

ILOHI Interview with Stephen Ferguson

July 30, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana

Interview by Ben Baumann

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

MP3 File, Sony

Stephen Ferguson=SF:

Ben Baumann=BB:

Copyright ILOHI/Indiana State Library

BB: [0:00:00] All right, so before we begin, I would just like to state for the record that today is July 30, 2021. And my name is Ben Bauman, and I'm here in Indianapolis, Indiana, and I'm speaking via video call with Steven Ferguson who is in Bloomington, Indiana, is that correct?

SF: That's correct.

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

SF: January 3, 1941, actually, in Indianapolis, because it was a complicated birth. And mother went to Indianapolis for that?

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

SF: Arlene Ferguson, and Luther S. Ferguson.

BB: All right. And where was your family from before Indiana?

SF: [0:01:00] On my father's side on the Ferguson side, they moved in and homesteaded in Lawrence County in 1860. We still have the farm has been in our name for over 200 years. Mother was from Peru, Indiana. And they moved in from Canada. Her parents did.

BB: Okay. That's interesting. Wow. Okay. And what were your parents' occupations?

SF: Dad had various was a superintendent of schools, a teacher, a principal in Lawrence County. And then went with Scribner's Publishing Company. And was a salesperson then Western manager I think West of Indiana, did the West Coast. [0:02:00] Mother went back to school after my brother and sister were born and got her degree then. But she did apartment management was really what she did. She was home and housewife mother and managed some apartments.

BB: Okay, that's interesting. And what understanding did you have of your family's political views? As a child?

SF: I don't know that I had a particular understanding. I do remember watching the convention. Conventions, you know, at the point they were just beginning to televise, [0:03:00] television this was early on. And we hadn't had TV very long. But if I can remember my grandmother and I, my mother's mother sitting and watching the Republican Convention with Eisenhower, when Eisenhower was the candidate. I don't know. I think Dad crossed political lines back and forth with you know. Not a Republican, not a Democrat. And when he was County Superintendent of Schools in Lawrence County. The township trustees were the ones that selected the superintendent. And [0:04:00] I remember he

was supported in that. By or as the story goes he was supported in that by Democrats. Of the trustees, so.

BB: Yeah, interesting. Okay. And, how did you like your educational experiences growing up in the schools you went to?

SF: I went all the way through preschool through high school at University High School in Bloomington. And then it's always been one building my entire career until I went to Wabash College. After high school.

BB: Okay, and what was your major?

SF: Political science and economics at Wabash. [0:05:00]

BB: Okay. Did you start to develop more interest in politics when you were in college?

SF: Yeah, a little more Dick Christine was from Crawfordsville. And so, I helped out in his campaign and then I worked one summer maybe 1961, 62' at any rate. (Unintelligible) there for Bill Bray in Washington, DC Congressman Bray. Who happens to be the grandfather of the current Pro Tem of the Senate.

BB: Yeah, that's right. And how did you view your college experiences?

SF: [0:06:00] Well, I think that I'd viewed them more as you know, now, things are change. I think there is cycles in it, but right now. There's an awful lot of, of controversy and pushback and emotion, rather than reason. And my experience in the General Assembly, everybody knew what we need to get done. We all work to that end. Now, there might be points that people needed to make, to because of their particular background, or the fact that they were a Democrat or Republican. But everybody knew where we needed to get to and work to accomplish that. It's hard to see that [0:07:00] today as much as it did back then.

BB: Yeah. Okay. And that's interesting. So yeah, I would like to talk about that a bit more, a little later. In terms of your time at the university, did you have an idea of what you wanted to do after college?

SF: Now we'd had the farms in Lawrence County, that's really where I spent most of my time and spent all my summers down there and vacation time and weekends. Staying down there at my aunts, and the families still on the farm. So, when I got out of I really went to Wabash, thinking I'd go to Wabash, and then get a master's in agriculture at Purdue [0:08:00] on the farm, so that was really where I set out to, that's my career plan at that point in time. As it turned out, prices, especially cattle prices were so low when I graduated from college, that wasn't really a practical thing. Although my wife and I were both thought well we would teach, which works well, because you get the summers free to farm. And so that was sort of our goal, went through the interviews with various school corporations. But then decided, cause I decided where I wanted to live. I've always thought I'd need to be smart enough to do that. I had spent a summer in DC and had done other things. So, [0:09:00] I knew that I wanted to live in the Bloomington area, a good place to raise kids. Close to the farm. I liked being outside. So, I could do that. You got Big 10 Sports here and etcetera. And so, I knew I wanted to live in Bloomington, it's a question, figure out what occupation I would do. My brother was an attorney here and so I finally decided to go to law school and work with him. So that's how I ended up going to law school and practicing law in Bloomington.

