Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Willie Lewis Brown, Jr.

Willie Brown: Mayor of San Francisco, 1996–2004

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker
in 2015

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It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

Willie Lewis Brown, Jr., "Willie Brown: Mayor of San Francisco, 1996–2004" conducted by Martin Meeker in 2015, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2020.

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Abstract

Willie Brown was the 41st Mayor San Francisco, serving two terms between 1996 and 2004. Prior to that, Brown represented San Francisco in the California State Assembly for thirty years, serving as that body's Speaker for a record fifteen years. Brown was born in Mineola, Texas, in 1934 and moved to San Francisco at the age of seventeen in search of greater opportunities. He graduated from San Francisco State University in 1955 and UC Hastings School of Law in 1958. The Oral History Center conducted a lengthy interview with Brown in 1991 and 1992, "Willie L. Brown, Jr.: First Among Equals: California Legislator Leadership 1964–1992," covering his upbringing, education, and most of his time in the State Assembly; the transcript is available to read online. This second oral history, conducted in 2015 and 2016 touches on his final years in the State Assembly and then focuses on his two terms as Mayor of San Francisco. Topics discussed include: Bill Clinton and Democratic politics in the early 1990s; election to Speaker of the Assembly in 1994; term limits in California; San Francisco mayoral elections of 1995 and 1999; first term agenda: economic development, homelessness, housing, Mission Bay development; appointments to the Board of Supervisors; second term agenda: Transbay Terminal, housing; "Progressives" in San Francisco politics; and the image of Willie Brown.

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Foreword

By Mike Roos, Member of California State Assembly, 1977–1991

I first "met" Willie Brown in 1972. I was working in Lyndon Johnson's War on Poverty office in Los Angeles.

Politics and public service were the constant objects of my attention. Watching the Democratic convention on television, I was suddenly riveted by the passionate and perfectly elocuted speech persuasively urging the seating of his California delegates. At close, the hall erupted in sustained and then thunderous applause. I never forgot his name and yearned our paths would cross one day. And they did.

In 1975, we met again. I was in the gallery of the California Assembly chambers when what proved to be the landmark Consenting Adults Bill was debated. Not much to my surprise, but certainly to my delight, the author, the same Willie Brown of 1972, rose to present the legislation. Without notes, he proceeded to spellbind the membership (and gallery), brilliantly arguing the law should focus on the consent of the adult for the sexual act, not the act itself. He won the day and California scored another progressive first with Governor Jerry Brown's signature.

I personally met Willie Brown on the floor of the California State Assembly in June of 1977—as a colleague. I had just won a special election to fill a seat vacated by an incumbent to assume a federal appointment. I had now realized an ambition unthinkable as recently as a year earlier.

Now, here I was observing and participating in everything around me, but always with a keen eye on the work and moment of Willie Brown.

In those days, he was involved, yet detached from daily legislative life. He had lost a contentious contest for Speaker. The winner, Leo McCarthy, had publicly exiled him. Yet, the adage that the institution needs and requires its top talent led McCarthy to appoint him Chairman of the Revenue and Taxation Committee. Willie accepted with the caveat that he would faithfully chair his committee, attend floor sessions, but otherwise be in San Francisco.

Who knows, had a hostile contest for the speakership not erupted in 1979 between McCarthy's majority Leader and McCarthy himself, Willie's legend may have been written in the annals of famous trial lawyers: Think Johnny Cochran.

Nineteen seventy-five became a lesson in combative leadership for me and virtually every member of the Democratic caucus who had chosen to stand with McCarthy. Without formal title, Willie fluently became the instructor.

It was a revelation to watch him stealthily come into a caucus, move unassumingly to the back of the room, listen as the conversation moved gloomily to capitulation, and then, Willie, upon recognition, asking had anyone read the rules of the Assembly. Stunned looks transformed into cautious optimism as Willie, in measured tones, explained that a speaker could only be removed

by forty-one votes. Everyone's assumption had been that a majority vote by the Democratic caucus (which the majority leader had) would determine the outcome.

I devote time to this watershed event as it defines the moment for me and others what it meant to keep your head, while others were losing theirs.

This story ends well as McCarthy stepped aside after the November elections. Maxine Waters, Elihu Harris, and I persuaded Willie he could assume the mantle of the Speakership and prevail, which he did in a matter of thirty days prior to the scheduled vote.

And that brings us to a remarkable run as Speaker of the California Legislature. It is a remarkable record in which he addresses the AIDS epidemic, South African sanctions to confront and destroy apartheid, the first assault weapons ban, requirements to wear seatbelts, and on and on. Progressive legislation becoming models for the rest of the states.

Eventually, after holding the Speakership longer than anyone else in California history, he then left his beloved legislature to become an equally effective Mayor of San Francisco. It is all spellbinding in what follows.

My job here is to make a quick and brief introduction to the man.

What I really want to accomplish is to call out how special a public leader he was.

Someone once said in response to the question of how you define leadership, "You know it when you don't have it." I posit there is something primal in how we gravitate to people who we ultimately rely upon to lead.

It entails the rhythm of speech, the quality of laughter, the authenticity of personal caring and engagement, unpracticed intelligence, and kinetic energy. Willie Brown was blessed with, yet constantly developed these attributes through meticulous effort to become the most effective state leader in the later part of the twentieth century in the most influential state in the United States.

It is too easy and, again, fairly human to forget those of previous generations, but somehow you have been drawn to listen to him for some purpose.

I urge you to really get to know him through these masterful interviews. You are in for a unique ride with the most accomplished leader I have ever witnessed.

It is my honor to say, "Meet Willie Brown: a timeless leader."

Interview 1 February 11, 2015

01-00:00:15
Meeker: Today is the 11th of February 2015. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Mayor Willie Brown. And let's get started here.

01-00:00:43
Brown: This is actually my late mother's 106th birthday.

01-00:00:49
Meeker: No kidding?

01-00:00:49
Brown: February 11th was her birthday.

01-00:00:50
Meeker: Wow, yeah. Important day.

01-00:00:52
Brown: Yeah.

01-00:00:53
Meeker: And she was really influential, profoundly influential in your life.

01-00:01:00
Brown: She was.

01-00:01:00
Meeker: Well, let's back up a couple of decades. At the end of 1991 and the beginning of 1992 you conducted a series of interviews with the Regional Oral History Office of UC Berkeley. I think it was probably about a dozen hours of interviews looking at your time in the State Assembly and also your background, your birth in Texas, moving to San Francisco, education in San Francisco. And, of course, the interview wrapped up in January of 1992, leaving the last couple of years of your term in the State Assembly undiscussed. There were some interesting things that happened in those couple of years, so I'd like to talk about those, just to follow-up from that interview.

But what I'd like to do really is start with 1992. That last interview finished in January of 1992. The presidential race was just heating up. And, of course, in that race Bill Clinton goes on to defeat incumbent George W. Bush. George H.W. Bush.

01-00:02:20
Brown: H.W. Bush.

01-00:02:20
Meeker: Yes.

01-00:02:21
Brown: The old man.

01-00:02:22
Meeker: The old man. And an important generational transition, I think, in the Democratic Party. Clinton was a baby boomer. He was pretty young. And then also in California you have two new senators elected that year, the so-called "year of the woman." Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer, both of whom are Bay Area based. So I'm wondering if you can just give me your perspective as a Democrat in the California State Assembly looking at Democratic prospects at the beginning of the 1992 election cycle. Did it seem like a good environment for Democrats to retake more offices on the national stage?

01-00:03:15
Brown: Nineteen ninety-two was a very good year prospectively for Democrats. I was serving as the speaker at the time and my role and my job was to make sure [we maintained control]. In the eighty-member House, we were always in a position to control with forty-one plus numbers of people. And we were somewhat measured by whether or not we would lose any of the incumbents. And we were somewhat in a little bit of a transition as a legislative body because we were the first time people who had been the end product of new lines. Every time we do the census in this nation we draw new lines for legislative districts and congressional districts and there were a number of our members who were making the decision about their careers, like Maxine Waters going off to Washington and others. So we were losing some of our stalwarts. We were an operation that ran based on a buddy system, where you might be able to raise money, I might not be able to raise money, but I might need money. What you raised you shared with me and with a whole bunch of other people. And that's how we had been really successful over the years. We had literally made sure that the resources were applied where they needed to be applied and not where they may have originated.

And so 1992 was that kind of a year. We had a golden opportunity, frankly, to do wonderful things in California because Bill Clinton, had won the Democratic nomination in what clearly was an upset—Cuomo was our first choice. We wanted to do Mario Cuomo but he went to the tarmac in New York on his way to New Hampshire to enter the race and apparently changed his mind, for whatever reason, and he didn't run. Bill Clinton was not liked. Bill Clinton, you know, is from Arkansas. He was just kind of a five or six term governor but nothing compared to what we thought would have been a better candidate. But when Cuomo dropped out we immediately hooked on with Clinton.

01-00:05:49
Meeker: What had been your interaction with Governor Clinton up to that point in time?

01-00:05:53
Brown: Bill Clinton had arrived in California in the late eighties. He represented the Democratic Leadership Group, and that was the more moderate Democratic governors. And he had come out in a cheap shiny blue suit with a full head of hair. We had him appear at our caucus. We have caucuses every Tuesday and we had Bill Clinton come to our caucus. And he was a fun guy. He really was a fun guy. Not a good poker player, blackjack player, or any of the games that we were playing in the lounge. But he was fun and we got to know him on a personal basis rather than just in the governorship title. And some people really embraced him. Like Maxine Waters really embraced Bill Clinton in spite of the fact that some of us were more intrigued by Nancy Pelosi's advocacy for Mario Cuomo. Maxine was a Clintonite from day one. When Clinton got the nomination at the Democratic convention in New York, we were heavy duty in the California legislature in session. We were in a war with Pete Wilson over educational money. As a matter of fact, it was a delayed budget, a stalemate involving the budget in that time period.

01-00:07:27
Meeker: Sixty days or something like that, right?

01-00:07:28
Brown: Or more. Yeah. And it was pretty vicious. I got to tell you, though, it was fun because we kept trying to figure out how do we get the public behind us on this fight. The public usually is always with the governor. And we watched closely every move Pete Wilson made. We were making a countermove. We were desperate in our engagement with our own membership. Our membership was so frightened of the possibility that the voters would revolt as they had done when they elected Pete Wilson in 1990 rather than Dianne Feinstein. We were really frightened. President Bush at that time had won the war handedly in Iraq and it was just unbelievable what everybody was thinking.

01-00:08:26
Meeker: His approval numbers were through the roof at that point.

01-00:08:29
Brown: Off the scale. And our standard bearer was just a guy from down in a place called Arkansas. Hope, to be exact. And it was kind of descriptive. And we had been a part of the effort in '88 involving Jesse Jackson and so the phenomenon in this country at that time was around kind of Operation Bush and the Jackson movement. Organized labor was not nearly as engaged as it ultimately did become. But for us the confrontation with Wilson was the main factor that shaped what we were trying to do in the 1992 election cycle.

Well, lo and behold, Pete Wilson kept being challenged by us when we would meet with him. There's a group called the Big Five. It was the two Republican leaders, the two Democratic leaders, and the governor. In those meetings we would argue about whatever on the policy questions surrounding the budget.

And we were determined not to allow him to cut public education. And we kept pushing him and pushing him that he should be specific with reference to what he intended to cut. And somehow he made the tragic mistake of saying the exact number that was needed and that we were arguing about was the exact number that funded early childhood education, that funded kindergarten. And when he announced that all we'd have to do is no longer have kindergarten we were delighted because we knew that all those mothers that had been with those kids for four or five years, not able to go to lunch, not able to get her hair done, she'd been waiting to get rid of that kid. And we knew, Republicans and Democrats, we knew that he had made a mistake. We went to the teachers and made sure that with their resources they put every shot of him making that comment on every television station, whether it was in Chico or Chino. We made sure that every television station and every radio station, every newspaper, had it. Every editorial board. And it was not long before the tide turned when he said he was going to abolish kindergarten. We started talking about saving kindergarten, not saving the teachers' salaries. Start saving kindergarten. And so we ended up literally exploiting the hell out of that mistake by him in the July/August saga just leading up to the November election.

Bill Clinton gets the nomination and suddenly we've got this oddity. But this oddity instantly became a problem because he had apparently had some relationships with women that were being highlighted by the Republicans. And *60 Minutes* was going to do a profile on him and all those kinds of things. So we were facing those possibilities. And we had managed in the spring, in the primary, to get two women nominated as US Senate candidates. So going into the fall with us needing to make sure we maintained our majority, if not improve our majority, the senate being in the same identical position post the term-limit measure that had been passed trying to get rid of some of us, and suddenly the whole mix of what happens in the world of politics changed so dramatically. The Republicans could not define what the dialogue would be surrounding the nation. Bill Clinton, not only did he push back on all the accusations about the Jones woman and others, but he suddenly touched a nerve and the nerve was, "You don't have a job. You are not in great shape economically speaking, etc., and it's because of Bush." And suddenly this enormously popular president began to be measured not by the win in Iraq but by whether or not you got a job. And the Democratic base was incredibly energized beyond belief. The Jesse Jackson phenom that had occurred in '88 suddenly blossomed and spread. The idea of female representation across the nation, the Year of the Woman, happened to be 1992. All those things came together simultaneously and it gave us probably the greatest electoral victory we had in the entire nineties.

01-00:13:50

Meeker: Was there a moment at which you really felt the tide turn? That it seemed like the Bush presidency and the power of Pete Wilson were not going to be the story in 1992?

01-00:14:05
Brown: Well, it was clear that when Pete Wilson literally said kindergarten would be the basis of funding, the education cut he was talking about, we knew at that moment he was no longer at all an attractive alternative. Period. Because in every neighborhood, in every community, it was the abolition of kindergarten. And that you cannot do. Period. So we knew that that was a moment for us. Period. We also knew that the nominations of Feinstein and Boxer in June of that year were pretty important. We didn't, until maybe late August or early September, have a complete appreciation of how important Clinton's nomination really was. Some of us were questioning whether or not that nomination would be helpful in California, but it turned out to be so.

01-00:15:13
Meeker: There was also Jerry Brown kind of running as a favorite son in California at that point in time. Did you ever develop a position on his presidential candidacy in '92?

01-00:15:23
Brown: Well, yes, we did. We didn't think it was a good idea because Jerry had gone through the process of being a party chair for Democrats in the state of California. He had been unsuccessful at being helpful in that regard. The party chair has got the responsibility to raise a lot of money. A lot of money. Jerry Brown is not a money raiser for other people. He raises money for himself because people always think he's going to win and people donate to anybody they think is going to win. Period. They want to be on the winning side. But that did not translate into resources similar to the ones that had come from Nancy Pelosi when she chaired the party or were to come from other people who would chair the party in the future. So the party was not carrying the weight with Jerry Brown, in what Jerry Brown was about. He was pretty much a loner. He was pretty much on his own and he had literally gone through the process of evidencing an interest in being an independent, so to speak. And so he had gone through so many changes that his candidacy as a favorite son was not eagerly embraced and supported by people who were looking to win their elections in legislative districts and in the congressional districts and in the US Senate.

01-00:17:03
Meeker: Back to Bill Clinton and Maxine Waters. Did she ever explain to you why she was so taken with him early on?

01-00:17:11
Brown: Maxine is probably the best bellwether of quality principled politicians. She seldom, if ever, tolerates anything less than the ultimate quality on the decision. And I think she saw Bill Clinton in that vein. She may have had a closer look at Bill Clinton because she comes from that area. She comes from St. Louis, Missouri. My guess is that her history and her relationships down there had given her a better perspective on Clinton than most of us ever had

on Clinton. We had paid him virtually no attention at all. She had been riveted on Clinton from day one, though.

01-00:18:00
Meeker: Well, Mineola, Texas isn't so far away from Arkansas either, right?

01-00:18:04
Brown: Mineola, Texas is light years away from Arkansas. [laughter]

01-00:18:09
Meeker: Okay. [laughter]

01-00:18:11
Brown: Mineola is a very small town. But the southern flavor of Mineola is not anything comparable to the southern flavor of Arkansas or Alabama or Mississippi or any of those places.

01-00:18:31
Meeker: How is that? What is the distinction in the southern flavor between those places?

01-00:18:37
Brown: Because I don't think Texas was ever really a big star, so to speak, in the southern strategy, in the southern movement. Texas was always kind of an independent southern state rather than a sister. Even today Louisiana doesn't think of Texas as being as close as they do Mississippi or even Georgia or Alabama. And Texans don't think of themselves that way. And so the smaller towns in Texas pretty much reflect the same thing.

01-00:19:22
Meeker: When it comes to November of '92 then and Clinton emerges victorious and so do Feinstein and Boxer, as well as your caucus, did it feel that you were riding Clinton's coattails or vice versa?

01-00:19:44
Brown: No, I think that, interestingly enough, legislature, Democratic caucus members in both the senate and the house, constituted the real Democratic Party in California. We were it. We were the power brokers. And that situation remained for a long time, by the way. But no. We didn't think that Clinton's candidacy had been helpful to us. We did think, however, the women's candidacy in the year of the women had been helpful because we had been for some time, on the leadership edge, trying to empower women. As a caucus we had dedicated ourselves to equal funding for women candidates. And it was practical. Women were seldom, if ever, subject to the attacks that guys were subject to in a campaign. You couldn't demonize a woman as you can demonize guys in campaigns. Women were never suspected as being players or drunk drivers or even dishonest. And on a practical basis in the early eighties we came to the conclusion that if we could find women candidates, we can beat Republicans in Republican districts. And that's what we had kind of set out to do. And in the process, obviously, it

became clear that we could win Democratic seats easier with a woman than we could with a man. So we literally became a partner and we treated the women's movement as a partnership, whether it was Emily's List or any of the others. And so in 1992, if you stood back from afar, looked at the political landscape in California for power purposes, you would assign it to the legislature and its partnership with elements including organized labor, by the way. We had a peer partnership with organized labor. They didn't dictate as they currently do. They did not dictate policy. They didn't dictate people. They really stayed within the framework of what labor needed to have happen rather than labor ordering it to happen.

01-00:22:22
Meeker: This is something that we should probably talk about as we go along, when you see this transition start to happen.

01-00:22:29
Brown: Well, if you go back to the first series of interviews you would know that that process with labor started with a guy named Jack Henning. Jack Henning was a labor leader and he had been the undersecretary of labor during the Kennedy and Johnson Administrations. And he had returned to California at some point and when he returned to California he became the head of labor for the state of California. At that time labor was doing what people usually do who donate money. They would give everybody a dollar, so to speak, those who needed it and those who didn't. And when I say those who needed it, for one example, why would you give anybody in the districts in Oakland or San Francisco or the Latino districts or the African American districts throughout the state, why would you waste money? They are going to win. Once they win the primary it's over. And it's just which one of them wins. The labor was in the process of building their friendships, providing resources.

Well, when Jack Henning came along, he and I had a long conversation about how to expand the number of seats in the house, et cetera. And we knew that managing the resources would be probably the best way to do that. He needed, however, to have a shield for members being able to say, "You didn't help me." And so he extracted from me the right to say to anybody who asked for contributions from labor, "Have you cleared it with the speaker? Have you cleared it with the president pro tem of the senate, David Roberti?" And that caused a redirection of the resources and better management. We didn't take resources directly. We would put them into voter registration in your district rather than money in your campaign. We put it into opposition research. That's how Ace Smith came to be. We hired Ace Smith as our opposition research guy. That's how he ended up doing what he's currently doing today. His origin was opposition research. And so in that regard, that's what we had in 1992 and it really evidenced itself more dramatically than it had ever evidenced itself.

01-00:25:01
Meeker: I'm curious. Clinton is obviously inaugurated January of 1993 and his first six months were especially rocky. His first two years were pretty rocky, actually, leading up to the mid-term elections that were rather problematic nationwide for Democrats. He comes in as President and he, with Hillary, is pursuing an aggressive healthcare reform agenda that ultimately doesn't pass. There was his initial move on allowing gays to serve in the military, which didn't work for him either. I'm wondering, from the vantage point of California, just a few months after this great victory, what was your thought about his initial performance in Washington?

01-00:26:06
Brown: Well, his initial performance was actually not as President. Once he got elected he immediately called an economic summit in Arkansas. And instantly he became the focal point of potential domestic policy for this nation. The journalists devoured his ability to accumulate all this brainpower to talk about the economy. And people sought the positions of being an attendee at his summit as they ultimately had sought ambassadorships and appointments to the cabinet. It was just incredible what occurred as a result of that. And it inspired people to do summits in states, one of which we did. And we did it in partnership with Pete Wilson, who by that time had become aware that there was no way that he was going to be able to be as decisive as he had hoped because we were a lot more agile and a lot more organized than his Republican caucus side. And understanding that we did our own state summit. Other states probably did summits, as well.

Out of those summits came all these incredible policy initiatives and all this imagination that became the cornerstone of Bill Clinton's first two years. And those cornerstones for his first two years were not well marketed. He really did not fully appreciate how far back in time, so to speak, for policy purposes were the people who were already in Washington, both Republicans and Democrats. And he ended up with almost no allies on any of the respective issues, either in the private sector or in the public sector and he really got his hat handed to him handsomely. And the Republicans nationally had become better at doing what they intended to do. They had more skillful people involved. It ultimately didn't adversely affect Clinton's reelection chances because by the time '96 rolled around he had become a lot smarter at playing the game and he had literally stolen every one of their ideas practically and twisted it just a little bit and made it almost as if it had been Clinton's original ideas.

01-00:29:17
Meeker: And the economy was going gangbusters in' 96, too.

01-00:29:20
Brown: That's right. Yeah. People had gotten jobs. So many things had dramatically changed. We were really not at war with anybody, so to speak. People were not dying needlessly. And so the first season of his presidency was marred by

the absence of marketability of great ideas. And symbolically with the healthcare measure, which was not new. People have been trying to do something with health for sixty or seventy years. Republicans and Democrats, and they had all failed. And he handed it off to Hillary. Maybe she took it without being asked. And she became, and still bears, the title among some of the detractors, of some kind of an evil person or an evil individual. And they ran away from her.

01-00:30:22
Meeker: You're right in pointing out his pivot to economic issues prior to his inauguration and really bringing in many of the best and brightest lights, Nobel prizewinners and people like Laura Tyson and many others. And passing, with some difficulty, some extraordinarily important budgets that both cut costs and raised revenues that then, of course, set up the historic budget surpluses later in his presidency. I'm wondering, from your vantage point in California, how much of this were you getting? Were you seeing his economic model as something that could be transferred to the state of California?

01-00:31:16
Brown: No. We seldom if ever allow any outside model to be how we operate because we kind of treat ourselves as if we are a nation. We kind of treat ourselves as if we are ahead of everyone else in every way because of the diverse nature of our economy and because of the wealth that's here and it has proven consistently to be accurate by comparison. So what he was doing at the national level was not replicated and, in many cases, not embraced in California, for California's purposes. We were so far ahead in many of the respective categories that he was attempting to deal with.

01-00:32:09
Meeker: Well, what was your economic agenda then when you were still in the state house in the early nineties before—

01-00:32:17
Brown: Interestingly enough, it was initially based on schools. We really were riveted on trying to do something about soundness for education. We had gotten quite a taste of it with the teachers putting together Prop 98 and all of the things that they were doing around that. And that kind of dominated our agenda. We were also, I think, fascinated with how we would make the economy of California solid by enhancing what farmers could produce. The food production in California was so far superior to any other place in the nation, if not the world, and we were riveted on that. And not so much from farm subsidies but from orchestrating—and, as a matter of fact, there was no requirement for farm subsidies. They were not asking for that. They were asking for regulatory considerations, et cetera. We were willing to do all of that. And then, interestingly enough, long before anybody else in the nation was thinking about technology, California in the nineties, in the early nineties, was really into what's going to happen in the world of technology. And so the

legislature was about affording these giants some level of immunity or civil tolerance from civil lawsuits for all of these wonderful innovations that were coming. We needed to encourage and enhance and the University of California and all of what we were trying to do with the University of California to get them into the research, execution and the ownership on the end result of the research shared with whoever did the research as well as some of the outside people who financed it. So our involvement on what happens with California's economy, Republicans and Democrats did not violently disagree.

01-00:34:54
Meeker: Technology is super interesting and, of course, that's going to be something we're going to talk about more during your time as mayor. What were some of the policy initiatives that the technology industry was interested in and what were you and the state legislature able to produce for them?

01-00:35:12
Brown: Well, organizations like Genentech were trying their best to find their way, frankly, into what ultimately became the stem cell initiative process. And people like John Vasconcellos out of Silicon Valley who had a keen interest in both what happened in the Valley and on the health side. We had a series of people out of the Los Angeles world in the area of health and there was just a great dedicated effort in that regard. There was also, interestingly enough, a dedicated effort about where people should live. Orange County was going to segue away from being a farm community into something else. Although we had tried to protect the farming interests long before 1990, we had allowed for agriculture preserves, areas that would be treated differently for tax purposes, for property tax purposes. And you probably couldn't get out of that very easily. Well, all those things were the kinds of things we were dealing with and in many cases we were prompted by our desire to be as aggressive in the world of innovations as we possibly could. And many members were the authors of those options.

01-00:36:53
Meeker: When you were representing San Francisco in the state assembly were there local technology firms that were coming to you suggesting there were certain policy initiatives that would contribute to the growth of those industries?

01-00:37:10
Brown: No, not really. Not really. San Francisco was not the hotbed. It was San Jose, Mountain View, Palo Alto. And it was driven primarily by Stanford and the emphasis on engineering at Stanford. While we did have a working relationship on the health side with the UC Med Center and its operation—and we had a little bit of research going on on various areas and various categories generated primarily by the UC system. It was more the southern part of the peninsula rather than San Francisco. So there were very few occasions when I would be approached by individuals with ideas that needed legislative protection, governmental protections.

01-00:38:13
Meeker: In thinking about this, was the position of being a speaker, did you experience that as a statewide leadership position or—

01-00:38:25
Brown: You could only see it as a statewide leadership position. You could never see it as just a—

01-00:38:29
Meeker: A local.

01-00:38:30
Brown: No, not even close to being a local. Being the speaker had almost nothing to do with your district. Period. And the speakership was and is to this day, more so then than now because of term limits, but then it was really statewide. As a matter of fact, it was second only to the governor.

01-00:38:51
Meeker: Well, then, how do you balance being a local representative at the same time you are leading a legislature?

01-00:39:00
Brown: Well, if you are from San Francisco you really do have an advantage over almost everybody else. Every person elected from San Francisco, even though they may be from a geographical space, that geographical space is part of all of San Francisco. So suddenly, if you're a San Francisco representative, whether you are in the Italian part of our city, North Beach, or whether you're in the Sunset part of our city, which may be the more conservative area, the policy initiatives in the state are more reflected than the individual districts. Period. And so you're not burdened with looking for a DMV building in your district. You're not looking for any kind of special treatment except on policy issues like transportation and freeways. The freeway movement is not a local operation. It is part of a statewide policy. But it may have an effect on your district, such as the central freeway in San Francisco or the western freeway that they wanted to run through Golden Gate Park. It was not unlike what they were doing in other parts of the state with the freeway system. And so suddenly, although it affected your district, it was a statewide issue and it was to be dealt with as a statewide issue. It was the same with redevelopment, by the way. Redevelopment was a statewide issue, although it had some specificity in your own district or in your own neighborhood. But the policies were state policies, not district policies.

01-00:40:57
Meeker: Let's go up to '94 and the midterm elections and also the elections then that—it's a complex story but Republicans take over the state legislature to a certain extent, right, because you have Mountjoy.

01-00:41:13
Brown: Well, let's talk about that.

01-00:41:13
Meeker: Yeah. Why don't you explain because it's very complex and I'm going to get it wrong if I try.

01-00:41:18
Brown: By 1994 the opportunity to run for statewide office was available. We owned a series of districts with the incumbents that we had managed to acquire in down Republican times or in times when there was a tremendous advantage to a Democratic candidate, like 1992. And so we owned at least half a dozen or maybe even more districts that should have been Republican in their representation. For example, we had Rusty Arias, a farmer, a Democrat, conservative Democrat, we had managed to orchestrate his victory. Betty, Karnette, down in the Long Beach area, a district that should have been Republican, we had managed to win it with her. We had a whole series of those particular wins. In the Inland Empire we had three or four seats that we had because we'd gotten them in down times for Republicans and we had continuously serviced them with voter registration, et cetera, et cetera. We would continue to win if the incumbents stayed put.

But instead everybody, because of term limits, knowing that 1996 was their exit date, they had to make a decision about their careers. So we had three or four incumbent members running against each other for secretary of state. We had two or three members running for other positions against each other. Which, one, sapped us in terms of incumbency in competitive districts and, number two, sapped the resources because suddenly people that we used to take resources from no longer felt the need to participate in our efforts. So we were at a great risk, not some risk, a great risk, by virtue of all of the shifts that were prospectively taking place post reapportionment and the business surrounding the approval by the voters of term limits. And, for the first time, several members were affected by term limits. Their seats were being vacated because they no longer could stay there since they had run the length of the time period they could hold in the legislature. And it was not a presidential year. It was a non-presidential year, which means we didn't have the advantage of a need to help just the president, which is what some democrats only do. They don't do legislators. They don't do congress people. They do only the president. But when they're in there voting they will then be helpful. And we didn't have a whole series of attractive candidates in the primary with all of the internecine warfare. By the time the dust cleared we were at a terrible disadvantage because people were angry with each other. They were separated et cetera, et cetera, et cetera. And it translated into a slight defeat for our dominance. The Republicans got forty-one seats and we had thirty-nine seats when the dust cleared. Period. In November of '94. However, the Republicans had one person who had won two seats.

01-00:45:24
Meeker: Mountjoy.

01-00:45:25
Brown: He had won a seat in the senate in a special election on the same date and he had won reelection to the house. But the question was which house can he participate in. He was determined to stay in the Assembly and vote me out as speaker and Brulte in as speaker before he would go over and be sworn in to the senate seat, which is what he wanted to do for the rest of his life anyway. Well, obviously that didn't sit well with some of us. But the opportunity was there for us. If we kept him out, we're now down to forty to thirty-nine. And all we needed to do in a forty to thirty-nine house was get one of the Republicans to vote with us and it would be thirty-nine plus one to thirty-nine only on the other side and that's essentially what we did.

01-00:46:32
Meeker: This is a fascinating analysis of the maybe unintended consequences of term limits. This idea that it would result not simply in kind of a principled opposition to term limits in that you're losing expertise and those kinds of things, but it will confuse and change the political landscape so that former political allies, in thinking about their own political future, are placed into the arena with one another. Did you anticipate that that would be a possible impact of term limits?

01-00:47:19
Brown: No, nor did the sponsors of term limits. They didn't really think it through. It was a fellow named Peter Schabarum, who was a member of the board of supervisors in Los Angeles County. He had been a member of the California State Assembly. Been a famous football player at the University of California. And he was never, ever embraced from a friendship standpoint or relationship standpoint by legislators. They didn't like him at all. He was an oddity. I think Reagan appointed him to the board of supervisors in Los Angeles County and when he went down there he was still not a popular figure among his fellow Republicans. He hated us and we hated him. He saw an opportunity with what was called term limits. It was being touted as the answer to every ill in the state of California electorally speaking. And so that movement post-Jarvis, Gann, and that whole crowd, set out to do exactly that and Schabarum was the architect of it. And in the '90 election cycle Republicans either went silent in the house, even though it affected them, or they supported it. Now, on reflection, if you interview them they tell you it was the worst thing they ever did. They should have helped kill it.

Reagan actually wrote me a letter which he authorized that we could publish it in the election itself. And it said he was against term limits. He was voting against it and that he really believed that he could have won the presidency again if there had not been term limits for the presidency. Now, that would have been a profound statement in Republican neighborhoods throughout the state. But David Roberti, the president pro tem of the senate at the time had the responsibility to do the mail in the no campaign. My side, under my leadership, had the responsibility to do the media. We did television and radio. Obviously the most expensive part of the campaign was television and radio.

We recruited people like Jack Lemmon and Angie Dickinson and a whole lot of other people to do the commercials for us in the Hollywood world. We spent a lot of money on radio and television. The letter from the President came late and Roberti still had 400 grand in his account, about that amount, and he promised to get the letter out. That was ten days before the election. And our pollsters had measured at least a 5 percent effect net/net by Reagan, if the knowledge of Reagan was known. We decided if we didn't have Reagan on camera and on television people would never believe. But the letter on your kitchen table in Orange County or in Ventura or any of those places in those horrible Republican districts would be accepted because it really was Reagan's handwriting.

And lo and behold, we didn't realize until seventy-hours before the election that Roberti had not sent the letter out. He had decided that the 400 grand that he had needed to be saved so that he could run for either the LA City Council, for a supervisor in Los Angeles County, or statewide. He ultimately ran for treasurer statewide. And he'd never be able to raise that kind of money if he was termed out already. And so he just never told us. We would have put together a means to get that communication out. We have not forgiven him to this day for his having done that to us. And in seventy-two hours we were unable to penetrate. In those days you didn't have the robocalls. You didn't have any of that kind of technology. You didn't have any of the social media contacts like you now have, that you can instantly Instagram, you can do Twitter, you can Facebook. You can do so many other things in a split second of communication. You didn't have that in 1990, in that election. And you were still with the ironing boards and the mimeograph machines. You didn't have any of the things you have today. And so we ended up losing by about two points because Roberti had double-crossed us and reneged on his burden. We had carried ours and we had spent all of the money that we needed. Some of us had mortgaged our homes to finance this campaign because we really knew that term limits would take us out, personally take us out. And that's what occurred.

01-00:52:46

Meeker: And term limits are one of the sort of Pandora's box issues, right, in that once it's out it's kind of hard to put it back in. There's obviously this ongoing "throw the bums out," politicians as a class, whether they're Democrat or Republican, "are not representing our interests in the right way." So to then turn the clock back and end term limits is a much more difficult thing than starting it to begin with.

01-00:53:19

Brown: I don't think it could ever return to the post-term limit days. You can modify term limits. You can appear to make them more workable, as we have done in California [Proposition 28 passed in 2012, which slightly changed the term limits law].

01-00:53:31
Meeker: Do you think that that was a good solution?

01-00:53:33
Brown: No, I do not. I believe that you ought to abolish term limits, period, and I think that ought to be the quest and you ought to line up the League of Women Voters, you ought to line up everybody and keep assaulting with that concept. Because there are some people that shouldn't get one term and then there are others that ought to stay as long as the voters will have them because, after all, that's what it is. It's a voter's choice. And when you limit the voter's choice you take out really talented people. Yeah, I don't think there's anybody that has replaced Byron Sher on timber, for example. Byron Sher was the most prolific producer of public policy for timber in the state of California. There's nobody in the legislature with that skill. Term limits took Byron Sher out of the legislature. Literally took him out of the legislative process. There's nobody that understood how to fashion protections for innovation, as was the case with John Vasconcellos, the name I mentioned earlier. Term limits took John Vasconcellos right out. Just totally and completely eliminated him. And there are so many other subject matters in the same category. In the world of health, Art Torres was a cornerstone of health policy in this state for a long time. I think he now is a vice president of stem cell research that the state has funded. But he was the cornerstone of health policy for this state. Well trusted, well respected. And the house was made up of giants in the subject matter fields, that when they took to the floor to debate, they became the decisive party potentially on the public policy issue and that subject matter, you don't have that anymore. Somebody gets up to debate, nobody cares to listen to somebody who knows less than probably any staff person about the subject matter because they've only been there for a minute. And you're never going to be able to reverse that unless you constantly highlight it, unless you constantly go after it in that way. Making it convenient for one individual to remain speaker for a period longer than ordinary under term limits was what was originally the motivation for changing and when that didn't work because it was identified as benefiting only one individual, under the guidance of Arnold Schwarzenegger they went back again and came up with the twelve-year cycle in both houses. They now have the twelve-year cycle. So a person can serve for twelve years and that's it.

