earn trust. And I think that's important enough, not to brag, but I think I had a lot of trust. I mean, I think I was relieved. And I got along with people very well.

BB: Yeah. Sure.

JD: For example, I sponsored the school breakfast bill, and I had a Republican woman teacher from a rural district was my co-sponsor, because we both had interest in children, and a good nutrition at school.

BB: Yeah. So did you get support from bills by just identifying other members that would kind of want to get this type of legislation passed and. [0:18:00]

JD: Yeah.

BB: So a lot of recruitment, I guess.

JD: Yeah. Sometimes we just had to ask people and other times, it was just volunteer and say, we're interested in that issue. We want to help you. And so that was really always music to my ears.

BB: Yeah. Oh, of course. I bet that makes things a lot easier.

JD: Like that teacher up North, she lived near Huntington, and she was a grade school teacher. And she said, I'll be glad to help you with that bill. She said we ought had that years ago. In the past. It was one of my best days, passed in 93'. Very exciting day. Evan Bayh signed it the day, he got the bill a couple of days, and he signed it right away.

BB: Wow. How was legislative business conducted outside of formal votes and committee meetings?

JD: Having lunch with people, maybe. Again, finding areas of common interest. And then you sort of got to know who you work with. [0:19:00] There was Republican lawyer from Brazil, a guy named John Thomas, who's very low-key guy, but very bright, and very fair minded. He and I worked on several bills together, because I really liked the guy. He was very good to me. And if he said something, you could count on it.

Bb: Okay, cool. Yeah. So did you have a sense of how people would vote prior to them actually voting?

JD: Yeah, there's some it's not that...how should I say it. Not that sophisticated but some of the older members of the caucus, they were very loyal to the party. So, if you're a Democrat, I'm sorry. If you're a Democrat, and I'm a Democrat, and you had this bill, I may not know much about it, but it was Important for your district and your fellow Democrats [0:20:00] I'm probably going to vote with you. There was a lot of that. I don't know if that's still true today. But that was true when I was there. And some things the party took a position on, they said, this is really important. We want you to be with us. We want you to vote for this. And then they would say to us, if you have objections, let us know. We'll try to work with you. If you can't vote for us, tell us in advance because we want to know how many votes we got.

BB: Yeah, okay. So was party leadership, pretty influential then?

JD: Yes. Sometimes I went against the party leadership, not very often, but once a while I did, generally, probably always with them 9 out of 10 times.

BB: How did they react when you went against party leadership?

JD: They didn't like it. But they knew there was another day we had to work together. So they got over quick. I think people that are smart, realize that one bill is not the end of the world. [0:21:00] That there is a next day, there's a next week, there's a next month, there's a next election, there's a next session. And you got to work together.

BB: Yeah. Yeah, that makes sense.

JD: That's how I kind of took it and how most people I like took it from both parties.

BB: Yeah. So can't really hold grudges against people for voting differently yeah.

JD: Counterproductive.

BB: What would you say the public does not know about the Indiana General Assembly and how it operates?

JD: Gosh, I think a lot of people. I don't know, I don't think the media does a good enough job of explaining it. I think the people. The public's not as informed as they ought to be. And maybe the members could have done a better job to explain things. [0:22:00] But I think there's some sort of uncertainty or fuzziness about it all.

BB: How did your legislative service affect your family life?

JD: It puts the strain on things, we had a nice session several times and I'd missed supper. Of course, I'm lucky I live here in Indianapolis, and I could be home in 10 minutes. But it took away from family life sometimes. You miss some birthday parties and other things. And I didn't like that. I felt bad about that. And I tried to make it up to them. Time question how to how to watch your time. They were very good about it, and they didn't complain. I mean, my kids, and my wife was very good, very supportive. [0:23:00] And I would think it'd be terrible. If you were in a situation where your family didn't support you. Or your wife said, you got to go down there again. That wouldn't go very far. But my wife was very supportive. And she's been active in her own career, and I've been very...trying to be very supportive to her.

BB: Yeah. I imagine that it's pretty important that if someone decides to run for state government that they have their family on board with their plan I guess.