BB: Yeah, that makes sense. And so, when did you first start thinking about running for the Indiana General Assembly?

SF: It was at my brother's house after [0:10:00] an IU football game. And there were two people from Bedford, Bob Short, who was an attorney down there, and with the Savings and Loan Veteran Federal and Bob Skinner, who was a had been a prosecuting attorney and practice law, etc. And so, Bob was saying what you need to do is run for office and get known if you're going to practice law. And Bob Short was on the other side, saying that. That wasn't necessary, enter into the practice of law. And obviously, and I've got no interest in running for office. And so that was, that was the conversation. And that's in November, in February [0:11:00] about the time of the filing. Bob Skinner came to Bloomington and said, this is a joint district for Brown, Lawrence, and Monroe County. And, you know, you got a lot of connections in Lawrence County, because the farm and in Bloomington, and there's also a candidate from Bedford, who had been there, Maurice Chase who had been in the legislature back before and so we'd like for the two of you to be the candidates, one from Lawrence County and one from Monroe County. Because there were two Democratic incumbents. So, I was...so that, at that point in time, I said, no, I still I'm not interested in running. So, my, [0:11:00] that led on to my aunt who was in Bloomington visiting. And staying with us from down in Lawrence County. And she had been in politics in terms of been a Vice Chairman of the Republican Party in Lawrence County. They've been great. My brother came by and said, they're having a Republican meeting down at Republican headquarters. "You want to ride along?" I said, "Sure. I just ride along." I went, we walked in the front door. And the County Chairman came up and said, "Jim, we want you to run for judge." Jim said, "Oh I can't do that because my brother's running for the legislature." I looked at him and said "Jim, I'm not running for the legislature." And about that time, it was Carl Myers was chairman and must have been a 100 People there. [0:13:00] He turned around said, "Oh, here's our candidate for the legislature." So that's how I got into run for the legislature.

BB: Wow. Okay. That's interesting. And so, when you started running, were there any particular things you wanted to focus your campaign on any particular legislative issues at all? Or?

SF: I suppose that my focus in the legislature was really on policy issues. If you look back, I don't know whether you've looked back at that period when I was there. It was...There were only 23 Republicans in the House of Representatives after the Goldwater election. And then, when I was elected, there were probably 58 or something in that neighborhood. [0:14:00] So there'd been tremendous swing, the thing that it had done had really defeated most of the old time, incumbents. So, people that were elected were coming in, like John Mutz, and Bill Ruckelshaus, and Larry Borst. And a long list of young, you had a new approach of course, I was what 21 years old. So, I'm not quite as old or as senior as they are coming in, but it was really a good group of people that were interested in, not in politics, but in and whether we got elected again, was secondary to everything. And so, they came in with a lot of ideas. And if you look back at what we did, of course, Unigov was one of the most famous, but we went to biannual from single sessions, biannual to annual sessions in the legislature. [0:15:00] We took the Supreme Court out of politics. The list goes on, we changed the election time, we did tremendous amount of reforms in... one of the things when you look at California, Illinois, they didn't clean up their pension situation. And that's got them in bankruptcy. But we cleaned it up. And now the police and fire pension, we went to the fight, and we didn't get it done while I was there, but then it was done subsequent. But the state employee retirement and things were all made physically sound. Which has helped had a tremendous impact. We passed bills to fund a study, which was a neat study of the next 20 years and the needs to the roads and highways. And so, we adopted that [0:16:00] with the primary road system. And we funded it first time the gas tax had been raised since the 30s. So, we funded that looking forward to the need for transportation and highways going in the state. And that was both local and state highways. I could go a lot through the list. But if you look back at the list of all accomplished during that period, it's probably no other time in history.

BB: There was definitely a lot that was done for sure. Let's see. So, what was your first reaction when you officially became elected? What was your reaction to election day?

