

ILOHI Interview with Richard Boehning

March 24, 2021

Indianapolis, Indiana

Interview by Ben Baumann

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

MP3 File, Sony

Richard Boehning =RB

Ben Baumann=BB

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BB: [0:00] So just to state for the record, today is March 24 2021. And my name is Ben Baumann and I'm here in Indianapolis, Indiana, and I'm speaking via phone with Richard Boehning. Who is in Lafayette, Indiana.

RB: Well, no, it's Richard. I pronounce it Boehning. That's B-O-E-H-N-I-N-G. People can't spell it and people can't pronounce it, so you're not an unusual situation. But I now live in Fort Myers, Florida.

BB: Fort Myers, Florida. Got it and we're doing an interview for the Indiana legislative oral history initiative. So just starting off when and where were you born?

RB: I was born in Rensselaer, Indiana, which is in Jasper County on July 2, 1937. The same day that Amelia Earhart went missing.

BB: Wow, okay. That's a trivia fact there. Wow.

RB: Trivia. Yes, indeed.

BB: [1:00] And what were your parents' names?

RB: My father's name was Virgil Boehning and my mother's name was Catherine. Her maiden name was Hoferlin H-O-E-F-E-R-L-I-N.

BB: Okay, and where was your family from before Indiana?

RB: Well, my father's, my grandfather came from Peoria, Illinois. And my mother's family migrated from the east through eventually Ohio and then Indiana.

BB: Okay, interesting. And what were your parents' occupations?

RB: My father was a truck driver. And my mother was a housewife.

BB: Okay. So how would you describe your childhood?

RB: I grew up in Francisville, Indiana, which is a town of a small town in Pulaski County, about 1000 people or less. [2:00] And I had a great life. And the older I get and the more I learned, I kind of realize that it was a great life, a great opportunity. I always thought that the education system wasn't the best the school system was sort of run by the township trustee and he was always pretty tight with the money. So, when it came to getting the best teachers, we had a few good teachers that were there for long periods of time, but a lot of the new teachers were on the low end of the scale. So, you know, I thought education wasn't so good. But you know, the results were good. I mean, I look at what some of my compatriots in my class and classes behind me did. We had a nice high percentage that graduated from college and went on to have successful professional careers.

BB: Yeah, okay. That's good. And who would you say was the most influential people in your childhood? [3:00]

RB: Oh, my, my mother and my paternal my maternal grandfather.

BB: Okay. Interesting. And why were they so influential?

RB:

I don't know. My, my mother was pretty unusual. She gave me a lot of freedoms. I was always kind of an independence sort. And I started working construction when I was 14, and, and I started working for the Monon Railroad as a student to like refer when I was 15. And I was working for the railroad as a calligrapher taking the place of train agents who were going on vacation for two weeks at the started of that in June of my junior year in high school [4:00], and I was 16 at the time, I had turned 17 In July, but I started actually, when I was 16. So, you know, it was pretty young, I commuted to wherever the job was in Northwest Indiana, on the Monon Railroad and enjoyed that independence. And so that kind of got me going. Sort of stubborn. Kind of wanted it my way. You know actually I was very stubborn.

BB: Fair enough. All right. And did you have much understanding about your family's politics or political beliefs as a child?

RB: You know, not as a child but as I as I got older into my teens, our family always [5:00] chuckled at my maternal grandparents. My grandmother was a was a Republican Baptist. My grandfather was a Democrat, Catholic. You know, that was quite a contrast.

BB: Yeah, definitely.

RB: But they got along fine. And their marriage survived for many, many, many years until they both passed away. So. But no, politics was not a big thing in our lives.

BB: Now, how would you describe your educational experiences in terms of did you have any favorite subjects or extracurricular activities that you were involved in?

RB: Talking in college?

BB: I guess in high school and college.

RB: Well, high school, it was a small school. The choices weren't too great. [6:00] But I did all of the activities. I mean, yeah, I was president of the class in the eighth grade, the ninth grade, the 10th grade, 11th grade and 12th grade. And, I was active in just a lot of activities in high school, but in college, not quite so much. I kind of emphasized the studying and just, we our family had little or no money. So, it was pretty important that I not play in college, but use my time wisely and get out as soon as I could, just from an efficiency standpoint.

BB: Sure. And where did you go to college?

RB: Indiana University at Bloomington. I was involved in the business law program, which was actually I was interested in business, not so much law, but I thought law would be a good, a good graduate [7:00] degree to have rather than getting an MBA. So, I got in the three program where you spent three years in business school. And then your senior year you went to law school, your first year of law school and your credits counted, both for your undergraduate degree in the business school, and for your law degree. So that saved me a year. And then I went to summer school of law school also and business school.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Cool. Now, as a child growing up, did you have any views about the state of Indiana or about being a Hoosier?

RB: No, you know, I, I don't think that I did. I mean, yeah, I love basketball. I played it, I wasn't good, but I loved it. And, you know, I can [8:00] remember where I was when 1953 Milan played Muncie Central, Bobby Plump game and. But, no, I don't think so. As far as being a Hoosier compared to being a Buckeye or you living in Kentucky. No, I. I did not.