01-00:56:36
Meeker: Do you feel like that's [Prop 28] an improvement or—

01-00:56:37
Brown: It is an improvement. It is an improvement but it is not the answer. Eight and a half years is about the amount of time that most people spend. I spent fourteen plus years as speaker, fourteen and a half years as speaker, twice as long as any other person in the history of the state of California. And I must tell you, I never would have been mayor. I would still be speaker because even when the Republicans took over I remained as speaker because I had managed to develop a relationship with a sufficient number of people on each side of the

aisle that the speakership was no longer subject to party control, it was subject to house control, which is the way it should be. Period. And I would have kept it that way in perpetuity had I been able to continue in the legislature.

01-00:57:33
Meeker: Well, let's talk about that, because here it is January of 1995. Because Horcher, I believe, was the gentleman who contributed his vote to you retaining the speakership.

01-00:57:47
Brown: There's a great story behind that.

01-00:57:48
Meeker: All right. Well, why don't you tell me the story then.

01-00:57:51
Brown: When the Republicans won in '94, they began to think in terms of a celebration. We began to think in terms of how do we make sure that we controlled the speakership. Well, we first had to get our own people in line because politicians are amazing. The will to survive and hold the meager title that they have or the meager position that they have or the office that they have or the parking space that they have is more important than public policy for some. We had to first make sure that all thirty-nine Democrats were willing to stay together no matter what. Because you understand the Republican leadership potentially was offering opportunities to participate beyond the skill level and ability of some of the Democratic members. Well, once we had done that, we were in a position to do no worse than have a forty/forty house, because we knew that we had one Republican vote no matter what. And that was Horcher. We had that vote because over the years of my speakership the Republicans had changed leadership five or six times. They had gone from Carol Hallett to Bob Naylor from down the peninsula and they had gone to Pat Nolan. They had gone to Ross Johnson. They'd gone to Bill Jones. They had gone through literally five or six Republican leaders. And each time it was a fight and they would literally fire the Republican leader. And I had always been careful enough to make sure that once you'd been leader, even though you're no longer a leader and you're still in the house, you were treated with the leadership respect and the leadership perks and the leadership et cetera. More choices. And so to that extent I built a relationship.

Republicans also had another characteristic and that is, for whatever reason, if they didn't personally like you, so to speak, they would treat you as if you were worse than a Democrat and that's how they treated Horcher. I, of course, was always looking for someone who needed assistance. When Horcher needed assistance over a three or four, five-year period, I had provided it. And Horcher always wanted to change his registration from Republican to Democrat and I wouldn't let him. Said, "Because you're from a district—you can't win as a Democrat in Diamond Bar. You can win as a Republican. You

win the primary, you win it. And we Democrats can help you." We got the electrical workers to help him, et cetera. So we had a great ally. Republicans were totally unaware that Paul Horcher was that kind of a potential defector from their operation. They selected a guy named Brulte to be their standard bearer, to become speaker. And Brulte had literally been the point person to Harm Horcher when he was a member of the house. Horcher, of course, called and said he's not voting for Brulte, he's going to vote for me if I'm going to run. Well, that gave me the oomph that I needed to keep the thirty-nine in place because suddenly I got forty. But I can't tell them. I can't tell them because if I tell them then who knows what kind of pressure that could be brought to bear on Horcher. Horcher's wife had a very high executive position in the world of technology in Los Angeles County. Kids were in school and he had a mortgage. And Republicans are not above using everything in the world to pressure you into doing things.

01-01:02:39
Meeker: Especially with the speakership in their sights.

01-01:02:43
Brown: Yeah. The power of that job was just unbelievable. And with that in mind, and with Wilson being a part of that effort, he was still the governor, it was clear that Horcher would be at great risk. And so we came to the conclusion that we needed to hide Horcher, so to speak. We knew the Republicans would never look for him. They'd just assume he was going to show up as a sheep and vote accordingly. They were busy celebrating the whole month of November. We were busy concealing Horcher's existence. And the way we did it was very simple. I had a very close friend who was connected, a woman, was connected in Korea. She lived here, worked here. And I got her to take Horcher on a three-week trip to Korea with a strict understanding of no telephone calls. You didn't have smartphones yet in those days. You didn't have the internet. You didn't have any of that kind of—and being as connected as she was, once we got Horcher into the Asian world, not even the CIA would be able to find him, if Brulte and those guys started looking for him. They didn't look for him. They didn't look for him at all. They just assumed that he would be there and he would vote accordingly. We kept him in Korea until the Sunday before the Monday noon election. We flew him back in here on Sunday night, had dinner at the Palace Hotel right around the corner here. He stayed overnight at the Palace Hotel. Our people drove him to Sacramento. At noon on Monday, which is the exact moment the vote is to be cast, and that's when they discovered they didn't have the votes.

Well, now we're in a position where we challenged the right for Mr. Mountjoy to be a participant. And, of course, in that regard he would have to step aside until the House made a decision on whether or not he could be seated. The House decides by majority vote to test whether or not he's been appropriately elected. Our argument was a very simple one. He filed for the State Assembly in March. He filed in the special election for the State Senate

back in August and he swore, he had the penalty of perjury what he wanted to do. So he said in August that he wanted to be a state senator. That was post a comment that he made in March when he said he wanted to be reelected to the House. He got elected to both. Well, the question is which one was superior in terms of the affidavits and the declarations which he had—so it's a legitimate reason to question his right to be a participant in the deliberations in the House. We won that argument.

Before the legislature is seated, the clerk operates the House and the clerk is the parliamentarian under those circumstances. If, for whatever reason, the clerk is disabled then the senior legislator, whomever that happens to be, becomes the arbiter of any dispute, as if he is the parliamentarian. Well, this fellow Dotson Wilson, he used to be on my staff. The Republicans had voted against Dotson Wilson becoming the clerk. Black man. First black man ever in the history. He's still the clerk. And lo and behold, when Dotson was there, unbeknownst to us, Dotson had married a woman who was a Republican and she apparently had great influence on him. And for whatever reason, he did not want to rule on whether or not Mountjoy could participate in the challenge to Mountjoy's right to be seated. That's rudimentary. If you're being challenged, there's no way you can vote on the appropriateness of your being seated. He would not rule. That started the delay and the stall, because our strategy was very simple. Forty to thirty-nine get rid of Mountjoy. Now we got a seventy-nine member house and it takes not forty-one votes. It takes a majority of the house to elect a speaker. Period. And that's forty in a seventy-nine house body. Dotson wouldn't rule. And Dotson ended up in the hospital so the senior member could rule. I don't know what illness he suffered but he was hospitalized, which means he was not able—

01-01:08:33

Meeker: Fear of his wife, perhaps?

01-01:08:35

Brown: I have no idea up 'til this day. He was hospitalized. And the senior member of the house happens to be me. I was the longest serving member of the legislature at that time. And, of course, I ruled immediately that Mountjoy was not eligible to vote. And when Mountjoy was not eligible to vote I was reelected speaker with the Paul Horcher vote. That's how all that happened. And it was dramatic. The Republicans, of course, would not show up for meetings, which means we could not convene the house because we couldn't get forty-one people. Constitutionally it takes forty-one for a session, for a quorum and for a session to take place. Not just a majority of the house. It has to be a majority of the membership. And so in that regard the Republicans tried to stall. Well, I cut off all their pay. And it took about two and a half weeks, maybe three weeks, before their wives and their husbands began to say, "Cut out the nonsense. Go back. So what, you've lost. Get it over with." And so about the third week in January they showed up. They were meeting in the Senator Hotel across the street every day. They showed up. They couldn't

get per diem unless they were on the rolls. And we put every Democrat on the roll every day. And so the per diem paid to the Democrats were there and the salary paid to Democrats were there. And when the Republicans began to suffer economically they decided that they had been legitimately beaten and they came back and I continued as the speaker. After trying my best on multiple occasions to offer them a share of the leadership, to offer some understanding so that we could process the House. Because to do what we did meant that every day we always had to have one more vote than the Republicans on everything. Period.

01-01:10:47
Meeker: Well, you must have anticipated, one, Mountjoy would have been replaced by a Republican.

01-01:10:52
Brown: Not for seven or eight months.

01-01:10:53
Meeker: Not for seven or eight months. And then did you anticipate that they would try to get rid of Horcher, as well?

01-01:11:00
Brown: Recall.

01-01:11:02
Meeker: Recall him. And so that would have brought them back up to forty-one. The question is when—

01-01:11:07
Brown: We had three or four others.

01-01:11:10
Meeker: Oh. Waiting in the wings?

01-01:11:12
Brown: Obviously we did. We had Doris Allen. And then we had Brian Setencich. As long as I was there they never succeeded, even though their numbers were their numbers. We always had one more of theirs than they were aware. So we elected Doris Allen. They recalled Paul Horcher. Twenty-four hours before the vote to recall Paul Horcher we elected Doris Allen speaker because I had signed at that time to run for mayor. It was early June. And in that regard I'd always made clear to the whole world that if I was running for mayor I was not going to be speaker. And I'd said that a long time ago. And so in my resignation as speaker we put Doris Allen in as speaker and they immediately started trying to recall Doris Allen.

01-01:12:13
Meeker: Well, this is something, of course, that doesn't really appear in the newspapers. You get the Horcher story because that transpired. But what you don't get is the other potential people you had waiting in the wings.

01-01:12:25
Brown: We would never tell you until we sprung them. So we had Doris Allen. And then when they recalled Doris Allen we had Brian Setencich. And it was Democratic votes that did all this. And then I left, of course, and after I left the Republicans in the following January were able to elect a guy named Curt Pringle from Orange County for a very short period of time before the Democrats won the house back in '96.

01-01:12:59
Meeker: What a remarkable story.

01-01:13:00
Brown: It is. It is. In the history of California, there probably has never been such a maneuvering to hold on to power without the numbers and to do so effectively and to have planned it two or three years in advance. There's no way you could have ever known that you would use these friendships or need these friendships in the way in which you needed them and which you used them. But I have always, in the world of politics, anticipated disaster. And if you anticipate disaster and you prepare for disaster politically, you never experience disaster because you have taken out the insurance that allows you to weather it.

01-01:13:57
Meeker: The counterfactual is one way of looking at history, right, which is something that didn't happen but might have happened. And you had mentioned that without term limits you might have continued in the role of speaker perhaps until today. Would the arrangement that you had had in '95, '96, have translated to that, do you think, if term limits hadn't been a factor?

01-01:14:20
Brown: Oh, sure. I had five. I had five.

01-01:14:26
Meeker: You had five people?

01-01:14:27
Brown: Yeah. I had five Republicans. They could never have gotten above thirty-six or thirty-seven, no matter what they did.

01-01:14:38
Meeker: Interesting. Wow. So you would have been able to retain that position?

01-01:14:42
Brown: Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. Yeah, I was prepared. But keep in mind that I had already made the decision to run for mayor before the vote was counted in '94. We knew the term limits was taking us out. Burton, Brown, all of us. We're all gone in '96. And so everybody in the legislature knew that all of the sitting members of the House are going in '96. Everybody who was there, starting in 1991, would be out in '96. So everybody was preparing. That's why so many people ran against each other in '94. Some of us had a clearer path. In my

case, the decision was made more for John Burton's benefit than for mine. The polls were taken to evaluate whether or not this oddball police chief who had beaten our guy Agnos for mayor, whether or not he could be beaten. And there were two spots open. There was the state senate seat being vacated by I think Milton Marks at that time and there was the mayorship about to be vacated if we beat him. Well, when the exhaustive opinion polls were done by our pollster David Binder it came up with I could win either one of the seats easily. I was a popular figure, powerful figure. Resources. I could either be a state senator or I could be mayor. Burton could win the state senate seat just as easily as I could because of the Burton history. Couldn't beat Jordan or he'd have difficulty beating Jordan. Our team obviously made the decision you can't be selfish. You got to run for mayor and he runs.

01-01:17:05
Meeker: When did that decision happen?

01-01:17:07
Brown: Oh, that happened early on. Early on.

01-01:17:11
Meeker: The papers talk about it happening in the spring of '95.

01-01:17:14
Brown: I know. I know.

01-01:17:16
Meeker: Yeah, but it sounds like it happened quite a bit earlier.

01-01:17:17
Brown: No. Much earlier.

01-01:17:18
Meeker: All right. Well, I'll let you go. And we're meeting next Tuesday.

Interview 2: February 11, 2015

02-00:00:10
Meeker: Today is the 17th of February 2015. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Mayor Willie Brown. This is interview number two. So let's get started. And we had wrapped up last time just on the verge of you talking about your decision to run for mayor, mostly prompted by the passage of Prop 140 in 1990—

02-00:00:33
Brown: Not mostly. All. All prompted by that because I had no real desire or need. Unlike many politicians, I was perfectly comfortable with my position as speaker and my membership in the California legislature, which I had held for thirty plus years. And there wasn't any reason for me to do anything else.

02-00:01:00
Meeker: So that passes November of 1990. It wasn't basically going to term you out until—

02-00:01:10
Brown: Ninety-six.

02-00:01:11
Meeker: Ninety-six. It would give you in the State Assembly three two-year terms.

02-00:01:14
Brown: Correct.

02-00:01:17
Meeker: And what you had mentioned in the previous interview was that contrary to media reports, if you read the [San Francisco] *Chronicle*, it looks like there was not a clear decision on your part to run until spring of 1995. But it sounds like there were polling and other considerations that were already in place well before that. When did you start thinking about what your next chapter would be after 1990?

02-00:01:49
Brown: Well, when it became clear that we would not be able to test this matter in court before the implementation of term limits on any of us, then it became clear that as a practical matter, if you wanted to stay in public policymaking, you better find a spot in which to do it. And to that end, our friends and relatives in our political clique in San Francisco had already started to do that. Because John Burton, the congressman, return member of the California State Assembly, had become very much an activist looking for an alternative. Period.

02-00:02:34
Meeker: Alternative meaning he was interested in leaving an elective position or—

02-00:02:38
Brown: No. Alternative to an elected position. He was never interested in leaving elected position. Period.

02-00:02:47
Meeker: And so what you had mentioned in the previous interview was that there was some polling done and it was determined that you easily could have won or—

02-00:02:56
Brown: Could I win? There were two possibilities. There was the [state] senate seat being vacated under the same concept of term limits or there was a mayor's job potentially. Although it had an incumbent [Mayor Frank Jordan], he was a disaster as a mayor for the city and in that capacity he was being targeted by some of us for replacement. He had beaten one of our own, Art Agnos, to get the job to begin with, and so we didn't feel any qualms about taking him on if the opportunity presented itself. But then City Attorney Louise Renne, and a fellow named Jack Davis, who had been the campaign manager for Frank Jordan in the previous election, they had all become disenchanted with his performance and they too were in dialogue about what should be done and could be done and, "Why you, Willie Brown, ought to do it."

02-00:04:02
Meeker: Well, why did Willie Brown want to do it? I think it was perhaps in your book that I read that, going back to the 1960s, the mayor's job was something that you would have been interested in at that point in time. But going through all the traumas and travails of San Francisco in the 1970s in particular, such as the assassination of George Moscone, who was both a friend and a mentor to you, that must have soured your ambition to be mayor at that point in time.

02-00:04:43
Brown: I think that's what I had previously said. That, in fact, George had convinced me out of the box that being the mayor was the greatest job in the world. You were the king. There were no limits on how long you would be the mayor of San Francisco, et cetera. And I had, in running around with George in his mayorship, begun to see it as a wonderful place. Every restaurant you go into, every nightlife activity, every opportunity for ballet or theater or any of the other things on the streets. People just absolutely knew who the mayor was and kidded with the mayor and had fun with the mayor. And George was that kind of person. And he was just happier than ever in that capacity and said, "When I'm no longer mayor, you have to be mayor. You are the most natural to take this job." And then the assassination occurred. By then the divisions had begun to evidence themselves. The so-called run from districts rather than citywide. Becoming interested in all the business surrounding tenants and poor people and all of the kinds of things that you see today in San Francisco. And so that had begun to be less attractive for me. And then Moscone's assassination wiped it out.

But by the time term limits had kicked in, a number of things had occurred. San Francisco coming out of the Moscone tragedy. Dianne Feinstein's tenure as mayor. The Democratic National Convention, which had been held here in 1984. The Jesse Jackson candidacy that had been part of the '88 convention. The efforts by my friends in Atlanta to get the Olympics, the Olympics in Los Angeles. There had been so many wonderful things. And then, of course, the whole business of Feinstein solving the problem with reference to the 49ers and their unprecedented collection of Super Bowl victories, some five of them, and all the personalities surrounding that. Suddenly San Francisco was not as offensive and as unattractive as it had been post the Moscone assassination. And so the sales pitch was rooted in the true nature of San Francisco that could be one's place after term limits.

02-00:07:49

Meeker: Sure. I mean, San Francisco in the 1970s is rife with all sorts of conflagrations. You have things like Patty Hearst and you have the Zebra murders and the Zodiac killer and all of this kind of stuff, right. But in the 1980s, certainly Feinstein provided some measure of stability to the city in leadership. But there were still major challenges here. There, of course, was the AIDS crisis, which hit the city really hard. There were financial downturns, economic problems both nationally as well as locally. There were jobs, as well as residents, leaving the city, although the population overall was increasing at that point in time. Agnos talks about years of drought and that caused some problems for him during his tenure as mayor. What seemed to you like the biggest challenges facing the city when you were mulling over the decision about if this was a job that you really wanted?

02-00:08:56

Brown: That was very simple. It didn't take a whole lot to convince me that the same skills that I had applied, mastered, acquired, and applied in the state legislature, working with both Republicans and Democrats could be put together in San Francisco in a very productive way. Period. And that optimism was there and it was heavily fed by those who were pushing hard to get me to run for the mayorship of San Francisco.

02-00:09:36

Meeker: What were those things that were pushing you?

02-00:09:39

Brown: Well, the things that pushed me probably more than anything else was the prospect of being able to solve the problems and fashion a solution to the problems in San Francisco and that the political climate was ripe to so do that. With at least two members of the board of supervisors from the gay and lesbian community, at least talented persons serving on that body, like then young Kevin Shelley, who had been a graduate of the Burton operation from a staff standpoint. With Nancy Pelosi clearly rising in power in the Congress and with the contact, relationships there. And with my vast array of relationships with people who would continue to be in Sacramento, as well as

those who had migrated to the Congress as a result of term limits, and with the change in the statewide voting habits of people and a number of our friends being so elected, it appeared as if it was going to be a walk in the park to put together the resources that needed to be put together to make matters work. And the business community was overly optimistic about the prospect for somebody with my credentials coming aboard to do what needed to be done to save the San Francisco Giants, to solve the redevelopment issues existing both in the Hunters Point and in Mission Bay, to do what needed to be done to complete the restoration of all the damage that had been done by the '89 quake, which had all been put on hold, to get City Hall completely restored because the city had been absent from City Hall for a long time as a result of the '89 quake. There were just all those incredible things that needed to be done that nobody was doing.

02-00:11:56

Meeker: Was there ever a moment that you considered going into the private sector?

02-00:11:59

Brown: No. No. I was never, ever interested in going to make money. It was not part of what I ever wanted to do. I was always interested in making enough money, obviously, as a practicing lawyer, to take care of the family. But simultaneously, my involvement with public service and public policymaking and public participation is far beyond anything anyone would ever conceive of.

02-00:12:29

Meeker: So you announce that you're going to run late spring 1995. Obviously Frank Jordan, the incumbent, was a candidate. And then the other candidates that emerged as potential competitors to your votes were Angela Alioto, who was on the board of supervisors at the time, who dropped out before the election, and then Roberta Achtenberg, who was on the board of supervisors, then had been appointed by Clinton to Housing and Urban Development and then came back to San Francisco to run for mayor. What was your thinking about this range of candidates?

02-00:13:23

Brown: The only opponent really was Frank Jordan. Neither of those two people could beat Frank Jordan, nor could any of the other four or five people who were candidates. They had those perennial candidates, people who run for everything. They could never win. And it was clear that Angela nor Roberta could beat Frank Jordan. And so the race was Jordan and Jordan only. That was the object.

02-00:13:53

Meeker: There's been some conversation historically that perhaps in the initial, the November election, not the runoff, your greatest opponent would have been Achtenberg, not Jordan. She maybe could have been the runoff candidate

against Jordan and then lost to him. How seriously was her candidacy taken before the November election?

02-00:14:20

Brown: I think her candidacy was taken very seriously. But my object was Jordan. There was no criticism by me of Roberta. There was only complimentary things said about Roberta, including the prospect of having her run housing in my administration. There was no criticism of Angela because I never considered either one of them capable of getting past me or Jordan. Period. We were always aiming at Jordan. Jordan was the one different candidacy versus all of the other candidates who were in the race. There was nobody on his political side, in his political sphere except him. We were all from the same general collection of voters. We all appealed to the same people, whether it was labor, whether it was women, whether it was gay and lesbians, whether it was African Americans, whether it was Chinese. It was interesting that in all of the configuration, the one thing that was very clear, and Rose Pak probably made that clearer than anything else, and that was we could potentially get exclusivity on the Asian vote. And we aimed for it. There was like maybe 1750 Japanese surname voters. However, a treasure trove of Asian voters, Chinese voters in particular. And then we suddenly discovered that there was a collection of Asian voters nobody was paying any attention to and that was the Filipinos. And Dennis Normandie put that piece together. So we had a whole series of specialty places where you could get votes that was uniquely available to us. And in our operation, led by Jack Davis [ed. note: or possibly Dennis Normandy], it became clear exactly what we needed to do in each one of those categories. What we needed to do in absentee balloting. And we put together a team of ten people and their job was to everyday do something about those five or six categories of specialty voters for early voting. And in that process, when the report would come in and we did the check-in every day and we ended up terminating a couple of people because they were not as productive as they were supposed to be or they may have even misrepresented where they actually had gotten the signatures and things of that nature. By the time we got near election day for the primary, we knew exactly where we were vis-à-vis everybody else.

02-00:17:24

Meeker: When we're dividing up the electorate along these lines, which sounds like primarily ethno-racial or quasi-ethno-racial lines, so you have the Chinese, you have the Filipino, you have the gay/lesbian population, you have the Latino population: what are the different issues or policies that you're interested in discussing so that those populations see you as their candidate?

02-00:17:57

Brown: When you go for votes to a particular constituency, you really do have to have done your homework and your research to determine what in a global sense of the word are the problems as perceived by that constituency. And you do your best to tailor your appeal as being the responder to those particular problems. San Francisco was not terribly diversified in its representation on boards and

commissions. San Francisco was not terribly diversified in its employment programs, particularly with reference to fire and police. Almost no leadership in either one of those from people of color. So if you were going into the Chinese community, you could almost lock yourself in as being a potential getter of all the votes, of all the family associations if you made it clear that you understood the need for Asian representation in leadership positions, et cetera. In this case it was easy. It was police chief is what I ended up doing as a result of that advocacy.

02-00:19:29
Meeker: So I'm guessing Fred Lau was already on your radar—

02-00:19:32
Brown: High on my radar screen. I could not have named him police chief on inauguration day without having had his perspective in mind for a long time. And that was another Rose Pak move early on. And then we had, of course, my own experience with the fire department. And this guy [Robert] Demmons had been the plaintiff in the federal lawsuit to integrate the fire department and nothing, in my opinion, would have been more attractive than having Demmons become the fire chief. And that seemed almost natural. You understand, the fire union and the fire membership endorsed against me. They endorsed Jordan. Whereas the police union endorsed against the former police chief, who had now turned in to be mayor. And they endorsed for me. And so suddenly I was in an ideal position to get eons of benefits, potentially, if I could orchestrate it correctly. And if you can send that kind of a message you can generate a responsiveness. On the other hand, because Roberta Achtenberg was a member of the gay and lesbian community, it was a bigger challenge. But I had been the first legislator to decriminalize sexual acts between consenting adults in private [AB 489, 1975] and wipe out the barriers to access to license and the other things that gays and lesbians were experiencing. We didn't have at that moment transgenders and bisexuals yet in the mix. That came later. And then I had gone into the world of dealing with AIDS in the early '80s. I'd gotten George Deukmejian to be the first governor in any state to make appropriations for research on the issue through the University of California. So suddenly my credentials in the gay and lesbian community, even though I'm not of that sexual orientation, was credible. You could not simply say, "We've got to support a gay," because you've got someone who's been as productive, if not more productive, than anybody else had ever been on behalf of gays. And for a twenty-year period. This was not like it started. I started back in the sixties when nobody was doing anything. Nobody was risking anything to do with gays or lesbians. And I started back then politically doing that because I thought it was the right thing to do.

02-00:22:45
Meeker: And that was very risky at that time, even in San Francisco.

02-00:22:47

Brown: Totally. Risky everywhere. And as a result of that I could not be discredited or I could not be depreciated among gays and lesbians. And Jack Davis was gay. He was my campaign manager and he was gay. Just his presence alone, with the gay newspapers, et cetera, et cetera, reduced any potential exclusivity that Roberta would have on that constituency and on those voters. So the issue of gay and lesbian was never as central as, one example, was the issue of African American membership. I was an African American and they made no bones about the fact that this was the first opportunity to elect an African American. Black folks registered like they had never registered before. And they were turning out and doing absentee ballots like they have never done before. And then there was one more, something plus, and that was that I had lived in public housing. And suddenly public housing tenant associations evidenced themselves as being desirous of being participants. And they so performed on the electoral side that they actually generated some suspicions there might have been some crookedness involved because the percentage of people who showed up and voted as public housing resident equaled Pacific Heights and that had never occurred before.

When you ask, "How do you go about putting together an enthusiastic response from specialty constituency," you get the identification ethnically, you get the identification on performance, as was the case with gays and lesbians, you get the identification from hope, as was the case in particular with Chinese. Now, how about the other? In this case Filipino. It was back in the sixties, in the halls of the legislature, when it was called to my attention that Filipinos who were trained as dentists and doctors and nurses in the Philippines could not be licensed in the state of California. I put together the program. In the sixties I put together the program. And having been married to a half-Filipino, it became very preferable for the Filipinos to announce to the world that they were going for Willie Brown exclusively and without apology. And so when you have accumulated the skill set that I possess, the accumulated political capital that I had acquired, you have a candidacy that has the potential to exceed all expectations, even against an incumbent and even against people who have better credentials for local government purposes in San Francisco than I.

02-00:26:25

Meeker: People talk about the Chinese in San Francisco really as being the swing vote in that election. And people talk about three Chinatowns of San Francisco. You have the original Chinatown right off here on Grant Street. The second one over near Clement Street, and then the third one kind of over, I guess, near City College. The first one, of course, was in your assembly district, right? And so you would have had some interaction with—

02-00:26:51

Brown: No.

02-00:26:53
Meeker: No?

02-00:26:53
Brown: Only part. Chinatown was actually in John Burton's district. Assemblyman Burton. And the Burton's always had Chinatown and that's why they had gotten Lim Poon Lee as the first, I think, postmaster.

02-00:27:15
Meeker: Back in the sixties.

02-00:27:15
Brown: Correct. They had been instrumental in getting the first Chinese appointed a judge. In this case I think it was Harry Low. They had been instrumental in a whole series of appointments of Chinese to positions, including going on the board of supervisors, in this case Gordon Lau. And so there had been a wonderful working relationship between the Chinese and Burton, which I inherited. Period. When Rose Pak left the journalism world, her friendship became something I could rely upon. And by then she had literally become the one single Chinese who wanted nothing for herself and never got anything for herself. She only wanted for the Chinese community. And she became almost the sole protector of Chinatown. And with that, the Chinese world viewed her differently than they viewed almost any other Chinese. Her focus, dedication to the Chinese hospital. Her adamant view that Agnos had been wrong about killing the freeway for access to Chinatown [the Embarcadero freeway link to Chinatown was removed after the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake]. Her desire to make the whole business of keeping Chinatown just as it is in spite of the incredible modification for land use purposes around Chinatown. Rose Pak had been responsible for all of that. And to have her as an ally on top of what the Burtons had done with the Chinese community was an enormous benefit.

02-00:29:14
Meeker: What did it take to get her to be such a stalwart ally for you during the mayoral campaign?

02-00:29:18
Brown: Just candor, honesty, and attention. She has a marvelous ability to relate on behalf of Chinatown, on behalf of Chinese. Period. She's not diplomatic at all. And if you can handle that kind of a relationship she can become an ally with very little consideration and compromises you would have to make because you know she's right.

02-00:29:58
Meeker: What about the other Chinatowns? I understand they were pretty strongly for Jordan the first time around, both because he was able to cultivate the Chinese vote but also because of the geographic differences, the sort of east side/west side thing in San Francisco. They were more the bedroom suburban San Francisco if you will. But you successfully peeled them away from Jordan. That maybe Chinatown was an easier task but I wonder about the other

Chinese communities in San Francisco. How did you peel them away from Jordan?

02-00:30:37

Brown: The other Chinese communities in San Francisco had their own leadership group. The one in the Richmond, as we call it, you said Clement Street and we call it the Richmond, was led primarily by two women who were on the radio. Rose [Tsai] and Julie Lee. And then there was the other component of the Chinese community, Chinese newspapers. And in particular, the one that was a crossover newspaper owned by the Fang family. Well, let's start with the Fang family.

Jack Davis had been the godfather of the Fang family for San Francisco political purposes. He had managed to get the contract given to the newspaper of publishing legal notices and that was a godsend for the foundation of that newspaper. And as a result of that, there was a relationship. Although the Fang family had a relationship with Jordan, when Jack Davis said, "You might want to consider an alternative," their relationship with Jack was superior to any relationship they had with Jordan. And the same goes for other Asians who were inclined to be favorably disposed to Jordan. I got no worse than equal treatment. No worse than equal treatment under those circumstances. On the other hand, I actually went to the Richmond and went door-to-door aggressively with Julie Lee. She somehow decided she liked me. Although Rose, Julie Lee, and Florence Fang didn't get along, I managed somehow to develop a relationship with all three that translated into my dominance with Chinese voters because I had the three components of a leadership team for that community. Neither of them ever attempted to drag me into their fight with each other. And when I got elected I put Julie Lee on the housing authority and she became president of the housing authority. When I got elected I argued vehemently against the acquisition of the *Chronicle* by the Hearst Corporation and that led to the Hearst Corporation having to sell the *Examiner* and they sold it to the Fangs and the Fangs obviously became wealthy people as a result. But the Fang family was paid like sixty plus million dollars because in the merger Justice Department required a life expectancy of three-to-five years for the paper. And to do that you had to guarantee that there would be a paper. And Hearst paid sixty to sixty-five million dollars for that purpose. So all of the elements that had anything to do with changing to support me against Jordan originating, as was the case with Rose, benefited and to this day the relationship that I have with the Asian community remains as viable and as active and as directed as it did at that time. In the inaugural address, Julie Lee's son sang the national anthem at the inauguration. That's how you can go back and look and see the erosion of exclusivity, because of the geography. Obviously, it got undone from June when I announced until November when the primary was over.

02-00:35:19

Meeker: I'm not sure when to bring this up: "Shower Gate." I'd love for your comment on this. When a sitting mayor pulls this stunt where he has a picture of himself taken naked in the shower with two deejays, radio shock jocks or something like that. Obviously, this was an embarrassment for him but there's some speculation that, as a result of that, the conservative Chinese community just left Jordan in droves. They were maybe the most important constituency to abandon him as a result of that. Did you see that happening? Maybe back up and just say when did you first hear of this media event?

02-00:36:16

Brown: Let's go backwards, even further back, so we get to the shower scene. The campaign had begun to unfold dramatically from the time I announced, because from the date that I announced I absolutely had zero money. I had not raised a nickel. I had not signed where you have to sign in order to raise money for that purpose. I had a lot of money but it was all money for campaign purposes in legislative races and I did not intend to touch it and be criticized for that. That wasn't the way we played the game. And so we set out to get everybody we knew, you had to do a fundraiser for Willie Brown. Whether you raised $5,000, $10,000. And at your house so we wouldn't incur the expenses. And we signed up 250 fundraising events to be held on my behalf. In doing that, suddenly the idea of participation in Willie Brown's campaign became in vogue. Whether you were the 49er football team. It didn't matter who you were. It became part of the glamour. We had a friend, a longtime friend named Herb Caen, who literally, ever day damn near, made it appear as if it was an opportunity to go to the Grammy's for a fundraiser, opportunity to go to the Academy Awards, opportunity to go to the Final Four. He made the campaign sound so interesting and glamorous that everybody wanted to be a part of it.

Suddenly Jordan began to look like old school. Jordan began to look like somebody who was not part of the new breed of people living in San Francisco and operating in San Francisco and it became a fun operation. And with my energy level and my involvement with so many things and so many people, the Jordan campaign decided that his dull demeanor and his dull reputation needed to be spiced up. And in that process the spicing up was highlighted by this shower scene with two disc jockeys. By the time that occurred it was one-week or so before the election. It was late October. And it occurred and it was such a terrible scene. October, November, I can't remember which. I think it was October for sure. And it was a terrible scene. I was, however, already under the weather. The pace that I had been keeping up of eighteen to twenty hours per day, eighteen to twenty hours per day for three months, non-stop. I had made every fundraising event for the 250 people. I had made every other event that went on in the city. I had made every egg and ginger society. I was doing three, four, five events on Sunday at Catholic churches, the black churches. I was really going beyond anyone's capacity. And my voice began to show it and I ended up losing my voice. UC Med

Center was of course called in to do something about my voice and they said, "He's got to rest it. There's nothing that can be done. He doesn't have anything that's broken." He said, "It's just worn out. And so you've got to rest it, otherwise you won't be able to keep up all of your appearances and all of your speeches." The big debate was going to be like Wednesday or Thursday of that week. I'm now confined to my home. Can't even talk on the telephone. And they're really monitoring me, my staff, my campaign, and Jack. They're really on my case. The surrogates have gone out making the appearances for me. And I'm there with no voice. For some reason, on this early morning, I actually answer the telephone and it was a voice that I'd never heard before. It was laughing like hell. It said, "You won't believe what I'm looking at here at the paper. But Frank Jordan is in the shower with two guys." So, now, I know that's bullshit. Know it's absolute bullshit. So I said, "No, you're full of shit," and I hung up the telephone. Another harassing call. The reason you could reach me very easily because I'm listed. I'd always been listed and I stayed listed. Well, I called Jack. By then Jack had gotten the same call. He didn't react the way I did. He immediately found out who the photographer was and he bought the negative.

Before I reached him he had bought the negative and he forced me to get off the telephone. He said, "Get off the goddamn telephone." I said, "Well, now I've gotten a second call," and the second call came from the newspaper, as well. And it turns out these were people working on the line in the newspaper watching the print and they see this and they couldn't help themselves. They were so joyful that this would be important. And lo and behold I showed up for the debate. By now my voice has come back enough so that I can debate. Frank Jordan is being vilified all over the country. We didn't have the internet at that time. He would have gone viral with that if there had been that. The world would have known about it. But enough people knew about it where it was a terrible embarrassment for him. And his people didn't handle it. Whoever he had trying to spin doctor it didn't do a good job either.

So we show up at Golden Gate University, right here that night, and first question was from John King of the *Chronicle*. And he had a copy of the newspaper and he said to Frank Jordan, "What was on your mind that caused you to want to do this?" And Jordan tried to make a joke or something out of it. Then I think he went to Roberta and she, of course, talked about the absence of dignity, et cetera. And then they came to me and I think I, smart-assed, said something to the effect that I wouldn't mind being in the shower with two disc jockeys but they'd have to both be women or something to that effect. And my campaign went crazy. "Oh, no." [laughter] At any rate, that was literally the end of Frank Jordan's candidacy. He never, ever recovered from that. And so when one goes back and looks at the campaign and says what was the most decisive moment, I would guess the shower. Period. And I think it caused everybody, and in particular his base constituency, the old white folk from the Irish Cultural Center in San Francisco and from the Sunset and from the Catholic church, they were just humiliated and embarrassed

beyond tears that he had pulled that stunt. You'd think that that would be a stunt a Willie Brown's candidacy would generate, not a Frank Jordan. But Frank Jordan's explanation was that he and his campaign manager, Clint Reilly, was treating it as a joke and he and his campaign manager and his wife agreed that it would be a great stunt to pull.