JD: Oh Yeah, yeah. Yeah. And we'll never know. I bet there's some divorces because of that, too.

BB: Yeah. Yeah, I think I've heard about that.

JD: Didn't get any statistics on that, but I'm sure. I feel pretty certain that was the case.

BB: Yeah. No, there's got to be at least a few. That's for sure. Yeah. What would you say was the most controversial legislative issue during your time in the General Assembly?

JD: [0:24:00] I think abortion was probably the most controversial.

BB: Okay. And was this throughout your entire time in the General Assembly?

JD: Pardon, I didn't hear you.

BB: Was abortion an issue throughout your entire time in the General Assembly?

JD: I'd say probably 8 or 10 years.

BB: What timeframe wasn't an issue? Do you remember?

JD: Oh, gosh. Let's say the 80s and 90s. And, of course, the budget was always controversial. And to raise taxes was controversial. I sponsored a cigarette tax once to pay for childcare and public health programs. That seemed to be controversial, but I tried to explain it by what you're getting for this. You're getting a lot of really good things. People with healthcare and children [0:25:00] to go someplace after school for after school childcare? So, I didn't mind a cigarette tax at all. It didn't bother me a bit, because the tobacco lobbyists were mad at me, but they get over it.

BB: Yeah, yeah. Well, yeah, certainly won't make the lobbyists happy about that. (Both laugh)

JD: I think taxes is always controversial. And of course, abortion was always was controversial. And always you did a lot of mail, about those things a lot of phone calls and a lot of lobbying.

BB: So, were the abortion debates during your time similar to the abortion debates that go on today in modern politics?

JD: Gosh, I think there was more explanation in the old days.

BB: Okay. [0:26:00] Do you remember a particular piece of legislation that sort of took the most time to get done or to work on?

JD: The landlord tenant bill.

BB: Okay.

JD: Let me explain to you a little bit. There's a thing called uniform Model X. And this group in Washington, I think, writes bills and send them to all 50 states and say, here's a model, if you want to try this for the issue you're working on. And they did a reform bill on landlord tenant reform and spelling out duties to the landlords and the tenants. And this is a big bill like 30 pages. And some people say to me, John, we like some parts your bill by section so and so, but we can't take the last chapter. And so, I was stubborn, and I kept the 30-page bill together for several years. And it would pass one house and failed on the other. Some years, we wouldn't get to hearing if the Republican had charge. [0:27:00] In one year, a tied in the Senate 25 to 25. I'll never forget that I was so disappointed. I thought for sure we had a day here. Tied 25-25. So finally, after about 10 years, I divided it up into three, three different bills. One was a security deposit, you get your money back after 30 days, and sending it forward address and no damages to the building, you get your money back from deposit. So that bill passed first. Then I had a second part of that original bill was no retaliatory evictions for a tenant complained to the Board of Health about the building. And that passed pretty quick. And that passed a few more years later. And then the last part about habitability that you place, it's got to be habitable, and meet certain standards that passed 2002. So, I broke a big 30-page bill into three smaller bills, and they passed over about a 15-year period.

JD: Wow. Okay. Geez.

JD: And the landlords were always on me, they just gave me the blues. [0:28:00] It was a while we'd get along okay, but usually it was not that John Day again. (Both Laugh)

BB: So, you caused them a lot of trouble, I guess.

JD: I did the same thing back to them. Sometime in jest, sometimes I meant it.

BB: Yeah. What would you say was your proudest moment as a legislator?

JD: Probably the landlord tenant bill and the school breakfast it fed 40,000 children. So those 2. There are several other bills. I really was proud of, but those 2 were probably my favorites. They were the most needed.

BB: Yeah. So, could you explain the nutrition in schools and stuff and what was going on?