BB: Yeah, okay. Sure. Did you enjoy your experiences at IU?

RB: I did. I enjoyed the business school more than the law school. Law school was extremely competitive. But yeah, I did. Those are. Those are great years.

BB: Did you start to develop sort of a political identity as you went through college?

RB: No. But you know, both my parents were Republicans. And, you know, in my small town, I would say 80% of the people in the town were Republicans. [9:00] It was just a very conservative German base type community. Just very conservative in nature. And I think that had a lot to do with my political upbringing.

BB: Yeah, sure. So, what was your first job out of college?

RB: My first job out of college was I joined a lawyer in Lafayette, Indiana by the name of William Bennett, or Bill Bennett, who was who was a sole practitioner. We practiced law together and we stayed together. For I had my license for 50 years, even though during the years 46 to 50. I was kind of semi-retired. I was starting to back out a little bit I would have given up my license before that, but my wife said no, "You work too hard for it, keep it for 50 years." So I did. [10:00]

BB: Uh, okay. That works. When did you get married?

RB: I got married while I was at college actually my sophomore year of graduate school.

BB: Okay, cool. And do you have any children?

RB: 5 children. Yes. By the time I got out of law school, we had two children. So you can see why it was anxious.

BB: And how would you say your family influenced your career?

RB: Well, it's primarily my mother, but just having confidence in me and giving me a lot of freedoms to do what I wanted to do. I mean, I was playing around, I had a stock market account. With an investment firm when I was 16, and made enough money in the stock market to buy me, a used car that was [11:00] actually just a year old. So she really encouraged me in a lot of ways. And, and, you know, I didn't have hours and she just, she just gave me a lot of freedom. And she just said, "Don't abuse the privileges that I give you." So I think that kind of gave me a good start.

BB: Yeah, that's cool. Wow. And so how did you become more seriously involved in politics?

RB: Well, I started practicing law in Lafayette, Indiana, and we moved into a neighborhood in Lafayette. And one of my neighbors 1-2-3 doors down was a gentleman by the name of O. U. Sullivan. And he was active in the local Lafayette Republican politics. In fact, his brother was lieutenant governor in Mississippi, I think one of the southern states, so he had always been involved [12:00] in, in politics and I started practicing law 1961. And but in 1963, he said, "Why don't you become a precinct committee and help me work on Don Blue's, mayoral race that was being held. Let's see, that was in in the fall of 1963. So, I did, I became a precinct committeeman and work my precinct got involved in politics and kind of work with him and, and became active in Don Blue's bid for Mayor of Lafayette. And then when Don Blue won, he asked me to be city attorney. You know, I've only lived here two years. So that was very complimentary to Lafayette, actually. Because, you know, as a university town, it had a lot of people in and out. So, the philosophy of the town [13:00] was, you know, we don't know strangers. come into our town, you're accepted you don't have to live here for three generations for us to know you. That was really something.

BB: Yeah, okay. That's cool. And as you initially became involved in politics, did you start to develop an idea of like, what key issues were important to you?

RB: No, I just loved politics for politics. Not issue not issue oriented.

BB: Now, how'd you get involved with the Indiana General Assembly?

RB: Well, as I was a city attorney, and in 1964, in 1965, and in 1966. The existing legislators representing the county, and we had two in the county [14:00], we didn't have single districts at the time. Retired or one died and one decided they just decided not to run. And so, a bunch of Republicans ran I think there was six or seven of us ran in the primary. And, and the persons with the top two votes. Were the people representing the Republican Party and the general election in November. And there are a lot of well-known people running in that election, including the vice chairman of the Republican Party, and that was Francis Gaylord. She got more votes in that election in that primary than I did, but I came in second so boom, I was I was on the ticket. And then you know, during the summer months I don't know [15:00] for sure. I seemingly had more appeal to moderate and independents than a lot of Democrats or Republicans, and I don't know why, but I did. But I got them the most votes in the fall election and got more than Francis Gaylord and two Democrat candidates that were running against me, because I think I had more of an appeal to independents and even some Democrats.

BB: Okay, interesting. Now, was there any legislation that you want to champion or fight against?

RB: Not that I recall.

BB: Okay. Did you have any political heroes at the time?

RB: No, I can't say I did. [16:00]

BB: Interesting. All right. Now, what type of campaign did you run? Was it's kind of one of those group campaigns, or was it an individual campaign?

RB: It was individual campaigns. Okay. You know, as you mispronounced my name when you got me on the phone here, and my name is hard to spell. So, I use that in my initial campaigning. And, like, I had billboards with my name misspelled four times, and then crossed out and then spelled the correct way, the last time and it was, it was kind of funny, but people remembered it. So, it was a name recognition thing. We didn't spend a lot of money on campaigns at the time. We just didn't.

BB: Yeah. Did you emphasize any particular things in your campaign?

RB: No, not that I recall. You know, let me tell you a little bit, philosophically [17:00] here. Every everything that happens now, how old are you Ben?

BB: 26.