SF: [0:17:00] Well, obviously, you're satisfied, and you want to thank everybody who had helped you get there. I really worked it hard. I shook a lot of hands. I carried always bought 5000 emery boards and 5000 pencils, on the theory that women won't throw an emery board away and men won't throw a pencil away. And so that I'd measure how hard I worked by how many I've given out. So I gave them out to people, and I still have people and kids come back and say my grandfather died and he had this in his drawer, which was a pencil or an emery board they keep they still show up, you know here all these years later. And so that was the way I approached it [0:18:00] But this allowed people to express my appreciation to and thanks

BB: Yeah, sure. That's interesting. So, what was your reaction to walking into the state house as your in your first day as an elected official?

SF: Well, I actually missed the first day. The swearing in, because my son was born on that day.

BB: Ah, okay, well, that's a good reason.

SF: So, I was at the Bloomington hospital waiting on the birth of my son, so I wasn't there for the traditional first day of the session and swearing in. I think that obviously, there's a tremendous sense of responsibility that you feel when you walk in there the first time you know, I've got a lot of responsibility to the whole state of Indiana and to the constituency. [0:19:00] So, I think that's probably the thing that was the most and then secondly, I don't know a damn thing about you know, the ins and outs I know a lot about government. I know a lot of things but it's different in because legislatures a relationship organization. And so, you're coming in new and just meeting people for the first time that other people there they've been in law school, my brother and other connections like that. That sort of gave you uh immediate something to talk about. And helped in that relationship building.

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

SF: [0:20:00] Well, I had paid attention, I think I guess I was really pleased, because there were a lot of people there that wanted to do the right thing and weren't interested in getting reelected. And we're bright, young, enthusiastic about what we could do. And so, I think I found that really, I don't know really appealed to you. But it sort of gave you that sense that we're on the same wavelength, same team, we're going to work our way through a lot of these issues. I'd felt strongly about the Supreme Court being out of politics, because there was a judge that my wife's family knew from Anderson, who got beat [0:21:00] because of a decision he wrote the ICA didn't agree with. And they went out campaigned against him and beat him. And I felt strongly that our judiciary should not be subject to worried about what politics were. So, I was really into that constitutional amendment.

BB: Yeah. Okay. That makes sense.

SF: And several of the others, you know, I felt over the course of time you learn that 61 calendar days is a horrific time to get things done. And through and so I felt strongly about the biannual sessions. If you just look back at the constitutional amendments, we passed back then. Those were all things that I thought needed to be done, the governor needed to succeed himself one term, your lame duck when you're elected. [0:22:00] I thought that was really important. I thought Unigov ago was important. I would like to have seen similar things across the State of Indiana. I even had a bill that said, trying to get all units of government to do it themselves. It said that you could contract with another unit of

government, without having a complicated structure to deliver any service and I had really thought well, then maybe we can get rather than having every town have their own highway department, every city in the county, etc, that you could enter into an agreement. Okay. This is a way you're going to do one snow removal, one county maintenance rather than having all of these separate entities doing that, that idea, I thought was a good idea. [0:23:00] Still think it's a good idea, but it didn't work out, you know.

BB: Yeah. Okay. How did you communicate and interact with your constituents?

SF: Well, see (Unintelligible) I felt like one of the things that happens to you, when you're in the legislature, you get to talking to yourselves all the time. And see, begin to believe what you're hearing. And so, I felt like it was important to get back home and do that. So, I drove back and forth of course I had young kids. And it gave me an opportunity to do it. So, I drove back and forth, and being young, you know, you can be up late and get up early and then doesn't have much effect on ya. [0:24:00] And then if I had something, I need to do all I could also do that. So, I drove back and forth. Trying to keep as much context as I could. Back with the, you know, where I thought people were, they weren't caught up in the conversations. You know they gave you a different, a different view. And then you always had those Saturday morning sessions, where constituents can come in, and you have the legislators in the area. And then you get, a lot of mail and phone calls. Talk to people about what their concerns are. A lot of times when they call, they're by the time they've gotten to the point they're going to call you. They've really got themselves worked out. Especially if it's somebody you don't know. So, they're, you know, and when they First call you, they're just dumping all their ideas on you. [0:25:00] And you got to let them just talk until they don't have anything else to say. And then you can have a discussion with them. You just gotta let them get it off their chest. And get to the point where all of a sudden they're silenced because they've run out of things to say. And then you can have a conversation about whatever the issue is. I always, you know, there are certain emotional issues, that you just aren't going to be able to talk to people about, you know, alcohol, for those that are opposed to alcohol or they're no conversation about that. And we, we changed, the rules sorta like Lake Monroe, you can have an alcoholic beverage license in a rural area, if you have so much food up until then, alcoholic beverages could only be sold within city limits. But this allowed if you had over 300,000, I think it was in food, they did have a license outside of the city, [0:26:00] trying to get away from the old concept of roadhouses. And then we also change. So, in fact, you could have you could do leases on state ground. So, like the Four Winds on Lake Monroe, they could build that facility under lease with the state. And also, a lot of them have wicker on those. Now, something like that is an emotional line. And I, I came in, I had a pile of mail, just people opposed to that. But I thought that something to do (Unintelligible), was also from the district was, you know, they'd participate in TCU, you know, against alcohol, so really hard for him. But he thought it was the right thing to do. [0:27:00] And I kept saying, Maurice, just let me do it. You know, just, you know, he could already go to church for people. (Unintelligible) on him about it. So, there are a lot of ways you have to interact, but you need to make sure you're talking to everybody. And give them a place that they feel like they can go and at least be heard.