02-00:45:33

Meeker: It's remarkable that that ever happened. You had mentioned Herb Caen and I wanted to ask you about him in that, of course, he was just a seminal figure in San Francisco history. Everybody read his column. I did read a lot of his columns that he wrote about you over the course of the campaign and there was one in particular that was not just a paragraph block, it was the entire column. It basically read as an endorsement. But I found it really interesting in that it wasn't a conventional endorsement in that he talked about you as a real person. He talked about you as a person who was estranged from your wife and you had a girlfriend at the time and things like that that might not play so well in other places. But it actually seemed to be a very kind of honest portrait. I wonder what you thought of that, when he would write about you in a way that was almost like a friend writing about you but for public consumption.

02-00:46:45

Brown: Politicians thought they'd lived a charmed life if they were ever mentioned in Herb Caen's column, positive or negative. That was more important than the editorial page. And most of them, I think, could not understand how, in all of the years that I had held public office, no politician had been mentioned as often as I was mentioned in Herb Caen's columns year in and year out, month in and month out, sometimes day in and day out. He once said that my name appeared in his column almost as much as his did, and he was the writer of the column. When he wrote what he wrote, he wrote that because the *Chronicle* had endorsed against me and Herb thought that was the worst single thing they could have ever done. He did not think it was in the best interest of the city, period. He thought the city was more like Willie Brown and needed Willie Brown more than anyone else running and he just decided, I think—he never really told me that he was doing it—but he just decided to write his own personal perspective as to why he had contributed to my campaign and why he thought the city would benefit and needed my leadership. Period. And that's what that column was. And he wrote it with the same degree of candor that we always dealt with each other and talked with each other about, et cetera, and how we talked to each other. He was more than, I think, blown away by my holding public office, running for public office and never, ever changing my lifestyle, no matter what it was, when it was, or where it was. And he thought every politician ought to be that open with the public, that transparent with the public, but simultaneously show that their superior skills and knowledge and work ethic was what the public was entitled to, not whom they'd be having dinner with or where they may be having dinner, et cetera.

And so he wrote the column with that in mind and that's what that column really displayed.

02-00:49:37

Meeker: It really fits within his vision of what San Francisco should be. I've read a lot of his columns going back to the sixties to do other research and I'm thinking about he would write about gays in San Francisco in the sixties, and the idea was it was really sort of a live and let live place. That if people are contributing to the *joie de vive* of the city, that's the most important thing. It's not that they're doing something that might make you feel uncomfortable personally.

02-00:50:20

Brown: Well, Herb Caen was, I think, the keeper of the contemporary history of the city. Six days a week he wrote that column. At least one of those days he would do an actual essay. And that essay could cover a critique of the environmental movement. That essay could cover a critique of the labor movement. He was really quite an observer and a critic. And a fair critic. Almost everything that this city was about. His other five columns were devoted to what the city should be about and who represented that component of the city. He really thought that this was the place where democracy really worked. Period. And he didn't hesitate to describe things that annoyed him if they were inconsistent with what he thought was in the best interests of the city. And as a result of that, he became the most sought after scribe by San Franciscans, as well as non-San Franciscans. And they really looked forward to how he would word, whether it was food, whether it was the Warriors, whether it was the opera. It didn't matter. They would wait for Herb's comments because they so respected the integrity with which he would observe and then share his observations.

02-00:52:26

Meeker: Just a few more questions about the election. You had mentioned the police endorsement. How did you secure that? That must have been pretty remarkable considering the mayor was a former police chief.

02-00:52:38

Brown: Well, as a practicing lawyer my specialty had been criminal defense work. And in that capacity, I had come to know a ton of working members of the police department. Not the upper echelon but the street guys. I had come to know the people that went after the prostitutes. I had come to know the people who went at the dope dealers, the vice team. I had come to know some of the homicide team and I had been participants in promotional ceremonies honoring the first this or the first that. The first inspector, et cetera. So I had some relationship with the police. My friend, again, Jack Davis, had a relationship with some of the police commissioners who were there. So there was already an environment of let's take a close look at Willie Brown. It was enhanced tremendously when the mayor, who had been the police chief, fired his brother or refused to promote his brother in some capacity. It was

unforgivable because his brother was so popular among the line working police.

02-00:54:13
Meeker: Jordan's brother?

02-00:54:14
Brown: Jordan's brother. And then the endorsement I didn't think we would get. But I thought we could keep him from getting the endorsement on whatever the vote requirement was. We knew we could do nothing with the fire department and the fire association. Firefighters. They held the endorsement meeting at the Fairmont Hotel and out front were a collection of thirty or forty motorcycles. Because the motorcycle cops were really active. Every one of the motorcycles out there were "Moto Guzzi" police specials. None of them were Harleys. I saw that. Couldn't believe it. I was late arriving so by the time they got to me almost everybody else had made their pitch as to why they needed the endorsement. And I got up and I said, "Before I talk to you guys about cops and what you guys do and what have you," I said, "are those Moto Guzzis out there, what you guys came in here on?" And they said, "Yeah." "Well, let me tell you something. If I'm elected mayor, it's Harleys. No real cop rides a Moto Guzzi." And the place went crazy. I maintain that that's how I got the endorsement. Period. And the appreciation was shown. When they endorsed me they then made me an honorary solo and I think I'm number nine. I have the helmet and I have the badge. I'm an honorary solo motorcycle cop of the city and county of San Francisco. Well, they at that meeting at the Fairmont Hotel endorsed my candidacy against the incumbent police chief.

02-00:56:37
Meeker: You had already made it known that you were interested in getting rid of their police chief, Ribera.

02-00:56:41
Brown: Oh, yeah. Ribera was in a fight with the rank and file. Ribera had been sued by a woman named Joann who had claimed that she had been sexually harassed or something of that nature. And so I made it clear that I was getting rid of Ribera early on. And that dovetailed with what the membership wanted, as well. And nobody else would dare do that. No other candidate would say they were going to get rid of Ribera because Ribera had good skills as a chief. But he just had bad politics. And none of my opponents were as light and airy and as direct as I was about what they would do with the police department. And I think that's what got me the endorsement of the police department.

02-00:58:04
Meeker: Let's spend the last ten minutes just wrapping up the election because there's still a few things I'd like to talk about. We haven't really talked about the issues that came up in the election. And maybe you'd like to tell me about the most important ones. But the ones that came up in the papers, of course. There was homelessness. Jordan's matrix plan was at the center of it. There was

BART to the airport. There was something you'd said about a Treasure Island casino. Crime, Muni, contracting out of city services. Some of these, like homelessness and Muni, of course, become important during your term as mayor. Other ones, like the Treasure Island casino, never see the light of day. In hindsight, what do you think were the important issues that people who were most interested in these broad issues impacting the city—

02-00:59:06
Brown: As it is today?

02-00:59:08
Meeker: Yeah.

02-00:59:08
Brown: Homeless is still the number one issue. Jordan fashioned something called the "Matrix" to deal with homelessness. The civil libertarians and the tenants and the people who really cared about other people thought that was such harsh treatment that they really had a case against him. So it was easy to step in and pick that up, particularly since you didn't have to actually demonstrate what your program would be. You can make statements that politicians make without solving the—

02-00:59:48
Meeker: You could oppose matrix?

02-00:59:49
Brown: Yeah. Yeah. And I talked about a homeless summit. And nobody had ever heard of anybody having a homeless summit. The same kind of attention I paid to Muni. And I mistakenly accepted the recommendation from the transport workers union and some of their friends that in a hundred days Muni could be fixed and I announced that by March, one hundred days after I'm sworn in, by March 8th, Muni would be fixed. And then I went on with a whole series of other things. Your reference to the casino on Treasure Island. I was pilloried by every church element in the city. I was condemned in part by some of my other friends and supporters. I had ignored the fact that people were concerned about money going to gaming that should be going to people's families, so much so that they had shut down the possibility of any gaming, a gaming facility, an outlet, a satellite operation for off track betting in Chinatown which the Fangs had put together, a restaurant down there. And they backed off on that. And I had ignored the fact that the card clubs had been banned and pushed out of San Francisco. But I just was fascinated with the idea that we would have something like you'd have in Europe, an island where you'd go and you could control who the gaming participants were. It was not like people could just walk in. It seemed like a great thing and it seemed like a natural for being able to pick up the gap because at that time there was a huge budget deficit in the city of San Francisco that had to be made up. And I referenced the money that would come from that. But I had to give that one up fairly quickly. But all the others we addressed and we got

killed on later on because the remnants of the Muni fixing. I'm still teased about that.

The whole business of the homeless summit was quickly abandoned after three, four, five months of observing what really was a terrible situation on homelessness, and that there was no way there was anything that could come out of a summit except a lot of people shouting and carrying on. The *Chronicle* really went after me for abandoning the idea of a homeless summit. And then I said it would be impossible to fix homelessness by one single city, that it really did have to be a regional kind of thing, because at that time social workers in surrounding counties were sending people to San Francisco because we were more generous. But in the process of saying it could not be fixed, I set about to do affordable housing more aggressively than any predecessor mayor and for a long time any successor mayor. And in that regard we were going to be able to really provide some homeless facilities. I also set about to have troubleshooters work the streets to reduce the discomfort which homeless people were causing to ordinary citizens, and that was my way of covering that prospect.

I then went about the whole business of changing the budget process, as well as taking money and refusing to do certain kinds of things with the pension fund that didn't need to be done, because the pension funds were solid in their own right and there was no sense contributing to those things. Went to the employees to get the employees to agree to start making pension contributions as employees. All in the quest of trying to solve that deficit problem. And then I went to the federal government to get assistance. One example, the public housing was so in need. I advocated. And the first person I terminated was a black woman who ran the public housing agency in San Francisco. And I brought in a feds team to do that kind of work for about two years. Fired all the commissioners on that body. So there were a number of things that I talked about that I instantly implemented on day one. Literally on day one to prove that you can do the job that needed to be done and you can get things done.

02-01:05:30

Meeker: On the question of homelessness, how is it that you gained intelligence on this issue, say, from the period of time that you announced that you wanted to run to that point in time that you tell the *Chronicle* that this is like an intractable problem and it's not anything that the city can do on its own. How were you learning about the problem?

02-01:05:56

Brown: You start interacting with everybody who claimed they wanted to be involved and were involved, whether Glide [Memorial Church], whether it was Mother Brown out in Hunter's Point. People whose judgment you trusted and who were usually factual with that information. And when you know enough about what you can and cannot do to people, without crimes being committed,

through your state service, you know that you're in a quandary, that you're in a position where there is probably very little that can be done. You can't keep people from getting on BART and coming over to San Francisco on a day when you're giving out money to homeless people. And they come over and get their money and go back on BART. And your people let you know that early on, that that is the kind of thing that was actually occurring. And so how did I do that? That's where I got the information. I got it by listening to the non-profits and all the people who are trying to deal with the homeless issue and who had been trying to deal with the homeless issue for a long time with almost no success. And Glide was probably the number one source—and the one perceived by people in need. Yet their penetration into that world was *de minimus* for effectiveness purposes.

02-01:07:45
Meeker: Was their advice to you simply to offer more services to alleviate the problem or—

02-01:07:53
Brown: No. Actually, their advice was what ultimately Newsom did.

02-01:07:58
Meeker: The "Care Not Cash" program?

02-01:08:00
Brown: Put together a means by which, when you build a structure for affordable housing, you put the services in that building and the people who live there become a part of that and you require them to do that. And there were also the folk who talked about whom you had to partner up with. Like the Veterans Affairs people you had to partner up with. You had to partner up with a whole series of folk and they let me know all of that. And they also said you cannot be tolerant of bad behavior. Period. You've got to be prepared to take the heat from the folk who think homeless people ought to be allowed to live on the streets. You've got to be able to say, "No. In view of all these things that can be done to help folks without imposing, I am going to make sure you don't make it uncomfortable for me to walk the streets or for me to use the streets and what have you." And so knowing that there was going to be no win for you politically in the process. And that's how we moved on it.

And there's only one thing that we didn't talk about. We didn't talk about BART to the airport. BART to the airport became the means by which Quentin Kopp ultimately supported my candidacy. Most unlikely because ordinarily Quentin Kopp was a Jordan person. But Jack Davis had run Quentin Kopp's campaigns. And when Jack went to Quentin to talk about helping Willie Brown out, the goal in life that Quentin had was to get BART to the airport. And Jack told him how the two of us teaming up could probably produce BART to the airport. And sure enough, we did. And so when you think about the issues that prompted the success, that's one of the outstanding ones.

02-01:10:25
Meeker: It's amazing how much—I remember being here at the time—but how much that was an issue. You kind of look back upon it now and whether it was the people mover that started on the BART line or actually came to the airport probably doesn't make much difference in retrospect because you still have to get on that little train. But at the time it was also symbolic. It was also like, "European cities have this. We need to have this!"

02-01:10:57
Brown: Well, also, it was where the city should be going for the future. Period. And if you really want to see your city able to handle the volume, then you've got to do things that represent the opportunity for that volume to occur.

02-01:11:23
Meeker: Well, let's wrap up there. Actually, last bit is so you emerged victorious in November.

02-01:11:30
Brown: No, December.

02-01:11:31
Meeker: December, I'm sorry, yes. In the runoff in December. And you were polling well ahead up to that point. Did it seem like a *fait accompli* that you were going to emerge victorious in the runoff?

02-01:11:47
Brown: From the moment that it was clear we had won the primary and Roberta Achtenberg endorsed as a third place finisher without solicitation on the night of the election, without even calling me to make the announcement that she was doing that. It became how do we plan being mayor, not how do we get elected mayor, and that's what we did. We started programming how we would become an effective mayor on day one.

02-01:12:21
Meeker: So next time we meet we'll talk about the transition. I want to talk about the economic summit because that's something I find really interesting. People have these summits all the time and they can be sort of throwaway but it actually seems like something very interesting came out of that and that it impacted your thinking about the future economy of the city.

02-01:12:46
Brown: Yes.

02-01:12:47
Meeker: So I want to spend a little bit of time talking about that and then we'll get into some of the core issues of your first term.

02-01:12:52
Brown: Yeah. That was our first major move, the economic summit. Well, first move, as I said, was to terminate the head of the housing authority. Because I had to

do that swiftly and shut down that terrible operation. Gilmore had been the best executive director and Jordan had dumped him because he was inconsistent, allegedly, with Jordan's views. But the housing authority, they had probably 5,000 units that should have been occupied that were not occupied because the maintenance wasn't there, et cetera. And so moving quickly on that. And then the first supervisorial appointee had to be done. Who did I do that with?

02-01:13:42

Meeker: Replacement for Hallinan, right?

02-01:13:43

Brown: That's right. Michael Yaki, chief of staff of Nancy Pelosi in San Francisco. So you can see the pattern.

Interview 3: April 18, 2015

03-00:00:00

Meeker: This is Martin Meeker interviewing Mayor Willie Brown and today is Saturday, April 18, 2015 and this is interview session number three. So last time, it's been a couple of months, we wrapped up talking about just after the time that you were elected mayor. And I just had one sort of follow-up question about that. And that was I wanted to ask you about the transition team you established. And some people with a lot of long history in San Francisco politics that helped you get your administration going. And I wonder if you can maybe sort of walk me through who you selected and why and what kind of role they played in helping you establish your team.

03-00:00:50

Brown: Well, in reality I'd have to go back and take a look at the list of people that were on that transition team. I designated two or three people to be in charge of the transition team and then obviously others were selected for specified purposes. In the case, however, of heading the transition team, it was the woman who eventually became the director of the department of health for San Francisco and then she and a fellow named Rudy Nothenberg, who had been my chief of staff some years before when I served in the halls of the legislature and long before I even envisioned becoming the mayor. We also relied upon some of the existing previous people who had served the city in some capacity. And the reason that these people were selected to be the people heading the transition team is because, again, I was not a local government person. I had not been actively involved very much in the politics of San Francisco. I had not been involved, frankly, in public policymaking of San Francisco. I did not know how powerful or weak many of the commissions that helped shape the policy of the city and helped implement whatever rules and regulations are there, and so I needed to get a handle on every aspect of the city because I really do believe in strong mayors. And if you're going to be a strong mayor you really do have to have great follow personnel and great personnel willing to follow you. And in this case, that's what I had in mind when I said to Dr. Sandra Hernandez and Rudolph Nothenberg, "You guys need to make sure that we get the right collection of people for all these boards and commissions."

03-00:02:54

Meeker: Well, let's talk a little bit about what it means to be a strong mayor. I know also in '95 when you were elected mayor there was charter reform on the ballot that was passed, correct me if I'm wrong, that actually did in fact provide more power around commissions and some flexibility for the mayor. Was that something that you were advocating and interested in having happen?

03-00:03:22

Brown: No, I really inherited whatever was on the ballot in '95, along with the mayor's race and what have you. All of that I inherited because I really had

zero appreciation of what one could or could not do as a local government official and as the mayor of this city. But a strong mayor clearly is one that has the authority to make all of the appointments that need to be made. And there's more than 300 people to be appointed to boards and commissions. There are at least two commissions that are independent operators. The Port Commission is independently operated because it has a relationship with the state, since the state owns the port and we were just the trustees of the port. And, of course, the airport, which is an independent entrepreneurial agency. And then the third one was Public Utilities. The San Francisco Public Utilities Commission that sells water and power and things of that nature and makes its own money, as well. So these off-budget commissions and off-budget units of city government were extremely important and therefore the mayor needs the power to appoint people to those for the implementation of the mayor's policy. And then, of course, you have the police commission, the fire commission, the parking and traffic commission. At that time the people who ran the Muni bus service was different from parking and traffic. You had a whole series of other organizations and commissions that had a lot to do with how the city is run.

The ultimate, however, though, was the Planning Commission. I became aware only after becoming mayor of how important planning and land use really were because the war zone for politics in San Francisco was pretty much planning and venues. Eventually some of the critics of how the planning commission and the planning department operated created a building inspections department and suddenly the mayor had the appointing authority for that. And in some cases many of these people serve at the mayor's pleasure. In others they have fixed terms and can't be removed except for cause and then there was a civil service commission that controlled the flow of the employees and the qualifications of the employees, and et cetera. So you can see right off where the mayor, unless he is a strong mayor, could find himself being buffaloed and sabotaged by all of these independent agencies that do not come directly under the mayor's office but are subject to the mayor's authority.

03-00:06:31

Meeker: And that is, in fact, where governance happens. That's where policy is implemented, through these various commissions and the staffs of those various commissions.

03-00:06:39

Brown: That is exactly where every aspect plays out, whatever the policy happens to be. And the policy originates, obviously, first, in most cases, with suggestions or recommendations made by the mayor's office but invariably the elected members of the board of supervisors have their own view of what policy ought to be. The mayor's administration and the state of the city address and things of that nature, there is an outline. The mayor's budgetary control and how he lays out the program there. All of that is how public policy gets

formed. And then the board of supervisors can and do hold a series of hearings. They make proposals for ordinances and sometimes they are ordinances that have been orchestrated by the mayor. Well, my ascendancy to the role of mayor of the city came at a time when there was a cooperative board of supervisors, a real cooperative board of supervisors. A majority of that board had actually supported my being elected mayor. It was the city attorney who had actually recruited me to run for mayor.

03-00:07:55
Meeker: Was that Louise Renne at the time?

03-00:07:56
Brown: Yeah. Louise Renne had recruited me to run for mayor. And, of course, at the same time there was a major war going on about who would be the district attorney for the city and county of San Francisco. Only the sheriff's job was pretty much set in stone, so to speak. And so my coming along as mayor and being able to begin the exercise of power of mayor, I really had a quality foundation in which to do it because I had been recruited by people who were very critical of the existing administration and in many cases administration which apparently was not cooperative with them. And so when taking over, the first thing I did, of course, was notify those commissioners who my transition team had said probably should not continue. And in some cases I had to wait for their terms to expire. In other cases ones who clearly understood how government should work resigned and left. And that was a good, good thing because I got a chance to fill the vacancies and in many cases put most of the commissions under my direct influence by virtue of the pure numbers. And in those days there were no appointments to the boards and commission from the board of supervisors. That came many years later when the progressives decided that I was not—although in many cases they had been supportive of me—I was not willing to take orders from them and they responded by putting together a series of elections that ousted some of the people that I had appointed to the board of supervisors, like Michael Yaki and people of that ilk. Or Amos Brown. They got bounced. And when they got bounced it gave really a lot of energy to the persons that called themselves progressives. And one of the things that they subsequently did was put on the ballot a measure that allowed them to appoint some of the members of the boards and commissions, with the mayor still having majority of appointments but in all cases the mayor's appointees had to get the consent of the board of supervisors, not unlike Congress's view of the people who serve the president in a cabinet position. So in that sense of the word there was some change. But the early years, 1996 years, it was purely in mayor power and that translated into lots of action and lots of activities for the city, many of which are still going on.

03-00:10:52
Meeker: You just had mentioned that coming into the position of mayor, running a city, whereas before you were in Sacramento and it was a very different entity, clearly, you had to learn what you could do and what you couldn't do.

How did you learn that? What was the process by which you learned the mayor of the city, in which you learned the governance process?

03-00:11:16

Brown: Well, you learn fairly quickly. In your capacity as mayor, the accessibility to the power of government—by the citizens—is unlimited. If you are a visible mayor it's even more unlimited because people will interrupt you in the bathroom, people will interrupt you at dinner, people will interrupt you at church. People will interrupt you at the baseball game. People will interrupt you at the football game. They'll interrupt you wherever they find you with their complaints about what's going on in the city. And you respond, or you should respond, to that. And that's when you begin to find out what your limitations are, if any, on what you can or cannot do as the mayor. There's no written set of rules or book that informs mayors. At least I never found one. There may have been one. But it certainly wasn't made available to me. And your predecessors usually don't share their experiences with you. And so you are, frankly, on your own. However, when you have a city attorney who's been around for a long time and has some sense of the history of the city you are able to interact and get info almost directly. When you have somebody like Rudy Nothenberg, who had been very intimately involved with every aspect of running the city, both in the Moscone administration and in the Feinstein administration, there was access to information that otherwise would not have been readily available.

However, the absolute best method is to make the decision on what needs to be done and try to do it and suddenly find that you don't really have the total unilateral authority to implement it. For an example, the mayor cannot say, "Fix that streetlight." The mayor can give directions and recommendations but because of the way in which the employment situation is in the city, the civil service protections in the city, the whole business of the commissions and the boards that are in the city, sometimes you have to develop a relationship with that crowd. For an example, the mayor, unbeknownst to me, could not hire the police chief, could not hire the fire chief. The commission made a recommendation to the mayor after appropriate interviews and says, "Which of these two or three people would you want us to have as your fire chief or as your police chief?" In my inaugural address on the 8th of January in 1996 I identified Fred Lau as the new police chief. I identified Bob Demmons as the new fire chief. I did not know I didn't have the authority to do that directly until the clean-up had to be done at the commissions that had the responsibility to give me a recommendation came back and gave me the recommendation. But I had announced that they were being appointed fire chief and police chief from day one. So you sometimes don't find out until you have acted and then discover that you really don't have the authority to act.

03-00:15:01
Meeker: How did the members of those commissions respond to your precipitous announcement of the new police and fire chiefs?

03-00:15:08
Brown: They were being appointed about the same time. And so they were my majority and they simply totally and completely cooperated with everything I said. One example: At the same time that I made those two significant appointments I also appointed the chief of protocol, which I obviously could do because that's directly in the mayor's office. Those people that are not directly in the mayor's office come by way of a commission approval process and commission recommendation process. So it's kind of a façade but it does work and it worked very well for me, particularly if you have a majority of commissions. It would be unusual for any commission to ultimately object to the mayor's chief for any department head, even though not directly under the mayor, because I can assure you a quality mayor would make sure that, the next time there was an opportunity to appoint, that person would not be reappointed if they did not agree and support what the mayor had concluded was the proper thing to do.

03-00:16:24
Meeker: Well, it's a very interesting point. It's the idea that a mayor is not akin to a CEO of a corporation that has departments and vice presidents underneath him or her and can make those decisions to ensure that the corporation as a whole is running as his vision wants it to be. In a mayorship, it's very different, in which you're dealing with commissions who are in essence running those departments.

03-00:16:53
Brown: No, it's worse than that, believe me. It's worse than that because there's also a chief administrative officer [CAO] for the city. And that person has an appointment that sometimes goes longer than the mayor's appointment. In this case, a fellow named Bill Lee was the CAO. I had to reconfigure, which a mayor can do under the authority granted in the reforms. I had to reconfigure the various units for assignment that the CAO had control of. The CAO had twenty-plus departments under his jurisdiction. And if the mayor and the CAO were not totally in sync it became a problem because suddenly you have two CEOs, so to speak. You have two guys attempting to run the business if you're comparing it to the private sector. We eventually had Mr. Lee move on. But by the time he did move on we had moved virtually everything out of Mr. Lee's control because Mr. Lee preceded me in the job. And there's also another operation that works closely with the mayor but not necessarily subject to the mayor's total control. The controller was a ten-year appointment. And the mayor's tenure can only be eight and that's only if the mayor's successfully reelected. And so you had all these unusual things out there that I guess somebody had in mind not letting the mayor become a total dictator. And to avoid that they designed the system. But a quality mayor can get past all of those obstacles and all of those roadblocks by doing what you

do if you're the speaker of the California State Assembly. You really do have to guide and you guide, by whom you put in charge. You guide by the cooperation that you can extract from them. You guide by the inclusion in the deliberation process, to make public policy, of all these people that are implementers of that policy. And that's essentially what I did in San Francisco, was to make sure that all of my department heads were very much a part of my public policy operation.

And I did something differently than most mayors. I had regular meetings of all of the department heads, not individually in most cases, but I had them all in the same room and I had each one of them, on the occasions of that meeting, say what was happening in their department and what they needed. And I also had them tell me if there was another department interfering or failing to cooperate. And, believe me, they were ecstatic to be able to sit in a room and say, well, what's not happening at Laguna Honda [Hospital], or what's not happening at the airport, and what planning is doing to block them from implementing something they need to do here or there. And it turned into a real great work session. And I presided at every staff meeting. I didn't do what many mayors preceding me and mayors since my tenure. Mayors since my tenure would come in and say to the staff people, "I'm not coming to the staff meeting. My chief of staff will handle it." And eventually the mayor gets totally isolated from the day-to-day operations. Gets totally isolated from only the things that they don't want him to know about. Gets none of the nuances. Has no time to observe and no opportunity to observe the interaction between the various department heads and the various departments. Well, I eliminated all of that. I really wanted a smooth operation. And so, as had been done in the legislature through that process, we really broke the barriers of isolation for various departments. And it really worked extremely well. And it extended, frankly, the power of the mayor because suddenly not only were these people department heads they were almost like project directors or project managers of whatever was under their jurisdiction.

03-00:22:01

Meeker: It's kind of an abstract question. Or, actually, it's not an abstract question. I'm asking for something very specific but it might be difficult to remember. In the staff meetings that you had, in essence a cabinet meeting, can you think of some examples by which there were maybe long-running conflicts between departments that you were able to preside over the resolution of because you attended these meetings regularly?

03-00:22:27

Brown: Planning [Department] and Redevelopment [Agency]. Redevelopment, by virtue of being created by state statute, they had been given the opportunity to operate almost independent of the land use issues. And so there was constantly a war between redevelopment and city planning. And the planners are people who are incredibly deliberate. They take days and weeks and months and years to get to a conclusion. Redevelopment was about moving

quickly because the greatest component of redevelopment was the economic development component of redevelopment. Deliberation on how to manage the economy lends itself to total and complete disaster. Almost every meeting there was some issue or some set of issues between redevelopment and planning. Planning wanted desperately to make sure that redevelopment complied with the master plan for the city and with every aspect. And redevelopment wanted a redevelopment plan. A redevelopment plan had been adopted that affected a given geographical area, not the whole city, and they wanted to have that on fast track. They wanted to have that speeded up. They wanted to have that implemented. Mission Bay is an example of redevelopment rather than city planning. Redevelopment is what ultimately produced Mission Bay. And the speed with which all of those buildings have gotten approved and the authorization and the streetscape and all the things that are there came by way of redevelopment with the umbrella of the state protections and with the umbrella of the mayor's office giving priority to the decisions made by the redevelopment agency head, versus the city planning director. At that time redevelopment was under the control of Marcia Rosen and planning was under Gerald Green and they were constantly in conflict situations.

03-00:24:47

Meeker: I imagine with Mission Bay—it's a redevelopment project. It moves along fairly quickly once it's approved, although it's decades in the making. But there it is. A discrete spot of San Francisco, massive but still discrete, that nevertheless has to integrate with the rest of the city. And so I imagine that's where the planning department comes in. And they want to make sure there's power issues, there's transit issues, there's just circulation, those kinds of things.

03-00:25:16

Brown: Well, redevelopment, obviously it does all of that. It has that in mind because that's also controlled by a commission appointed by the mayor. And that commission discharges the functions and the responsibilities of that particular agency and that agency also happens to be the number one developer of affordable housing in the city. And you can't have a city operational without a supply of housing. And redevelopment provided a swifter, more direct means by which to do that because they had license with the federal government for funding purposes. And in the city obviously we're going to have to pass a bond issued to get its own funding for affordable housing or we're going to have to, in the budget process, produce something. Redevelopment did a better job of that. And so there was always redevelopment saying they were just as cognizant and just as respectful of every aspect of the general plan for the city not just their geographical area.

03-00:26:36

Meeker: Can you tell me about the establishment of your own staff in the mayor's office? Who did you bring in and what kind of work were you wanting them to accomplish from, I guess, Emilio Cruz as your chief of staff, on down?

03-00:26:51

Brown: Well, my staffing of the mayor's office was, again, in many cases by accident. I had maybe the best staff any speaker had ever had in the halls of the legislature. I'd had the blessings of Rudy Nothenberg. I'd had the blessings of Phil Isenberg, who went on to become the mayor of Sacramento. I had a genius named Bob Connelly on the environmental side. I had a genius named John Mockler on the education side. I had, on the health side, a fellow named Steve Thompson. And on the economic development side a guy named Clarence Williams. I had an incredible staff in Sacramento. And on the higher education side Tom Gwyn. I'd had some really fabulous people.

I arrived in San Francisco and none of those people existed. They lived in Sacramento and in many cases they were not interested in relocating or they were not interested in staying in government. I only had access to Rudy Nothenberg directly, and so to start to put together a staff in San Francisco was dramatically different. In Sacramento I had the right and the opportunity to pay whatever I believed to be the appropriate level of compensation. The voters of this city, apparently in retaliation to something Agnos attempted to do, had an ordinance, made it impossible to pay more than 70 percent of the mayor's salary for any person, or some other similar kind of number. That meant, instantly, you were not competitive because people's salaries were already more than that. The mayor's salary was whatever it was. And if you only paid 70 percent of that, nobody wants to work directly for the mayor except incredibly dedicated people who had no intention of staying very long.

And so I had to recruit, totally and completely handicapped in terms of benefits that people need to live in a city like San Francisco. And I had to reply upon those who had supplemental incomes from other associates, from husbands, wives, companions, or what have you, or were independently wealthy. Or I had to go to people who were starting their careers, so to speak. So I was severely handicapped after having been spoiled with all of this array of incredible talent and specialists in every category. I had to look among the existing city personnel to find what I could find. And obviously Sandra Hernandez with the health department [San Francisco Department of Public Health] was spectacular. You can pay. Didn't work for the mayor. The guy who runs the airport, didn't work for the mayor. The guy who ran support. Didn't work for the mayor. The guy who ran public utilities. Didn't work for the mayor. None of those people worked for the mayor. They were working for the commission, an independent agency, so they were not exactly the mayor's staff.

So I got lucky, though, because I got a recommendation about this Stanford engineer, Emilio Cruz, and my own person who'd been running my San Francisco office when I served as speaker was Eleanor Johns. I made her deputy chief of staff because she knew me well enough. And then every other single person was a new recruit. Period. Every other person was a new recruit that we got from wherever we'd get them, whether it was a budget director,

whether it was people who had worked for city government before, like Steve Kawa who had worked for Tom Hsieh and was now without a job because Tom Hsieh was [defeated in the 1995 election]—and I was told that that guy was really good. I brought Paul Horcher, however, who had been a member of the legislature, I brought him down to be the liaison to the board of supervisors from the mayor's office because I know we needed that, and I trusted Paul and I knew he was skillful enough to deal with other elected officials. So I could fill some of those but I could not under any circumstances call upon the kind of talent that I was accustomed to for staff purposes—because I have a firm belief that an elected official is only as good as his or her staff. Period. And unless you have really great staff, no matter how talented you may think you are, you aren't going to be much of an elected official. And we put together that operation.

I recruited people to do my communications. One example, in Sacramento, I had skilled people, a woman named Bobbie Metzger ran my operation in Sacramento on the communications side. Everybody liked that in San Francisco. And so I tapped a reporter from San Francisco. I think she worked for the *Examiner* at the time before the *Examiner* became the *Chronicle* and the *Chronicle* became something different. And then we had these young people that worked in my campaign. I took a whole collection of people who had helped me get elected. But they were not experienced staff people. They were experienced outreach people, experienced people who had done some specialty assignments. Like PJ Johnston had done a special assignment in the campaign. Well, I pulled people like that from the campaign. I rewarded them with the challenge to continue working with me. And a number of the staff people came directly out of the campaign. We only were able to pull one or two people out of the Sacramento scene. Margaret McArthur, who still works for the city at rec and park [San Francisco Recreation and Park Department]. We pulled people like that, single people, fascinated with the idea that they might want to live in the city and who did not need a lot of money. The salary that they were being paid up there we could match down here, working not for the mayor, though, but for some other place like rec and park, independent of the mayor again. So not capped by the mayor's salary structure. And that's how we recruited the staff.

We recruited staff out of Louise Renne's office. We recruited folks to be the negotiators with the various labor organizations because that was a major factor. The city is structured, employee-wise, with both union contracts and civil service. And it was interesting. The employees would utilize whichever one of those gave them the best advantage in their relationship with the city. And so we had to get somebody in quickly and schooled on who could do the job of helping us manage the employee situation, which means I had to get on top of the Civil Service Commission, and handle that, and I had to get somebody who could really do that job. And the city was so fraught with real problems. A ninety million dollar structural deficit. People who were providing healthcare for people who couldn't afford it, so to speak, and the

city was failing to pay in a timely fashion and the medical providers were threatening to pull back and no longer take any person who anticipated having his or her treatment paid for by the city.

So the challenges were just absolutely mind-boggling. Find personnel to take care of those kind of specialty operations and that came about from recommendations from other staff people who knew some of these people working in certain places. And in particular, on the money management side, got introduced to people like Monique Moyer, who now runs the port. But she ran all of the money for the city. She was the finance director, recruited by me to come aboard as the finance director for the city, at obviously a reduced salary rate. But all of the staffing process was a challenge, to get staff people and to succeed at that, almost equal to trying to get elected.

03-00:36:15

Meeker: Take the example of the finance directors you mentioned who would be in charge of investments and the portfolio of the city, in essence, correct?

03-00:36:26

Brown: So to speak. To the extent that we actually had control of city money. There is a directly elected city treasurer and that city treasurer exercises a considerable amount of authority and power over money management of the city. The finance director was the person who would handle the bonds for the city, for an example, or would handle all aspects of how the funding of city programs and projects interacted with the budget authorizations, et cetera. And so the people who were running the controller's operation would provide certain level estimates, et cetera, and some interpretations. But the finance director was not like the Secretary of the Treasury for the United States. Did not have that kind of power and that kind of authority.

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Meeker: When you hired her and brought her on, what kind of direction would you give somebody like that in a leading staff position?