RB: Oh, gee. All right. I've got grandkids older than you. (Both laugh) All right. But everything that happens now is a lemon. And they try to make lemonade out of it. Nothing can happen in society today. That that is not made a political issue one way or the other. Whether it's COVID-19, or the killing of nine people or 10 people in Boulder, Colorado recently, or whatever it might be, has to become a political issue. And I get I get so tired of it and sick of it, because it was not like that back when we ran we were, you know, yeah, there were issues. But in essence, you voted for a person, not based on where he stood on the issues. [18:00] But you voted for a person by saying, I trust this guy's judgment. And I think he will make good decisions for me, and will represent me in the General Assembly. Not issues. Character.

BB: Yeah, that's interesting. And so I guess, you feel like politics has changed quite a bit then from when you served.

RB: Oh, yes. Oh, yes. I mean, it's pretty sad when I can't watch. I haven't watched news for years on television. I don't even know why they call it news. It's, it's so upsets me. That I refuse to, to and the only I read a few things on the internet. I read the Wall Street Journal and that's it. But it's really sad.

BB: Yeah, yeah. [19:00] And why do you think it is drifted into kind of a political situation where it's, it's mostly, you know, lots of opinion pieces and cultural issues are talked about almost nonstop. Like, why is that?

RB: Because it works. Okay.

BB: It gets attention.

RB: It's not right, but it works. It's not right in my opinion. My humble opinion.

BB: Yes. Well, I guess Yeah, people like kind of like gossip more than news. And that's, yeah, that's interesting.

RB: You know, and, and again, I grew up in a Christian community, where lying was frowned upon. I mean, you didn't lie. You didn't stretch the truth. But, again, this is an old man talking. Sometimes I feel like that standard would be laughed at today. [20:00]

BB: Yeah, Yeah, that's interesting. Wow. Have you noticed if the Indiana General Assembly has changed a lot in your opinion?

RB: Yeah, I'm assuming that it has. I really don't follow it that closely. You know, I could draw some conclusions. But those conclusions would be based on not facts. So, I would say probably has changed. But if you asked me specifically, in what regard, you know, I really couldn't tell you.

BB: Right, right. Okay. Now, when you were campaigning, did you have a campaign strategy at all?

RB: Yeah. [21:00] I had a, pretty much it was just pretty much a get out the vote thing. You know, my billboard, everything, I had a consistent color on my campaign brochures and, and things and I, you know, I, I had this postcard campaign where it said, "I'm a Boehning backer, will you join me in voting for Dick Boehning?" And then I had these packets and gave packets of 10 to people I said "You want to help my campaign?" And I'd say this kind of to independents and Democrats. And they said "Sure, Dick we like you", I said, "Would you mail 10 of these." They were stamped, just write on an address 10 of your friends who are independent, or Democrat, and send them out to them. And we did hundreds of these things, and we set a certain time when they were to send them out, like 10 days before the election, but that worked very well for me. I mean, I had some people saying I got five postcards in the mail today about you. So that that type of thing. [22:00] Just to get out the vote. situation. It was cheap.

BB: Yeah, that works. What was the most important thing to you as a candidate?

RB: Selling myself, that people could trust me.

BB: Did you have a particular method of selling that to people?

RB: No, no, not really.

BB: Okay. What was your first election day like?

RB: My first election day?

BB: Yeah.

RB: Oh, it was pretty exciting. It was the primary election. And we'll went down to the local newspaper, when, as I recall, as it were the Journal Courier. The votes were coming in. They had sort of a station, there were a report from the courthouse. And it was kind of fun watching those votes come in [23:00] and, and, and winning the election.

BB: Yeah. What were you thinking when you walked into the state house, your first day in office as an elected official in general assembly?

RB: I felt proud. And I knew I really done well. I mean, I was the first person my family ever graduated from college. And it was a nice accomplishment for me, and for my family and my parents, my grandparents. So, I felt I felt good about that.

BB: Yeah, that's, that's really neat. What expectations did you have for the legislative process?

RB: Well, you know, I just didn't know what the process was like. I mean, I read every bill, I mean, every bill that came up for a vote I had read, [24:00] and I spent hours and hours at night reading these bills. And I think Adam Benjamin from Lake County, and myself are the only two that read all of the bills. I mean, you can't do that anymore because they're too long or too complicated, but they were a lot shorter and there are fewer of them and they were a lot simpler then.

BB: Yeah. Interesting, okay. How did you learn the ins and outs of state politics?