JD: Yeah, after World War Two, you know, we got school lunch program was in the late 40s. And then they later added school breakfast, the school breakfast wasn't required. But schools were required to have school lunch. [0:29:00] And then school breakfast came as an option. And so, a number of states passed it, but Indiana did not. And so, we had a school lunch program, of course, which is fine. But no...some schools on their own did school breakfast, but over half of them did not. So if a kid had parents who worked, a single parent that went to work too early in the morning, the kid was on his own, or her own to have breakfast. And there are all these studies show that kids do better if they have, they do better on tests. They have less absences, they do better in school. They're happier children. And so, I introduced the school breakfast and of course, first year didn't pass [0:30:00] then I had a woman named Lena Hackett who was a nutritionist, and she was very interested in this and said she'd help me all she could, and she did great research, wrote letters to the Public Health Committee, wrote letters to all the leadership people. And then I, like I said that my friend, that teacher up in Huntington, Indiana area, that Republican grade schoolteacher, she became a co-sponsor, and it passed in 93'.

BB: Wow. Okay. Yeah. That's impressive.

JD: And so that meant all, every school in Indiana, where 25% or more of the kids were eligible for school. I'm sorry. Every school was 25% or more kids below the poverty level. That school had to have a school breakfast program. That was about 40,000 More children who got the School Breakfast Program. So that I was really happy about that. I was astounded at and a good thing it passed. [0:31:00] I don't know you're a Christian or not, but on Holy Thursday night, school breakfast passed the night of the Last Supper.

BB: Oh, wow. Okay.

JD: What a coincidence. I was floored by that.

BB: That is that is wild. (Laughs) Okay. Yeah, that's cool.

JD: It was a night session, and I had gone to church for mass about 6:30 that evening, came back to the Statehouse to vote on bills about 7:30 and about 10 o'clock that night it passed. I'll never forget it.

BB: Yeah. That's pretty memorable. Wow. What would you say was the biggest hurdle that you had to overcome during your time in office?

JD: I think not a hurdle, but just trying to get support for my bills. [0:32:00] Most people were very civil. I think we got along well. People go to lunch together with either party. I don't think they have that too much today. But we had lunch often with people of the other party. It was no

big deal. People got along and we learned to be able to disagree, but not be disagreeable. And then there's a lot of common interest. For example, if you went to IU, there's a common interest in the basketball team. You talk about that. And then about your bills a little later. Look, there are a lot of people there at the statehouse, which is now probably about a fourth of the members who are IU graduates.

BB: What, in your opinion, is the most important work of the Indiana General Assembly?

[0:33:00]

JD: I think to learn and to act on the needs of the people of the state.

BB: Yeah, okay. That makes total sense.

JD: Then I always wanted to be, how to say this, not bragging. I always wanted to make my family proud of me. And my party proud of me and do a good job.

BB: So, turning towards some specific legislative issues, I was doing some research on your time in the General Assembly and saw just some things that had occurred while you were serving. Do you remember much about the debate over the Equal Rights Amendment?

JD: Yeah, yeah, I voted for that. I was. I think I should say this. [0:34:00] It was kind of a cultural thing. You know, the woman's place is in the home. That you heard around 50 years ago, and forever got there. But I think it was some church. Conservative churches were opposed to it. But I was very much for it. I grew up with two intelligent bright sisters. And I have four daughters. And so, I'm, I'm favorable, unfavorable to begin with you know. I didn't need an extra (Unintelligible). But uh, but some people just thought it was a religious thing and that it would ruin the home ect. Phyllis Schlafly that bunch. But I was never bothered by it. I was far from day one. I was proud to vote for it.

BB: Yeah. That's interesting. Yeah, so I guess it sounds like that. A lot of the debate was just over [0:35:00] kind of this traditional view of life versus people just trying to make it a little more fair for everyone.

JD: Yeah. And the question about the role of women, what should be their role? Could they be both a mother and work outside in an office? Right? There's one sufferer, because you do both. All those kinds of things. And of course, for women who were widows they didn't have a choice, they had to work.

BB: Interesting. Another thing, I saw that you had some interest in getting legislation passed that would kind of prevent former legislators from getting involved in lobbying like right after they left office.

JD: Yeah, the revolving door rule. Yeah. [0:36:00] That never passed. But I think it's a good idea. I think there's a rule like that in the Congress, you have to wait a couple of years before you come back as a lobbyist. I thought it gave the person they lobby for a big advantage. And I didn't think that was in the public interest.