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Brown: I couldn't really give a whole lot of directions. I didn't give a whole lot of directions. And that was apparently what was exciting about working for me, because you had an opportunity to be as much of a pioneer on how the city should be run and how that unit of the city should be run, and you had the assurance that I had enough respect for you that I was not threatened by your judgment and by your execution if it was inconsistent with something that I had said or something that I had thought. I was comfortable enough to utilize talent. Which, again, comes from the experience in the legislature. And so hiring someone or selecting someone like a Monique Moyer, did not require me to walk through how she should operate. She instantly went about her own research to determine how finance directors in cities throughout the United States operated. She talked to the rating agencies. She talked to everybody that had anything to do financially with the city and she read everything that there

was available to read and came back and gave me a program for how that office ought to operate. I didn't give her one.

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Meeker: So apropos of the discussion around mayoral power and trying to figure out ways to extend that power: Part of it is the bully pulpit, right? That's something that elected officials regularly do that's not part, necessarily, of the job description if you will. It's not an official activity. Another thing that you did very early on that I thought to be interesting was calling this economic summit in April after you were elected.

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Brown: Three months after being elected.

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Meeker: Three months. So this is something that could have been a throwaway, right? People have summits all the time. But from what I understand, it actually was the genesis of an economic vision for the city that was acted upon and actually had great influence as the years went on. Where did you get the idea to do this economic summit? What were your goals when you were first putting it together?

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Brown: My goals, let's start with that, from the summit, was to acquire for the city access to the best brains and the best resources to get the city back functioning and to get completion on things that the city needed to be a great city, and to provide the services to the citizens of the city, and to figure out a way in which to pay for those services, have citizens pay for those services. That was the goal in the economic summit. Where did I get the idea? Again, the halls of the legislature had afforded me. Pete Wilson and I, when he was then governor, along with the president pro tem of the senate, we sponsored an economic summit somewhat based on the model of what President Clinton had done when he was elected in 1992. And we set about to do an economic summit. And we did so. We had about, oh, I don't know, 275 people. It was the hottest ticket for people wanting to come and participate in that one day. Extensive examination of every aspect of how to run a good state. The economy in the nation wasn't very good at that time. That's why Clinton had the summit. And the economy in the state wasn't very good at that time. We were looking at staggering deficits, et cetera, and we had to get a handle on all aspects of that in spite of the political differences between the Republicans and the Democrats, in spite of the fact that Democrats controlled the legislature and the Republicans controlled the governorship. That summit turned out to be a godsend. Much of what the state of California ultimately did over the next ten, twelve years came from the recommendations made at that summit.

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Brown: It was early ’93 when the summit actually took place. About February of ’93 is when the summit would have taken place. And it turned out to be magnificent.

Well, having had that great experience, when I took one look at San Francisco it was painfully clear that a summit of a like nature needed to be done. But I needed to use my personal connections and my personal influence to get the best minds because there had not been any serious economists participating in the dialogue. And what did I do? I got the number one economist in the nation, George Shultz, four times a member of a cabinet in both the Reagan and the Bush administrations. He was here. And there were a whole series of people: Milton Friedman. And we needed somebody who knew how to run a city. So we got Mayor Daley out of Chicago to come in. Literally I got our business community to finance it. They are the ones who paid for the cost of this summit, which was held at the Fairmont Hotel. And it was just a fabulous operation because out of that summit came a program that ultimately got implemented and in some cases is still being implemented at almost every level.

Just the issue alone of, how do you manage housing production? An answer to that came within the framework of the summit. And it translated into, how do you improve the economy of your city by virtue of managing how to produce the housing that you need to produce? We went from there to putting on the ballot a measure, $250 million bond measure for affordable housing. And we got the tenants and the landlords to agree that there would be a 50 percent pass through for the cost of those bonds. So there was shared responsibility. That all came out of the summit. And there were other things of that nature that came out of the summit. The whole business of what do we ultimately do about the Embarcadero and what do we ultimately do about the Western Addition and the freeway, the removal of the Central Freeway. All those kinds of things were discussed at the summit and ultimately programmed and implemented in terms of policy options. And that production stood my administration in good stead for a long period of time because the board of supervisors were participants in that summit.

Almost anybody who had any significant role in the city participated in that summit, whether in the private sector or the public sector. The vast array of university talent that we have in San Francisco, whether it was UCSF, whether it was USF [University of San Francisco], whether it was SF State, whether it was UOP [University of the Pacific], whether it was Golden Gate University, whether it was private sector schools and universities, for-profit, that are all here, they all participated in that summit. And with the vast array of talent that we were able to recruit on the expert side to be reflective of what was being talked about and done, it was just a quality effort that translated into ultimately good public policy. I would tell you that I don’t think that there was

anything that came out of my administration that didn't have its origin, for public policy purposes, in the summit.

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Meeker: It's fascinating because you get someone like George Shultz on the one hand and then you get Robert Reich on the other hand. These people are coming from very different perspectives, yet they didn't produce a cacophony like one might expect in something like that. How did you manage to work with these different voices and then gather something that was kind of like a unified policy through all of this?

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Brown: Well, when you put together a summit you've got to make sure that you're talking about trying to get a result. And you seek from the participants signing on to that commitment before you commence to debate the issues. And therefore the recommendations become not recommendations that somebody is simply trying to make sure they win on, but recommendations for access to potential for implementation if adopted. And when people come in with that attitude and exhibit it inside, then the summits do really work.

We had a subsequent summit three or four years later. We did the stem cell summit in San Francisco and we did that at the auditorium at Fort Mason and we ended up with [Gavin] Newsom becoming mayor and adopting the results of that summit. That included the stem cell research institute [California Institute for Regenerative Medicine] being located in the Mission Bay area. They have been there for ten years or more.

And so our summits, the ones that did not produce very much, included the taxi summit. I saw the summits as an absolute golden vehicle after the first one in April. A golden vehicle for policy options to come out of summit deliberations that would not be perceived as only the mayor's recommendations and therefore not perceived as overriding the legislative authority and the legislative responsibility that members of the board of supervisors perceive themselves as having, particularly if they participated in it. And so literally you got what was a specialty legislative think tank supplying the information to the legislators where needed, without the resistance of the legislature, because of where it came from and who they were. And that in part was the beauty of the concept of the summits that we did and the ultimate policy options that got implemented and the programs that got implemented from those summits, because we never, ever had a pushback on the basis of where the idea came from, because it wasn't just the mayor's office: i.e., so the politics were removed. It wasn't just the Democrats, i.e., politics were removed.

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Meeker: Do you recall any other specific policies that emerged from that that, like you said, have continued on many years or at least throughout your administration in addition to public housing? Or the affordable housing initiative?

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Brown: Our public parks. Because the city is so dense, there are open space issues. Period. You don't have backyards. Single family dwellings in the old days may have had yards but that's all history. Now you have to have parks and open space that becomes an intimate part of any development. That program and its ultimate implementation, first by way of an open policy option that the city exercised to gain money for that purpose. But at the summit it was clear that the implementation of that open summit option was proven to be non-productive and they were doing some really silly things. Like, for example, with the open policy, people who would make the decision that if they had a dollar they would give ten cents to ten projects, which then means that if it took five dollars for each one of those projects to ever be completed, ultimately done, most of the people who gave the first ten cents would have long since died before there would be an accumulation of enough ten cents to make five dollars. In the summit, in this particular summit, the dialogue about open space and how much it is a necessary part of a densely populated city, including commercial and otherwise, coming out of that were those kinds of recommendations.

We went from a division of ten cents to each, to a commitment to prioritizing the completion of fully funding individual projects to the extent that the open space fund could do that. You switched the politics of getting on the list earlier. Before, you were on the list but only for a crumb. Now you got on the list for an actual project. And that's the kind of thing that came out of the summit. And that was done with our park system. And the first one, incidentally, was the Martin Luther King Jr. Pool in Hunters Point. We took all of the open space money that year and refurbished and redid that pool. And we've done those kinds of things in the city. So not only did the affordable housing component come out of that but in the planning and land use process, where you had the park system being affected. Also there was the business of the mini-parks. We started to grab small spaces, particularly in the Tenderloin, places like that, to do these mini-parks. And because of the issue of all of the people using our parks, we had to try to figure out how to get the park use for a given collection of people, i.e., children. So we put the parks together, the mini-parks together, and the restrictions were that adults couldn't go in there unless they were with a child, unless they were accompanied by a child. And that's worked extremely well all over the city. And that was part of options that came out of our summit experience.

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Meeker: It's so amazing how much was accomplished and actually even on the table at the summit. It was just one day, is that correct?

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Brown: Yeah, just one. But keep in mind, we had done a lot of development work. George Shultz didn't come in there unprepared. Milton Friedman didn't come in there unprepared. And that's where the beauty of the Monique Moyers and Larry Florins, who actually was the coordinator, the Rudy Nothenberg's, the

Emilio Cruz's. That's where their talent showed itself, by how prepared the agenda of the summit was and how the management of that agenda led to hard recommendations.

03-00:55:14
Meeker: I imagine there were concurrent sessions, right?

03-00:55:17
Brown: Oh, yeah.

03-00:55:17
Meeker: Everyone didn't go to everything.

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Brown: No, no.

03-00:55:20
Meeker: What did you go to? How did you spend your time at the summit?

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Brown: I presided over everything. I literally presided over everything.

03-00:55:28
Meeker: Were there any specific discussions that you were really engaged in?

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Brown: No. What we decided to do was not do the traditional breakout sessions. We decided that the brainpower of all these people needed to impact each one of the subjects that we chose to cover in this summit. And therefore I could preside over every aspect. And that was my role. My role was to keep things moving using the power of the mayor's office, again, not just me. But using the authority and the power of the mayor's office to keep the flow going and to force people into doing something other than talking for a long time. They almost had to start with a conclusion and then work backwards from the conclusion as to how they reached that conclusion if they were commenting on something that was on the table. And so we kept the breakout opportunities to a real minimum.

03-00:56:37
Meeker: One of the things that it seems happens in San Francisco about this time, in the mid-nineties, is that San Francisco had been the West Coast finance capital, I don't know, since the nineteenth century. And it seems in the 1990s you actually see a transition, while finance is still important here, to high-tech and the related industries, such as stem cell research and education, those kinds of things. Was that on the table? Was there an understanding that the high technology industry, that this is something that you wanted to nurture along and also perhaps a recognition that finance wouldn't necessarily play the same role in San Francisco as it had?

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Brown: Well, we knew by the time I became mayor that in fact San Francisco was being transitioned out of being the home port for many major corporations. Not just finance ones. Whether it was Chevron, whatever. Bank of America got bought by some outfit out of North Carolina. We ended up literally with the movement of corporations out of expensive real estate, leaving only their headquarters theoretically here and all of their back office operations in other locales. That discussion took place at the summit and how we could begin to adjust. In the nineties, at this summit, '96, the concept of high-tech was not as comfortable to be dialogued about because it just wasn't known, wasn't well-known enough.

We did know about every aspect of medical research because of the University of California, because of Genentech and those operations. We knew about that and we were conscious of that and so we were into accommodating or trying to make it attractive enough for medical research, biotech to be a part of it. But we had no real handle on technology. Believe me, had we known that, I would have stolen every venture capitalist and figured out how to get them here rather than have them in Sand Hill [Road] in Silicon Valley. HP [Hewlett Packard] was down there already and some of the others were not even thought about, frankly. Period. And they were certainly not thought about with reference to locating in San Francisco. The brainpower for that process was centered more around Stanford. UCSF's brainpower was still medicine primarily and isolated medicine. No serious relationship to all of the new machinery for diagnostic purposes. None of that was really upon us. And so we didn't spend a whole lot of time on the tech side and on dealing with the issue of tech. We did acknowledge, frankly, that we were losing share on the side of investment banks and things of that nature. We were no longer going to be looked at as a mini version of Wall Street. And we knew that we had to figure out some other way.

We were also, by the way, I think for the first time acknowledging that we were no longer going to be a port and we were going to have to do something else with our port [Port of San Francisco] property. Dialogue at the summit included serious attention to that. And so on reflection I'm glad that we were candid rather than pie in the sky chasing yesterday for our economy. We didn't do that. We sought tomorrow, acknowledging that yesterday had already happened.

03-01:01:20
Meeker: What then was tomorrow? In addition to medical research and the stem cell technology and that kind of stuff that was on the horizon, at least at that point in time, what other areas did you think that San Francisco's economy could flourish in?

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Brown: The arts.

03-01:01:38
Meeker: The arts, okay.

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Brown: The arts. We were really enthusiastic that no one else in the nine county Bay Area had any presence, state-wide or nation-wide or internationally for the arts as we did. And so suddenly we begin to think tourism is going to be extremely important as a part of our core economy. The summit dealt with that. What do you do to make sure that you maintain it? You don't do Disneyland. You don't do Disneyworld. You don't do Epcot Center. You don't do any of those things if you're San Francisco. You begin to think of how you can take the unique aspect of the artistic capacity that you have and turn it into a cornerstone of your economic development activities around tourism. And that's what we did. That's the point at which we start talking about encouraging the development of new places for people to sleep and for people to eat and for people to do the kinds of things that would cause them to want to come to San Francisco without all of the kind of things that were being done in Los Angeles or in Florida. Period.

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Meeker: Were there specific cultural institutions that were identified as cornerstones to this policy?

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Brown: Absolutely. All of the performance arts facilities and we had the great blessings of the Broadway types, who really did want a West Coast component. And the Shorensteins had the potential or the capacity to do that. So we had people wanting to do it and they probably had the vision for a long time. And with the city saying we will assist and accommodate we were able to get going in that regard. We also knew that the convention business was another resource that we needed to dramatically expand upon if we were to be competitive. We knew we couldn't be competitive with Vegas on certain kinds of convention activities. But we were comfortable that with the huge educational component we had here and with the artistic component we had here and with the potential for access to the Napa Valley area that was unique for us, that if we orchestrated it correctly the tourism component of our economy would be enhanced. And that's what we set out to do.

03-01:04:51
Meeker: Was there any effort to really formulate a policy that allowed San Francisco to really remain as a corporate headquarters city or a finance city? Were there any efforts to try to preserve at least a portion of that status and business?

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Brown: We had two operations going on in that regard. We really did have the great families of the city who were so instrumental in the artistic aspects of the city, whether the symphony, the ballet, et cetera. They were also in the business world. Don Fisher was the most outstanding example of that collection. Chuck Schwab, also one of the most outstanding examples of that collection of

people. And they really did make the effort to try to see if we couldn't make San Francisco more business friendly. At the summit that dialogue actually took place. How do you make it more comfortable for businesses to remain in San Francisco? And it became very clear that the tax structure of the city was an impediment and that we needed to address that tax structure in a way maybe that would change. But it was also painfully clear that the absence of land to produce competitively priced real estate occupancy opportunities would not exist in this city. There was just nowhere.

03-01:06:34
Meeker: Are you talking about commercial or housing?

03-01:06:36
Brown: Commercial. There was just nowhere you could have, let's say, the call center from Bank of America. It's out of the question. There's nowhere you could put that competitively with a call center in Concord for Bank of America or even in Sacramento for Bank of America or any of the other firms that were housed here in San Francisco. And so we realistically, I think, got advice that our best shot was corporate headquarters not corporations itself. We did keep, obviously, PG&E and we eventually redirected Wells Fargo, which is headquartered here. But they were the main ones. Schwab sold to Bank of America then bought back that component and he remained here. The Gap decided to remain here. But, again, they don't make anything. They orchestrated from some other place. And the same goes with Levi's. They decided to stay here for corporate headquarter purposes but their production is overseas and offshore. So suddenly we could create an environment for quality of life for the people who ran the big companies and the big operations but we couldn't hold under any circumstances the less than top echelon executives within the city and so we had to make the city more responsive to that audience than to an audience that we had no possibility of holding on to.

03-01:08:30
Meeker: Fascinating. Let's wrap up today. I don't want you to be late for lunch.

Interview 4 June 6, 2015

04-00:00:25
Meeker: Today is the 6th of June 2015. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Mayor Willie Brown. This is interview session number four. So I know it's Saturday morning but I'm going to ask you to start out today by giving me a bit of a civics lesson. And what I'm really interested in is actually something I don't really know the answer to so I'd love for you to help unwind it for me. And that is, particularly in your first mayoral administration, the relative relationship and importance of the redevelopment commission [San Francisco Redevelopment Agency] to the planning commission [San Francisco Planning Commission] in a lot of the big projects, a lot of the things that you were interested in seeing happen in the city. Things like Mission Bay, the new ballpark, a host of other transformations that you are interested in seeing happen in the city. So kind of give me a sense of the role of those two commissions in the transformation of San Francisco during your first term.

04-00:01:38
Brown: Usually the planning commission has very little to do with what happens within a redevelopment area. A redevelopment area is a geographical space within a city or county in which rules that are fashioned both at the state level and the federal level are applicable as it relates to land use rather than the local controls. Period. Whether it's height, whether it's what can be there because the opportunity and the concept of redevelopment was to take an area that was economically deprived, under producing, or a slum, and rehab it. And you can't always be burdened with whatever the obligations are under the planning code as it relates to the area that isn't subject to slums, that isn't subject to any of the kinds of things that go there. Redevelopment also allows for the acquisition of personal property belonging to someone without the great challenges you face when you do it in an isolated fashion under the concept of what people can usually do to acquire property in the hands of others. And so the redevelopment agency heads and directors of planning are usually archenemies. They really don't particularly like each other. The role that the mayor in that situation necessarily has to play is to be the referee between the respective parties and in fact insist upon adherence to their defined statutory roles. And in my administration that's essentially what we did.

04-00:03:40
Meeker: So what was the relationship between the head of the planning commission and the head of the redevelopment commission? What were their areas of collaboration and conflict?

04-00:03:53
Brown: Well, respective commissions or the advisory, that is, the oversight bodies. The executives of the two agencies, however, are more important, so to speak, for delivery purposes because they are the day-to-day operators of their individual agency. And so the executive director of city planning and the

executive director of the redevelopment agency are sometimes at war. I'll give you an example in my administration. My planning director was Gerald Green. My planning commission was a different thing but my planning director was a fellow named Gerald Green. My redevelopment agency director, among others, was a woman named Marcia Rosen. And Marcia Rosen and Gerald Green had major confrontations over turf wars involved in certain aspects of what we were doing in the city. We declared Mission Bay, one example, to be an area in which redevelopment would take place. There were train tracks, beat-up old warehouses, areas that were clearly unproductive and not complimentary, nor contributory to the welfare of the city. We made that a redevelopment area. And Marcia Rosen, who had the responsibility for that, really pushed hard to make sure that we were literally greater than adherence to land use issues. And Gerald, on the other hand, was a long-term city administrator. He had grown up through the process of working in city planning and he had graduated to the job of executive director of city planning. And so he had some very strong views on each of those issues. But obviously they worked themselves out because obviously Mission Bay is the crown jewel of organized, disciplined, appropriate development in the city of San Francisco and it was a redevelopment agency that actually adhered to the rules and regulations of city planning.

04-00:06:22

Meeker: Well, that's great. Let's talk about Mission Bay because I know it's a signal achievement of your term as mayor and it's changed the landscape and the livelihood of San Francisco in many ways. I know that Mission Bay had been eyed for some sort of redevelopment plan since at least the very early 1980s. It was owned by Southern Pacific.

04-00:06:55

Brown: That's the original owner.

04-00:06:57

Meeker: The original owner of the land. Eventually spun off into a firm called Catellus, which was related to Southern Pacific. And correct me if I'm getting this wrong. The plan is not approved until 1998 but there's a lot of work that happens before that. And can you give me a little bit of the longer history of what was happening at Mission Bay, what the original ideas were for it, and maybe why it took so long to get there.

04-00:07:36

Brown: Well, first and foremost, the prospect of developing that piece of land literally required finding somebody willing to put money in for that purpose. And a Canadian company won the rights to own and operate and develop on that particular piece of turf. And they hired their own people to do the work there. Frankly, in the eighties the city didn't pay a lot of attention to what was going on there and nobody was in an urgent mood to push that development. That development was to be similar to something that had been done in London or similar to what was happening in New York with reference to some of the

Battery Park areas. And the plan and the idea was submitted and it was under the director of an executive director, a young man who ultimately, I think, died in some kind of a tragic accident. By then the whole business of whether or not you could get the funding to develop on the private sector side of that piece of turf had pretty much resolved itself. No, you could not easily do that. And so suddenly Catellus had a co-investor, I believe, and that co-investor was the pension fund, CalPERS. And CalPERS obviously had a fifteen to twenty years plan on every investment rather than a five-year plan or whatever the shorter period of time of plans really happens to be. Now we're in the nineties and we still have nothing going in Mission Bay. We've had a multiplicity of ideas and none of them have ever proven to be workable or proven to be able to get the financing to do it.

04-00:09:45

Meeker: It sounds to me like you're describing—the problems in the eighties was mostly a question of financing. But what about other kinds of opposition the project faced? What is your knowledge of that? Was the city populous mostly behind the idea that this piece of land should be redeveloped?

04-00:10:06

Brown: Most of the city. Yeah. Matter of fact, anybody that paid any attention thought that those tracks should be removed and that something interesting ought to happen down there. But as is usually the case with San Francisco, there was no way to build a consensus around it. I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to it. At that time I was the speaker of the California legislature and only when Dianne Feinstein, Art Agnos, or Frank Jordan invited me—and those were the three mayors in that time period. Invited me to take a look, asked for some assistance on something to do with what they were trying to do. Well, come the 1990s, I had begun to pay a little bit of attention because I appointed people to CalPERS and in that regard, what CalPERS does with pension funds was of some interest. So there was again another plan and that plan obviously didn't work and couldn't work and would not work.

04-00:11:16

Meeker: Why is that?

04-00:11:17

Brown: Simply because it didn't have all the components that would in fact make it work. It did not have, for an example, any dedication to anything to do with technology, anything to do with health research, anything to do with the kind of things that ultimately that land did become. And so it languished again as a nothing piece of land subject to everybody's input if they chose to do so for all kinds of bizarre ideas. In the meantime the University of California had for a long time been looking for expand space, space in which they could expand. They had gone up on the hill and purchased from an insurance company a piece of turf and that piece of turf proved not to be large enough for their expansion plan purposes.

04-00:12:16
Meeker: Up on the hill behind their current hospital or the—

04-00:12:20
Brown: No. No, no, no, no. At the top of the hill, at the top of Pine Street named Laurel Village. They bought from one of the insurance companies [Fireman's Fund] that piece of land and they moved some of their administration, their administrative operations there, freeing up space for research, freeing up space for medical care at the Parnassus site. There was not much additional space that they could acquire on the Parnassus site because it was obviously just above the Haight District in San Francisco, the Haight community, the Haight Street neighborhood. And that neighborhood is one of the most activist. And on the other side was Twin Peaks. So they were literally locked in to a no win situation for the University of California in terms of its expansion plans. And so they begin to look at other locations. They looked at Alameda, they looked at the Harbor Bay Isle, and they flirted with going there. They looked at and were enticed to go to Brisbane, which is just south of the county line in San Francisco and they were looking for what an organization called Tuntex, they wanted to possibly locate the university there. They looked at Executive Park, which was just across the street near Candlestick. And then they discussed the possible merger with Stanford for the purpose of doing some double development with Stanford and probably with Tuntex at the site. Well, the relationship with Stanford obviously didn't work out. These two collections of people with Nobel Prizes, et cetera, clearly could not get along.

04-00:14:15
Meeker: A lot of ego.

04-00:14:17
Brown: Totally. In the meantime, Catellus and the pension fund had hired a person who was a real developer. Nelson Rising was his name. He had been chief of staff to Mayor Tom Bradley in Los Angeles and Tom Bradley was no longer mayor. Nelson moved on to become a true developer and he got recruited by the financial interests in this piece of land to come here and do something with this piece of land. First thing he did was abandon the adopted plan, abandon all of what had gone on before he arrived, and it was absolutely perfect for me because by the time I became the mayor it was as if it was a blank piece of land with a developer who had political skills and who had been a political operator and who had been a visionary on behalf of things that he developed in Florida, things that he developed in other locations. And he also saw the potential to get the University of California to stay in San Francisco, in Mission Bay, rather than to go to Alameda or to go to Brisbane. And with my swearing in as mayor, one of the first visits was from Nelson Rising and he had the idea of trying to put something together in Mission Bay that made some sense. He understood and wanted to do it with the University of California and that's where the concept of land donated to the university or given to the university, both by the city and by Catellus, that would cause the university to drop its interest in any other location and to do something in

Mission Bay. Simultaneously we begin to float with the governor at that time who would be pushing for some additional science buildings throughout the state of California. We needed to get one of those located here. Nelson Rising's plan, and he understood better than most, that there had to be housing, there had to be open space, and then there had to be a kind of wet lab facility built on speculation that are now all over that particular site. And so the idea of making this work was just a good one.

Private sector side, someone out of Emeryville named Rutter, I think, a fellow named Gerson Bakar and a fellow named Bob Burke, the three of them became the private sector people that were partnering up with the city and with the University of California in order to get the operation going in Mission Bay. And the university had to be the lead. No one else was going to invest a nickel in Mission Bay without the university being the anchor. And that's how we ultimately got the operation going that resulted in what we now see.

04-00:18:22
Meeker: So Bill Rutter the biotech guy was part of it?

04-00:18:25
Brown: Yes.

04-00:18:26
Meeker: Gerson Bakar the developer. And who was the third person?

04-00:18:28
Brown: Gerson Bakar. More than a developer. He really is probably, in northern California, the single largest residential landlord, period. He built rental housing, not housing for sale. And the third guy was a guy named Bob Burke, who was in the same world. And then they hired the person who had left as executive director of the redevelopment agency to be the guy to do their bidding as it relates to Mission Bay.

04-00:19:07
Meeker: So it's interesting. The way you're describing it, it sounds like there was a constellation of factors that come together. You have the right people with the kind of juice needed to make a project happen, and you also have the right kind of project, an interesting mix of white collar high-tech work, some open space with residential. And I think the previous plan it was mostly commercial, not very residential, so that was also a missing piece. But there still must have been some challenges or people pushing back kind of wanting their own piece of this. How did you respond to people like that?

04-00:19:53
Brown: Well, when we setup we knew that Mission Bay could be a gem if we could do it right. And so we setup to prove to the doubting public, i.e., San Franciscans who are into process, that the accelerated opportunity to build and develop there that we were employing using the redevelopment rules we had

to prove that we would do. For an example, the affordable residential component of it. We agreed that there'd be 6,900 units of residential housing. Seventeen-hundred of those units would be affordable. That's above 25 percent of what was going to be built there. We even went further to say that the affordable housing, based on where the plan designated it was to be, had to be built ahead of anything else. On the private sector side, if you wanted to build spec wet lab space, you had to participate in building the affordable housing component or the senior housing. Whatever we were going to do on the residential side. And that's how we gained the credibility with the San Francisco general public on—

04-00:21:33
Meeker: And people like Calvin Welch and those kinds of groups.

04-00:21:34
Brown: That crowd became supporters of Mission Bay early on because they were the people that were called upon to do the affordable housing component. One of the problems with affordable housing in this city has always been the absence of land. And sometimes people insist that it becomes inclusionary: i.e., you're building 450 units on Van Ness Avenue and you've got to do 12 percent or thereabouts of what's called affordable. You got to do it within those units. And then they discovered if those units were condominiums the business of subsidizing the construction of the units didn't include subsidizing the home owners' monthly dues. And therefore the affordability question goes right out the window. Yes, you did build it so that people who earn whatever the numbers were for affordability at that time. But being eligible to enter, the component of keeping them there, there was no subsidy available and the developer could not, under any circumstances, give them a lesser component to the monthly bills for the maintenance of the facility.

04-00:23:11
Meeker: The HOA [home owners' association fees].

04-00:23:12
Brown: That's right. And so it became really a challenge. What do you do? Well, obviously you build independent of the inclusionary and the group that I call "The Cartel" were able to do exactly that. And so the first thing built in Mission Bay on the residential side was the one that we wanted to name after Orlando Cepeda and it was built by the Mission neighborhood development group. And Cepeda apparently, his agent, wanted a fee for using his name and so they dropped it and made it named after the original executive director of that neighborhood development operation and that's the name. Rich Sorro I think is his name. Rich Sorro Commons is the name of that particular facility. And so the very first thing built down there on the housing side was exactly that piece and it was built on the edge. It was built right next to King Street or right next to Berry so that in fact you see it first. It's indistinguishable from all of the other sites. We wanted to make sure that that was the way we would do Mission Bay. So you can't tell what is designated to be affordable versus not

affordable. The construction process and the design all reflected what was in the best interests of the total neighborhood rather than whether or not you did it just to cut costs.

04-00:25:01
Meeker: So new model apart from the battle days of public housing projects that got a lot of stigma with them, too?

04-00:25:09
Brown: No question. They're indistinguishable. And, by the way, that is the way that most affordable housing is in the city. You go into the Tenderloin, virtually everything down there is Mercy Housing. It's the Tenderloin Development Operation, TNDC, et cetera. They all look the same.

04-00:25:31
Meeker: In the memoir you published you talked about the cartel. You actually talked about it as the "sacred cartel." To me that has a slight, I don't know, cynical tone, but it seemed like you were a little bit critical of how that operation—

04-00:25:48
Brown: Not a little bit.

04-00:25:49
Meeker: A lot. Can you unpack that a little bit for me because I thought that was one of the interesting parts of your memoir because here's a group of operations that are presumably contributing to affordable housing in the city. What's the problem here?

04-00:26:11
Brown: When you say contributing, that carries with it the assumption that somehow they brought some resources. Every piece of property developed as nonprofit affordable housing had 100 percent subsidy, either from government or from the bond measure passed by the people or from some mitigation from some operation on the financial institution side or somebody wanting to make a contribution. And so these nonprofit organizations bring talent but they were not blessed with resources. They were not like they were partnering up and they still are not like they were partnering up. Maybe Mercy Housing might do it. But if you do BRIDGE Housing [Corporation] you're talking about people who bring skills to what we have collectively produced politically as resources to be used for development of affordable housing. And I have at all times been super sensitive that there appeared to be a dividing up of the town.

All of these organizations who want to do the affordable housing have to meet the same requirements for those development rights as would anybody doing it for profit. I.e., if we the city has got land that we want to use for affordable housing we solicit somebody with the plan and a program on the RFP process in order to meet the ethical standards required. For whatever reason, when the bids would come back it would always be clear that there appeared to have already been a determination that CCDC, the Chinatown Community

Development Corp., was going to get this site, all in this geographic area and the Todco was going to get this site in this geographical area. And in the Mission area, the Mission neighborhood was going to get this site. And in the Bernal part same way. I maintain that that was all an informal relationship with these organizations and these organizations got the same fee that developers get from each one of the investments and these organizations hired their staff, not city staff, they hired their staff and they paid their staff from it. And then at the end of whatever the financing cycle happens to be, they'll end up owning. Theoretically when the obligation for the cost of a property and the cost of the construction and all the expenses associated with development, fifteen to twenty years later, it seems to me that property ought to ultimately be under city control. No, that's not the way it operates. Does it matter if I suspected some of those operations are now at the stage where whatever financial obligations they had to develop them, they've exhausted the repayment of all of that if they had a repayment obligation and they're now fully occupied with the same cash flow that they had at the outset and with accumulation of money not needed for maintenance and operations and a possible refinancing because the value of the property has gone up so incredibly in twenty years, that you might well be able to refinance and then take the entirety of the money from the refinancing and use it to develop new sites and use it to develop another place. That's not the kind of dialogue that is going on or has gone on. As a matter of fact, there does not appear to be a serious effort made to invite the public to their annual meeting of these nonprofit corporations or there does not appear to be an annual report that's highly published for people to be able to look and see.

So the transparency surrounding the cartel was always of some interest to me. I worked very well with the cartel. They never had the resources to be productive as they did in my administration. I went to the public and got a huge bond measure passed and I talked the landlords into supporting that bond measure. I talked the tenants into supporting that bond measure by a pass through under the way in which you determine what rents ought to be in rent control. I got the 50 percent pass through so the tenants wouldn't challenge that part of the increase in their rent based upon the repayment of those particular bonds. I then took those particular bonds and I did an arrangement with HUD and with some of the traditional sources that wanted to be helpful to nonprofits. We had the money to be able to do it. So in my administration that was a working partnership on a peer level basis with the people I call members of the cartel.

At some point, however, that relationship did not lend itself to a continuation of wonderment and I produced my own nonprofit corporation to build on Sixth and Howard. And at this date and this time, from a product standpoint, the quality of the materials and the quality of what went into that project, and I had Olsen Lee as the executive head of that nonprofit that the city created, a nonprofit to compete with the cartel and we obviously ran into some political issues with the Filipino community because the cartel, I believe, had urged the

Filipino community to come in and oppose it on the basis that that ought to be Filipinos doing that. Well, obviously we solved that problem and those issues because we built from a pure standpoint of quality probably the best of all the nonprofits in the city. And then we did a similar kind of thing over in the North Beach area when we took down the housing, public housing that was over there. We partnered up with Bridge and HUD and we put together an operation that allowed for some market rate, an expanded number of units beyond what was considered the North Beach public housing. And we put in also the opportunity to put in a Trader Joe's. We put an opportunity to produce some revenue and we put in some market rate as part of—but we did maintain the number of public housing units that had been the North Beach Public Housing Project. You go over there now, it does not look anything like it did as the North Beach projects—you don't even know that it's public housing now that we've done it the way we did.

And my personal relationship as mayor with the cartel, we were imaginative, we were aggressive, and we really did some very good work. We also expanded the number of producers on the nonprofit side. We got Glide to step in and take their parking lot and turn it into the first housing, nonprofit housing and affordable housing built in the Tenderloin that wasn't controlled by the cartel. Suddenly Cecil Williams and Glide became a partner with the city and we literally orchestrated the process by which they got the funding to be able to do that first component and now they've done obviously two other components on that whole operation. The cartel also had the tendency to choose their—they have their select group of contractors, their select group of architects. They were no different than any other cartel or any other exclusively operated trust operation that did not allow for anybody other than the people preselected. We broke through all of that and we did it, sometimes in cooperation with them and sometimes not so much in cooperation with them. The bond measure which we passed had given us the license to do what had never been done prior to my becoming mayor and so they couldn't argue too much with me about it. And I brought Calvin Welch on the inside. I had Calvin Welch at least once or twice a month meet with the staff to walk through not only what was happening with the nonprofit world but what was happening with city development in general. And so it was an interesting way to make the thing work. But it did work.

04-00:37:15

Meeker: It sounds to me like what you're saying, and just to kind of put it in a nutshell, because I think you've given a really interesting and complex description of the landscape. But you have these nonprofit corporations that have all the protections and benefits of being a nonprofit corporation but are really kind of being run as for-profit firms in the sense that they are thinking about protecting their turf, they're thinking about expanding. Kind of along those lines. And therefore it makes it very difficult to have a level playing field with other perhaps actors in the arena because they have sort of the protections of

the nonprofit world but they've got the resources perhaps of what a for profit firm would have.

04-00:38:15

Brown: Well, the nonprofit housing developers, or [Council of Community Housing Organizations], as they call themselves, had formidable political connections. They had managed to convince practically every member of the board of supervisors that they were pure, that they were to be exalted, that they were God's chosen providers of housing for people who needed it. Yet when you looked at it African Americans were almost not participants. African Americans were pretty much confined to the church-based sponsorship of nonprofit developments and the nature of what they developed was quite different from what the cartel had been developing. And the cartel also had literally the control of the schedule. They did not operate on the theory of trying to solve the problem of housing needed by people. They did it on their schedule. And their argument was that they didn't have the skills, the abundance of skills that would allow for movement any faster for the development of—and they had such political clout that they made it virtually impossible for pure for-profit organizations to get into the development of affordable housing. For profit organizations could contribute to the mayor's housing fund or whatever the fund was that you paid into in order to develop when you paid your dues, in order to get the right to develop your commercial space. But that same person and that same organization could not under any circumstances build and compete with the nonprofit world.