RB: Just by building up friendships and relationships with people. My after the primary election when I was elected to represent the Republican Party in the fall, general election, got a knock on the door one day and went to the door and there was a guy standing at the door and said "My name is Otis Bowen. Congratulations on winning the primary election. [25:00] I'd like to come in and to talk to you about the upcoming session" And I said, "Sure, come on in." He walked in and introduced himself and asked about our family and where it was from us, I said, "You know, grew up Francisville, Indiana went to high school there." He said, "You did." He said, "I graduated from high school in Francisville, Indiana." What are the coincidence there? So, I remember, I kind of immediately had a relationship with Doc Bowen. He said, "I'm running for Speaker the House, will you support me?" And I said, "Yes." I mean, that was a good decision. Yes. And it was a decision I shouldn't have made at the time, because I didn't know what he was running against. I didn't know the politics of it. But like I said, "Sure, I'll do that." Mistake, but and then, as the, as the Fall went on, and headed towards the election, Bill Ruckelshaus, who was the going to be elected as the majority leader, and, and what was his name, [26:00] Billy Howard, who they were sort of running as a team. Ruckelshaus wanted to be a majority leader. And Billy Howard wanted to be Speaker, and they will come to Lafayette and set up my office and kind of bugged me to get me to change my mind, because the vote was very close, you know, and in fact, after the election, there was 66, Republicans elected and we went to vote for Speaker of the House, the first ballot was 33 to 33. And so, you know, Otis Bowen was appreciative of the fact that he knew I was under a lot of pressure. And he was appreciative of the fact that I had stuck with him. And we liked each other. And so, before I was, ever voted on a bill, he appointed me as Chairman of this Cities and Towns Committee. [27:00] So, boom I hadn't served a day, and I was chairman of a committee. But there were a lot of new people there. You had to fill these, because there were not a lot. I mean, because the prior time had been the Goldwater debacle in 64' and all Republicans were swept out then new Republicans were smoked in, in 66'. And so, there are a lot of new positions to fill, and not a lot of old timers in there to fill them.

BB: Yeah, yeah. So, would you say that Bowen was one of your political mentors in the General Assembly?

RB: Absolutely.

BB: Yeah. So how would you know the needs and wants of your constituents?

RB: Well, you listen to them. You get letters from them, they all have feelings. And I don't know it's just a sort of a third sense, I guess. Fifth sense, whatever. Six sense. (Laughs) [28:00]

BB: Did you ever get any kind of sort of hostile letters from constituents at all? Or were they all generally fairly friendly?

RB: No, I didn't, they weren't hostile. But I got a letter once from a lady, elderly lady who I knew back in Lafayette. And she was a very devoted Christian. And it's when we were debating in the Sunday closing law you know used to have a law in Indiana, where businesses could not open on Sunday, unless it was a business where it had to be open, well, maybe like pharmacy or something like that. And so, I was kind of I was not as conservative as she was, and, and I was going to be voting in favor of that. [29:00] So, I remember she wrote me a pretty scathing letter about how I was gonna go to hell if I voted for it. (Both Laugh) I sent her a nice letter back, kind of, sort of explain my philosophy and, and understanding of that issue. And we had a typing pool. The type letters that we would dictate the gal that typed the letter came to me later and said, "You know, that was the nicest letter, but I had typed for a long time." So, I took that as a nice compliment.

BB: Yeah. Wow. Yeah, I'm sure it must have been always interesting to I guess you get messages from constituents. You never really know what you're gonna get. And yeah.

RB: Yeah. But then, you know, lobbyists are lobbyists and you got a lot of you got a lot of information from, from lobbying groups that sit there have positions on [30:00], on various issues. And, of course, I was in Tippecanoe County which Purdue is located. So, slipped through there, John Hicks was represented the university and its relationship with the legislature. So, he would kind of keep me advised as what the university needs and wants. So, you take in that information, and you tried to be responsive to the, and the university was one of my constituents. So, I wanted to be responsive, responsive to their needs too.

BB: Sure, yeah that makes sense. Do you remember the first bill that you sponsored in the General Assembly?

RB: No.

BB: Okay. (Both laugh) Some people do, but...

RB: I knew you were gonna ask me that. When we set up this appoint for this call I thought you know, I know he's going ask me what are the important bills I sponsored? [31:00] When I think back, what people were interested in is just let me live a good life with not a lot of interference. And give me some basics. Like good roads so I can go see my kids and my grandkids. It was a lot simpler then, than it is now.

BB: Yeah, yeah. I suppose. What was the regular interaction like amongst members of the General Assembly?

RB: It was good. It was good. I mean, we had various little. I mean, obviously, there were Republicans and there were Democrats. And within the Republican Party, there were there was the Marion County interests there 15 legislators that they had, and they tried to get through their Marion County, uh things that that 15 legislators [32:00] and Keith Bulen who was the Republican County Chairman had tried to put together and then there were rural and urban interests, and but they didn't dictate. I mean, they were just differences of opinion, but it didn't necessarily dictate the results of how it's going to be it just sort of was how people viewed things.

BB: Sure. What was the relationship like between Democrats and Republicans in your time?

RB: I mean, we had differences, but yeah, came noon, we went out to lunch together. And if we needed, we had a controversial issue where we were losing some Republicans and we needed some Democratic votes. Go to the majority leader, and say "Hey, we need three votes. [33:00] Can you give us three votes?" They will give me a day to find out. Come back, say, "Yeah, we got. Yeah, they'll support you on this issue." Of course, you know, three days later, they want something in return. But that was alright, too. That's what the Speaker of the House does. He manages those little controversies.

BB: Yeah. Okay. So.

RB: But it was not mean. It was not. It was not mean. Everyone, everyone was courteous to one another.