BB: Yeah, I guess it raises some ethics questions.

JD: Yes. Yes. Yes. In fact, a quick footnote on that. When I was working for the trying to get my landlord tenant bill through, there was a guy from Richmond, I won't say his name, because he's not here to defend himself. But this is a lawyer from Richmond, Indiana. And he was on the

Judiciary Committee. And he was kind of doubtful on the landlord tenant bill. Then he left the Statehouse and became a lobbyist for the landlords. He did all he could to try and beat the bill. [0:37:00] And I thought good God. (Laughs) But it passed anyhow a couple years later so the hell with (Unintelligible). He left the statehouse in May of one year and was back that November a lobbyist. I go wait a minute. Not right. But it was legal in those days. And I don't know what the rule is now. If there's a rule you have to stay out a year or not. I don't know what the rule is.

BB: Yeah. So how influential were lobbyists when you served?

JD: Oh, they were influential. Especially the big hitters, you know. The Business Associations, Chamber of Commerce, those kind of people. I always worked on minimum wage bills too. And the companies were always had their lobbyists lobby against that. [0:38:00] And could you be against giving someone that half dollar an hour raise, what's wrong with you? So, and to my mind, it was pretty clear. But for them, it was less profit margin. I don't know. I shouldn't be too harsh on them, because they're good people too. But I just didn't understand what their opposition was. I worked on that. In fact, the last bill that passed I think was 2008. The good news now is of course, we haven't raised it for 12 years, both at the state or federal level. But the good news is now is if the federal level goes up, Indiana's automatically goes up to be the same amount. That's really good. Fought a lot of battles over minimum wage, and I worked on a couple of bills that passed that raised it during the 70s and 80s. But now, the good news is if the federal passes is it, [0:39:00] and it goes up, the state goes up automatically.

BB: How much was money involved in politics when you serve?

JD: Well, I think a lot sure helped you get elected. I never had much money. Never needed too much money. I just, I was in a Democratic district. And so, if you won the primary, you're in pretty good shape overall. But the year after I lost the State Democratic Party, and the Democratic (Unintelligible) caucus helped me raise money because they didn't want me to lose again. So that year I raised about \$50,000, which is twice as much as I ever raised in my life. People now spend a lot of money, but I didn't spend much money at all. The first year I got elected. I spent \$400. Big difference from today. You believe that? \$400. [0:40:00]

BB: Big difference from today.

JD: People laugh if I tell them that today. They think I'm not telling the truth. Come on, John tell the truth. How much did you spend?

BB: That's, right. Yeah, it's pretty wild how much the amount people are spending has grown.

JD: Oh yeah. And the sad part is it keeps some good people from running.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. Well, I imagine there's a lot of people that would be turned off by the idea of having to spend lots of their own money to get elected for state government. So yeah, that's, that's a big investment.

JD: I think we ought to have campaign finance laws. I think that that would make an even playing field. But I don't think that, not in Indiana, that's not going to happen. I think in some states it may have happened.

BB: Yeah, I suppose. So. Why do you think it's; it'd be so [0:41:00] complicated to get something like that done? Is it largely because if one party kind of controls the government, then it's very hard for them to kind of it'd be basically giving up power to allow for something?

JD: I think that's part of it. Yeah, that's part of it. And I think that's a philosophical thing. People say they shouldn't be paying politicians campaign money. Try to attribute it they have to raise it themselves. But it's a philosophical thing. A lot its philosophical differences. Almost no matter what you say, you're gonna have a hard time convincing them otherwise. And I respect that they're entitled to their view. I don't agree with them, but they're entitled to their view.

BB: Did you ever oversee any redistricting when you were in the General Assembly?