And so you had a huge delay in between the conceptualization of a new project on the affordable side and the ultimate occupancy of the new project on the affordable side. You had the political clout that the nonprofits enjoyed. Made it almost impossible to challenge anything they wanted to do. I may have been the first mayor to come along who was able to match their advocacy where the decisions were to be made because I again developed a credential to do it with the bond measure, plus the ultimate productivity of what we did like with Glide, what we did with Calvin Jones's church, Providence Baptist Church, and what we did with the business of some aspect of public housing. And all of those things were part of what gave my administration the credentials to move faster than ordinarily would have been the case. For example, there is no way probably in anybody else's administration Glide would have ever gotten the ability to build the affordable housing that they built and managed. They would still be trying. But because of my administration's aggressiveness, of seeing it had happened, it did happen.

And so the nonprofit housing developers have tremendous political clout. They have great control. And within the context of how they operate, the nature of what they do with the resources that they get from all of their activities allows them to fund employment opportunities for individuals within their sphere of influence and their relationship. It also funds them to do

their political work that will ensure that they are never touched or heavily influenced by the political decisions that are made and that there would be no political decisions made unfavorable to them. Period. So they are a phenomenal, powerful operation. And I got to tell you that I think in part is because they have such great credentials on the productivity side. Chinatown Community Development is probably the best example of that. What Gordon Chin did in Chinatown on behalf of seniors and on behalf of families no one else in Chinatown had done anything now nor previously equal to what that organization is doing. And, again, Choo Choo did not even think of producing something comparable for African Americans. There was a little operation but nothing really significant.

04-00:44:16
Meeker: If you were given a blank slate and the cartel didn't exist, what do you think the best way to develop affordable housing in San Francisco would be?

04-00:44:27
Brown: I think the best way to develop affordable housing in San Francisco is let the for-profit people become equally as aggressive and equally as competitive at being able to do it. Because after all, on the nonprofit side you get the same fees as you do on the profit side. Well, if I'm a for-profit person building housing I think I would take advantage of the opportunity to produce housing that ultimately would be under price controls for affordability. But my construction costs, my development costs, and the fees that are paid to me are the same as if it was for-profit. The only time that the application of the nonprofit status becomes important is on the affordability. I can't charge market rate but I billed no differently than if it was market rate. Period. And so I would literally make it possible for anybody to compete with the opportunity to develop another housing site. I would take, let's say, some of the excess land that PUC has, surplus land that the school district had, and I'm going to use it for a site because if the land is contributed to his development you have taken away one component of the cost of the development. Now you can have people compete to see who will build it and get it done. There's no reason why a profit-making person wouldn't want the same opportunity as a nonprofit. Their numbers are going to be the same.

04-00:46:39
Meeker: And once you get competition then presumably the cost might drive down, as well.

04-00:46:45
Brown: Might drive it down. Might drive it down for sure.

04-00:46:48
Meeker: But cartels only increase costs typically?

04-00:46:52
Brown: Well, that's because of the long-term delay between a conception and the final product. I think a week or ten days we're cutting the ribbon on Broadway, I

think Broadway and Battery or Broadway and Sansome, Sansome and Battery. Another Chinatown development. That landsite was made available when we killed the freeway, the entrance to the freeway after the quake. The quake was 1989. It is now 2015. Let's see, '99, 2009, twenty-four years. Almost twenty-five years since the quake killed the freeway and we're building units for people to occupy. And it was the on ramp where this lane went. Now, on the other hand, the off ramp we built on that land probably twelve, thirteen years ago. Gordon Chin finished that site. They controlled both. They controlled the on ramp and the off ramp. The off ramp I think it's the northeast corner of Broadway and Battery. The on ramp is the Broadway and Sansome actually, in there. This one has taken almost twenty-five years. This one has been lived in for maybe ten years, twelve years. And there was no reason why it should have taken any longer except the absence of substantive, the absence of personnel to implement it. Gordon is now essentially retired and someone else took over. Norman Fong took over the operation. And it's just marvelous, though, to see how we as a group of citizens would tolerate that land being vacate that long when we so desperately need housing. If there had been competition for a for profit developer to develop nonprofit in the same way CCDC has done it, and at the same price that would be charged for the occupancy, it would have been open fifteen years ago.

04-00:49:58

Meeker: I have one more question. Actually, several questions about Mission Bay. But one thing that I hadn't really thought about before but the way in which you're talking about it now. This constant need for more housing. And, sure, what, the 6,900 residential units that were slated for Mission Bay sounds like a lot but that's a huge, huge piece of land. And considering the housing problems that we have now, and even the housing problems that were becoming readily apparent in the late 1990s, why was density not three times that?

04-00:50:33

Brown: Because the city is, I think, has always been burdened with limitations on how many units can be built. Period. Now, politically this city is about those of us who are already here. It's about not really making it convenient for anybody else to get here. Fun example. The concept of a moratorium is clearly counter to the needs of housing, a shortage of housing [Ed. note: referencing legislation before the SF Board of Supervisors, which failed, only to return as Proposition I on San Francisco's November 2015 ballot, which would have a moratorium on the construction of new housing; the ballot measure also failed]. How can you have a moratorium and a shortage? It seems to me to be just the opposite. You ought to be putting restraints up on the application of some aspects of what keeps you from building. And that means, then, you better think seriously about a piece of land that's now capped at four stories going to eight stories and for the additional four stories you suddenly get maybe 10 percent more on the affordable side or 20 percent more on the affordable side. We just don't have that kind of leadership. We don't have

anybody on the board of supervisors who is prepared in this political environment to say, "I'm going to make my mark by taking this square block that's now zoned four stories and I'm going to change it to twelve stories. And in that twelve stories I'm going to go to not 12 percent affordable, I'm going to go to 25 percent affordable. I'm going to double the affordable because I'm doubling the size, I'm doubling the density." And at the same time when you do the density you suddenly don't need as much money invested in transportation. You don't need as much money invested in a whole lot of other things of that nature. But when you do density you can also at the same time pick up space. Because right now, without density, you've got to use all the space rather than make density and free up some of the space to make an open space.

When I walked around before coming here this morning I went to look at some of what they call parklets, spaces that have been taken in the south of Market area that were where cars would go and they blocked them off and they put in these little structures for people to sit around on and people were actually sitting there. Four people right next door here in the alleyway that has been blocked off as a parklet. Well, it seems to me if we'd gone up much higher in this little two-story building—there's no reason why this building [California Historical Society, 678 Mission Street] ought to be here. This building is occupying a piece of land that you could put another twenty stories on because right next door is a forty-story building. And then just across the way is another twenty-five-story building. Well, it seems to me if you take this little piece of land and you put twenty-five stories and obviously you bring the California Historical Society back, they come back when the building was finished. They get the first floor. But now we've got unclaimed another eight or ten floors, and suddenly, with those eight or ten floors, they've got more people occupying the space right next door for the parklet. And so there is not the kind of leadership that is needed. There is not the kind of vision that is needed. And there is a total unwillingness to confront the naysayers and the people who don't want any more people in San Francisco.

04-00:54:55

Meeker: This is maybe an impossible question but I'm going to ask it anyway: The moratorium got seven votes on the board of supervisors. It needed nine to pass because it was a special deal. But it got the majority of the board of supervisors to endorse the moratorium. How in the world can one explain that in a rational universe?

04-00:55:17

Brown: Well, first of all, there were probably three or four people in the seven who voted the way they voted because they knew it wouldn't pass and they didn't want to incur the wrath of the cartel. It was simply a hands-on effort to keep my enemies from having a legitimate reason to go after me. I think that the questions asked by some of the people who voted yes were the most telling questions.

04-00:55:57
Meeker: For example?

04-00:55:59
Brown: Malia Cohen's questions about how many units of housing, residential housing being built in the Mission in the last year? A hundred. Well, now, why do we need a moratorium if there's only been a hundred units built? The current planning and land use structure clearly controls sufficiently so there's no great erosion. The next question was within the framework of the lines, the boundaries for that, how many applications for a permit to take any of the residential sites that are there for development? None. Today, not one.

04-00:56:55
Meeker: What does that mean?

04-00:56:57
Brown: Well, if you got the geographical area, you asked the question within that geographical area you're trying to place a moratorium on, are there applications pending to take residential sites and convert them from single family dwellings to multiple family dwellings? None. Not one.

04-00:57:21
Meeker: So there's not going to be any loss of existing housing?

04-00:57:23
Brown: That's right. None. None. So when you ask all those questions you could only come to the conclusion that there is no reason for a moratorium, that a case hasn't been made to stop the takeaway because there is no takeaway. But if you don't want Choo Choo full-time focusing on you for electoral purposes that crowd ask you, that group of protestors demanded that you side with them. When you noticed that no damage could come to the delivery system if you sided with them, you sided with them because of people like Mark Farrell and Scott Wiener and Julie Christensen have already blocked, just the three votes blocked a nine-vote out of eleven. Just the three blocked it. And so no, you've got a free ride. You can go either way. You can go either way.

04-00:58:36
Meeker: You see this happening in Congress all the time.

04-00:58:37
Brown: That's the rational explanation to your question.

04-00:58:45
Meeker: Let me talk a little bit more about Prop A. You've touched on it already but this was your proposition that you sponsored in 1996, a $100 million bond for affordable housing. Required a two-thirds vote by the populace in order for it to pass, I understand. It would basically help subsidize down payments and result in as many as 3,000 units of new housing. And it did in fact pass by a two-thirds vote. Maybe it didn't quite reach the 3,000 units but it got pretty close to it. Where did the idea come from for this affordable housing bond?

04-00:59:33
Brown: It came from the cartel.

04-00:59:34
Meeker: It did. And you supported it though?

04-00:59:37
Brown: No, it was mine.

04-00:59:38
Meeker: It was yours. Right.

04-00:59:39
Brown: I didn't just support it. It was mine. It was an idea that came to me, advocating for some form of a public bond that would get us the opportunity to take the public bond money and marry it to money from HUD, marry it to money from the litigation from the financial institutions, the real estate operations. Marry it from grants, from non-profit organizations or for philanthropic organizations that wanted to do something about housing and we could explore the opportunity on the tax side for some significant tax forgiveness. All those combination of things. We could take that hundred million and we'd turn it into about 450 million to ultimately do what we needed to have done. And we did it very well.

04-01:00:43
Meeker: To get two-thirds of San Franciscans to agree on anything is pretty amazing. What was the strategy and how did you get such a super majority to vote for it?

04-01:00:55
Brown: Well, it was like selling a candidate. We first went to the tenants. They got the tenants to sign on to the concept of the pass through. Then we went to the landlords.

04-01:01:13
Meeker: Can you explain the pass through?

04-01:01:12
Brown: Where rent control happens you are permitted to raise the rents based on your cost of operation and your cost of operation is precisely defined. The improvements that you might want to make must be necessary for you to be able to include that in the expense associated, et cetera. And new bond authorizations, let's say if the city approved a bond to build a stadium, that increase would be on the landlord. It would not be passed through to the tenants. The tenants had enough political clout to make sure that those kind of bond measures did not adversely affect their rate of rent. We went to the tenants and got them to agree that let's give the landlords the opportunity, in the computations before the rent board, they could include 50 percent of the cost of that bond measure as a pass through. They don't have to justify it, they don't have to debate it. So if their real estate taxes went up by a hundred

dollars they could pass through fifty dollars of that onto your rent. Fifty of it they'd have to eat. But fifty of it could be passed on to your rent. That's the pass through.

04-01:02:47
Meeker: That's interesting. So this was how basically you got tenants and—

04-01:02:54
Brown: And landlords.

04-01:02:55
Meeker: —and landlords to agree.

04-01:02:58
Brown: So we got everybody to join in. And anytime you put a bond measure on that requires two-thirds you know you're going to lose 30 percent. You know that 30 percent of the people are going to vote no, period. No matter what you say, what you do, how meritorious it may be. That's just the nature of how the history of voting has been in this country for a long time. So you have got to make sure that there is no real organized effort by any other unit to increase that 30 percent number by another six, eight, ten percent because then you lose. So we had the responsibility of removing any possibility of anybody adding to that natural 30 percent. And fortunately, the campaign manager for me, a guy named Jack Davis, he ran my campaign for mayor, he was also the guy who orchestrated the politics for the landlords in this city. And in that category he went to them and helped me convince them how important it was to develop a better relationship with the tenants. And my own history with the tenant movement allowed me to go to the tenants and get the tenants to agree to do the same thing. And I had a tremendous amount of help from what I ultimately would identify as the cartel folk. They had been instrumental in helping my campaign and one of the components of my campaign had been advocacy for a housing bond. And they came through with helping me convince the tenants.

04-01:04:50
Meeker: So the bond was going to be paid off through taxes on—

04-01:04:55
Brown: Real estate.

04-01:04:55
Meeker: On real estate. Okay. That's why it was a two-thirds.

04-01:04:56
Brown: General obligation bond. That's what we call a general obligation bond. All the taxpayers in the city, when their taxes are computed it would be included. Period.

04-01:05:11
Meeker: But it's property taxes?

04-01:05:12
Brown: Yes, property taxes.

04-01:05:14
Meeker: Yeah. Okay. That's fascinating. Is there a central organization of landlords in town?

04-01:05:25
Brown: Oh, yes. Yes, yes, yes.

04-01:05:25
Meeker: What is it?

04-01:05:27
Brown: It's called the Property Owners Association or something like that.

04-01:05:38
Meeker: We can put it in the transcript later. I don't want to test you on it.

04-01:05:40
Brown: Yeah. That, too. That, too, as a matter of fact. There are the small landlords and then there are the big landlords. And then there are also a separate group that are both landlords and developers in an organization. And that organization was headed by a guy named Joe O'Donoghue and it was the RBA, the Residential Builders Organization. And then there was the apartment house owners association [San Francisco Apartment Association]. That's another landlord operation. And then there is BOMA, which is the Building Owners and Operators Association. That's kind of the commercial side. So there are three or four, maybe five landlord organizations that kind of cooperate with each other. And their level of cooperation is probably more consistent than the nonprofit world. Nonprofit world is at war with each other sometimes, particularly those who run care facilities, so to speak, where, for an example, they receive direct subsidy to take care of and provide services to, including shelter. And a guy named Randy Shaw runs that operation in the city, and sometimes there is some confrontation between Randy Shaw and the tenants union [San Francisco Tenants Union] or Randy Shaw and the cartel because his operation is on a contract with the city. He may have 400 people, that the city has given him direct subsidy to take care of those 400 people. And that's not a bad arrangement.

04-01:07:42
Meeker: I'm wondering if you can help me think about the affordable landscape overall, from like a general perspective. And from what I understand San Francisco actually has a really robust affordable housing market. A percentage of all rental units and housing units available, it's pretty high compared to most other cities. Am I correct in that?

04-01:08:08
Brown: Yes. Absolutely. And that's because we've had for a long time a collection of talented skilled people who understood how to carve out a piece of the

decision-making process as it relates to housing for themselves. And they have done a great job. That's the cartel.

04-01:08:34
Meeker: That's the cartel. But they haven't solved the problem. And so—

04-01:08:41
Brown: Don't forget. They're not about being driven to totally solve the problem. They want to contribute to the solution of the problem. They're not accepting responsibility to solve the whole problem and that's why they build on their own schedule. They don't build on the schedule of need. They build on the schedule of convenience and opportunity for them to do what they need to do. Because some of them have a second component of what they're doing. They also want to provide advocacy services for residents and those advocacy services go beyond just housing. It goes to employment, it goes to mental health, it goes to substance abuse. They have a whole series of components to their operation. So their housing development operation is just one part of it. If you go check CCDC out you would see that they probably are maybe sixty-five or seventy percent non-housing production. It may be higher than that. And it's the same with almost every other one.

04-01:10:05
Meeker: I guess maybe the question I'm asking, is it possible outside of perhaps like a communist takeover of everything and redistribution and complete control of prices, to solve the housing problem in San Francisco?

04-01:10:31
Brown: Oh, no. No, no, no. I don't think you can ever completely solve the housing problem in San Francisco, just like I don't think you can do it in New York, you can't do it any other place. Unfortunately there's a huge time gap between when you conceive of the idea of building something and when you actually get it built. And usually by the time you get it built you are already behind the eight-ball because the population has grown and the demand has exceeded what you are building by a vast percentage. So now you're starting all over. You're starting again. So unless you are in a position where you had a unit that just constantly, every day, renewed to meet the projected demand, you would never, ever be able to get out ahead of or even keep up with what the demand happens to be. And in particular, in a place like San Francisco where there is no land—there's no land here—so you can never, ever have an adequate supply of housing in this city. Impossible.

04-01:12:09
Meeker: So we're left to Band-Aid solutions.

04-01:12:12
Brown: Well, I don't call them Band-Aid solutions. We're left to a realistic response within the framework of possibilities or rules and regulations on the production side. And that's the advocacy that I maintain the elected types need to undertake. I don't think that elected types really do. I'm not even sure

my administration did. But that's what elected types really need to aggressively do. There's just no reason why there ought to be, from the time you conceive of the possibility in Hunter's Point of, let's say, building affordable housing, to twelve years later building the first unit of affordable housing. You ought to search in what created and what caused that long delay and politically you can shorten that. And that ought to be part of your dedication. Because if you could be on a three-year cycle from conception to occupancy and that cycle is only limited by the availability of materials and people to do the building, it's interesting how, in the commercial world, there seems to be the ability to match the need. Period. But whatever skills prompts that possibility, those same kind of skills ought to be used for housing. And if they were, you may very well establish a better performance process than you currently have. As a matter of fact, I know you would because after all people regularly match whatever the commercial requirements are. It's amazing. But we don't match the residential requirement. And it's because we aren't motivated by profit to do it. If we were motivated by profit to do it we would.

04-01:14:49
Meeker: Well, and it also comes down to San Francisco's neighborhood politics.

04-01:14:54
Brown: San Francisco neighborhood politics, I tell you, doesn't seem to deter the ability to do commercial. We meet the commercial demands handsomely and that is kind of amazing because it's basically the same skill set. Basically the same construction crews. Basically the same land use people. But we can get from conception of a piece of commercial real estate to occupancy in half the amount of time using that same space for residential purposes. In half the amount of time if we were trying to do residential. And that's what we as elected types need to address.

04-01:15:52
Meeker: You tried to pass a second housing bond later in your administration. This one did not succeed. It was for, I believe, 250 million, so substantially more. What do you attribute the failure of that to in contrast to the success of the first one?

04-01:16:08
Brown: We didn't do the same kind of work politically. And we did not line up the beneficiaries of the first effort as aggressively as we should have. Period. That was just part of what we didn't do. We didn't do the work that needed to be done to get the number.

04-01:16:36
Meeker: Did it have the same pass through equation?

04-01:16:38
Brown: I don't remember. I don't think so. I don't think we even came close to getting the tenants. They were supportive of the bond measure but if it didn't cost them anything.

04-01:16:50
Meeker: Do you have an opinion on the current effort by the current mayor [Mayor Ed Lee]?

04-01:16:55
Brown: I do. I think that the cartel is trying their best to derail the mayor's efforts. They're trying to put their own measure on because they don't believe that the mayor's measure provides them with the advantages and the control that they desire. They're unwilling to have a playing field more reflective of equal competition between profit and nonprofit.

04-01:17:39
Meeker: Do you think that will kill it?

04-01:17:41
Brown: Could very easily. Two-thirds vote, as I said earlier. A two-thirds vote is easily killed. Just easily killed. The whole business of enhancing the 30 percent that is already negative will get you there pretty easily.

04-01:18:05
Meeker: Before I wrap-up today, I'd like to ask you about the new Giants ballpark and this was also at the very beginning of your first term and I think it's yet another piece in the sort of Mission Bay area puzzle. And also there had been conversations, obviously going back to the 1980s, about a new stadium for the San Francisco Giants. And there was, looking at that area down there as a possible location for it. It was approved on a ballot in 1986, I think in the spring, so shortly after you were sworn in. But this was after, I think it was a defeat in either '89 or '90 when there was a new stadium on the ballot. Can you tell me sort of what role you helped play in getting the '96 design on the ballot and why you think it might have been successful this time around?

04-01:19:09
Brown: We managed to put together on the Giants behalf, and on behalf of the city, an almost failsafe campaign operation. Let's just start with who the co-chairs of the campaigns were. I think it was Quentin Kopp. It was Reverend Cecil Williams, and it was, I think, probably Louise Renne or somebody like that, the city attorney. We literally had everybody you could think of, Roberta Achterberg [along with Quentin Kopp, Reverend Cecil Williams], we had everybody you could think of that might represent a potential opponent or represent some way that they could exploit it to be an opponent. We lined it all up. We did probably a year's work towards getting the public ready for the San Francisco Giants vote [Ed. note: PJ Johnston noted the campaign lasted only four months: December to March]. And that's what caused it to succeed. We also said no public subsidy. Every other effort had been ultimately flawed because it had public money and heavy-duty wealthy folk that owned the ball club. In this one we made it very clear that there was no subsidy at all and then we had my campaign manager, Jack Davis, running it. I think you go back and the public votes in this city that Jack Davis orchestrated were usually successful. And it didn't matter whether it was a stadium or whether it was

housing or whether it was some other program, including the efforts to get the Forty-Niners a stadium. In ’97, following the Giants, we followed up in ’97 and we got the voters to approve a revenue bond, retire-able and payable from the development itself rather than from anything else to do with the city. And that was another Jack Davis effort. And so the Giants successful approval came from a combination of all those things and the leadership of Jack Davis.

04-01:21:54

Meeker: Jack Davis is also somewhat of a lightning rod sometimes. I remember reading the newspaper account of the Giants ball park and it seems like he irked Rose Pak at a certain point in time. He maybe was sometimes not all that easy to manage.

04-01:22:12

Brown: I don’t think it’s possible to manage Jack Davis. I never found it possible to manage Jack Davis. That guy’s a genius and he operates like a genius and he really doesn’t work for money like most consultants. They want a percentage of what you book. They want a percentage of ads. They want a percentage of television time, radio time. He just gives you a flat fee and you pay the fee and then from that point on there’s no discussion about money. And he goes ahead and he helps put the campaign together and orchestrates the campaign. And you know that he’s being paid like any other worker. He is not being paid like he’s an agent. Period. And, yes, he is controversial. But if you chatted with the people who own Eighth and Market you may have noticed that there are buildings and developments going on. That’s all residential on Eighth and Market between Mission and Market.

04-01:23:20

Meeker: Yeah, near Twitter.

04-01:23:20

Brown: On Main Street. That whole site is a Jack Davis orchestrated site. And his partner in that effort was Chris Daly, the most ardent member of the board opposing development anywhere in this city, and in particular in his district. And that was Chris’s district. Yet Angelo Sangiacomo, who was the guy that prompted rent control in San Francisco, is building more residential units than almost anybody else except the people at Parkmerced. And that’s Jack Davis. On the other hand, Parkmerced is ultimately going to produce more residential housing. That’s Jack Davis. So no matter how controversial he appears to be, he has the ability to orchestrate the process in such a way that it does not become a referendum on him. It remains an issue to be determined for the benefit or not of the people.

04-01:24:34

Meeker: So do you think the success of the ’96 ballot initiative for the ballpark basically hinged on the fact that there was no public money guaranteed for the owners?

04-01:24:44
Brown: That was the key in our opinion, in my opinion.

04-01:24:48
Meeker: What was the initiative about? Was it simply getting like a voter approval for the zoning or something?

04-01:24:56
Brown: It was a voter approval for the whole project. Of course, keep in mind that on the transportation side we didn't respond to the need for parking. It was *de minimis*. On the business of how high up we could go we had to make sure that we got past whatever the limitations were for the waterfront, on the water, because the park was right on the water. And then finally we had to make sure that the public knew that the ownership of that land remained in the public hands. When they finally retire all of the indebtedness associated with building the stadium, we own the stadium.

04-01:25:55
Meeker: It's interesting. I just finished a big interview with Will Travis, who I'm sure you know from BCDC, and he talks about the stadium as kind of a crown jewel in the achievement of BCDC, too. I think it's something everyone's really proud of.

04-01:26:12
Brown: Yeah, yeah. And so the vote was a combination of all the things required under the law for that particular landsite. It wasn't like it was a landsite that wasn't touched by BCDC, like a landsite that wasn't touched by the state lands commission. All those things were part of what we had in the package.

04-01:26:35
Meeker: Okay. Well, shall we wrap-up there today?

04-01:26:39
Brown: Yes, Sir.

04-01:26:40
Meeker: Good. Thank you very much.

Interview 5 August 15, 2015

05-00:00:07
Meeker: Today is the 15th of August 2015 and I am here today with Mayor Willie Brown. This is Martin Meeker interviewing. We're at the California Historical Society in San Francisco and this is interview session number five. So let's get started. I think we'll talk about politics today. And I know that we've been talking about politics all along, but really politics. And I'd like to start out by asking you—I believe that you made five appointees to the San Francisco Board of Supervisors during your first time.

05-00:00:48
Brown: Six.

05-00:00:49
Meeker: Six. Okay. Well, I got Michael Yaki, Leslie Katz, Amos Brown, Gavin Newsom, and Mark Leno. Who is the sixth?

05-00:00:57
Brown: Alicia Becerril.

05-00:01:01
Meeker: Ah, that's right. Thank you. I didn't mean to test you like that. I'm wondering, if it's not too much, to kind of walk through each of these individuals and I'd like to get a sense of your process of selecting individuals to serve on, in essence, the legislative body of San Francisco and what kind of qualities you look for and then maybe an evaluation of how you think they turned out as supervisors. So maybe we can start out with Michael Yaki.

05-00:01:41
Brown: My very first appointee. Matter of fact, I appointed Michael Yaki in January of 1996. I got sworn in in January 1996 and Michael Yaki had been very much a part of my campaign. Michael Yaki had been a senior staff person for Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi and Michael Yaki had clearly evidenced over the years a superior set of brains, a great understanding of public policy making and public policy executing, and he had an ethnicity that was missing from the San Francisco Board of Supervisors. The qualities that I looked for were exactly those. He was politically connected, sensitive in all the other things that I just said about him. And so that appointment was probably the easiest of all the appointments and it was, incidentally, unsolicited. Sometimes you make appointments because they are solicited by friends and relatives and people like that. But this was unsolicited. It was a surprise not only to Michael Yaki but it was a surprise to everybody connected, and in particular Nancy Pelosi.

05-00:03:07
Meeker: Interesting. He was replacing Terence Hallinan. And Terence Hallinan had been elected—

05-00:03:13
Brown: Same time that I was elected to the mayorship, Hallinan won the job of being the district attorney. And he was a member of the Board of Supervisors, so he had to resign before he could get sworn in to the new office, which meant that there was a window of a few days and I never even told Yaki. I actually made the appointment at a press availability when asked, "You know have a vacancy, your first vacancy on the Board. Who will you appoint?" I said, "I'm appointing Michael Yaki." And Michael Yaki was in a meeting someplace on behalf of Nancy Pelosi and he was approached by the press guys who said, "How's it feel that you've been appointed to the Board of Supervisors?" "What are you talking about?" It's funny. Funny.

05-00:04:01
Meeker: But you knew him well enough to know that he would accept this as an honor, I imagine?

05-00:04:08
Brown: Yes.

05-00:04:08
Meeker: Yeah. How do you feel about his work on the Board of Supervisors?

05-00:04:13
Brown: He was a very good supervisor. As a matter of fact, it's too bad that he was not a good campaigner. He couldn't get himself reelected out there in that district, in the Richmond, and it was in part, I think, because he just didn't take the issue of campaigning seriously enough and the treachery that comes with the left's method of campaigning and that caused him to lose the job. But in terms of his serving on the Board of Supervisors, he was just spectacular. That set of brains he had, the previous Washington experience, the relationships that he had, all produced great benefits for the city.

05-00:04:59
Meeker: When you say the left's method of campaigning, and we'll definitely get into the 2000 election later on, what are you referring to when you say the left's method of campaigning?

05-00:05:12
Brown: The left really attempt at all times to make themselves appear to be not traditional political types. That they don't engage in fundraising from all the resources, that they are holier than thou in every sense of the word and they parlay that into making it appear as if they are really grassroots only and nobody else is and Michael Yaki missed all of that.

05-00:05:45
Meeker: It's interesting that somebody can be an effective legislator but not as effective when it comes to campaigning.

05-00:05:53
Brown: Well, ordinarily you don't get a job unless you are a good campaigner. The only way you'll get the job when you're not a good campaigner is you get appointed. And in this case that's what happened. If he had to go through the crucibles of trying to get the nomination to get into the runoff and to raise the money—he didn't have to raise a penny to do anything. He didn't have to ask for one endorsement. He didn't have to go to one debate. He didn't have to go to anything. So none of the skillsets that you normally have for campaign purposes visited itself upon him. When serving he didn't do any of that, and prep work that gets you there, because it wasn't part of his deal.

05-00:06:40
Meeker: Also during this time supervisor elections were still city-wide. Did that play into your consideration of who could be elected, because they only had to place—

05-00:06:58
Brown: In my appointment process I didn't think elections. I didn't think elections. I thought service more than anything else. My administration was new, I was new to local government, and in that capacity I was far more interested in making sure that we could do the job that needed to be done for the city which had not previously been done. Period. So I was interested in the skills that people could bring to the task that would allow for the policy of the Brown administration to be implemented.

05-00:07:34
Meeker: Tell me a little bit about Leslie Katz.

05-00:07:40
Brown: I didn't really know Leslie Katz either. But Leslie Katz was offered to me by just a whole collection of people, starting with Carole Migden.

05-00:07:54
Meeker: And she was replacing Migden, right?

05-00:07:55
Brown: She was replacing Migden and she was just perfect for that task. She had all of the components that Migden had had and she was connected heavy with the gay and lesbian community, beyond Migden, and particularly from the two gay clubs. She was an Alice [B. Toklas LGBT Democratic Club] person versus a person in what's called the Harvey [Milk LGBTQ Democratic] Club. The Harvey Club was more left than the Alice Club supposedly. And she came to me well recommended by a collection of folk. And there was competition among several people for that slot.

05-00:08:40
Meeker: There's actually something that's really interesting about San Francisco history, and I imagine it's not unique to San Francisco. But that is what I see as the shift in transformation in different political constituencies in the city. I've studied the history going back to the early twentieth century and there

were certain important commissions, I think probably like the school board at that point, and I think it was appointees at that point, that different groups in San Francisco would have strong input into who would get on those commissions. So you would have the dean of Grace Cathedral, you would have the archbishop, you would have the head rabbi at Temple Emanu-El. You would have the chamber of commerce and the labor council. They would each—

05-00:09:31
Brown: And the newspapers.

05-00:09:31
Meeker: And the newspapers would get their own appointees. I always see this—

05-00:09:36
Brown: And grassroots had nothing to do with any of it. Labor had nothing to do with any of it.

05-00:09:42
Meeker: And for that matter, like the black community didn't have an appointee.

05-00:09:45
Brown: No. No Asians.

05-00:09:46
Meeker: The Chinese community didn't have an appointee.

05-00:09:47
Brown: That's right. No Latinos. And the emphasis on women was virtually nonexistent and clearly there was no gay or lesbians. That was just totally and hopelessly unacceptable.

05-00:10:00
Meeker: When did that change? When did the political constituency change from sort of religious groups, which still might have played a role, to the point at which you wanted to make sure that different racial and ethnic groups had their appointees and representation and also like women and gays and lesbians also had the—

05-00:10:25
Brown: That best evidence did sell from the seventies. However, that's not when it started. It started long before the seventies. You would have to attribute much of that elevated sensitivity on race to a fellow named Phil Burton. He was a man who ran for state assembly and lost to a dead man and he won the next time out and he was the first, I think, to really energize labor to do something other than just support labor persons for office. And it was what is now the SEIU [Service Employees International Union]. It was an organization that had its office over on Golden Gate Avenue and I forget exactly the name. But nevertheless, it was something that Phil Burton marshaled. Phil Burton also saw the potential for Asian voters, in particular Chinese, and he focused on

trying to get some symbols of that. He saw the absolute need with his friendship with a fellow named Carlton Goodlett, who owned the black newspaper at the time. And they were both basically left-wingers. They were persons who looked with some favor on the candidacy of Vincent Hallinan for the presidency back in 1952. Growing out of that, Phil Burton began to think about the clear potential for assembling a sufficient number of people for voting purposes from various constituencies. And he became part of the NAACP. As I said, he was a part of the labor movement. His headquarters was actually in the labor temple on 240 Golden Gate Avenue for a guy named George Hardy, who ran that labor union at that time. And Phil was about that effort. Phil also was about making sure that the real political union, which was Harry Bridges operation, the longshore and warehouse, that they were part of that effort. And so he really is the founder, in my opinion, for San Francisco of the elevated sensitivity to potential for broad representation among people of color, in particular.

05-00:13:05
Meeker: So fast-forward to the 1990s when Carole Migden, a lesbian, gets your seat in the Assembly, correct?

05-00:13:14
Brown: Correct. March 25, 1996

05-00:13:19
Meeker: All right. Is it a day that kind of lives in infamy for you? The last day of your time in—

05-00:13:26
Brown: It was actually when we first did domestic partnerships.

05-00:13:30
Meeker: Oh, interesting.

05-00:13:34
Brown: Literally. And that date came about, for election purposes, because I cut a deal with the governor. The governor calls the election. He had virtually no interest in whenever the election would occur in San Francisco. I wanted to get the election going as quickly as it was humanly possible. If I had resigned in January the election would have been in June because it would have been consolidated with an existing election. I resigned, I think, about December 14th for the express purpose of getting the governor to call the election in March so that she could win the seat and that's how that happened.

05-00:14:26
Meeker: Interesting. That's kind of another side conversation about Carole Migden's career, and maybe we can talk about that at some point. When she leaves the Board of Supervisors, is it presented to you that this is a lesbian or a gay and lesbian seat?

05-00:14:46
Brown: No.

05-00:14:46
Meeker: It's not?

05-00:14:47
Brown: No, no. Because it was a black seat. It was my seat. And I was neither gay or les—

05-00:14:51
Meeker: No, I'm talking about the Board—

05-00:14:54
Brown: Oh, you mean the Board of Supervisors.

05-00:14:55
Meeker: Yeah, the one that Leslie Katz got.

05-00:14:57
Brown: No, it was not presented to me in that fashion but I had already concluded that with Roberta Achtenberg already having exited, we had to make sure that our increasing politically powerful by pure numbers, gay and lesbians in San Francisco, would have a share of my administration and that's what I did. That was a conscious effort to maintain the gay and lesbian participation in politics.

05-00:15:37
Meeker: With some of these appointments did you ever feel kind of in a straitjacket that there were only certain kinds of people that were going to be qualified for it because of the different constituencies in San Francisco?

05-00:15:51
Brown: No, I did not. I really enjoyed probably the widest range of opportunities for choice for several years as mayor. I had won with such a handsome number and under the circumstances of defeating an incumbent and I already had such a reputation and I had literally national contacts like no other person who had ever held office in San Francisco had. There probably was not a significant position in government in any state or in any city that we didn't have access to as San Franciscans because of my previous political history. That was an invaluable tool and so I was not lobbied literally by movements to do certain things with reference to certain appointees. I was lobbied by individual persons like John Burton or Carole Migden for seats and for assignment. Yes, I was definitely lobbied from my friends, from my relatives. But there was no movement. The nonprofit housing cartel didn't come in to see me about an appointment or organized labor didn't come to see me about an appointment or any of those things. The Chamber of Commerce didn't come see me about the appointment and the newspapers knew they were not welcome.

05-00:17:27
Meeker: Can you tell me about Amos Brown? He replaces Willie Kennedy, I guess, who went to the redevelopment office.

05-00:17:33
Brown: Willie Kennedy was an elected member of the Board. She needed a job.

05-00:17:41
Meeker: Because the Board was not getting paid all that much.

05-00:17:43
Brown: No, the Board was getting nothing. I think they were making $5,000 a year or something like that. So somebody had to be appointed who would have the ability to sustain themselves without getting in any kind of trouble or cutting any kind of corners and what have you. And Amos Brown was a good friend. Been a good friend forever. He was not head of the NAACP at that time. None of the above. He had always been looked to as one of the black leaders in San Francisco. And so in a conversation with Willie Kennedy, when she told me she needed a job, said, "Okay, we'll give you a job and I'll appoint somebody to fill your vacancy." And in order to keep from being inundated with every name in the book I made the appointment instantly.