BB: So, I guess not like the stereotype of how people view that relationship today in American politics. What differences if any, were there between members of the House and Senate?

RB: Oh, that was just like rural urban. I mean, senators are senators and House members or House members. So, I think the Senate members thought, [34:00] you know, they represented a larger number of people in the House members, and they were more of that. But we got a long fine, I mean, and people got along fine. But again, it was just something that allowed people to make a slight separation as to who you are and where you're alive in the House or I'm in the Senate, or I'm from Marion County, or I'm from Sullivan, Indiana, you know, it just made your I'm North of Highway 40. I'm from South of Highway 40. I mean, all of these little things kick in, but they were not big. They were just the way a person felt.

BB: Yeah. What did you think of the process for generating a bill?

RB: I thought it was great. I really did. I mean, you know it had to go through the committee and had various readings. You had the right to amend the bill, it had to pass two houses and signed by the governor. There were veto rights [35:00] and you know, the process was actually quite good. I thought it was very, very fair. And I know it developed over a period of years long before I ever got there, but it was a to me it was an excellent system.

BB: Yeah. Okay. And how did you work to get support for any legislation that you authored?

RB: You work through your caucus through the, through the caucus primarily. And one on one.

BB: And what was that one on one process, like outside of formal votes and committee meetings?

RB: Oh, well, you just come up to a friend, say "I've got this bill coming up. Hope you can support it." And they'd say, [36:00] "yeah, well, no I won't." And then you talk to him and maybe try to convince them otherwise. It was all done on a friendly basis. You know when I was a freshman, first year, which would have been the, the 60, calendar days session, once every two years, in 1966, that's before they had longer sessions. It was before they had annual sessions. Bill Lass a State Rep from Allen County sat behind me, he was kind of a character and, and Ruckelshaus, who was majority leader gave Lass and made a bill to, to introduce and try to get through and it was, and he knew it wouldn't pass. And he told us it wouldn't pass, but we would get some good publicity [37:00] on it. It was to create an ombudsman for the State of Indiana so that people would have someone to talk to if they were having problems with any governmental agency in the state. Bill Lass, and I had fun with that. But the House didn't even get it out of committee. But it was fun.

BB: Yeah, okay. And so, did you have a pretty good sense of how people would vote prior to actually voting on a bill?

RB: Yeah.

BB: Now, what about the roles of party leadership? How critical were they to determining if a bill got passed or not?

RB: (Laughs) You gotta be kidding. The Speaker was the father in the House. Again, he said pretty much, pretty much. When I was majority leader, I was majority leader for well, Ruckelshaus left after his first term [38:00] in 66' I was majority leader and 68', 69', 70', well 4 years. Last year being 72'. And Otis Bowen was speaker during those periods of time, and that was a period of time when the Marion County delegation was trying to get Unigov passed, which would expand the city of Indianapolis to all of the county except for a few places like Speedway.

And it was an important bills and important bill for the Republican Party, it was an important bill for the city of Indianapolis and Dick Lugar was Mayor and Lugar was a fine intelligent individual, but he screwed up. He Bowen was the debt, the Republican Marion County delegation was giving the caucus some problems by not supporting some things that Otis Bowen [39:00] wanted sponsored. So, Bowen was holding and not handing down the Unigov bill, well Bulen got I mean Lugar got a little miffed at that so went on television and had a press conference and gave out Doc Bowens private telephone number, where he was living and asked people to call him to convince him to vote for Unigov. I mean Bowen was really ticked off. He was ticked off he goes, that bill is never gonna be handed down. I promise you that. And I thought oh crap. This is not very good. So, I let him cool down for a day and then went and talked to him and said, "Doc, you know, this is really important for the city of Indianapolis. Look, Lugar messed up but, you know just brush it off and move ahead because it's more important that this bill passed" and eventually he did cool down and handed it down and passed. [40:00]

BB: That's interesting. So you played, I guess, a fairly substantial role and all that to help get that moving along.

RB: Oh, deep in my heart. I knew that if I hadn't done that Lugar would never been a United States Senator, no I'm kidding (Both Laugh).

BB: That's right for the record, by the way.

RB: For the record yeah yeah. I mean, but it is interesting how little things can mean such a difference in the history of, of what happens.

BB: Yeah, sure. Yeah, that's true. Something that might just seem like a conversation could be a pivotal moment.

RB: Yes. Yeah. Little things right.

BB: Now, this is kind of a fun question. I like to ask, what does the public not know about the Indiana General Assembly and how it operates?

RB: [41:00] Well, I mean, back then or now. Now, I don't have the foggiest.

BB: But I guess back then.

RB: But back then. I don't know a lot of the lobbyists did a lot of entertaining. I mean, we all had to stay in. I mean, it was 60 calendar days, it was the fast moving thing. We had to get a lot out. So, we had to stay in Indianapolis pretty much full time. So, my first session, I stayed at the Claypool Hotel, which was the pits. But it was cheap. And I hadn't had a lot of money. So, you know, but you get lonesome. Your wife's not there, your family's not there. And the lobbyists

would have hotel rooms, and they would open them up, [42:00] and you could go in and there'd be other legislators in there. And you could go in and socialize in those places, have a Coke, and sometimes they've had food in there. So, I would say that was probably not known by the general public, but the general public would be very skeptical now and say, "Oh, well, they influenced you." But did they influence me? No, I don't think they did I just ate their food and left and forgot about it.