BB: Right, right. Yeah, that makes complete sense. I'm sure it also takes...you get used to it after a while when you're dealing with people all the time, especially people that are angry about something that they want changed in law.

SF: Oh yeah.

BB: What would you say the interactions were like between Democrats and Republicans while you're serving?

SF: Between the Democrats and Republicans?

BB: Yeah.

SF: Back then. Oh, good relationships. [0:28:00] Fred [Pat] Bauer, who's a minority leader, great guy, good friend of mine. Buzz Barker from up in Attica, great guy, Jimmy Plaskett, for down on the river down in Clark County. Great guy, good friend. And we all knew what needs done the other thing that you didn't. That was enormous. And the change during that period was moving. Really, state education to be sportive of the state rather than from local property taxes. And set up the structure so that everybody had a \$2 base at that point in time. That's the way taxes are figured. So that raise whatever money and then whatever above it would be paid by the state. And then we increase the sales tax, but in the income tax of course I've talked about the fees [0:29:00] till we completely switch the way government was funded in the State of Indiana and how education was funded in Indiana. So that, but that was enormous issue because Dick Christine had broke the tie. The Democrats had set it up in whatever it was the 61 session. So, there was a tie. And Lieutenant Governor had to break the tie. And that was this during the sales tax. Well, they just pounded him on it sort of like when George Bush Senior, you know, switched on the tax issue was your read my lips the tax increases. Then they just pounded him after that with that issue and really gotten beat. Well, they did the same thing to Christine prior to that, so [0:30:00] overall the Democrats thought this need to be done. But we didn't have enough Republican votes to pass it. So, Buzz Barker, Jimmy Plaskett, there were about four Democrats who came over and voted for it, even though the Democratic caucus was against it. They knew we had to have the votes to get it passed and it needed to be done. And so that it was more and more of what we needed to get done. It wasn't this emotional clash. You guys are bad guys more good, sort of that no Republicans good. Or if you're a Trump supporter, you're an idiot. And you know, you're off the page. And if you're on the left over there, you're communist, you know, all those type things weren't around in the General Assembly now. But the Indiana General Assembly's not you know, as divided [0:31:00] as national television.

BB: Yeah, that's true. Yeah. Different levels.

SF: Did that answer your question?

BB: Yeah, no, that was it. That was a good answer. Yes. I guess, sort of piggyback off of that. So, do you know...what do you think has changed then with the Indiana General Assembly politics? Like, why is it more divided today than before?

SF: Well, you see, back then you worked together, you know, like on the gas tax, the income, you know, property tax, on the constitutional amendment, etc. And there were a lot of things to work together to accomplish, you know, and so like. I mentioned the 1875 bill, which was the change in alcoholic beverage, so you could build in state parks, etc. [0:32:00] Everybody worked together to do that, now there might be people who are against alcoholic beverages, but they might be on Democrat or Republican. They have his own the issue as opposed to fact that its Republican or Democrat. I think what's changed over the years and a story that Senator Bayh told me, Birch Bayh because I'd got to know him. And we, we were good, good friends. And he was telling me one day when we were talking about the same subject, he says, "You know", because he sponsored more changes to the US Constitution than anybody except the, the original writers of the Constitution. He had more impact because all the amendments, you know, etc. But at any rate, he [0:33:00] was saying Everett Dirksen was in the leadership in the US Senate at that point. He said, "I saw him one day", and he said, "How's your election going?" And Bert said, "Well, you know, it's only these things are always tight, you know, being from Indiana, and he said, "Well, you let me know if we have anything I can do to help." Which is entirely different now. It's winner take all. And the other thing you see changed on the national level,