05-00:18:32
Meeker: You didn't let any daylight happen between—

05-00:18:33
Brown: No, I didn't even let anybody know it was available.

05-00:18:37
Meeker: Amos Brown, is he a reverend? Did he have a congregation?

05-00:18:43
Brown: Third Baptist Church, 1399 McAllister, was at one time the largest black church in the city. Third Baptist Church, maybe one of the first African American churches, was pastured by Frederick Douglass Haynes the First and subsequently pastored by additional Haynes' as things went on. Brown was relocated here from Mississippi. He was a civil rights advocate and demonstrator back in Mississippi and when he came here he had an enormous presence and a great reputation, just an impeccable reputation on the black side in particular. And so that appointment was just an ideal appointment to maintain the black representation on the Board of Supervisors. That I was sensitive to. I did not even think of any other ethnic group. Period.

05-00:19:41
Meeker: Do you go to church? Are you a religious man?

05-00:19:44
Brown: Jones Methodist Church, 1974 Post. I was for many years a trustee at that church. The pastor of that church was Hamilton T. Boswell. Hamilton T. Boswell ultimately got the appointment from me to be the chaplain for the

California State Assembly and for some ten to twelve years he was the chaplain of the State Assembly while I served as the speaker. Boswell was off the scale in every sense of the word. I was a janitor in that church. I worked as a janitor in that church. I lived in that church for a brief period of time while I was still in school and the Boswells were always great friends. I worked as a youth coordinator, MYF it was called, Methodist Youth Fellowship, and I was the director of the Methodist Youth Fellowship at Jones Methodist Church. When I became a lawyer, I became the lawyer that incorporated the Jones Memorial Homes, Inc., the nonprofit organization that built the senior housing on the church land and ultimately affordable housing across the street from the church from land acquired along Post and Fillmore.

05-00:21:13
Meeker: Does the Jones Church, Methodist Church still exist? Is it still in operation?

05-00:21:17
Brown: Yes. Staci Current is currently the pastor of that church. When Boswell left, retired—he didn't actually retire. He became the bishop for all the region. His job was taken over at Jones Methodist by a person named Booker T. Anderson. Booker T. Anderson was a college classmate of mine. He had gone on to become a pastor. He had gone on to become a political type. He became the mayor of Richmond, California. Ran Easter Hill Methodist Church over there and when Boswell left and got elevated by the Methodist Church generally they brought Booker T. back to San Francisco. Unfortunately Booker T. ended up having a shorter life than expected. He died on health reasons and the job was then taken over by a couple of other people before James McCray became the pastor of that church. In the capacity of pastor at that church I appointed James McCray to boards and commissions in San Francisco and so did Gavin Newsom. James McCray has since left the pastorship and it's been taken over by Staci Current. I'm not as active in the church as I was in my early years but it was a church I joined the first Sunday I arrived in San Francisco.

05-00:22:42
Meeker: That neighborhood, I imagine back then, and it would have been the fifties, right?

05-00:22:47
Brown: Fifties. Fifty-one to be exact.

05-00:22:50
Meeker: Would have been much more of like a black neighborhood.

05-00:22:53
Brown: It's all a black neighborhood.

05-00:22:55
Meeker: Whereas now I imagine—

05-00:22:56
Brown: It was called the Fillmore at the time. Not even the Western Addition. And I lived in the public housing projects up on Sutter Street, 2547 Sutter, 326, I think. Unit 326.

05-00:23:11
Meeker: How has the nature of the congregation changed since the 1950s for Jones Methodist?

05-00:23:18
Brown: That congregation has, as is the case with most churches, the congregation has gone down in numbers simply because there's been a reduction in the population of San Francisco, and in particular the African American population. When Boswell was running that church the membership was made up of people like himself, and Boswell was a housing commissioner, public housing commissioner. The chief deacon in the church was a guy who ran one of the federal agencies, a fellow named Floyd Pierce, that ran one of the federal agencies. He had a public defender, a fellow named Leroy Cannon. He had a public defender who became a judge, Joseph G. Kennedy, Willie Kennedy's husband. So in terms of the black leadership in San Francisco, they were in only two churches. They were either in Third Baptist, which is where Amos ultimately became the pastor, or they were in Jones Methodist. And the population of San Francisco, the doctors, the lawyers, the schoolteachers or the social workers, were all members of one or the other of those churches. And so that was a powerful voice in the city, well-respected in every way, and the population of that church was significantly black and reasonably well-educated. As things unfolded black people began to move out of San Francisco and each of the churches began to suffer some loss in membership. Jones' loss in membership was probably less than almost everybody else's because Jones Methodist Church membership was never that big. The Methodist Episcopal Church was traumatically different from a Baptist Church. Baptist Church had southern roots, Methodist, the Episcopal did not have real southern roots. And then, of course, Methodist Church was into social work kind of things because the sister church to Jones Methodist was Glide Methodist in the Tenderloin and it was virtually an all-white church, endowed by two white women who lived in the Silk Stocking Theatrical part of San Francisco, which was the Tenderloin, and their will left all of their money, and they were wealthy, to Glide. But Glide had to stay where it is and it had to administer to the people in the neighborhood. They never knew that it was going to be the druggies and the homeless and the gay and lesbians and the immigrants. They never had any clue that they would end up literally funding 39 or 40 programs that were dramatically different, nor did they have any clue that they would ever have anybody like Cecil Williams running that particular church. And then there were other Methodist churches in San Francisco. So there must have been maybe five. The only real black one was Jones.

05-00:26:39
Meeker: You referred to the declining numbers of African Americans living in San Francisco, so they're moving out of the city. Do you have a sense of why that demographic transition has occurred over the last fifty years?

05-00:27:00
Brown: I think it had to do more with opportunities. I think it had to do more with cultural relationships. San Francisco was not a black city. San Francisco beyond Hunter's Point Bayview, Ingleside, and the Fillmore, there was nothing black in this town. You could come downtown San Francisco and not see a black, whereas the population was so much greater in Oakland and in Richmond that black people felt more comfortable being a part of the black world socially and otherwise in the communities where there were more black people. And so with some regularity the younger black population, as they graduate from college or as they did whatever they were doing, didn't come back to San Francisco.

So let's say that Dan Collins, who was the premiere dentist in San Francisco, and as he transitioned out, he moved to Marin County and took his family with him to Marin County, although he still practiced dentistry in San Francisco. His kids went to school in Marin County and the same was for several other black people in the same way who were prominent. But their youngsters end up growing up and going to better quality schools in surrounding communities, even though the anchor tenant and the family still had the San Francisco roots. They had no San Francisco roots and so their participation in San Francisco was not ongoing. So when they married and had children, their children were not here either. So suddenly you begin to see what at one time was a family of eight and they move, let's say, to Marin County and that family of eight's gone. Now you've got people coming back but not to live. They come back to visit, et cetera. That's the way in which the process of the diminished number of African Americans begin to evidence themselves.

And San Francisco didn't do anything to make them welcome anyway. We were still in the process in some cases of absence of job opportunities. No promotions in business. Almost no employment in the private sector. Employment, if at all, was in the public sector. Federal, state, in the city. Virtually nothing in the private sector. And had become a change in how people, for an example, working on the waterfront, San Francisco was losing dramatically all of its relationship with the shipping world and that was moving to Oakland. And so there was no reason why a person who had a gig in the longshore would be living in San Francisco. Now they could live in Oakland, it was cheaper, and they made the same money because it was the same union, et cetera. And then suddenly you've had black folk moving to San Mateo County. The cost of living down there less, they could get jobs teaching school down there easier than the activities in San Francisco. And the union movement did not make it attractive. For an example, the plumber's

union was still virtually an all-white union. And you had the same activity evidencing itself all over. You had virtually no black policemen. We had to sue to integrate the police department. We had to sue to integrate the fire department. The only place where you had black people proliferating for job purposes were mini-drivers. But in all of the other areas of potential employment black people were not recruited, whether it was a sheriff's department, et cetera. And so you get the impression that the 90,000 black people that were here at one time begin to dwindle to eighty-five, to seventy, to sixty-nine, and I think it's somewhere in the neighborhood of forty-five now.

05-00:31:30
Meeker: When you were mayor did you implement any programs or try anything to help stem that tide of black exodus, in essence, from San Francisco?

05-00:31:42
Brown: In my capacity as mayor I decided that every single solitary board, commission, department, et cetera would have some of everything in it. So all of my appointments, whether to the Board of Supervisors, to the police commission, to the fire commission, you go back and take a look at it and you will see that there were the incredible diversity reflected in all of those operations under my jurisdiction. I deliberately set about to make sure that African Americans in particular had access to City Hall and to City Hall opportunities. I am really proud of that photograph that we did on the steps of City Hall of all the black folk that I had recruited to become, in one capacity or another, part of city government and there probably was, I don't know, 200 people or more in that one photograph. And a few years later, when Newsom took over, somebody urged him to do another photograph and it had shrank to fewer than half of what I previously had. So it was clear that my efforts had been fruitful but did not make the institutional change that I had hoped. I'd literally hoped that doing the kinds of things I did—and I also required you work for the city, you had a significant position in the city, you had to live in the city. Literally you had to live in the city. Ed Lee only moved to San Francisco because he wanted to have the job of the purchasing officer for the city. He lived in Oakland. And I absolutely said, "No, can't have it unless he moves to San Francisco." He's got the job. That's how he ended up moving to San Francisco. And at the time, housing prices were so fabulous that he bought in Bernal Heights where he currently lives and he bought really cheaply. The house he's in is now worth almost two million dollars and his wife constantly reminds me of how grateful they are that I pressed and that's the source of their wealth. That's the source of their retirement income if they ever get to that particular point. It was all because I insisted that they live here in San Francisco.

I also set out to put black people in positions they'd never been in, like the director of city planning was a black man, Gerald Green. The director of park and rec, Joel Robinson. These are slots people never had before, let alone the

fire chief, Demmons. Ultimately the police chief, Earl Sanders. I really did literally cherry-pick and did my best to change the perception of black people's participation in San Francisco in the decision-making and in the economy of the city. And I did it successfully on the public sector side. None of that translated into anything on the private sector side.

05-00:35:14
Meeker: It was just the mayor didn't have the kind of power to influence the private sector? To open up their doors to the African American community or—

05-00:35:24
Brown: Unless you have the power to impact the flow of income, on the question of race there are not a lot of people that become aggressive about trying to reflect equality, demonstrated equality, in their management and in their choices, period.

05-00:35:53
Meeker: I want to go back and actually ask you about a couple more of these appointees. Gavin Newsom, perhaps the person, well, along with Mark Leno, the person who's had the longest career in politics since his appointment. How did he come across your desk?

05-00:36:14
Brown: Gavin Newsom campaigned with me. Was dedicated. He and his roommate, was Billy Getty, and they were the young white entrepreneurs who really wanted me to be the mayor. And they were the owners of bars, restaurants, liquor stores, and other kinds of things. And I met Gavin because I knew his father. His father had been a candidate for state office whom I had supported back in, I don't know, the seventies for state senator or something. Billy Newsom. His relatives, Newsom's relatives, included Nancy Pelosi, included Ron Pelosi, Nancy's brother-in-law, who had been a supervisor. It included a whole host of people. And so when Kevin Shelley leaves there's not a straight white male on the board. Now we got to look for a straight white male. Newsom was the only thing available and Newsom initially didn't want the job because it meant he was going to have to give up this enormous flow of income that he had. He had not yet married anybody or anything of that nature and he was expanding the empire. And it took probably, I don't know, I appointed him and he must have taken four or five weeks before he was ever sworn in. In part because he was waiting for his father to come do the swearing in. Justice Newsom. His father by then had been elevated to the appellate court by Jerry Brown and he wanted his dad to swear him in and he got the job just that way. That's how that came about. Period. I was looking for a white straight male to keep my balance of people who were serving on the Board of Supervisors. And I got a tremendous amount of support from John Burton to achieve that goal because John Burton was a very close friend of Justice Newsom. As a matter of fact, they played racquet ball at the Bay Club I think once or twice a week together. So I got a lot of input from multiple sources, whether it was Nancy, whether it was John Burton or others.

And I already knew of young Newsom because during the course of my campaigning for mayor he created something called the Bar Crawls and he would take me at nighttime, whether it was on Geary, among the bars on Geary, he'd go in and he would buy everybody in there a round and introduce them to his candidate for mayor, Willie Brown. And he did the same thing down in Cow Hollow, on Chestnut Street. And so he was frankly invaluable. I had appointed him already to the chair of what essentially was the traffic commission and I wanted to do something about cleaning up the taxicab industry. I called a taxi summit. Only person that spent the same number of hours at that summit as I did was Gavin Newsom. So I knew that he was a real student of public activities because I not only observed him in the bar crawls, and his relationship with people there, but in the business of being able to listen to a bunch of crying, whining, offensive cab drivers accusing the city of everything under the sun and cab owners doing the same thing. He sat through all of that as chair of the Parking and Traffic Commission, was the actual name. So I had a perspective on him. And with the massive political support that his candidacy generated, triggered primarily by Burton making a recommendation when I asked the question where can we find—don't you think we ought to have a straight white male? He was it.

05-00:41:01
Meeker: It's interesting that it has come to that, right? Or at that point in time it did. It shows how—

05-00:41:05
Brown: Yeah. Before that it had been all straight white males.

05-00:41:09
Meeker: Right, right. And, of course, Newsom takes to campaigning much more naturally and is quite successful at it.

05-00:41:17
Brown: He is the personification of a campaigner. First of all, he had his own constituency. That Pacific Heights, Cow Hollow, Stanford type. He was frankly, I think, probably the first candidate since Dianne to naturally have that constituency. Dianne had that constituency but I don't think anybody else since Dianne instantly generated contributions from Marian Davies Lewis, a woman whose mother endowed the symphony hall. I don't think he had the natural Bechtel participation, the Dede Wilsey participation or the Getty participation. He came with all of that. So he came with a constituency right out of the box. And he has been a fair-haired outwardly aggressive entrepreneur. So that whole collection of young rich white guys, the IPO types, were right on him and by virtue of having to acquire permits and authorizations to build a winery, build a resort in the Napa Valley, he had enough aggressiveness about him to make him unique. And his candidacy was unique in that there was nobody else in that vein. Period. There was no other white candidate that had the white bread qualities and he had that. Period.

05-00:42:59
Meeker: What about Mark Leno?

05-00:43:01
Brown: Mark Leno was an appointee, another heavily influenced appointee by Carole Migden. I had met Mark Leno because I needed to settle a dispute in the gay community for the center. We built a center on Market Street and the historical preservationist people did not want to lose that corner building. They wanted that to be the center. We knew that that could not be the center because the nature of what the center needed to have done could not be done in that old Victorian. But that was a split like you wouldn't believe. And Mark turned out to be—

05-00:43:52
Meeker: That seems sort of ridiculous in hindsight, doesn't it?

05-00:43:53
Brown: Totally stupid. Mark turned out to be one of the people that really helped—and he was recruited by Migden—to help us bridge that gap and also to raise the money that would allow for the restoration of that old building connected to the new building, which we were raising money to build. So I'd gotten a little bit of exposure to Mark, who was not at all interested in politics, I don't think, and into elective office. But Migden convinced me that he would be a very good choice. As I said, I didn't know him from Adam. Period. And I made that appointment almost exclusively on Migden's recommendation because Mark didn't know any of the rest of the people either. He was not like exposed to anything or anybody. He had had an ongoing relationship with our symphony head, Michael Tilson Thomas years ago. They had been lovers or something.

05-00:44:55
Meeker: Oh, I didn't know that.

05-00:44:56
Brown: Oh, yeah. They had been lovers or something. And Michael was just starting. He didn't have the same presence he has now with the Pacific Heights crowd and with the donor base, et cetera. But he and Mark had a relationship so there was a little bit of a connection there. And as Mark proceeded to help out on solving that problem and the event that we gave on Treasure Island to raise money for that purpose, Mark began to meet a few more people. And so when Migden got on me to give that opening to—I don't even remember who left to create that opening.

05-00:45:40
Meeker: Yeah, I can't remember.

05-00:45:41
Brown: Oh, I know who left to create that opening. Leslie Katz [Leno actually took the seat vacated by Supervisor Susan Leal].

05-00:45:44
Meeker: Oh, okay. Right.

05-00:45:47
Brown: Leslie Katz left to create that opening. She didn't want to run for reelection. And so we appointed Mark.

05-00:45:46
Meeker: It's interesting. He didn't have this kind of DCCC [Democratic County Central Committee] Bush league credentials.

05-00:46:03
Brown: He had no political credentials at all. He had no gay movement credentials except to what they called the blue blood gays. Well, he's like Michael Tilson Thomas. He was not like a guy that you might expect wear a skirt. No, he didn't do any of that. He looked like a straight businessman. He ran a sign shop somewhere south of Market and he sold signs to all the gay community. He wasn't even as connected, so to speak, in terms of the gay world, except just by being acquainted and he was particularly acquainted to a fellow named Barnes, Robert Barnes, who was a stone political person. Robert Barnes was absolutely the personification of a campaigner. More aggressive than you could ever believe. He didn't tolerate anybody not being good on all the issues effecting gays. He was very close to Mark and he helped canonize Mark as a good quality potential candidate and simultaneously literally promised to make sure nobody else ran against Mark. So it wasn't Mark so much as it was Robert Barnes. Barnes is a partner in Barnes, Mosher, Whitehurst & Lauter that big political firm.

05-00:47:34
Meeker: From my understanding, Leno becomes somewhat of an independent, unpredictable vote on the board when you were mayor.

05-00:47:45
Brown: Oh, the first thing he did was try to prove just that, that he was not part of the Willie Brown movement and a part of the Willie Brown team, which was not a proper thing to do. If you accept the appointment from the administration then the administration's policies have to be favorably considered. And unless there's something tragically wrong with them, you really should not fail to give them that vote because it's never more than one or two votes in any given term. Period. And then once you are elected on your own, then you can treat that administration's policies the way you would as an independent. But if I appoint you, your consideration has got to be that I'm trying to implement the policy that the people elected me to implement. I am not trying to create barriers for the policies that I'm trying to advocate. One of the first things he did was not follow. He just voted to override my veto.

05-00:48:57
Meeker: What was the issue? Do you recall?

05-00:48:59
Brown: I don't even remember. It was something insignificant. But he voted to override my veto. At that stage of the game it was my critics who had advocated that policy and I said that's a stupid policy for the city. I'm killing it. And it takes eight to override my veto. So all you got to do is not be one of eight. Period. You have to have almost blind respect on the veto side versus being for my policy. You might be against my policy but you definitely should not have me suffer the embarrassment of having my veto overridden. And he did that. Until this day he still remembers it because I remind him.

05-00:49:49
Meeker: Did you have words with him afterwards?

05-00:49:50
Brown: Oh, yeah. Oh, of course I had words with him. Still have words with him about that. And he acknowledges that that was an improper thing to have done.

05-00:50:02
Meeker: And finally Alicia Becerril.

05-00:50:07
Brown: Becerril. Bad appointment.

05-00:50:10
Meeker: Bad appointment. I don't remember her name.

05-00:50:13
Brown: Yeah. Nobody remembers her name. I didn't know Alicia Becerril. I think I had appointed her at something at the request of John Burton. I think she formerly dated John Burton. John Burton probably had more influence on whom I appointed than any other elected official. I appointed his daughter public defender and she lost to Jeff Adachi. Jeff was the left-winger's candidate and she was the Burton machine candidate. Because by then all of the activities had begun to center around the "Burton Brown machine." Burton Brown Pelosi machine versus the so-called left. The progressives.

05-00:51:03
Meeker: The progressives, yeah.

05-00:51:05
Brown: And they went after her and they beat her.

05-00:51:08
Meeker: Do you think, I guess, that that coalition started to like really gel and form about this point in time? The sort of progressives? It's almost like they're a separate party because San Francisco, there's no Republican presence per se. There's like always a natural tendency toward a two-party system in the United States and so what happens in San Francisco is you have more of the

main stream establishment Democrats but then you have the alternative party, which is the progressives.

05-00:51:52

Brown: We were all the progressives through the seventies, through Moscone. We begin to have something evidencing itself a little bit different. We were still the progressives through Dianne, the nine years of her tenure, and we morphed into a different kind of a progressive when Agnos beat Molinari because there had begun to evidence itself as people a little less tolerant of each other, even though philosophically they were in essentially the same place politically. And when Jack Davis and his crew put together the operation that beat the incumbent, Agnos for mayor, you would begin to see the real evidence of the potential for something more left than less left. And then I beat Jordan, an incumbent, and at that stage of the game it was clear that the voting pattern on the southeastern part of San Francisco was evidencing itself as not being able to do a majority without something on the west side. Agnos had lost because he was not able to do anything on the west side. I ended up winning because I was able to penetrate on the west side in spite of the fact that I was running against a person from the west side, in that case Frank Jordan. But I had the east side totally and completely locked up. And then the east side began to make, with Calvin Welch and their crowd—their demands became beyond reality, so to speak. And that's when they triggered their own candidate in this case, a write-in called Tom Ammiano. And the results of that election was that the west enhanced its participation and because I clearly had credentials equal to, if not greater than, Tom Ammiano, I must have won every single solitary supervisory district. By then they were districts. Except maybe one. But I won every other super, which meant I won the east and the west and I put those two together.

A few years later, a fellow named Matt Gonzalez came along and on election day he actually beat Newsom but by virtue of the technique of campaigning and the job that had been done on early voting caused Newsom to be victorious in his election for the mayorship of San Francisco and his reelection obviously was ensured by virtue of all of that. And so the left, however, had grown completely intolerant of anything except what they wanted to talk about. And they didn't want to talk about city issues as a priority. They wanted to talk about things beyond the confines of the city and far beyond anything that affected the lives of the city. In part that's why our housing situation is as bad as it is, because that energy, which should have followed the 1996 ballot measure that we passed for affordable housing, by the time we used that money up in maybe 2002, we should have already been into the next version of that. But by then we had become so different left to left to left and so distracted and so personality driven or individual personality driven and so reflective of barring anyone else from coming into our neighborhoods by height limits and by other kinds of things that were counter to trying to tolerate a growth in population and newcomers. The left had almost become like what the Tea Party people were without the Tea Party advocacy because

the so-called moderate, which I say was really the real original left, was about being aggressive at extending opportunities. The real left was about holding everything as it is and not allowing anybody to come in and avoiding gentrification or identifying progress as gentrification. And all of that represented what has become, for San Francisco, a definition of who's really left.

05-00:57:15
Meeker: It's so interesting because I think that's exactly where we are today. I think in the early 1990s there were people of different political persuasions on the board of supervisors but now San Francisco actually mirrors the rest of the country in the polarization. You have the David Campos group and then you have the Scott Wiener group and I guess David Chiu would maybe be sort of part of that, as well.

05-00:57:46
Brown: No, he went back and forth.

05-00:57:48
Meeker: He went back and forth. Yeah, he continues to go back and forth. [laughter] He's a good politician in that way. Let's talk about, in the time that we've got left today, let's talk about the 1999 election. A very interesting election and I think probably surprising for you about how it came out. The field of candidates that first started out, it didn't look like you were getting a real serious opponent. Frank Jordan became an opponent again, which I don't know that anyone ever really took seriously. And Clint Reilly, the political consultant also—

05-00:58:34
Brown: To Frank Jordan.

05-00:58:36
Meeker: Yeah, yeah. That was so weird. And nobody wants to vote for a political consultant. I don't know that he ever really had a chance. And then there was you.

05-00:58:45
Brown: Well, by then, keep in mind, you had the advent of the first prospective burst of the bubble. We had had a traumatic change in the economy of the city. We had really become a city on the move, so to speak. And being on the move meant changes, for sure. And being on the move meant modifications of existing plans that had been in place. Being on the move meant the business of not putting the freeway back and instead developing new building structures. Being on the move meant doing what we were doing south of Market and lo and behold that generated a considerable amount of hostility to my administration. We were identified as selling out to big business. We were identified as being indifferent to the needs of the homeless people because I had said, "Homeless problem is impossible to solve." And the homeless advocates went crazy. They were certain that I was anti-homeless by virtue of

saying that. And nothing has proven to be more accurate, by the way, than that comment for all over the nation because you don't have any way to force people to take medication. You don't have any way to force people off the streets. You don't have any way to force people to take counseling and treatment. And you don't really acknowledge how multiply challenged many of the people who are out there on the streets are. I canceled the homeless summit. I was going to do a homeless summit and I concluded that it would be a waste of time and I canceled the homeless summit. I did so many things of that nature and I generated such hostility that you would not believe.

So by '99 it was ripe for somebody to step up, just as it is today for somebody to step up and run against the incumbent, successful mayor, and none of the names that were offered at the outset, Clint Reilly and Frank Jordan, and I think one or two other names. But those were the two most prominent in the debates around the city, which I had actually initiated. I had been for debating. I always loved to debate because I always thought that it was a stronger suit for me than for almost anyone else. And in that regard those debates clearly demonstrated that the superior candidacy was that of the incumbent mayor and that nobody else disagreed, except the far left. They were without a champion. They were without anybody to embrace all of their silliness, as I called it, or wildness, as they would like to call it, or progressiveness, as they would really prefer to call it. And in that regard they start looking around.

A person who had endorsed me ended up being their choice. Tom Ammiano had endorsed me for reelection because I had been incredibly, for ten years, helpful to him. When he ran for the school board successfully I had been a great supporter of his and other things that he had tried to do politically, including Board of Supervisors. I had been supportive of his and he had been supportive of mine. But the gay community at that point, some of the members of the gay community, even though I was literally the number one advocate since 1969 for gay issues and gay interests, they began to pull back and try to figure out how to do some only for gays and only with gays. They had become pretty possessive of trying to elevate themselves by being whatever, rather than being supportive of a non-gay who had been their advocate. And to that end they jumped out there.

And I must tell you that Migden, who I had been obviously incredibly helpful to, having resigned early, orchestrate—I gave up one year of retirement for Migden. In the world of retirement, if you stay for one day in any given year, the whole year counts, as evidenced by one paycheck. So if I had waited until the 8th of January to resign I would be able to have counted the year of 1996, thirty-two years for retirement rather than thirty-one years. So I gave up a year of retirement to facilitate because I didn't want anybody running against her in June of that year.

I got paid back by her disappearing the minute the word went out that Tom Ammiano was going to do a write-in. Leno, however, redeemed himself by

sticking with me and by, in fact, showing up to introduce me wherever I asked him to do so, so that we could offset the so-called gay versus non-gay. And I ended up beating Tom Ammiano in the gay community, by the way, in that election. But Mark Leno had kept his word and really worked, just as Roberta Achtenberg kept her word. A number of gays kept their word. So Tom—all he got was the real radical gays, like the ACT-UP type gays, not the stable gays that had been part of the movement, including Robert Barnes. He didn't get Robert Barnes. I got Robert Barnes. He was a Willie Brown person. Barnes, Mosher, Whitehurst operation, very supportive of my candidacy. But he beat all of the other people who were on the ballot running against me. And the world thought, "A write-in candidate showing up?" He didn't beat me in the primary but he beat all of them and everybody figured, the pundits figured that he was a phenom. And, of course, that proved to be not even close to accurate. By the sixth or seventh debate, we set a debate schedule. Every supervisorial district would host a debate. He bailed out. Didn't show up after about the fifth or sixth debate.

05-01:06:07
Meeker: Really?

05-01:06:08
Brown: He was doing so badly.

05-01:06:10
Meeker: In the debates?

05-01:06:11
Brown: He couldn't match the experienced skillset that I had acquired debating public policy matters. And there were too many opportunities for me to reference a reality check at each stop. Period. And he flaked out. And we knew it was over.

05-01:06:37
Meeker: Well, you beat him by twenty points.

05-01:06:41
Brown: That's right.

05-01:06:41
Meeker: But what was your strategy for campaigning against him? What was your strategy for campaigning against, for instance, somebody who represented this progressive block in San Francisco and also the gay block, too.

05-01:06:56
Brown: Let me tell you, the same way that I've done all of my political life. I dwell on the opportunity to compare my candidacy to anyone who is against me and preferably in their neighborhood. So I would deliberately see his agenda, where he was going to campaign, and I'd go there and campaign right with him. And invariably take him apart on issue-by-issue and establish the fact that you're in a room, you are more closely aligned to my view of what things

ought to be rather than the view of this guy that's carrying the title that you are fascinated with but only until the confrontation between us occurred. That's why he stopped going to the debates. He could not handle the responsiveness that came from me on every issue. Period. And I was really proud of that. We really prepared. We really did the work that we needed to do. So we simply out-campaigned him in his own neighborhood, in his only constituency.

05-01:08:11

Meeker: Did you happen to see, I think it was maybe today or yesterday in the *New York Times*, I think finally a real sensible article about Hillary Clinton versus Bernie Sanders. And the point of the article was that, yes, Bernie Sanders had this surge but he's really hit a wall and Hillary Clinton is still in a really good position to win the nomination. And it's something similar because Ammiano, I think, could reach a certain point but once the larger percentage of people in San Francisco, majority of whom are Democrat, learned what Ammiano was really about, he just couldn't get past that.

05-01:08:59

Brown: That's correct. He could not get past it. As a matter of fact, in some cases erosion would occur on what he had achieved. He hit the wall, just like Sanders had. But if Hillary shows up on any given day with his 20,000 people, she'd walk away with almost half of his people being as interested in and enthusiastic about her candidacy as it was about his. Exclusivity did not exist among the Ammiano people for Ammiano. They were interested more in whom they might believe could solve whatever the problem was or become the best spokesperson on the issue. And if Brown and Ammiano were on the same playing page on an issue, they instantly believed Brown had a better potential of implementing the solution that Ammiano—

05-01:10:02

Meeker: Can you give me an example of maybe a few of those issues whereby there were reasonably clear differences between the two of you?

05-01:10:16

Brown: No, I don't remember that far back. I only remembered homelessness for an example. In the Richmond district, at that debate, Ammiano opens by talking about how dramatically different we were or the two of us were on the homeless issue because I had announced somewhere that all the carts, the grocery carts that these homeless people were putting their stuff in, we were going to take them away. And he got up and talked about how inhumane that is and et cetera, et cetera, and how he wouldn't do that and he thinks it shouldn't be done and how at least they ought to be given a warning. And I got up and I said, "Hey, Tom, I don't know what you're thinking about but those things are on wheels. You put a warning on it, and it'll disappear." And I said, "By the way, Tom, before I came to tonight's event, I went to every place in the city where you might be able to buy a cart and I couldn't find a place where there was any cart for sale, which means everybody has a cart

stole them and all I'm doing is recovering stolen property. Now, you may not want to recover stolen—s" [laughter] God, he was so embarrassed.

05-01:12:00
Meeker: Interesting.

05-01:12:01
Brown: I said, "That's stolen property. I'm not just confiscating homeless property, property in the hands of homeless. I'm confiscating assets that are owned by Safeway, assets that are owned that have been stolen and you want to give them warning. That's crazy, Tom." I remember that because I had talked about how they are rolling, you put a note on them and they are gone. The next time you come back [laughter] and he was totally and completely embarrassed that I had made a joke out of it but then translated it into the reality of stolen property and the recovery of stolen property. Period. And I said, "And by the way, to the extent that the cops recover it, I'm advised by Safeway that every cart returned to them the city will be compensated by X-number of dollars." And suddenly the cost of doing this will no longer be part of it. And he was perplexed, to say the least. He wasn't ready for that kind of a response. I'm trying to remember if there were other examples of where you could want to—can't think of any other at the moment.

05-01:13:26
Meeker: Do you have any other thoughts about the 1999 election?

05-00:13:30
Brown: Yeah. I had so much fun. I had so much fun in that election. First of all, I had a hell of a good time debating Clint Reilly and Frank Jordan. As a matter of fact, our sides almost got into a fistfight at Mission High School. The very first debate was at Mission High School. And my political consultants were really amped up. And they really wanted to get involved. And Reilly and Jordan, of course, were straight-laced and doing whatever they were doing and I, of course, was constantly sticking pins in whatever they are doing before I would elaborate on where I stand on the issue. And the reaction from the audience, it was like Black Lives Matter audience versus Bernie Sanders. And, man, that was so funny. And the other side got angry as a result of that and they wanted literally to get into a scuffle with our guys at that event. And then fast forward. We were at Saint Stephens out in the West Portal area and Barbara Taylor from KCBS is the moderator and it's Ammiano and Brown in that district for the debate. This is one of those times where all the television cameras decided to cover that particular debate and they were all there. It's Barbara Taylor, Ammiano, and Brown. And she gives the introduction, et cetera, and then she comes to me with the first question and I do my number. But during the course of it, it was the first time I have seen Barbara Taylor really well-dressed. She had on a beautiful rose dress. She had gone to a beauty salon. She normally doesn't really get spiffed up. But she had had her hair well-done because she knew the television was there, what have you. And I closed by saying, without singularly directing, I said something to the effect,

"And I'm going to say that your hair is just really spectacular." Tom says, "Oh, thank you." I said, "I didn't mean you, Tom." [laughter] The audience went crazy. And he was nonplussed for the rest of the evening.

05-01:16:53
Meeker: And Tom Ammiano doesn't become nonplussed easily. He's a comedian.

05-01:16:57
Brown: No. I'm the only person that can drive him crazy. No, he's pretty sharp. Yeah, he's pretty sharp, pretty clever. In any one of those debates I always had at least one little way in which to vex him and my political consultant was almost like preparing Johnny Carson for his monologue. We would go through five, six, seven items that maybe, if the opportunity presented itself, you could absolutely throw him off. And that's what we did. We literally threw him off every time and we would do it early enough so that the rest of the debate he would be gun-shy thinking that he's got to be doing it again. And we really neutralized his showmanship.

05-01:17:48
Meeker: I can see why you got so much enjoyment out of those debates.

05-01:17:51
Brown: Oh, I had so much fun. That was a great campaign. Better than Jordan. Jordan was a nothing. Jordan was very boring and not terribly productive, and not quick at all. Tom was quick and sometimes funny. He can be funny. Well, knowing all of that we knew that the stage in debates had always been mine, no matter who else was on the other side, because I always tried my best to entertain as well as inform. So we always wanted to neutralize Tom. We also knew that Tom didn't have a whole lot of information about anything. Nothing. He didn't have a long suit on subject matter. We had a long suit on subject matter, as well as a contemporary response operation and that's what we did.

05-01:18:44
Meeker: It's almost sounding like you kind of relished him as an opponent.

05-01:18:53
Brown: Well, in the first campaign my staff kept literally pounding me because they said, "You sound like you're bullying Frank Jordan, that he really is not up to your magical comments, your reference to what you did with Cuomo, your reference to hanging out at the White House with Hillary and Bill. He doesn't have any of that. He has none of your reference to Pete Wilson in Sacramento or Gray Davis in Sacramento or the Jerry Brown years. He has none of that. And when you talk about him being shallow on that stuff, it really gets in to your demonstrating ego greater than even you have, so to speak. So you've got to tone down." And it was harder than hell not to be natural. I mean really hard. I had to almost defer sometimes and be insincerely complimentary of something that he had allegedly done. With Ammiano it was "Katy, bar the door!" [laughter] I could treat him like I would treat Republicans and like I

treated Republicans on the floor of the legislature. I used to delight in debating the entire Republican caucus on issues because it was always great theater. Well, with that in mind you could come off as a bully if you were doing it with somebody who was handicapped in that kind of an arena and Jordan was kind of in that vein. He was an ex-police chief. There's no way you could say that he's been any of the things that you've been. He was never into politics. He got elected almost by accident and his service as mayor has not been distinguishable. So I did sound like a bully. But with Ammiano, un-unh, are you kidding me? I was home.

05-01:21:27

Meeker: All right. Shall we stop here for today?

05-01:21:30

Brown: All right.