BB: Yeah. And how did your legislative service affect your family life? You mentioned how hard it was being away for a couple of months.

RB: I mean, they survived. They turned out okay. We were all right. Yeah. We functioned. We got along. We survived.

BB: Yeah. Okay. That's good. [43:00] What would you say was the most controversial legislative issue during your time to the assembly?

RB: Oh, Doc Bowen was hot on property tax relief. There are only three ways that you can basically raise money to fund something financially, the state government that's through the taxation of property, property taxes, or what you buy sales taxes or what you earn income taxes. And sometimes those become unbalanced. One of those three legged stools ended up paying more and supporting more of the total costs than the other than the other two from an equity standpoint. Doc Bowen thought that property tax was paying too much of that and that other people who didn't own property were not paying [44:00] their fair share. So, you know, property tax relief was that issue. But I mean, the sub issue was, yeah, you can only have property tax relief, if you've increased the income tax with the sales tax. So, some people issue was increasing taxes, not decreasing taxes. So, you know, he tried to convince people it was a dollar for dollar thing, you know, we're not going to spend more. They said, "Oh, yeah", you know, the politicians say that all the time, but they end up spending more. And so, it was a it was probably the biggest issue during my years in the legislature.

BB: Yeah. Okay. And what was eventually decided on that with property tax.

RB: He got his plan passed and adopted. I think it increased both the sales and income tax I can't quite remember but and then the money did go into a property tax replacement fund. [45:00] Final property taxes were reduced at the time.

BB: Yeah. Okay.

RB: And that was big, particularly for farmers and businessmen, you know businessmen who own property. Because that load was very heavy for them.

BB: Yeah. Sure. What legislation that you worked on took the most of your time?

RB: I can't remember. I mean, my first session, I was a freshman, I was chairman of the Cities and Towns Committee. You know, I voted on the bills. I held my Cities and Towns committee, as well as I could and people didn't complain to the speaker. So, I guess I did an okay job. But I can't remember what wonderful legislation I passed during my first 60 days session, probably nothing. [46:00] But I can't remember. And then and then later on, I mean, I went from that 60-day session to becoming the chairman later. So, I was more concerned with leadership issues than with specific pieces of legislation. And, you know, I would carry legislation for some of the state offices, like I in essence was representing the Governor and what legislation he wanted passed. I was representing the Secretary of State, the Attorney General. And I tell you a story that Ted Sendak was the attorney general. He loved his piece of legislation. And I said, Ted it won't, it won't pass." He goes, Well no, yeah well, yeah, just introduce it for me. And I just, yeah, it'll pass it'll pass." So, I did. And the vote was one aye and 99, nays, I was the only one that voted for it. And poor Ted said [47:00] that everyone was just laughing at him. I mean, it may not have been 99. There were probably some absent, but it was there was only one vote in favor of it and that was my vote. I mean, come on, Ted.

BB: And what would you say was your most sorry, what would you say was your proudest moment as a legislator?

RB: I don't know, I can't say.

BB: Ok, no worries.

RB: I'm actually pretty proud of my having the guts to talk to the Speaker of the House about the Unigov thing. [48:00] So, you know, that was behind the scenes. But that was pretty important. I was pretty proud of that. That was an important thing for Indianapolis, it was an important thing for the state of Indiana. And if I contributed just a little bit and proud of that.

BB: Yeah, that's cool. All right. What was the biggest challenge you had to overcome during your time in office?

RB: I don't know. I probably if I gave some thought to that I would have an answer. But I can't think of anything now. That I would view particularly as challenging. I think my biggest challenge was my was a personality defect that I had. [49:00] And that was that when I did something, and I, I would have my priorities of what I wanted to accomplish, but once I accomplished them, then I got tired of the job. And so, after six years in the legislature, Otis Bowen was running for governor. I had a chance to run for Speaker of the House, which would have been interesting position, but I was just kind of tired on the legislature and I wanted to move on and sort of do something else. It's like when 1972, Otis Bowen appointed me as chairman of the Indiana State Highway Commission. And he told me he wanted certain things done. And I developed a plan to get them done in the first four years and we got them done. He ran for election again and won, [50:00] said, you wanna be chairman another four years and I said "No, I really don't I mean, yeah, I got everything done. I wanted to get done. And it's just

difficult. I mean, it could but I'd be, you needed new people in there with new ideas.” So that's probably a personality defect I have.

BB: Okay. So, is that why you left the General Assembly then was just you got kind of tired of it?

RB: Yeah.

BB: And that's also interesting, because I feel like most people don't do that. They will just want to either stick around or they lose an election. So.

RB: Yeah, well, they, I mean, let's face it. There's a little pride in being a legislator. And you like the recognition of it. Which, which is fine.