JD: No, I was never on the committee that did redistricting. But what will happen when the Democrats had [0:42:00] charge, the people doing the maps would call us in and say, "Here's what we think would be a good district for you. What do you think you want us to make any changes? Or are you happy with it?" Once I made a slight change, to get the area around St. Mary's Church downtown on Vermont Street in New Jersey, that was an area where I had a paper route when I was a kid. And I wanted that neighborhood in the district, they put it in for me kind of an innocent request. Materially, they would say this is what we think would be helpful. We want to get your opinion too. So, they tried to get our approval for what they did before they put it on the floor to vote on it. Which is nice. That's when we were in the majority, but when were in the minority. Don't bother us, we'll tell you what your district is next week.

BB: Okay so, it really is pretty one sided then [0:43:00] if there's not an equal amount of power in the General Assembly?

JD: Yeah, I think what several states do now and I wish we do it here in Indiana, have a nonpartisan commission to draw the maps. That's probably the best. Because it's hard to ask someone to give up some of their own power. It's too tempting you want to help your friends and your party. As to something you want to help your friends in the same and your party. I mean, it's natural. So why not take it out of their hands and put it in an independent commission, like, say, for Democrats and for Republicans and draw the map? And then then the way to do it is didn't have the General Assembly vote on that map. And they didn't approve it, then go back and draw another map. But at least you'd have an independent group drawing the map, I think that's the best system. We never had that here. But I wish we did. [0:44:00] I think about 10 or 15. States do it that way now.

BB: That would probably make more sense and be more fair.

JD: Much more fair. I think it gives us more credibility with the public.

BB: Yeah, probably. Yes. I mean, yeah. It seems like gerrymandering is one of the things that is kind of universally upsets people from all parts of the political spectrum so.

JD: Yes, you're absolutely right.

BB: But, yeah, interesting. Okay. Let's see. I saw that in the 90s it appears that you were interested in some like gun regulations.

JD: Yeah, have to store the guns in the house. There were a couple of kids killed. By an action a three-year-old boy was killed. His parents, someone left a gun out, and the kids got it and this kid

was killed. And there are some states now that have a law that you have to have a gun stored [0:45:00] and out of the sight and control of children. And that's what I wanted to do. And it didn't pass. It had a hearing, and in fact the hearing passed. I mean was approved in the committee hearing. But I remember it didn't get a majority vote in the House, but it passed the committee one year.

BB: Yeah. Okay. So, I guess legislators in opposition to it just thought that this would be a part of a process to sort of government overreach or something like that when it came to guns.

JD: Yes. Yes. Big brother. Yeah, but we had speed limit laws too and that's not big brother. It is again you can see, with a lot of these questions we discussed. It's a philosophical thing,

BB: Right, yeah. Certain things people are more freaked out about than others. Yeah. [0:46:00] What about... Oh, I saw another thing that you were interested in extending voting hours?

JD: Yes. Yes. Were one of the worst in the country. Kentucky and Indiana close at 6 PM. No other state does that. So, I wanted to... I think Ohio its 8 o'clock at night. In New York it's 9 o'clock. So, I wanted to make our, our hours longer, I think I wanted to have it from 6 to 8 PM. And I had a really good co-sponsor, Republican guy named Ralph Ayers, who is a teacher from the Valparaiso area. Really a good guy. And he was my co-sponsor, and but we couldn't get it through.

BB: Okay. And what were people saying in opposition to that bill?

JD: Both party chairman were against it. Why God knows.

BB: Okay. Wow. That's interesting. So for both parties? Wow.

JD: Yep. [0:47:00] I thought in my mind, this is supposed to be a Democracy were supposed to encourage the vote.

BB: Yeah. Well, I guess that is interesting.

JD: A lot of people they couldn't, they have to work at 5 o'clock. So, you got 5 o'clock traffic. How you gonna get to your home polling place? I like what great thing has happened since I've been out. Is this early voting. I think that's terrific. That's a good idea. Something like 20% of the borders of the country. I'm sorry. 20% of the vote last election was early voting. That's great. Anything we can do to encourage voting and make it easier we ought to do it.

BB: Yeah, that would make sense. Yeah. Especially in democracies yeah.

JD: Yeah. Yeah. What team are you on partner.

BB: That is interesting. Yeah. [0:48:00] I also imagined it is kind of interesting to see some opposition to that to extending voting hours, especially because historically, Indiana has not had the highest turnout rates so.