Interview 6: February 27, 2016

06-00:00:00
Meeker: Today is the 27th of February 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Mayor Willie Brown for the Oral History Center of the Bancroft Library at UC Berkeley. This is interview session number six and here we are at the California Historical Society. So we left off, I think it was in August when we had our last session, and we talked about your reelection bid. I believe that was in 1999. Am I getting that correct?

06-00:00:38
Brown: That is correct.

06-00:00:39
Meeker: Okay. And I think that's where we left off, was your defeat of Tom Ammiano—

06-00:00:47
Brown: Correct.

06-00:00:47
Meeker: —in the runoff campaign. Then bring me up to your inauguration, January of 2000. Did you have a particular agenda for your second term as mayor of San Francisco?

06-00:01:00
Brown: Well, the agenda was a continuation of the projects that were not yet done from the previous four years or some parts thereof. It included expansion of the affordable housing component of what we were doing. It included the enhancement of Mission Bay as a biotech entity and research park. It included the business of trying to get the central subway project going aggressively. It included attention to the Transbay Terminal project, which was just really envisioned. All of those things were part of what was projected to be the next four years.

06-00:01:51
Meeker: We haven't really talked a whole lot about transportation. I think the first couple of sessions we might have talked a bit about Muni. But these two points are extremely transformative in the landscape of San Francisco, meaning the central subway and the Transbay Terminal. Let's start with the central subway. Can you tell me the background about how this major public works project comes to be? Subways are extraordinarily expensive to build. You don't see a lot of cities undertaking them these days. Can you tell me about the rationale for wanting to construct a subway through the central part of San Francisco?

06-00:02:33
Brown: Well, I inherited responsibility to see that the central subway would get done. Mayors who preceded me had been part of the people who envisioned the central subway. It was to be a means by which you got people from the

southern part of San Francisco into the northern part of San Francisco, in particular in the corridor that was basically Chinatown. The business of running the 30-Stockton, which was the primary method and the primary route by which people got from that part of town to the other part of town, and the growth that was occurring out in the Excelsior, in places of that nature, on the Outer Mission, all lent themselves very clearly to the need for a better method of transportation north and south in San Francisco. Over the years there had been far more emphasis on east and west for transportation purposes rather than north and south and the central subway had been supposedly the panacea to respond to that requirement.

It takes a lot of money and a lot of commitment to put together a subway but we, in fact, actually did that through the process of the administration in the second time around and the efforts that were made to achieve that goal. Central subway process, the construction, did not start until in the first year or so of my exit, maybe even the second year of my exit from the mayor's office but the foundation had been completed by then. We had great luck in that Nancy Pelosi was growing with great power in the Congress, obviously eventually becoming the speaker within the decade, the first decade of the twenty-first century. Dianne Feinstein and Barbara Boxer were both clearly on the ascendency power wise. A combination of those three things, plus my long-term friendship with people like then Governor Schwarzenegger lent itself appropriately to the ultimate implementation of that long twenty-plus year subway, central subway concept and central subway way.

The politics of Chinatown had helped dictate what we would do with the central subway because when Mayor Agnos declined to rebuild the Embarcadero Freeway, Chinatown was essentially cut off from the outside world with the configuration of traffic and the configuration of streets in the city. And so suddenly the central subway became the lifeline for the maintenance and the rehabilitation and the economic viability of Chinatown. All of those factors combined to produce, prior to my exit, the thrust that became ultimately, in the next maybe three or four years post my out, and the first three or four years of the new administration, the implementation of the central subway plan.

06-00:06:04

Meeker: What you referred to I think is quite interesting in the sense of a big project like this cannot be paid for by the city or by the taxpayers of the city. It needs to be paid for by the state and the federal government ultimately because it is such a major project. And that's, I think, something interesting, worth talking about in its own right. But maybe what I'd first like you to talk about is simply the power of San Francisco. Here you have a city that's, frankly, not very big, a city that is seen to be perhaps out of the mainstream of US political culture further to the left, yet you have two senators who are either resident here or closely associated with it, so the two California senators, and Nancy Pelosi, who would go on to become the speaker of the house, not to mention a

mayor of the city who has perhaps an outsized role than a typical mayor of a city of 700,000 people would. Why do you suppose that so much power emanated from San Francisco?

06-00:07:18

Brown: In part, I suspect, because San Francisco had always been perceived as a powerful Democratic ally for everybody's purpose. They've always been perceived as a place that was not just San Francisco; it was really a place that was the centerpiece of a very powerful and economically stable region. The whole business of San Francisco, being as representative of the peninsula, particularly Stanford University, and the strength of that educational institution, the University of California, and the strength of that educational institution from Berkeley, plus the UCSF Med facility, which was obviously world-class in every way. And if you coupled that with the old-time San Francisco role in the world of politics, particularly on the democratic side of the aisle, you really would have, and could have, easily a very powerful instrument for political purposes and that's what San Francisco has been, that's what San Francisco is, and let's hope that's what San Francisco will ultimately become. After all, for the statewide elective purposes even today, you've got an attorney general from San Francisco for the state of California. You've got a lieutenant governor from San Francisco for the state of California. You've got Jerry Brown, who lived in San Francisco, was raised in part in San Francisco, and now moved over to Oakland. But he's the governor of the state. Plus you still have the same two US senators and it's just an example of how San Francisco has always been perceived. It's always been perceived also as a feeder city for campaign contribution purposes. When you come to this part of the world you don't always come for vote purposes, you come for resource purposes. And then, finally, this is probably the most labor powerful friendly city, if not one, in America. It really has always been reflective of the most progressive of all the labor movements, whether card check neutrality, whether what happened under Harry Bridges many years ago for the International Longshoremen and Warehouses Union. You name it and it's always been reposed right here in San Francisco or in this region with San Francisco being the kick-off place.

06-00:10:01

Meeker: There's been a lot of talk in recent decades really of the anticipated ascendency of Los Angeles. Certainly we've had governors from Southern California. In political circles is there much of a rivalry or is there really sort of a sense that whatever is best for the party is good for the state?

06-00:10:27

Brown: Well, fortunately for us, we've never allowed ourselves as San Franciscans, and particularly in the world of politics, to get into the numbers game. Our numbers are so much smaller than any other area of the state. And the Central Valley could end up being more powerful if you did only the numbers. Clearly Southern California could become more powerful if you did only the numbers. Fortunately for us, none of those places have ever gotten together.

San Francisco manages to get itself together because it basically is a one-party town. The difference here is between how liberal you really are and are you really as progressive as some people would like to have you be. And the same goes when it comes to the environmental movement. It's the same way. San Francisco is so far ahead on the more visionary side on those issues than almost any other place. So we don't have to get into the business of pure unadulterated numbers in order to prevail. There's always been a presumption of brainpower being greater coming out of the San Francisco region than almost any other section of the state and we benefit as San Franciscans handsomely from that. And we still are, frankly, a desired location to go visit. If people want to go to Southern California they start thinking about, "Well, I'm going to visit Disneyland." Not considered Los Angeles. "I'm going to visit Hollywood." Not considered Los Angeles. "I'm going to visit something of that nature." You never say, "I'm going to visit LA." But you only say, "I'm going to visit San Francisco." And there are no bridges like the Golden Gate associated with San Francisco or like the Bay Bridge associated with San Francisco. There's nothing like that in Southern California.

And Southern California is in competition internally. The people in Orange County have a constant issue with the people in Los Angeles County in one fashion or another. The people in San Diego have a competition with people in other parts of Southern California. We have always been singularly, be one, so to speak. We're not in competition with Oakland. We're not in competition with Berkeley. We're not in competition with San Jose. We're not in competition with Marin County. We're not in competition with the wine country. We are reflective of each of those particular regions and we are perceived by the whole world as being exactly that. That adds to our strength and eliminates the need for us to do pure numbers.

06-00:13:20

Meeker: You had mentioned Nancy Pelosi and her important role in Congress. I know that you've known her for many decades. But during the period of time that you were mayor and she was in Congress, did you have like regular meetings? What was your method of engaging with one another to sort of figure out—I'm sure she was curious about what was happening in San Francisco and you were certainly interested in figuring out how Congress could help projects here. What was the mechanism of exchange of ideas and communication?

06-00:13:56

Brown: Well, first and foremost, in my capacity as mayor of San Francisco, all of the skills and experience I had at working with seventy-nine other members of the legislature in the assembly, plus forty members of the state senate, has always led me to position whatever I was attempting to do in a way in which it's of equal interest to people I'm trying to gain support from. So as mayor, with regularity, my appointing powers, I shared them with other elected officials, and in particular with Nancy Pelosi and Dianne Feinstein. I would not hesitate on any opportunity for any kind of involvement by people who were not

elected officials. I'd seek advice and recommendations from elected family, the elected family. An example: When first elected in 1995, sworn in in 1996, my first appointment was to take Nancy Pelosi's local chief of staff, Michael Yaki, give him the job of replacing—I think it was the person who won the district attorney's job, Hallinan, who was a supervisor. I gave that slot to that young man. I did that with reference to practically all of the other elected types. That first established a window of opportunity. Same goes with reference to people who served on board and commissions. I would always interchange with other elected leaders, and in particular those who had a significant spot that could be of value to the city. And Nancy was high on that agenda.

I also had the advantage. There was a social relationship between the mayorship of Willie Brown, Nancy Pelosi, Dianne Feinstein. There'd been a personal friendship and a social relationship for years. Sometimes celebrated all of the New Year's eves together when neither one of us had any power on anything. Those are the kind of things. And it also would lead to the opportunity, whenever it was convenient for us, without any formality, to join each other for dinner or for lunch or on any other occasion. And in those situations, dialogue about the needs of the city or the needs of us individually, were in fact discussed. So there was no formal apparatus. Whether it was a formal meeting, et cetera, it was always reflective of personal relationships and the sharing of what is envisioned and what is in fact needed and how it could be accomplished.

Plus, there was an ongoing regular telephonic communication between me personally and all of the other elected officials, and between staffs in the other elected officials' office and staff in my operation. And so the system was almost as if, on a regular daily basis, weekly basis, or monthly basis, every other elected official of real importance to the city was constantly aware, on an unfiltered basis, of everything that was being done to enhance and to push a program for the city. There was also the opportunity for discussions about whether or not it was practical to proceed in whatever direction we thought the city should be going. And that all comes from personal relationships.

06-00:17:59

Meeker: Let's talk a little bit about the Transbay Terminal. It's still in the process of being built. It's a major and extraordinarily impressive project, not only with the terminal but with the tower that will be next to it. And, of course, what it anticipates to bring in to town is the first high-speed rail in the West Coast that would go from San Francisco to Los Angeles. Was high-speed rail a component of the new Transbay Terminal from day one? Can you tell me about the ideas of this major project and what it was to accomplish?

06-00:18:36

Brown: The Transbay Terminal, for as long as it has existed in San Francisco, has always been where we all consider the place for transportation beginning and

transportation ending from all over the state of California, the nation, but in particular from the state of California. And so from the time that the key system, which was originally what we had that Transbay Terminal for, the turnaround spot for our own streetcar lines that roamed down Market Street, they went up on the rise at the Transbay Terminal and then down the other side and back out to wherever they were going to go, whether it was the Sunset or the Richmond district part of San Francisco. All of that said transportation and in fact rail transportation in particular. And then it obviously became as convenient for bus turnaround as it was for streetcar turnaround, and in particular when the Bay Bridge got converted, no longer a rail system using the Bay Bridge for east bay purposes, but instead ground transportation by way of buses, Transbay Terminal became where the East Bay systems landed, AC Transit. And period. And then suddenly you had SamTrans doing the same.

What we did not do at the outset, however, was bring Caltrain all the way down to the Transbay Terminal. We stopped Caltrain just north of the Mission Bay on King Street, King and Fourth Street. We never completely brought it all the way down, which is what we should have done. If we had done that right now there'd be no debate. But we didn't do that.

06-00:20:46
Meeker: When did Caltrain first come into that? When was that terminus established? Do you know?

06-00:20:52
Brown: No, I don't recall off the top of my head but it was long.

06-00:20:55
Meeker: Decades ago.

06-00:20:57
Brown: Decades ago. And that was Southern Pacific. All of Mission Bay was a Southern Pacific rail yard. That's where they stored their equipment and what have you. And Southern Pacific was a private operation, not a government operation. When it was first envisioned, Caltrain was just kind of a component of it. And, of course, Southern Pacific got bought out and we went on to do our thing that we'd done. But we really did envision at all times the Transbay Terminal as being a train station, a place where trains would eventually come. We didn't do anything about it though. Strangely enough, when we could have had trains coming from what is now the Caltrain, King Fourth station, we could have had that all the way downtown. But we didn't.

06-00:21:53
Meeker: So you're talking about the period of redevelopment where there was a lot of transition in south of Market?

06-00:22:00

Brown: Where South of Market was not even considered an appropriate place to build anything. It was considered a wasteland, so to speak. It had any number of small manufacturing facilities, shop repair facilities. It was not residential in any way. We just had zero on the residential side for it. Along the waterfront there was virtually nothing beyond Howard Street for purposes—everything you see now that's beyond Howard Street is subsequent. Everything else was related either to the shipping world or to the manufacturing world. There was no such thing as lofts for artistic purposes. None of that existed in that part of the city. So it would have been really simple in those days if those who were the city fathers had really allowed a continuation of the rail yards all the way to the Transbay Terminal. We would not even be debating it. There would already be a right of way. We would have designed the city around that right of way and the question would be do we try to take it underground or don't we? Probably not underground because much of what I'm talking about was land that was recovered from what basically was part of the bay and you couldn't very easily do that successfully. You would have had to do some form of a tunnel in order to just be able to do it and make it work. Wasn't that way and so consequently although we always envisioned Transbay Terminal being the final landing point for trains, we never did anything to enhance that possibility. Nothing. We did nothing except talk about it. Period. And so in this day and age we still are pretty much in that position. I can tell you that the plan that was done for Mission Bay, for Transbay Terminal, the whole business the Joint Powers Authority had in mind, bringing trains to Mission Bay, the design, the program, or the infrastructure, the foundation on which everything now sits, it's on top of a train box, which would allow for trains to come in, repose themselves, and turn around and go out. That's how committed we have been for that kind of a design and for that kind of an end product. We were not envisioning a Salesforce 1,000-foot tower. We always envisioned a train box.

06-00:25:20

Meeker: Can you tell me then how it develops and what some of the main hurdles, if you will, that had to be crossed in order to get to the point where it is now, which is under construction?

06-00:25:38

Brown: Our main obligation once the Joint Powers Authority got created and the people who were the components of that, it was clear that we needed additional land. And so essentially we established what is comparable to a redevelopment district. Surrounded the Transbay Terminal as it existed. It was, frankly, a small footprint to begin with. Since then, obviously, we have envisioned a much larger footprint. We've acquired that footprint and that was the greatest challenge because Transbay did not control that land. We really had to acquire all of that land, which also means we had to get the money for that purpose. Hence, a replication of what we did with reference to the central subway, except in this case it was a much shorter period of time. It took about twenty-five years on the central subway. It took us less than half-a-dozen

years to get ourselves positioned to in fact implement the vision of Mission Bay once it became clear it was never going to be an East Bay feeder point. It had always been envisioned, as I said, to be the end point for land transportation coming from Southern California. We were able to move much quicker. Also, our people were in more powerful positions than they had ever been, in order to get there, and so when Nancy Pelosi moved years later to get greater funding for the Transbay Terminal, it was not as difficult a task as the central subway. And then we also had the Joint Powers Authority being akin to the Metropolitan Transportation District, so to speak. And suddenly tolls became a part of the financial mechanism. Tolls were not part of the central subway. Tolls were a key part of the transportation hub called Transbay Terminal because of the fact that AC Transit and other components of the transportation for the region will be reposed there. It's a bus terminal. It would be a train terminal. It would be moving people that way. And so it became possible to answer all the questions about resources for acquisition. We also envisioned—

06-00:28:30
Meeker: Just to clarify that. So MTC, because it collects tolls on all the bridges in the Bay Area except the Golden Gate, generates a huge amount of income every year and this gets distributed to various transportation projects, mass transit, but so the Joint Powers Authority becomes one of those recipients of MTC funding.

06-00:28:52
Brown: With specificity. In fact, when the division of resources begin to take place, there was actually an add-on for the Transbay Terminal, and so with some specificity. And that's always been kind of an annoying factor for the MTC, was in fact those tolls were in some cases extended to make sure that the Transbay Terminal got its just desserts, so to speak, and not in competition with some lesser worthy project.

06-00:29: 39
Meeker: Increasing the size of the pie rather than just additional slices—

06-00:29:40
Brown: Absolutely.

06-00:29:40
Meeker: Yeah, okay. I'm sorry. Go ahead. You were talking about the process of getting this moving along. I'm sorry, I think I interrupted you.

06-00:29:50
Brown: And that became very political, by the way, at that stage of the game when a project of that size and that potential—it was regional in nature, not just San Francisco centered. It was regional in nature. It was regionally controlled, although located here. And there could not be the assertion of dominance, let's say, by the muni representative who was a member of that board, or by one member of the Board of Supervisors who's a member of that board. Politics

wouldn't allow for that total and complete San Francisco dominance. It's truly a regional component. AC Transit was fully aware that they needed every aspect of a successful Transbay Terminal because they have no other place to park in San Francisco, so to speak, and they love the connection. And all of that trove, the potential for a power base, it produced the resources for the Transbay Terminal.

06-00:31:06
Meeker: Did you feel like at any point your ability to exert influence over this political process was particularly difficult given how many different elected officials and governing bodies were involved in this?

06-00:31:23
Brown: Well, on my way out the door, so to speak, the Transbay Terminal was just one of the many items that would clearly be unfinished and probably not finished in the next two or three terms of any given mayor. But, again, the personal relationships constituted the foundation for the effort to get it centered. And so therefore when the choice was to be made of who the executive director, that was pretty much left to me as the mayor to drive that.

06-00:32:06
Meeker: Who did you choose?

06-00:32:07
Brown: The woman who's running it now and who has been running it all these years, Maria Ayerdi. She's now Maria Ayerdi-Kaplan. She's since married. But she was working in the mayor's office in San Francisco and she became the mayor's transportation representative and morphed into the job of the executive director of the Transbay Authority and she has been the only executive director the Transbay Authority has ever had. So everything you see that's coming out of the ground, everything you see that's happened, happened on her watch. Every funding source that expanded beyond that which already existed when it was first envisioned happened on her watch and pursuant to her direction. The expanded relationship with the participating agencies that provides the resources and the fight currently being waged to stick to the approved plan for the Transbay Terminal is being driven primarily by what she has done.

Currently the mayor's office is at odds with the original Transbay plan. The mayor's office now is talking about trying to go back and kind of replicate what has happened with the central subway. They're actually talking about trying to kill the freeway at a certain point on 280 and chop underground and try to come through the South of Market area, through Transbay Terminal with a new configuration, which obviously would alter for many years the previously approved operation of what the Transbay Terminal was supposed to be. I would think that the results of that struggle is probably going to be beyond anybody's current lifetime in being.

06-00:34:21
Meeker: Wow. So this is a story that will continue for many decades.

06-00:34:26
Brown: Forever.

06-00:34:27
Meeker: I think historically perhaps one of the frustrations of San Francisco was that the terminus of the Transcontinental Railroad, 1869, was Oakland, not San Francisco.

06-00:34:40
Brown: That's always been our issue, by the way. We don't have trains that come to San Francisco from that point of the world. Obviously we get Caltrain that comes up from down the peninsula, but it brings no freight. All of freight, if any, that comes by rail comes in to Oakland. Any travel for the rest of the United States does not go by way of Caltrain, it goes by way of our taking a bus from the ferry building here in San Francisco to Emeryville and getting on the train to go to wherever we want to go throughout the United States of America. One of the reasons support ultimately expired as a water transit facility, so to speak, for freight purposes was because we had no rail. If we had had a rail then the whole container world could have been enhanced through San Francisco. We would be okay. But we never had that. And what we have envisioned with Transbay Terminal was never to replicate Oakland.

When I arrived in San Francisco, 1951, I actually arrived in Oakland. I came by train. And I got off the train in nighttime in Oakland and I was driven across the Bay Bridge to San Francisco. Period. Because there was no rail access to San Francisco.

06-00:36:14
Meeker: There was some amount of questioning and debate about where the terminus of the high-speed rail line from Los Angeles to the Bay Area would be. Would it be in San Francisco? Did you weigh in on this and did you have any influence on its ultimate terminal?

06-00:36:36
Brown: No, I did not. As a matter of fact, I didn't pay a whole lot of attention to the high-speed rail, although—

06-00:36:42
Meeker: Did you see it as a boondoggle or—

06-00:36:44
Brown: No. I think that at some point we actually and hopefully will have it. I actually went throughout the world to check out the operation of high-speed rails in other places as late as May of '95. I was in Europe at a high-speed rail conference. And that was before I was mayor. I was just envisioning running for mayor and I knew I had to have that as part of my portfolio. And I remember at this moment, because my best friend went with me on that train,

one of my best friends, and he had a massive heart attack in the engine room of the train going between Paris and Germany and he died. And I had to bring him back from Europe.

06-00:37:41
Meeker: Who was that?

06-00:37:42
Brown: His name was Elmer Cooper. He was the first president of the BART board, first elected president of the BART board. Interesting story on how he got elected. He was a local black guy living over in the Mission area. Actually, Castro more than Mission. I think he lived on Noe. His name was Elmer Bernard Cooper. We ran him as Elmer Bernard Cooper in a district that had a tendency to vote for Irish. We never had his picture. He won for the BART seat. First BART election. When we obviously did establish the BART system, the Bay Area—

06-00:38:35
Meeker: He ran as black Irish. [laughter]

06-00:38:36
Brown: No.

06-00:38:37
Meeker: Yeah, I'm just kidding.

06-00:38:37
Brown: Yeah, so to speak. He could have. But he ran Elmer Bernard Cooper and they just assumed that that had to be an Irishman. And he won. He won. But he had an incredible fascination with trains and that's why he wanted to be on the BART board. And in that capacity we ended up doing a lot of things together over the year's vis-à-vis BART. But in 1995 he went with me to Paris, to that international conference about high-speed and he had a massive heart attack in the engine room of a train. And they had to bring him back to Paris. And I ultimately had to orchestrate how to get him back to America. By that time he had relocated to Washington, DC and he was in business in Washington, DC running some form of an import/export operation and a beauty supply system for African Americans in the beauty business, beauty salon business.

06-00:39:53
Meeker: It's almost like the thrill of being in the engine room of a high-speed rail just might have been too much for somebody who loved trains.

06-00:39:59
Brown: That's what it was. Yeah, train going along at 200 miles an hour or something. Massive heart attack and he died on the train. I was on the train. He was up in the—and when they announced that, "Is there a doctor aboard this train? You're needed in the engine room," I instantly assumed that it had to do with him and I made my way to the engine room and found him on the floor with other people trying to attend to him. But he had already expired.

But yes. I had thought about high-speed but I had never made it a condition of what I intended to do. I had too many other things. I announced in June I was running for mayor, in ’95, and I don’t think I ever mentioned high-speed rail at any of the activities that led to my election. However, by the time of my reelection high-speed rail was an agenda item.

06-00:41:04
Meeker: So you’re reelected in ’99. You start your term in January of 2000 and then November of 2000 is another election. Of course, it’s a national election year and this is the contested Gore versus Bush election, and we might talk about that. But in San Francisco it’s also a highly contested election. Was this the first election with the return of district supervisor elections?

06-00:41:38
Brown: No.

06-00:41:39
Meeker: No, that had already happened.

06-00:41:40
Brown: It had already happened. That was voted in in about ’96, maybe, and I think—[Ed. note: 1998 was the last year of citywide Board of Supervisor elections; district elections returned in 2000.]

06-00:41:48
Meeker: Yeah. So I guess ’98 would have been—okay.

06-00:41:49
Brown: Yeah. Ninety-eight, somewhere in that neighborhood. Because my appointees, people I had appointed, had been defeated in some cases. Nancy Pelosi’s chief of staff had been defeated in the '00 sweeps. I think that Amos Brown, my appointee, had been defeated. Becerril, appointed by me, had been defeated. So the whole series of people that had been defeated and there were district elections by then. And it was clear the district elections were not, and they still, in my opinion, are not good things for San Francisco. Way too small.

06-00:42:39
Meeker: So a lot of those transitions happened in 2000, correct, and so you get Matt Gonzalez, Aaron Peskin, Chris Daly, Jake McGoldrick, Gerardo Sandoval.

06-00:42:53
Brown: Yeah, Sandoval.

06-00:42:54
Meeker: These are guys who don’t have political experience in the way that somebody like Michael Yaki did. They certainly had community organizing or activist experience. What did you think when these guys were all elected? Did you see a group of people who you thought you might have been able to work with or did it seem like they came in with an agenda that would be antagonistic towards your own?

06-00:43:37

Brown: They ran as a representative of the symbol of antagonism to Willie Brown. That was the basis of their candidacy. They had nothing positive about their candidacy other than the fact that they were going to stop Willie Brown from ruining the city by way of the development process. They maintained that my use of land in the city and the allowance that I was making for people to develop this land was inconsistent with the best interests of San Francisco. They did not like the idea of the Mission Bay, they didn't like the idea ultimately of the ballpark. I had managed to get the ballpark done. I had managed to get a vote for a new 49ers stadium. Obviously it didn't happen because Mr. DeBartolo lost control of the team and his successors didn't like San Francisco. And, in part, because of the antagonists who were attacking me. They didn't like that group. We were in the first evidence of a tech world potentially being involved in replacing old traditional kind of methods by which an economy existed, evidenced itself, and I appeared to be embracing that concept with a greater degree of enthusiasm than that crowd. They did not like the fact that I wanted to make something special out of a place like Treasure Island or out of the land that we were going to acquire from the federal government for land base closure purposes. They didn't like the idea that I was trying to get control of the Presidio when it was being offered up. And so in the confrontations that were taking place over these multiple fronts, this new crowd who had been elected with literally a small component of the city, the district elections for the real first time were evidencing itself. On the first election cycle involving district elections there were still people who had run citywide but were now reduced to running for a district. Barbara Kaufman was reduced to running just for the district. And their thrust, they were still sensitive citywide, they were still cooperating with the mayor's operation for what we could do. By now we had a district attorney who was beginning to become a part of that alleged new progressive movement to control the growth in the city and could stop the gentrification. Yes. To stop the gentrification, et cetera.

And they were the people who embraced Ammiano. Ammiano had been a write-in candidate and that was supposed to be the best evidence of any protest because if you could get somebody—by the way, he had endorsed me, as you will recall, and being the evidence of no loyalty, or the situational loyalty, he decided to align myself to be the write-in candidate. He beat out all of the other people, including Clint Reilly, the previous mayor, all of whom were trying to challenge me. And he ended up not being much of a challenge ultimately but he did beat all of them. He got the nomination to run against me because you couldn't win it in those days. There was a run-off and it wasn't rank choice. It was a run-off and you had to go through a run-off and that always occurred in December. The primary was in November and the election December. That crowd ended up in a position where my administration was being constantly challenged. I still had a majority of the board. Still had Newsom there, I still had Mark Leno there. I still had Leslie Katz there. I still had a majority of the members of the board. But there clearly was an activist

group whose goal in life was to somehow dismember me. They didn't succeed in dismembering me but they made life absolutely horrible for Newsom.

06-00:48:33
Meeker: Yes, if you look at the *Chronicle* during that period of time it's very clear that they were running on a big kind of "no" campaign, no to in essence Willie Brown's agenda or what they perceived to be Willie Brown's agenda. Did you ever get a sense of what their vision for San Francisco was? Was it just sort of preserve it in amber? What was this sort of progressive group's agenda for San Francisco?

06-00:49:09
Brown: The interesting thing about the challenge to me was not an alternative method of productivity. It was strictly an effort to try to have everything stop and then figure out what to do after you stopped everything. Build nothing. Produce nothing. Do nothing. And then we'll plan. So it wasn't as if there was an alternative to the central subway. It wasn't as if there was an alternative to the T-line going out to the Bayview. It wasn't like that was an alternative to what we should do with Treasure Island if we get it from the feds. It wasn't like that was an alternative to what ought to happen to Presidio if we get it from the feds. No, it was, "Let's stop everything and let's just see what we'll do after we stop everything." So there were no visionaries on the other side. Or if there were, they remained silent and allowed just the fervor of the protest against the establishment, me, to be the basis of what they lived and breathed for. They were not required to do anything else. And none of the media organizations tried to extract from them what is your alternative to the existing order. What is your alternative to the existing programs? What is your alternative, for example, to whether or not the waterfront ought to be widened, to widen the way in which it's being done? What's your alternative to the idea of the F line down Market Street and all the way to Fisherman's Wharf and back? What's your alternative to that? There was no offered alternative to anything.

06-00:51:23
Meeker: Did you ever get a sense, either just through your own observation and engagement or maybe through polling about why it was that this progressive group, what I would just call the big no agenda, why they had appeal in San Francisco? What were they appealing to amongst San Franciscans?

06-00:51:48
Brown: They were appealing to the group of people who arrived yesterday but wanted to keep the city as it was before they arrived. And they really had made great arguments and generated enthusiasm for that concept. They were never able to carry out any of their objections. I, through the years of my mayorship, continuously made progress toward what we see today. The permit progress, for an example, for many of the structures that have just been completed or about to be completed, those are permits and authorizations that came from the Brown administration. There was no way in which anybody envisioned

trying to change the affordable housing requirement while the Brown administration was doing its number. And since it takes about eight to ten years to succeed in anything in this city on the construction side there was no effort made toward any of that. They just wanted to have everything stop and they did not have an alternative. They had no alternative to Mission Bay. None. When we gave the forty-three acres of land to the University of California to beat out Brisbane and Alameda for the location of the expanded campus from the University of California, that crowd had no alternative to that kind of an effort. And so they had to stand by and watch success after success on a programmatic basis. Period. Not until I left did they begin to have any effect on stopping the world, so to speak.

While I, as mayor, operated, I made it very difficult for them to really organize a real force because my efforts to encourage non-profit housing developers to build, and I was so successful at getting the subsidized resources they needed and the partnership resources they needed from entities wanting to do business in San Francisco on the construction side. Suddenly the Tenderloin begins to be developed for residential purposes because of my administration's efforts. The South of Market, on the senior citizen side, begins to be developed because of my administration's efforts. So I was into their knickers, so to speak, by virtue of all the things that I was doing with what would be their natural coalition. And so the tenant advocacy groups could not really get an anchor on what they would like to do until I left.

And the same with the homeless coalition. I didn't have any trouble exercising total authority on moving homeless people off the streets if I chose to do so or keeping them from developing tent cities if I chose to do so, because their natural allies were already engaged with me on other issues and on other things, whether it was building what we did with public housing in Hayes Valley, what we did with public housing over in the North Beach area. We had that confrontation over the public housing that was in the North Beach and we built and we added some market rate and we added Trader Joe's. We did so many of those kind of creative things that we kept them from being able to develop the kind of coalition that they ultimately developed against Newsom and they now have in the city, in kind of San Francisco. There were no five people on that board of supervisors in lockstep with whatever or the sixth person who made the decision because I had the sixth vote, not them.

06-00:56:31

Meeker: I think that one of the most important pieces of legislation that came before the voters that would have profoundly changed San Francisco was in 2000, Prop L, which was narrowly defeated. That was the big no legislation, right, which would have ended all sorts of office developments, office conversions, building of live work lofts, all of this kind of stuff. Really that proposition was designed to stall what was then the dot.com boom in San Francisco. I see this as like a real cultural thing. And I'm kind of laying my cards on the table here because I'm admittedly much more sympathetic with your perspective than

with the progressive groups because I'm a historian and I see that cities that stagnate die and cities that look to the future and change and address those changes head-on are successful. And San Francisco has done that. But there is this group, the progressives, that just want it to be as it is, it seems.

06-00:58:01
Brown: No, as it was.

06-00:58:01
Meeker: Well, right, as it was. Okay.

06-00:58:03
Brown: They didn't want it to be just as it is because as it is means that the kind of vision that I'm talking about is where we were going. They don't want that. They want to reverse all of that. They would like to have it go back to the time where the operation on Geary Boulevard was an old street car called number thirty-eight, not the current bus system. If they had really been on their job, with the corridor we have we would already have light rail. But if you do light rail you literally expand the opportunity for people to look to build additional residences in the transportation corridor. They don't want any of that. They're not about trying to make the city really work. They are about yesterday. Purely and simply. And every time they've ever been confronted, by the way, with a true vote where it's universal they've lost. They obviously won Prop 8, Eight Washington. They beat Eight Washington. "No wall on the waterfront!" Total and complete misrepresentation. I mean like a gross misrepresentation.

We never in my administration allowed for those isolated single entity operations where they could generate west side support for what they were doing. We always banked on our approach in such a way that we would have components not capable of being rode over. For an example, public money for a football stadium. Nobody else would ever try that. We tried it and we did it barely but we did win it simply because we really did the politics as effectively as they were attempting to do the politics. They've since become relatively successfully. As a matter of fact, when Gonzalez ran against Newsom they demonstrated great dexterity at vote getting and vote counting. But they still lost because the skills of putting together the operation before the election and in the early balloting, in the absentee ballot program beat them. They've never, however, been able to master a majority vote in the city. And they won't be able to.

06-01:00:59
Meeker: For mayor?

06-01:00:59
Brown: No, for anything.

06-01:01:01
Meeker: When I look at this group I see like a sense of cultural difference and a suspicion as kind of cultural warfare. Coming from this group, this is just me,

but I see this suspicion and perhaps distaste for success or material success or building businesses and that kind of thing. It seems like there's almost like a class warfare or something that they think exists and that they are trying to expand and pursue through their own approach.

06-01:01:51
Brown: I think some of them are theoreticians in that regard but that's why I don't think they can ever produce a majority on anything of great significance for the city. Because their theory just doesn't gain the momentum it needs on a citywide basis. That's why they went to district elections. That's why they went to public finance of campaigns. All of the rules and the restrictions that they have tried to install has been because they can't fashion a majority out of their advocacy and out of their political philosophy. Their political philosophy is so inconsistent with what's in the best public interest and it's ultimately perceived by a very sophisticated voting population. San Francisco is not a dumb voting population. So they cannot get beyond their twenty-seven to twenty-eight percent, sometimes 30% of the people. Period. Even though there are virtually no Republicans in this town, so to speak. They just can't get beyond. So they can't elect one of their own and they usually cannot do an issue that becomes revolutionary. Their process is more guerilla fighting than it is open and aboveboard, uniform confrontation between opposing forces advocating anything.

06-01:03:34
Meeker: So hence the defeat of the "Moratorium in the Mission" this past November [2015]?

06-01:03:36
Brown: Correct. But on the other hand they can do things like kill the mayor's appointees. They did with mine and they have now done it with two of Ed Lee's appointees. But those are very narrow perspective contests. Those are not universal.

06-01:04:00
Meeker: Oh, you mean appointees to the board of supervisors?

06-01:04:02
Brown: Correct.

06-01:04:04
Meeker: Right, the one here in North Beach.

06-01:04:06
Brown: Yeah. Julie Christensen lost to Aaron Peskin and I believe the last big loss before that was London Breed beat [Christina] Olague. Both appointees of Mayor Lee.

06-01:04:24
Meeker: You haven't mentioned anything about the personalities of these insurgents, someone like Chris Daly, who has been described by more than one journalist

as slightly unhinged. How did you try to work with them on a person-to-person basis? Did you find it was possible to or did you find that their personalities just got in the way?

06-01:04:54
Brown: Didn't waste any time. I assumed that their illogical conduct and utterances would be inconsistent with any rational approach to build a consensus, so I set about to always maintain the majority on every issue, and I did it in some cases without even considering calling on either one of them, because I did not believe that they would have ever allowed for a follow ship. On the other hand, along came a guy like the public defender, who reached out to say that he was not part of that San Francisco anti-Willie Brown crowd and he would like to have an opportunity for open dialogue.

06-01:05:51
Meeker: Was that Jeff?