they've changed the ordinary course where bills introduced, the ghost committee, it's amended, you have discussions in that you had changes given take on amendments that comes before you offer amendments there. And so, it's, you know, it's more a legislative process. Now, anything of any importance comes directly from the speaker and goes through or comes from the pro Tem, and they cut off the bait. [0:34:00] So, they set the rules that you can't make amendments to, and I've been in DC at times, and where there ever was highway bill or something. At any rate, but there was gonna be amendments, and everybody's excited. Both sides of the aisle, the staff, because we're actually gonna have the opportunity to have, you know, a debate about it. So, what's happened is, its winner take all and so winning becomes everything. If you're in the minority, you got no say, you can't do anything. And if you're in the majority, you control it. And so being in the majority is, is so then the moderates can't move back and forth. Because if they're in the minority, well, then I can't do anything. And so, that's what's created now. I think that's some what happened in Indiana and when I left in 75', [0:35:00] I was feeling more and more people were concerned about getting reelected. Then doing what needed to be done. And I think that concern about reelection rather than doing what's right, and then election go where they go. That's change things and I think it makes it much more personal at stake you know.

BB: Yeah. Yeah. So, it's no longer just about trying to make the state better, but it's about having sort of power, I guess, and keeping that power. Interesting. Wow. Yeah. How influential would you say party leadership was in your time at the General Assembly at sort of dictating affairs and?

SF: [0:36:00] Well, I think when I was first elected the Chairman of the Republican Party in Marion County was very influential. Because it was a county wide election, and I think there were 11 legislators from that county. And so, the ability of the party to control the primary election is that you have a lot influence and however Keith Bulen was very nice for Unigov ect. So he was pretty much on the reform movement to I'd say, wager, Republican Party. [0:37:00] Statewide really didn't have much influence at all. So, I'd say very little influence.

BB: Okay, that's interesting. Yeah. You've talked, you mentioned Unigov several times now. How big of a role would you say that you had in helping craft Unigov or getting it passed?

SF: A big role did I have?

BB: Yeah.

SF: Well, I don't know that I had a role in the passage. I thought that it was important. We also did the put money into the first convention center in downtown Indianapolis and the state level and Unigov. Now, you know, there's this Marion County versus the rest of state issue [0:38:00] was very strong back then. I don't know if it's as strong today. It's very strong urban-rural. I think my voice was important because I was from the rural saying it's ending nowhere it hurts Bloomington. Bloomington can't be successful unless our state's capitol is successful. And so, we, you know, we've moved from Indy, now we're, Indianapolis is really a shining star. I mean, if you look, Detroit and Indianapolis are about the same and look at the difference now. So, I was a spokesman for we've got to support this, we've got to have a broader concept of ourselves than just it's Marion County versus Bloomington or rural counties. [0:39:00] We need to support that because that's important to us. it's not only important to Indianapolis, but it's important to us and to all of you need to listen to this and be supportive of what they're doing because it helps us. And so, I think probably that message, helped move things along on what was a very tight vote to get done.

BB: Yeah. Okay. So, I guess just trying to make people understand that the state is connected, the cities are connected and that, you know, it's important that they're successful, to help each other. Especially

Indianapolis, and how it affects other places in Indiana. Yeah, that's interesting. What would you say was the most controversial legislative issue in your time in the assembly?