JD: Right, right. Now, in fairness to the opposition. I think it's a mechanic's kind of attitude. Several people who didn't want to do who were against the bill, said we can't and they have a good point. They said we have a hard time getting people to work at the polls now. And if you make it longer, it's going to be even harder. That's a good point. And my answer back was have two shifts six to noon, noon to 8.

BB: Right, try to find things to make people want to work at the polls.

JD: I also talked about recruiting with colleges. Let them work a day at the polls and see what governments like and contribute to the betterment of the community. Working in the polls one day or. [0:49:00]

BB: Interesting. Okay.

JD: But they had a point about it is true. It's hard to get people to work at the polls. When I was a kid, it was pretty...these old timers. They looked forward to every election to work at the polls. That day is over.

BB: I think I also saw that you were advocating for preschool.

JD: Oh yeah. That's an issue close to my heart. I was on the Headstart board of directors for several years, I think six or seven years. And I'm 1,000%, 100,000% in support of early childhood education, it's so important stuff so much good. We're tapping, Headstart's done an enormously good job, and really on the ball of communities have early education programs. Yeah, but in the end, [0:50:00] it's not and I think that's a huge disappointment and we hurt ourselves by not doing it, preschools an issue close to my heart, I think that's a great concept. We ought to do it. And I was, like I said before I was on the Headstart board of directors here in Indianapolis for several years, and I saw the good they do and I was, I was there number one cheerleader.

BB: Yeah. So, what was the situation then at the time? Was it just like, was there no preschool that was being offered or something for?

JD: Some, but it was private setting. And more suburban districts than inner city districts. So the system is the most got the least. Sound familiar?

BB: Let's see. Also, you're a part of the legislative walkout for right to work legislation. Do you remember that? [0:51:00]

JD: Yeah. I don't know if we did any good, but we called attention to the public. I think we stopped it that year, the next year it passed. So, it was a short-term victory. I had mixed feelings about it. In fact, some people I really respect, were upset with me because I wasn't doing my job. And I took the...and I respected them a lot. And so, when they said it, it meant something to me. So, I really had struggled with question, you know, but I did it. And we all did it. So, (Unintelligible) in Texas now. You know, they're leaving to stop the voting suppression bill. Same thing. When your backs against the wall, you do extreme things.

BB: Yeah. So, what exactly was the right to work legislation? Can you describe a little bit about that? [0:52:00]

JD: I don't remember it all now. It weakened unions. I don't remember all the details now to be honest. But I think in most places, you have to pay union dues if a union is representing you and helping you get, you know, better conditions in wages and so on. But this weakened that a lot, in favor of the corporations over the unions. We all walked out I was...I called Mary. "You won't believe this, Mary. I'm in Illinois. I think that tested her a lot. She...bless her heart hung in there. I feel bad about it. I said, "I'm over in Illinois." Champaign, Illinois or wherever it was. I forget where it was now. Some town in Illinois. [0:53:00] I forgot where it was. It's been so long ago.

We held out for a couple of weeks. There ought to be a better way to do it. But I don't know what the answer is. But I had mixed feelings about it, to be sure. And some people, like I said, that I really respect gave me a lot of criticism about that and I took that to heart. So, it wasn't an easy thing.

BB: Yeah, yeah, I understand. When did you leave the Indiana General Assembly and why?

JD: My last election was 2010. And I retired in 2012. I thought my time was up. I'd been there 36 years. And it was time for someone else to have a chance to serve that district. [0:54:00]

BB: Yeah, that's a long time. Yeah. How would you summarize your time as a state legislator?

JD: I really enjoyed it. Overall, it was a real plus. And it's an honor to be elected to serve your community. It says people trust you. That man lost to me.

BB: What is your favorite story from your time as a legislator?

JD: Oh gosh. I don't know. There's a lot of them. The major bills that I worked on that got through that gave me great satisfaction.

BB: What lessons did you learn from your experiences?

JD: I think it increased my working with people skills and taught me [0:55:00] not to give up after the first go round. To be persistent to keep working.

JD: Yeah. Okay.