BB: Yeah. What would you say is the most important work of the Indiana General Assembly?

RB: Probably trying to differentiate [51:00] what's best for the people versus their prejudicial views based on their politics or their background or whatever. I don't know. That's, that's hard to say. Sorry have so many I don't know (Laughs)

BB: That's okay. I mean, it was a while ago. I don't blame you. Let's see. Now, these are some when I was doing some research before this interview, some different topics seem to be talked a lot about in the newspapers, and just want to see if you remember anything about them. So, do you remember a bill that was going to lower the voting age to 18? In like, 1971?

RB: I sponsored it.

BB: [52:00] So tell me a little bit about that. And what made you come up with that idea? And, you know, how was it? What was the response to it? I guess.

RB: Again, I was majority leader at the time. This has been talked about publicly through media and everything, it was a time to lower the voting age to 18. I mean, 18-year-olds, were going into the service there, the Vietnam and all that. It was a time to do it. And, you know, just as a political party things that let's get out in front of this. And let's do it, you know. And so we did it.

BB: That's cool. And so, was it received pretty well, then for the most part?

RB: Yeah, it was.

BB: Everyone thought it made sense then.

RB: Yeah. I mean, now there's talk about lowering the voting age to 16. Do I think that's good idea. No, I don't. Do I think 18 is a good age? Yeah, I do. Do I think it ought to be increased to 21. No. [53:00] Do I think it ought to be decreased to 16. No.

BB: Yeah, yeah, I understand. What about this bill about wiretapping? Do you remember anything about that?

RB: No. Does not ring a bell at all.

BB: 1969 I guess about like, the ability for police to do wiretapping or something to catch criminals.

RB: No. Interesting. I don't remember that.

BB: So how would you summarize your time as a state legislator?

RB: A great learning experience for me. I mean, I was first elected in 1966. I was 29 years old, about your age. And so, it was it was a learning experience. I was still young enough. I learned a lot [54:00] and met a lot of interesting people. And it was a great, great experience for me.

BB: Sure. Do you have a favorite story or memory from your time as legislator?

RB: Probably do. Well, I, you know, I think the election of Otis Bowen as speaker was kind of interesting. That wasn't legislative but that was part of the legislative process of electing a speaker when the first vote was 33 to 33. Now people have committed votes to various candidates but a lot of the, several of the people that had [55:00] committed to Howard said, "I'll just commit to you on the first vote." So, they switched then on the second vote. So, you know, that was that built helped build the career of a very successful human being in the State of Indiana, a guy that I really respected and loved a lot. I don't know if you've, you know, even his life in Washington and when he was Secretary of Health and Human Services, interesting stories. I don't know if you've read his book or not.

BB: Yeah, I have. Yeah, yeah. Yeah, okay. Oh, what lessons if any, did you learn through your time in the general assembly.

RB: [56:00] Lessons you have to be proactive in thinking all the time to try not to stretch the truth. Be honest, because you're going to be put in situations where it might be easier for the people that you're talking to, to stretch the truth, but don't do it. I guess that would qualify.

BB: Yeah, okay. Did you have any regrets as a legislator?

RB: Oh. Perhaps, a perhaps regret was that I didn't stay in the legislature run again, and try to be elected as Speaker of the House. It may it might have been another nice footstep to a more elevated political career in my life.

BB: [57:00] Okay. What advice would you give to future legislators or even current legislators?

RB: None.

BB: None. Okay. Fair enough. (Both laugh)

RB: I mean, they just roll their eyes anyway. Say thank you, sir. (Both laugh)

BB: Well, I figured I'd ask you anyway. How has the state of Indiana changed over the course of your lifetime?

RB: How's it changed. Well, you know [58:00] I don't think it's changed substantially except in good natural ways that that it should have changed. Indianapolis has grown into a wonderful community. Back when I was in law school. There was no way I'd want to live in Indianapolis it was no place. It just wasn't a place to be it was. It was depressing. And that's why I said where do I want to live. And I said, "Well, Lafayette's goods community town, Fort Wayne's nice pretty progressive town, but city and so that's kind of a I thought that would be good. But Indianapolis has changed and you know, I think one of the big considerations, what makes Indiana great and again, this is coming from my background. Because I loved the study of transportation when I was in, [59:00] in business school, and I was Chairman of the Indiana Highway Commission. And that was on Bob Orr's Transportation Coordinating Board or whatever there was for a few years and so transportation has been big and I can see what transportation has done. From when I was young, I can remember when I was in the legislature, Bowen, telling me that this was on US 31 North of Rochester, Indiana and Fulton County had a one lane bridge. I mean, you had to stop and let traffic through the other way because it was a one lane bridge. Now, people wouldn't even understand what you're talking about if you said that now. I remember driving. My father had some customers in (Unintelligible) Park, Illinois. [1:00:00] So, we drove down 43 and then cut over West on Highway 24, which was a two-lane roadway in Indiana. But we hit the Illinois border. And you've probably never heard of this Ben. But it was a one and a half lane road.

BB: That's interesting. Yeah.