SF: Well, you know, [0:40:00] it's rather interesting if you take the decision of Roe versus Wade. And then we drafted the Indiana statute to conform to that one night because a lot of committee meetings met on adjournment. So, if the adjournment was late, the committee meeting was late, really no controversy around that. It was, you know, the committee were made up of all attorneys are saying they're drafting something that met the standards that the Supreme Court set forward. So, you might have said, well, you know, that was a emotional issue, but it really at that point, wasn't it. [0:41:00] Obviously, taxes were an emotional issue, gas tax had some emotion in it. The one that I mentioned the death penalty. You know, the courts had ruled about the death penalty. That's a emotional issue that you're either for or against it. You know, I mean, it's not one that you can talk to people about. Have a discussion about, I think that was pretty controversial. One of them that was I talked about legislation on the State Bar, and liquor there, that was really controversial, very close votes, gas tax was very, in fact, at that point, you didn't have to have a fifth constitution, majority of 51 votes, you could do [0:42:00] a majority in the House. And that gas came back and passed, not one didn't have 51 votes, but it had a majority of those voting. Interesting story, I'd say on the I go back to that gas, because it sticks in my mind. On a wide lease of ground in state reservoir properties, or state parks, the private industry to develop, allowing liqueur, in those. be sold in those it was pretty hot, because you had the Audubon Society, and you had all those groups and environmentalists, all saying you don't want to do that in our state parks. And he had everybody who's against liquor. [0:43:00] So he had a big it was, and so that was really controversial. Very close, both in the House. Governor Whitcomb vetoed it. After he told me that he would not, you know, he thought this was a good idea, and etc. ect. I asked him, I said, "I don't want to bring it to the floor. If you're going to veto it. I don't want it so controversial. I don't want to put everybody's feet to the fire. So, Ed, are you going to sign it?" "Oh, yeah. I'm going to sign it etc. etc. Cal Brand who was on his staff who had been a former legislator. And I'll never forget this, I'm walking down the second floor, Cal comes off the elevator sheet white and says Steve he vetoed it. [0:44:00] And I said "Cal, he said he wouldn't." He said, "I know. He vetoed it." And so, but then the legislature, I think, in part because of the fact that the governor had gone back on his word, we actually had more bullets to override the veto than we did in the original passage.

BB: Interesting. Okay. Yeah. Wow. To what extent do you think I guess how big of role was money and in politics when you served in the Indiana General Assembly?

SF: Oh, you know, I, if I spent \$1,000 on my election, that was a lot. Buying pencils and emery boards. And a few hats. You know, [0:45:00] it's not now, it seems you don't spend much money in the races where there's no contest, it's solid Democrat or solid Republican. Some people may end up fighting the primary. But there's no money spent on those. On the federal level, it's sort of like you saw down in Georgia, how much was spent in Georgia? Because it was going to decide who controlled. And so, he's spending a lot. And so, you'll see a big expenditures in Indiana on some of those, you know, type races. Now, of course, the Senate has such a large Republican majority its probably not gonna make any difference, one way or the other. But what really brings the money out is in those races that are for control, or have some influence like that, and then [0:46:00] unbelievable amount of money spent I you know can't believe how much is spent. I can't believe how much is spent in the federal elections. You know, it's just, it's astounding so what you've done is say that everybody's gotta spend all their time raising money. And the second thing it does, on the congressional level, it gives leadership, so much control over them, because they've raised so much of the money, the speaker will or the Pro Tem, and so they've got this big pot. Well, if you don't do what they want you to, then you aren't gonna get support, or I may fund an opponent for you in the primary. And so, money from that standpoint is

gotten be really important. But it really gives your political leadership a lot of leverage in this day and age.

BB: Wow. Yeah. Geez. [0:47:00] Let's see what would you say the public doesn't know about the Indiana General Assembly and how it operates, as well as what they should know?

SF: I don't think the general public pays any attention. Except if there was a controversial issue. And so, I think they know very little about the General Assembly other than the things that may get their attention, or that the (Unintelligible) so much what's important now, it's what the press makes is important. So, the press, you know, makes a big deal out of it, you know, it's on Fox, it's in the Indianapolis Star, it's, whatever they make a big deal [0:48:00] out of, then becomes important to the public. And so, I don't think the public really then sees all the other things that go on, that are probably more important than these controversial issues that the media picks up on.

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

SF: Nothing jumps into my mind.

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

SF: [0:49:00] I think vision is the most important. And sometimes the weakest. You know it's a representative form of government. So, you're representing your constituency. But your obligation is to be well informed, understand the issues and provide leadership to your constituents. And so, I, I think oftentimes, people are more listening to what the constituency said, rather than providing leadership to them and saying, hey, you may, you know, maybe we ought to talk about this because this may be more important. It may be the correct view. And so, I think it's a responsibility of the General Assembly, to provide leadership and leadership are several things. [0:50:00] As you know, so there's probably 10 things are important in leadership. Vision is one of them. I think having that vision providing the both statewide and to your particular constituents is really important.