BB: Do you have any regrets from your time as legislator? [0:55:00]

JD: Oh, I'm sure I could have done better on this or that bill, but overall, not many regrets. No. Not that I was perfect, but overall, I think it was satisfactory.

BB: What advice would you give to future legislators or even current legislators?

JD: Keep your word and try to work with other people.

BB: Last few questions here. How has the state of Indiana changed over the course of your lifetime?

JD: Hopefully, it's better. [0:56:00] I think it is better. I think there are more opportunities now. Like the 21st century scholarship program, was one of the best things Evan Bayh ever did. Let kids go to college, help them get the opportunity to go to college, when they otherwise wouldn't have a chance to go. The state would sort of be the financial backer for kids under certain conditions. It's called the 21st century scholarship program. And that would have been a great when I was a kid, but it's really helped a lot of kids go to college, and that's really good. So, I think there's more opportunities now. 21st Century Scholars was a really a good program it's still going on today.

BB: How has the General Assembly changed?

JD: Gosh, I don't know. I haven't been in there for a long time. [0:57:00]

BB: Yeah, its been a few years.

JD: Some of them get out and come back to visit a lot. I thought once you're out of you're out, and I haven't been back.

BB: How do you think politics has changed in Indiana?

JD: I think sad to say it somewhat reflects the national picture. More partisan. More strident. Less cooperation. That's not good for the country. That's not good for anybody. So, I where there was more civility. More trust for cooperation. Because we're working for the public not our party or not our own self-interest were supposed to be working for the public good. I think that's been lost sight of some time.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Why do you think it has become this way?

JD: I wish I knew. [0:58:00] I don't know. I think it's a national problem, not just Indiana.

BB: You think it's just kind of spreading from the national level down? Kind of.

JD: I don't know. That's a good question. I think it kind of goes both ways. I don't know.

JD: Yeah. Interesting.

JD: When like when Reagan and O'Neill we get together, they would argue all day long and go to dinner together. That didn't happen today. So, I used to tell a story when the ERA passed. I had lunch with three Republicans. They all voted against it and I voted for it.

BB: Yeah, that would seem kind of surprising I think to a lot of people today. Well, is there

JD: I think there's a lot of cynicism you know in the 60s [0:59:00], the assassinations of King and the two Kennedys. And the war went so bad, and the people were lied to. And I think there's a lot of cynicism today, which is sort of sad, though, these polls that showed you trust government to do the right thing. And back in Roosevelt's time it was like 80%. Now, it's probably 10%.

BB: Yeah, that's true. There's seems to definitely be a decline in trust.

JD: Yeah. And I think it's because of all these let downs and people not being told the truth. And both parties have been guilty of that. Nixon lied and Lyndon Johnson lied. Both about the war.

BB: What qualities do you think Hoosiers have and still hold dear? [1:00:00]

JD: I think a sense of fairness and trying to be helpful when you can.

BB: Yeah, that makes sense. What do you want the people of Indiana to know about their role when it comes to the function of state government?

JD: To make their officials accountable to know the records of the people you're voting for. It's all about accountability. And the more we're held accountable, the better we are. The better the public is. So, I think the key word's accountability. Knowing their records, knowing what they promised to do what they didn't do, what they couldn't do through no fault of their own. And like this walkout thing, [1:01:00] I think it hurt our credibility with the public. I think accountability is the big thing. And I always thought I did a better job when people were watching me.

BB: Yeah, I suppose that probably would make people think a little bit more about how they portray themselves.

JD: Yes and keeping their word. All you really have is your word if you lose that you don't have anything.

BB: Well, let's see. That's all the questions that I have. Is there anything that I didn't mention that you want to talk about?

JD: Gosh, you covered a lot more than I thought you would.

BB: Okay, good. All right. Well, I'm glad.

JD: So yeah, I think you asked plenty of good questions and I enjoyed the conversation.

BB: Perfect. [1:02:00]

JD: Okay.

BB: All right. Well, thank you so much for taking part in this project.

JD: Okay, glad to do it. Right. Bye now.

BB: Bye bye.

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