RB: A US Highway that was a lane and a half. I mean, every time a car came toward you, you kind of had to scoot off the road and get back on again. That's difficult really to comprehend. And then you think, what did the interstate system do to the city of Indianapolis. Oh, my goodness. What would Indianapolis be without you know, 465 in the end, with all of the interstate transportation systems that it has. It's just the railroad industry has been great in Indiana, because to get to Chicago, from the East, you gotta go through Indiana. [1:01:00] Which is, which is pretty good. We got ports now in the North, Lake Michigan and on the Ohio River,

and keep trying to build a good transportation system. But one of the issues currently in the Indiana legislature is increasing the weight limits for trucks in Indiana. Oh, my goodness. Do they tear apart the roads now and the bridges. Oh, yes, they do. Will, it be worse if they increase the weights? Oh, yes. It will. So be prepared if that happens. Again, the truckers are heavy lobbying group. And so it's an important issue.

RB: You know, one of the things that I did when I was chairman of Highway Commission was that Otis Bowen wanted all of the mainline interstates done in a four-year period of time.

[1:02:00] And at the time, he was staying at the top of the Riley Towers in Indianapolis. And he took me out there. And he said, and we walked around at night it was dusk. And he said, "Look" and there was all of the interstate going through Indianapolis. That was dirt, weeds. Not one piece of asphalt there. And he goes, I want all of this done. I want all of the main line interstates in Indiana, done at the end of 1976. So, I mean, we had great engineers, and they love the challenge and once during my four years as Chairman of the Highway Commission, Nixon had withheld highway monies. And so, the Supreme Court eventually released forced him to release those monies. And we know it was coming so I told my engineers I said, [1:03:00] "If you get me, I can't remember how many, let's say 30 projects on the shelf. When this money gets released, gonna be first come first serve, we're gonna have money to get all these projects done. So, I want all of these projects on the shelf, then. I don't know, it's 90 days or 20 days. And when you do it, I'm gonna take you over to Howard Johnson's across the street nad buy you a beer. You know, they did it for a beer. I mean they just worked their fannie's off. And it was fun. But you know, we ran out of money. The because the Federal Highway, the way that the monies were distributed for the interstates was that those had the most needs got the most money, or as your needs narrowed, you got next to nothing. So, we came up with this plan, that the Indiana Department of Highways would borrow the money from another state agency. And when the Feds paid them back over a period of years, we would pay back that money. And it's not a lot of money now it was like \$42 million, but then it was a lot of money [1:04:00] and the legislature passed it. So, we were able to get all those mainline interstates done during that four-year period of time. That's not legislative I'm sorry, but we took it to the legislature that counts?

BB: It's connected. Now, I know we touched upon this a little bit earlier on, but how has politics changed in Indiana?

RB: I don't know. I'm out of politics.

BB: Okay. Fair enough.

RB: I mean politics is politics. I think it's now more conservative liberal politics than Republican Democrat politics. I know that. There's a tendency to say the Republicans are more conservative than the Democrats. But, uh, but if you put the two together, back when I was a legislature, there was a large overlay I mean, [1:05:00] if you could put it on a spreadsheet or a chart, the Republicans who are in the legislature and the Democrats were in the legislature, there would be a lot of overlapping in the middle.

BB: Okay, so a lot more moderate people.

RB: Yes. There were Democrats who are more conservative than I was probably

BB: Interesting.

RB: Yeah, I don't think you find that now.

BB: Yeah, pretty rare, I guess. Yeah. All right. Last few questions here. What if any enduring qualities do Hoosiers still have or hold dear?

RB: (Laughs) Where did you come up with these questions?

BB: Just trying to keep you on your feet you know.

RB: Well, honestly, when you compare it to our neighbor to the west, that's a good comparison. I have a son that lives. [1:06:00] He's retired and just moved to Tennessee from Colorado. And I said, what were your neighbors? He goes, "Well, mostly there are people trying to escape Illinois."

BB: Okay. Interesting. Yeah.

RB: I don't know. There's I think there's still a good thread of honesty in Indiana. Like there's still some good politicians.

BB: Yeah. All right. And last one, what do you want Hoosiers to know about their role in relation to the function of the Indiana General Assembly?

RB: Repeat the question again.

BB: Yeah. What do you want Hoosiers to know about their role in relation to the function of the Indiana General Assembly?

RB: Well, voting is an important responsibility. [1:07:00] And try to examine the candidates and look for the candidates, who you think will most represent not only you but your neighbors, and your community and get off of this right wing conservative progressive thing, and just try to get somebody who's got a brain and it's got to be honest and just do a good job. Not someone who represents quote, your interests. Broaden your perspective a little bit. Think of your neighbors.

BB: Yeah. Okay. Well, is there anything that I didn't ask about that you wanted to mention? Or that you thought of or?

RB: No, I think you pretty well hit on the interesting points. It's very good.

BB: [1:08:00] Great. Okay. Well, thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it. I think it'll be a nice addition to the project. So

RB: Yeah, anytime good luck with your project.

BB: Sounds good. All right.

RB: Thank you, Ben.

BB: Thank you. Bye bye.