BB: Yeah, that definitely makes sense. What advice would you have for future legislators or current legislators based on your own experiences?

SF: Be pragmatic. You know, there's too much based upon on their particular philosophy and decisions that way. I think that's country wide. [0:51:00] You know, if you're a liberal, you got a certain tunnel vision. You know and if your conservative you've got tunnel vision. And you just need to lay down those tunnels and let's do what needs to be done and be pragmatic about. And then there's so much right now, if they asked for this, then I need to get this. You know, so there's rather than saying, hey, you know, what needs to be done here. And let's get together and do it.

BB: Right. Yeah, that's interesting. Yeah. It seems like yeah, it does seem like there's kind of a wall in between both parties. That's interesting. How would you summarize your time overall, as a state legislator?

SF: Tell me a little more what you're asking there. [0:52:00]

BB: So, you know, looking back at your time, as a state legislator, you know, what do you what did you think of your experiences?

SF: I don't know. I've listed a lot of the things and but there are a lot more, I thought, are still impactful today. Like the pension fund issues. Funding education that still carries over. I think they made changes that don't make sense. I think the original plan is still better than what they're dealing with doing now. I

think looking at what was needed. And I talked about highways, but both in the areas of treatment plants [0:53:00] and just looking across the landscape of Indiana, and trying to say hey, how can we how can we improve our state? And what's your vision for the future? It can take something like that. IU had extension centers, but the consolidation of IU and Purdue in Indianapolis, you know, has been a big deal. And that whole campus out there and developing that campus. That's a big impact on Indianapolis. The whole thing with the Unigov, with the convention center downtown. All those things. And moving, downtown has to be lived in and hotel is short term. [0:54:00] Bringing people downtown. I think if you look at IU and established in the Indiana Higher Education Commission, setting IU up with regional campuses, you know like IUPUI and Wayne and South Bend and Southeast, rather than just extension centers are really saying these are campuses. I think IU Health in taking it just used to be the School of Medicine and saying what we need to have these in South Bend and Fort Wayne and Bloomington and other vocations where you could get a four-year medical degree to try and keep it. [0:55:00] So the largest medical school or second largest in the country, but we still need more physicians and train them in those areas to keep them because they have a tendency to practice there. If you go through the list of things that are very thoughtful about the future and the vision of Indiana. And so, I think that you know, you asked, what I look back on that. I guess that's what I'm proud to be a part of. And helped work hard to accomplish that vision in a very I think effective way. Does that answer your question?

BB: Yeah, that's great. Yeah. Let's see, I guess the last question, then. What would you say is the role [0:56:00] of the public when it comes to the function of the Indiana General Assembly?

SF: I think the public always needs to have access. And it needs to be able to express themselves. I think one of the things that's happening in this country is, you know, you can't say anything, unless you get attacked for it. And you heard a lot of that during the last campaign, but I can't discuss anything because I get attacked. And in fact, they're people who are moving outside the city of Bloomington, because you'll likely get attacked all the time, for their political views here. And I think the general assembly has to set the tone on that. They have to show their constituents that you have reasonable discussions [0:57:00], these attacks are going on between Democrats and Democrats and Republicans and Democrats in DC are ridiculous. But that sets the tone for the whole country. And so, the way we can discuss things, and I think the general assembly has to be both the vision, but they also have to demonstrate how we work together in government. And that helps and helps bring the general public into it in a reasonable discussion way. So, I think you have to have forums, where you can talk to the general public, you always want them to be able to get it off their chest and feel like that they can have contact and talk to somebody who will listen to him. But you got to set it up to help them do that. Because our base is built upon the general public. You know, we all represent them. [0:58:00] So, we've got to have a way for them to communicate to us and have contact with us, rather than misinformation they ought to get or listen to the fights on the talk shows or worse than what they're fighting about. In Indianapolis or Congress, providing needs to set a tone and bring the general public into that tone. That answer your question?

BB: Yeah. No, that makes perfect sense. Yeah, absolutely. Well, thank you so much for doing this. It's been great talking with you. And I think that it's been a great addition to the project. So, thanks a lot.

SF: Yep. You're most welcome. If you have any more questions? Call me.

BB: All right. Sounds good. Will do.

SF: Okay. Thank you.

BB: Take care. Bye bye.

SF: Bye.

Transcribed by <https://otter.ai>