06-01:05:53
Brown: Jeff Adachi. Even though he beat my appointee. He beat Kimiko Burton, John Burton's daughter, whom I appointed to fill the vacancy that was created when Jeff Brown became a PUC commissioner. I appointed her and she promptly terminated the chief deputy public defender, Adachi, who then became the crowd favorite among those progressives, to their displeasure, by the way, because when he got elected he turned out to be more responsible than they would ever want to be. He had ambition to be mayor one of these days, to be something else, and he concluded that you could not be in that anti, anti, anti-vein and they have since obviously separated themselves from him. They don't follow his leadership on anything. Well, some of them stepped up to the plate and extended that kind of opportunity for dialogue. Even Matt Gonzalez ultimately did that. But he had decided he was leaving the political world completely since he didn't win the mayorship. He didn't run for reelection.

06-01:07:13
Meeker: Well, he ran for vice president [of the United States].

06-01:07:17
Brown: Yeah, yeah. It's a funny story. Somebody was on the streets many years later and they saw Matt Gonzalez and they hadn't seen him for a long time. "Hey, Matt, how are you? What's going on? What are you doing?" He says, "I'm running for vice president of the United States." "What?" It was friends of his who had not paid enough attention to what Ralph [Nader] was doing. [laughter] What Nader was doing in terms of his vice presidential nominee. And they told me that story. I started to print it one time and I changed my mind. I would never embarrass him that way. But so few people were aware that he was running for the vice presidency. "Well, what are you doing?" Just see him walking the streets. "Shouldn't you be in New Hampshire or North Dakota or Arizona or somewhere where people don't know you?" But only

one or two of them had any desire to be a part of the city. All the rest of them were just what you would call political terrorists.

06-01:08:25
Meeker: It's interesting. Chris Daly is gone. He owns a bar, I think, over in Vallejo or something like that.

06-01:08:32
Brown: Chris Daly was a trust fund baby. People never knew that. It might not have been a big trust but it was sufficiently sound to allow him to borrow against it for house buying purposes and things of that nature. And he actually owned a house, bought a house with a family of his up in Fairfield or someplace while he was still on the board of supervisors in San Francisco, keeping an apartment here. Kind of like Hallinan. Hallinan, his real home was up in Petaluma but he was a district attorney here living in one of the family's apartments over in the Tenderloin. All these progressives, or many of the progressives, have a weird sense of how they are supposed to be, who they are supposed to be, and it is to their detriment because they are not able to move their agenda, even with all the fixes that they've tried to put in place to enhance their opportunity to dominate. But they can't build a consensus among San Franciscans for anything except their little isolated incidents and they have so few of those.

06-01:10:05
Meeker: So around this point in time, I think sort of late 2000, mid late 2000, this is when the economy starts to shift and the go-go growth that was happening in San Francisco the late 1990s starts to pull back a little bit. And then obviously come up on November of 2001 with the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC. We're entering into a very new context for you to do your work, and that is the economy is not growing after 9/11, it falls into a recession. There were obviously growth difficulties when the dot.com bubble burst about that point in time. How did these transitions, how did these challenges, affect your work as mayor?

06-01:11:17
Brown: Well, instantly the prospect of resources coming from new tax bases, et cetera, all of that disappeared. Literally like overnight. There was nobody financing anything and so whatever development that was supposed to happen instantly went on hold. I'll give you an example. Where I live was one of the last sites for redevelopment purposes in the south of Market area. And the developer came to us and said, "We need to delay the completion date of our project." We reached an agreement, that you can delay the completion date, but the projected revenue date for tax purposes will remain the same. So how does that work? So I said, "It's very simple. If you were going to open on day X, you are going to begin to pay taxes on day X, whether you open or not. I want you to build into your delay my taxes on day X." And they loved it because suddenly the only expense they would have would be—it's almost like paying a little bit more for another option, an extension of your option. Period. And

that's how we did the developers. We said, "You can keep your entitlements. You don't have to build on the scheduled date. But we need the tax revenues on those scheduled dates." And so I extracted that kind of an exchange. But it didn't do anything for the city about development.

And then people began to abandon, wholesale abandonment of the promises for purchasing of projects. Three-oh-one, the Millennium, literally lost whatever number of people they had. Even my law associate now, Steven Kay, pulled back his commitment for one of the condos. We had people in the Four Seasons, I think 75% of the people that had reserved in the Four Seasons condos backed out post 9/11. So suddenly you're getting the absence of resources to build and buy and the business of who could sell and who would sell or who would buy went by the board. So we really did have a crisis. We had built our growth potential on certain measured levels of success. Those measured levels of success were going to come long after I had moved on and they did come. So we hit the wall and we were not able to continue with all the things that we wanted to do. We were literally stopped in our tracks. We delayed the completion of the Asian Art Museum. Money, again, not available because some of the resources had somewhat disappeared. What we didn't delay though, fortunately, was whatever affordable housing we had going, because we had with the Mission Bay operation, if you're going to do Mission Bay you've got to build the affordable housing first. And we had done that in other locations, but in particular in Mission Bay. So the first thing built in Mission Bay, literally the first thing built in Mission Bay on the residential housing side were affordables. And the interesting thing about it is the way in which we did the envisioning of the project. You can't tell what's an affordable housing unit in Mission Bay and what isn't. They all look the same. And that was part of what we kind of learned under the process of the Hope Six projects that we did in and around the city, whether in Bernal or wherever. All of that literally continued because the government subsidized and the government prompted structures continued and they were primarily—and it's too bad. I really couldn't have envisioned, because I should have jumped on the chance to build five times as many affordables and we wouldn't have the crisis we currently have in some cases or we'd be able to deal better with the crisis. Nobody was building anything for commercial occupancy purposes because there were no prospective tenants to occupy on the commercial side. Nobody wanted it.

06-01:16:28

Meeker: And, of course, what that results in is a decrease in city revenues, which means that there's less that the city can do that it had intended to do if revenues are down in a recession or in a uniquely challenged economy after, say, 9/11.

06-01:16:47

Brown: Obviously we couldn't follow through on things like the 49ers stadium. We couldn't follow through on a timely basis with reference to the naval shipyard

because we'd gotten that by then. We'd been designated but we couldn't move aggressively on that because we couldn't move on Treasure Island because we would have been at an incredible disadvantage if we had agreed to a financial arrangement with a developer. He would have taken real advantage.

06-01:17:27
Meeker: What does that mean?

06-01:17:28
Brown: Well, if you've got a piece of land and you'd like to generate $180 million out of the square piece of land, you suddenly find yourself with some guy saying, "No, I'll give you 150 million, I'll give you 130 million." So we take the land off the market. We won't do it because we need the 180 million and we know that in a year we might be able to get it. And we aren't going to build anything on it right now anyway, so there's no reason to sell it and land bank it to somebody else. What I did as part of my administration is I literally abolished the land banking process. If you got a permit you had a certain period of time in which to start building. That's how we got the Sony Metreon. That's how we got the W Hotel. I pulled the plug on the delay of those projects and other people stepped in and bought out an individual who had the authority but didn't want to move. And that's how the Sony Metreon got built, that's how the W got built. It was a Swiss hotel operator who was trying to do that. Starwood's bought them out because they're going to lose the right, the vested right to come out of the ground. So you have to have some means by which to have people keep their word. We tried to do that in order to keep our process going. And that's what we handed off to Newsom.

06-01:18:56
Meeker: You go back to the voters in 2002 to try to get another affordable housing measure passed. It would require two-thirds of—

06-01:19:05
Brown: The voters said no.

06-01:19:07
Meeker: Why do you think that happened?

06-01:19:09
Brown: Well, it was just the wrong time. It was the wrong time. I could not get the developers to agree and I couldn't get the tenant organizations and the progressives to agree on a pass through. What I got in my first effort in the late nineties, when I got the first affordable housing bond measure, it was a pass through on the rent control departments. Fifty percent of the cost of that measure could be passed on to tenants without going to the rent board. I could not get that same arrangement in 2002 and therefore there was some opposition provided by the landlords. Landlords did not want to suddenly have to pick up exclusively or have to go before the rent board and argue for an increase beyond what statutorily they were authorized for. In my first effort

to get a bond measure passed, I got it passed on the strength of the pass through. Didn't get that in 2002.

06-01:20:28
Meeker: The last thing that I'll ask you about today, and it's about housing, as well, and that is affordable housing, it's not for like the homeless, it's not for the very poor or the chronically poor or the indicted. It's also not for the middle class of San Francisco and it's like maybe the middle class are recognized as getting squeezed a bit more. Those people who are making 75, 80, a hundred thousand dollars a year in a place like San Francisco, housing is especially hard for them to find. Was this on your radar at the time? Were you starting to think about ways in which to address the middle-class housing crisis in the city?

06-01:21:16
Brown: We didn't call it middle class.

06-01:21:17
Meeker: What'd you call it?

06-01:21:18
Brown: We called it working class housing. We wanted teachers. We wanted cops. We wanted Muni drivers, we wanted hospital workers. All of those people were beyond the affordable housing group. We had literally taken care of, allegedly, the dirt-poor. We had taken care of that crowd. So we started to try to figure out how can we now allow the working class—workforce housing is how we defined it and we turned our attention to workforce housing. We never did solve the problem. We never did, I don't think, effectively address the issue and it's still out there as an item that clearly needs to be addressed. Period. And as they discuss at the board today, the whole question of affordable housing, they ought to switch that term because the developers overnight would adjust themselves for the opportunity to develop if they had a clear understanding that on a step-by-step basis there would be the kind of affordability questions answered based upon what people actually earn. Because if you're going to build housing that you primarily want public safety workers, fire and police to occupy, you know what they're going to be making, so you the developer can actually structure your financing of your project on the basis that this is who's going to occupy your project. You're not into that nebulous category of 12 percent, 20 percent and you don't know who they are, you don't know whether or not when you think in terms of the operational cost on a monthly basis. The operational cost on a monthly basis could exceed the mortgage. Well, all those kinds of things you need to build into the so-called workforce housing cost. And I bet you developers would jump at the chance. But the progressives can't handle that. They don't think that way. They don't have that concept in mind. They still almost want to treat it like it's public housing. Totally subsidized. Developers would be willing to get away from the concept of pure subsidy if it was clear that they could

design and frame and build within the context of somebody who earns $90,000 a year as their targeted market.

06-01:24:13
Meeker: Let's end there for today. Okay?

06-01:24:16
Brown: All right.

Interview 7: July 9, 2016

07-00:00:01

Meeker: Today is the 9th of July 2016. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Mayor Willie Brown and this is interview session number seven. We're here at the California Historical Society in San Francisco. Last time, which was in February, we wrapped up talking a lot about some of the transitions that happened after the supervisor elections in November/December of 2000 and about the sort of new coterie of supervisors who came in. That was a great discussion and I just have kind of a couple follow-up questions about that. And, in particular, when they start their new regime, if you will, one of the things that they do is they pass legislation to submit mayor's picks for the planning commission and the board of appeals and the public utilities commission to automatic review by the supervisors. This was a new thing in city government. Can you tell me about that process and what you thought of it at the time?

07-00:01:10

Brown: Well, I didn't think anything of it at the time. As a matter of fact, I don't think anything of it now, simply because it was strictly a political decision in pursuit of power that they could not get by virtue of challenging who should or should not be mayor. It was an effort to weaken the chief executive of the city and this city cannot, nor can any other city, run well without somebody absolutely being in charge. Obviously subject to some review, et cetera, but no interfering and no participating in the executive decisions by the legislative body. That was an effort made to achieve that goal. And when they said they would, by virtue of a direct vote of the people select, I don't know, some 40 percent of the persons holding the appointed positions in the city and be subject to nobody's review, but the 60 percent or so that the mayor had would be subject to their review. That makes no sense whatsoever and it has proven, frankly, to be virtually unworkable because invariably merit is no longer what ultimately determines the result of any deliberations. The politics between the mayor and the board of supervisors play a role in that and those politics should have no business in the final decision.

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Meeker: How then did that decision, that vote, influence the running of city government?

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Brown: It caused, frankly, city government to be less subject to consensus building. There was always the question of whether or not this would be against the mayor's wishes or against the board of supervisors' wishes. At all times it should have been what's in the best interests of San Francisco.

07-00:03:10
Meeker: Can you think of any examples of how that played out particularly, people who you wanted appointed to those boards that were rejected because of political rather than merit reasons?

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Brown: Well, frankly, it's too far back to go back and look at each one because there were replacements and non-replacements and what have you. I can only cite one incident. In an effort to be expansive and inclusionary, whenever the mayor leaves town he designates someone to act in his stead in his absence. And I extended that opportunity to all eleven members of the board, not just the Willie Brown traditional supporters. And one occasion when I was going to Tibet as part of the city government's outreach responsibility, I designated a fellow named Chris Daly as the mayor for a day or two while I was away. There were two vacancies on the PUC. Not only would the people I designate have to be approved and fill in the vacancies, clearly a member of the board of supervisors acting as mayor would be getting two bites at the apple. And that's what he, in fact, did the minute that I was in the air headed to Tibet and I had asked that he be designated as the mayor. He proceeds to fill one of those vacancies instantly. And so as soon as I heard that I obviously aborted my trip, turned around and came back. Didn't get here in time to stop the first appointment but I did get here in time to stop the second appointment.

07-00:05:04
Meeker: That's an amazing push for power, I would guess. The way that I understand it, the role of sort of fill-in-mayor is largely an honorific one. It's a gift. It allows the supervisor to spend some time in the limelight. But it is not really traditionally an invitation for them to act as the chief executive of the city.

07-00:05:37
Brown: Not at all. As a matter of fact, it's never long enough for a person in that category to do anything except that which is already the mayor's program. And the mayor's staff becomes the entity that should be relied upon for the appropriate information as to what the mayor is doing, has done, and intends to do with reference to a particular item. And there is no urgency ever in any particular appointment. There's nothing like a quorum needed, nothing like a decision need to be made. That was strictly a pursuit of power. And, again, it was the business of trying to gain authority that you could not get by virtue of a vote of the people. Supervisors are elected from districts that have sixty to seventy thousand people in it. The mayor is elected city-wide, which means the mayor encompasses all of the various districts, those that are pro-mayor and those that are anti-mayor, and supervisors only do their own little narrow jurisdiction and their narrow constituency. And so on any day in which their elevated to the point of being the acting mayor, that's exactly what the term means. Acting mayor. Nothing else. And in this case, Mr. Daly, who ultimately proved to be not a terribly productive supervisor, even among his fellow supervisors, exercised that authority and he prompted a reconsideration of what mayors should do when they don't plan to be here. Now it's pretty

much clear that you only put your mom, your dad, or your relatives in as acting mayor. Because you can name anybody. You don't have to name a supervisor. You can name anybody as acting mayor.

07-00:07:29
Meeker: Well, it's interesting. When Daly and his group ran, in essence, against you in that supervisor race, clearly they were in opposition to you and your program. Yet at the same time you were operating in the realm of traditional politics when you invited him to be acting mayor for that period of time. Were you surprised at the degree of antagonism and the willingness to upset the way in which politics traditionally worked as evidenced by that appointment?

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Brown: Totally. I was shocked that people who lose an electoral fight would try to continue that fight by hook or crook. That's not in the best interests of the city. That's not in the best interest of public policy in any given place where such could occur. And I never suspect that people are any less committed to the idea of proper functioning. Because when I lose a vote I instantly move on. Once the people have spoken in a democracy I'm obedient to what the people have said, whether I agree or disagree with what the people have done. And I think that's the only way a democracy works. Democracy cannot work where, if you lose the vote today, you spend full time trying to do damage to the entity that won simply because you lost. And so he ruined the potential continuous outreach that would have been demonstrated by me as mayor and could have been learned for future generations of mayors. That's no longer the case. Mayors now only trust friends and relatives to assume their role when they're not present.

07-00:09:31
Meeker: Did you make your displeasure known to him personally?

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Brown: And publicly [laughter] and to the remainder of his colleagues on the board. Interestingly enough, some of his colleagues on the board were appalled at his arrogance and in one case he had gotten his legal opinion from the city attorney as to whether or not, in his role as acting, he could exercise the power out. And the city attorney had opined yes. But, unfortunately, the city attorney should have warned me because the city attorney is, in fact, the lawyer for everybody supposedly. That's the point at which I got my own city attorney.

07-00:10:21
Meeker: About the same time, I think it might have been a couple of years later, Jerry Brown, who is then or about to become mayor of Oakland, advocated and I believe passed what was called sort of a strong mayor law in Oakland which gave the mayor in Oakland a little more power. Were you kind of paying attention to that and how did that situation compare to San Francisco?

07-00:10:49

Brown: Well, San Francisco has always been a powerful mayor. There's never been an occasion when this mayor in this city had any less power than any chief executive should have. You need that power in order to be able to run the city. You literally need the authority to hire the police. You need to hire the fire, to hire the health person, to hire the port director, the airport director, to hire the park and rec people. You need the authority to exercise the power of the entire city to carry out the program and the policies of the city that have been promulgated by virtue of the direct vote of the people or by the board of the legislative bodies which you have signed because you also have the power to veto. Oakland virtually had none of that power. San Francisco is also a city and a county in one entity. Oakland is both a city and a county. There are boards of supervisors that are seated in Oakland but they are county board of supervisors, not city super. Has a city council that is somewhat akin, in terms of their constituency in the jurisdiction, to individual little districts. Whereas San Francisco mayor is over everybody. Jerry Brown, having been the governor of the state of California before becoming mayor of Oakland, recognized right off that Oakland was at a tremendous disadvantage and therefore it was a city that had never really been run like a city and he set out to attempt to change that. And his subsequent successors have all tried to gear themselves up more to be what San Francisco's mayor's office is. Only Jerry succeeded in some limited way. He didn't get the kind of power that San Francisco mayor has because he's a city not a city and a county.

07-00:12:56

Meeker: I'm curious. When you were mayor and thereafter, have you had many other people come to you who are chief executives of cities or counties trying to get your sense on how one can be an effective mayor or chief executive?

07-00:13:13

Brown: One of the wonderful things about my experience in the world of politics is that I was there so long and I interacted with so many different people in so many different set of circumstances that conventional wisdom said there was nobody who had done it all and nobody who had been exposed to it all. So it has not been unusual for not only people from the state of California but nationally, through the US Conference of Mayors and other organizations, to seek my advice and to have me share my experience with them on situations and challenges which they're faced. Whether it's my friend Kasim Reed, the mayor of Atlanta, Georgia, whether it's Michael Nutter, the most recent mayor of the great city of Philadelphia, or whether it's the current mayor of Los Angeles, Eric Garcetti, whether it's the mayor of Cleveland, Ohio, or whether it's the mayor of Columbus, Ohio, whether it's the mayor of Detroit, I have had an occasion almost all over the country to be called in to be of some assistance and to share some knowledge. I didn't hesitate, by the way, when I became mayor to do exactly the same thing. I didn't know a whole lot about local government and so I did a summit and one of the leaders of that summit was Richard Daley, the then mayor of the city of Chicago. And he had been the mayor for a long time. Highly respected. And I leaned on him to share his

wisdom and his knowledge. And one of the things that he insisted upon was my being able, once I became in command, so to speak, and had the experience, to share that same experience. Joe Riley, out of one of the great cities in the Carolinas, Charleston, he has been mayor thirty-seven, thirty-eight years. One person. Just keeps getting reelected. And he has made that city just spectacular. He was more than helpful but he also insisted that in this fraternity of mayors where you have as much experience that I had had in state government and now in city government, that I had to share it. So I, even to this day, continuously share that info.

07-00:15:56
Meeker: I'm curious. What other advice did [Mayor Richard] Daley give you?

07-00:15:59
Brown: Well, he talked seriously about working with the labor organizations. He talked about the need to reach an accord and do everything you could to avoid any labor disruptions, any work disruptions. He argued that there was no occasion on which anybody ultimately won, that the cost for the city in disruptions and the cost of services and the financial costs to the workers themselves were inconsistent with what would benefit anybody and that should go as far as you needed to go to avoid those labor interruptions. He also talked glowingly about not allowing the bureaucracy to interfere with something that really needs to be done. For an example, he talked to me about how, on an occasion, it was an airport expansion project, the environmentalists were filing lawsuits and disrupting and delaying for several years, he would time his permission to demolish things such that he'd have at least forty-eight hours or so before they could get into court with an injunction. And on the occasions of the expansion of one of the airport runways he did exactly that. And in San Francisco, on the occasion of building a garage, I did exactly that. He talked about all those little techniques that could be employed to make your city work.

07-00:17:35
Meeker: When talking about labor, that's interesting. But it's easier said than done to avoid labor conflict or to try to prevent strikes or other labor actions from happening. Was he in essence saying sort of just give labor what they're asking for because otherwise everyone will lose?

07-00:17:55
Brown: No, that was not what he was saying. He was sharing with me how misinformation many times creates the impasses and that you really are much better off, and the labor leaders are much better off, if their membership believes in the accuracy of the information on which they are to make their decisions. So he said, "Don't hesitate to share every aspect of what the resources may be." Because after all, ordinarily labor is arguing about resources for their membership. And if there's only a dollar and somebody claims that there are three dollars, it's better that you right out of the box put on the table how much is available and how much is already obligated to one

way or another and then let's argue about how we get what will satisfy your membership out of the remainder. And that's the kind of effort that I really made. There was no occasion where there was a strike on my eight years as mayor of San Francisco.

07-00:19:10
Meeker: So part of the idea then was to communicate directly with the labor membership and thereby somewhat bypassing the negotiators or am I hearing that wrong?

07-00:19:23
Brown: No, you become the negotiator, literally. No such thing as deferring to somebody else to do the negotiating. And my insistence upon being in the room with SEIU and there would be sixty union negotiators. Because they didn't trust each other. It was amazing. And I'd be one lone city guy that could make every decision on every occasion with no delay, no caucusing, none of the above, and so it threw labor off completely. They were literally concerned because, first of all, on their leadership side they really did not want their membership as conversant with what the realities were. So they would do their best to try to keep me away from their membership. Well, they were unaware that it was years ago in the teacher's strike in LA when I was called in to settle it, the leadership of that union said to me privately, "The idea that you have to settle is a good one but you got to go sell it to my membership. I have to get reelected." And there's going to be some yahoos in that membership ragging on me for allegedly doing things that are inconsistent with what the union should have. If you, or your credibility, goes and lay out what the facts are—and so I said, "Then set it up so that you divide your membership into quarters and I will do four different appearances at a collection of decision makers on the teachers' union side." And they did that.

So I had that in mind when I came into the San Francisco situation and when Richard Daley said what he said, it was a no-brainer. Without waiting for a confrontation I started by wanting to visit with the membership in non-confrontational times to develop a relationship, to cement myself to the membership for questioning and answer without an interpreter coming from the leadership. And the leadership loved it because suddenly they wouldn't have to take the heat for any decision that may not have 100 percent support, that may just have a bare majority. And it still kind of works that way because now when the confrontations occur in the city, to this day, I am called in. The most recent one was, of course, the muni strike that was being threatened. And the mayor asked me to step in and mediate between the city and labor. And labor asked me to step in to mediate between labor and the city. And I accepted the responsibility but only if there was going to be an acceptance of my recommendation, no matter what it was, and each of them had enough confidence that I would do what was in the best interests of the city, ultimately, and of all the people, period, including the people who drive the

buses and run the cable cars. And I just did that within the last two years. And that was an example of a follow-up of all the kinds of things that I had learned from Richard Daley and others.

07-00:23:05
Meeker: Back to these other mayors, particularly the generation that follow you, and when they're coming to you, asking your advice or you're opening yourself to those questions. Do they have common concerns? Dallas, Philadelphia, Cleveland. Are you hearing common concerns amongst mayors of things that they're seeking your input on?

07-00:23:32
Brown: Interestingly enough, you could almost replicate the issues and the problems in almost every city. They are similar. In this nation the one executive on the electoral side that actually is responsible for services on a one-to-one basis are the mayors. Nobody else. Not the governor, not the US senators, not the president. No one else. Not any member of the legislature, not any congressman. It is the mayors who've got to do the potholes. It's the mayors who've got to do the public parks. It's the mayors. And in some cases it's the mayors who are now actually doing the schools. That's one of the most amazing phenoms that has occurred in the last fifteen or so years, where mayors have been taking over running the schools. Literally. Before that it had been school boards and superintendents. But there was such a disconnect between the quality of the schools that was necessary to really make your city work. If people want to live in your city they need to be assured that the public school system will have the quality of schools that they want for their children, that they won't have to pay private schools if they choose not to. That the public schools will be competitive. And the mayor needs that to happen simply because that's a way in which corporations will locate their headquarters, investors will be willing to build structures in a city where there are quality schools. When you do the surveys you see exactly that. And so there is a commonality now among mayors. When the mayor of Chicago took over the school system, the mayor of New York took over the school system, one after another you see add-ons. Before that mayors didn't touch the school districts. A mayor who is fortunate enough to have an incredible quality school and school boards is really lucky. San Francisco has been pretty lucky in that regard. Jerry Brown was not so lucky. Jerry Brown had to literally step in and do the politics of the schools in Oakland and they're still in chaos. They still haven't reached the quality level that makes them competitive with parochial schools, private schools, what have you. San Francisco has some of its schools that are equal to, if not superior, to any of the private schools that people will—and now that competition is how do I get my kid selected for this particular school or this particular school. Well, and mayors had a responsibility to try to deliver those kinds of services. So all across the country, when you look at how governmental services are ultimately delivered, invariably it's in the mayor's office.

07-00:26:39
Meeker: What kind of advice were you giving, then, when these mayors were coming to you and saying, "Listen, I'm having trouble getting the basic services done and my constituents are complaining about too many potholes or the buses aren't running on time. Did you have sort of a meaningful general response that you could give?

07-00:27:02
Brown: If you are the mayor of the city of San Francisco, you know that the resources of your city will not be adequate to fulfill all the things that you need, not only because you're a city and a county, but just generally. And you're the same way in almost every other city. You instantly say, "Where do I go?" I go to where somebody is taxing more than I'm getting, they're getting a bigger share of the tax dollar. The state. Suddenly you've got to develop access to the state and to the state resources. Then you quickly discover that that's not the final pot. The end of the rainbow is actually the feds. So you've got to develop a relationship with your congressional relationships and your US Senate representatives and you quickly recognize that that's not the end of the line. The end of the line could very well be a cabinet level position that might have some aspects of control of what you need, particularly if the cabinet level position has regional enclaves and regional places of operation. So suddenly something you never even knew about when you ran to be the mayor, you're going to have to grasp and begin to develop and operate within that framework and make it a part of your literally daily agenda. Just recently there was a huge pothole in one of our local California cities, northern California cities, and that particular mayor was arguing for assistance. His little city could not afford the three and a half million for this unforeseen incidence of a collapsed roadway. And finally the federal government did decide to step in and provide some disaster relief assistance. There have been calls for disaster relief all across the country by mayors and governors and people who have been in charge and if you have the relationship—and one of the things that we had, for an example, in San Francisco is that we had Nancy Pelosi in a huge position of power with the federal government.

But almost equally as important, the thirty plus years of being in the halls of the legislature, my Republican colleagues who were part of the Bush administration and had been part of the Reagan administration and ultimately were in positions of power all over the country, they could be called upon to assist San Francisco, and this county and this city. That kind of relationship and that kind of contact pays eons of dividends. It gets you things like assistance on affordable housing. HUD will come up with programs and you have to compete for those resources. San Francisco County, New Orleans as a city under Marc Morial and Boston under [Thomas] Menino. The three mayors. San Francisco, Boston got literally about seventy or eighty percent of HUD's money in those expected categories. So much so that the subsequent HUD director became enraged that there had not been a wide distribution of those resources. We argued successfully that you should concentrate where

your resources are relatively limited. If you've got a dollar, why give twenty people a part of that dollar? Don't do that. Use that dollar to its maximum, where it actually has an impact and that's the argument we made and HUD bought it and ultimately the retrofitting of public housing in each one of those cities became the beneficiary of this huge input from HUD and now you can hardly identify public housing in San Francisco or Boston or New Orleans because they don't look like prison camps anymore. They look like regular housing. Well, HUD had that vision in mind, didn't have the resources to do it for everyplace in the country but did have the resources to do it for those who could react instantly. We were the three that could react instantly. We helped shape the program and we benefitted quickly from the program and we only did that because of those ongoing working relationships with the senators and with the congresspersons, with the governor.

Jerry Brown did something similar when he was in Oakland. He got Oakland exempt from some aspect of the environmental laws when he said he wanted to get away from the constant ERA reviews and things of that nature. He did that and the results were that he started to reach the goal of the 10,000 new residential sites that he wanted in Oakland that would have been disrupted. It would have taken fifteen to twenty years to achieve that goal but Jerry Brown, using his personal relationship and his personal influence with the legislature and with the governor, even though the governor at that time was [Arnold] Schwarzenegger, it still worked out very well for the city of Oakland because of that relationship.

07-00:32:44

Meeker: I want to switch gears a little bit and ask you about the Democratic Central Committee in San Francisco. They're on the ballot. The population votes for their representatives on the Democratic Central Committee. The way in which it seems to operate is kind of like a bush league for higher elected office. Can you maybe tell me, for people who don't know what it is, what the Democratic Central Committee is and then what you think its role is in San Francisco?

07-00:33:24

Brown: The Democratic County Central Committee, essentially any party county central committee, has usually been made up of volunteers of grassroots people who really did the grunt work. They were the people who did the voter registration. They were the people who did the absentee ballot solicitation. They were the people who did the get out the vote operation universally. And they were the people that ran the monthly meet-ins for the sharing of views and the informing on issues that the party needed to be informed about. However, over the last several years the county central committees have morphed into something a bit more trident in terms of on the political front. In part, they have become breathing grounds for people who might want to run for office. In the old days a person on the county committee would hope to get on the state committee, which had the same kind of function statewide, and

then become a delegate to the national convention of that particular political party. Seldom if ever was there a graduation exercise from those places because individuals who were on the county committees were just really ordinary people with local jobs and with multiple memberships on county school activities, parent/teacher committees, and things that of that nature. They were never professional politicians. County committees are now becoming replete with current professional politicians and potential professional politicians and they have ventured away from their core responsibility, in part because the law is wrong on who can be on the county committee. In San Francisco, for an example, you can hold two elected office at one time. You can run for two elective offices at one time. You can run for the county committee and you can run for the board of supervisors. The rules for the county committee, electorally speaking, are different than the rules for the county board of supervisors. Rules for the county board of supervisors are ranked choice. Rules of the county committee is just simply whoever gets the most votes. Well, in the various assembly districts in which their candidacies, and it's ten from each district, the top ten vote getters are in, whether they have a majority or whether they have something short of a majority. And it's almost impossible to determine what a majority would be because of the nature of how many people it might be in the candidacy for the county committee.

The rules about contributions to the county committee are not the same as the rules for contributions to a member running for the board of supervisors. A member running for board of supervisors is limited, let's say, to a $500 contribution, unlimited if you're running for the county committee. And so persons run for both at the same time. And in their capacity as a county committeeman they take contributions from the same people they're taking $500 from for the board of supervisors. But they take $5,000 from that same individual if they can convince that individual to give it. They hold on to every nickel that they have for board of supervisor campaign because up till June, when the county committee election occurs, they can spend all the money advertising their name and themselves with virtually no restrictions on what they do. It's absolutely outrageous and so consequently, in the last election cycle in San Francisco, you had every member of the board of supervisors being elected to the county committee. Who ran for the county committee? They all won. And it's because their names are already known. They're already professionals. They've been on the ballot before. They are in the news at least once a week and sometimes even more. Period. And so consequently they have made it impossible for people who would like to volunteer but not be professional about it, who would like to participate, can't because they're now running against someone who is so formidable and can command so much money. Because if you're running for the county committee and you're already a supervisor you seek a contribution from somebody, they're going to be inclined to give you that contribution not because they want you to win on the county committee, they want to win your favor and access to you as a supervisor. So it's totally and completely unfair

and there should be a legislative action that would say you can only hold one elected office by the people at one time. Period. And that would eliminate members of our board of supervisors running for the county committee and probably roll the county committee back to the origin of what the county committees really were.

07-00:39:25
Meeker: Well, it sounds like you're critical of the way it has become. What do you think the negative implications are for the way that the county committee operates now?

07-00:39:37
Brown: County committee has become a subset of the board of supervisors. And it should not be. The county committee was always, and should always be, where we go to do our partisanship, where we go to do our development process in the interests of the party structure, et cetera, where we go to run voter registration campaigns, et cetera. Because county committees now are literally wandering into the world of policy making or policy influencing, which is not exactly what county committees were ever designed to do.

07-00:40:19
Meeker: Do you think it has also impacted the board of supervisors, as well?

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Brown: It makes it frankly difficult for people serving on the board of supervisors that may very well not want to be bothered with interfering with the county committee but they're now having to spend some time interfering with the county committee for fear what goes on in the county committee, politically speaking, may very well have an impact on their ability to do their job as a supervisor. So they now end up having to rotate back to the county committee, spend time doing county committee work when they really should be spending all their time doing supervisorial work.

07-00:41:05
Meeker: Did that play out in the Peskin/Christensen race at all?

07-00:41:09
Brown: Not really. That was a dramatically different set of circumstances. Peskin had been—at least they thought they had been promised by the mayor, that a person of Asian descent would be appointed to that vacancy because it had been held most recently by an Asian and they believed that they had that commitment. And when that commitment proved not to be honored by their standards it was no question that they were going to look around to see if they couldn't punish the mayor for that decision. And the ideal carrier of the punishment gene was Aaron Peskin. And they embraced Aaron Peskin's candidacy, got the Asian community to embrace Aaron Peskin's candidacy, and it ended up with Aaron winning. And he is a tormentor of enormous proportions to this mayor.

07-00:42:19
Meeker: Right. I mean, it seems like he's a bit more of an accomplished tormentor than your tormentors were.

07-00:42:26
Brown: He has become almost proficient at being a tormenter. Fortunate of me, I got him at birth.

07-00:42:35
Meeker: Meaning?

07-00:42:38
Brown: I'm glad I don't have him now. [laughter]

07-00:42:40
Meeker: Yeah, okay. [laughter]

07-00:42:43
Brown: He was not very good when he was challenging me. But he has learned and learned and learned and learned and his opponents are unlearned now.

07-00:42:57
Meeker: I don't know how much you have to say about this, but in other interviews I've done over the years, the question of regional governance is a pretty important question. I've been doing interviews around BCDC and we might be starting a project with SPUR soon, where both of these organizations, one governmental, one non-governmental, have an interest in regional planning issues. But, of course, regional planning then requires some regional governance, as well, to make sure that the players participate. There was also an effort, I think in the 1990s, called Bay Vision 2020 that was really trying to create a true regional government for the Bay Area. What do you think of these efforts to try to maybe put like a larger governance or a policy superstructure that regional governments, counties, and cities would be obliged to participate in?

07-00:44:06
Brown: Well, obviously there are things that are regional in nature. And we've recognized it as being regional in nature for many years. The most glaring example of it, and probably the most successful, is BART; Bay Area Rapid Transit District is a regional operation. The people who serve on the board of trustees are directly elected and they're elected from the geographical area from whence they come. And BART operates as a regional entity. There are other regional entities, as well, and there are other things that lend themselves to regional jurisdiction. One example, the three airports, Oakland, San Francisco, and San Jose really ought to be under one umbrella. The ports, Richmond, San Francisco, and San Mateo County or Redwood City ought to be under one umbrella on the port side. There is zero reason why there ought to be competition. Period. And it makes a lot more sense if you had one set of policies equally as applicable to all.

On the other hand, some aspects of regional government will have to be imposed by the state. We all made a mistake when we didn't do a nine-county transit district, not a three-county transit district. And then when we allowed things like the transit system out of Marin County and transit system out of San Mateo County. All of those are things that should have been under some umbrella of regionalism. Clearly in terms of the quality of the equipment alone and the cost of maintaining that equipment, would be so much better if you didn't have individual yards and you didn't have different kinds of equipment for each one and you didn't have different standards of operation for the operators and what have you. Because people don't live in isolation anymore. People now live in the nine-county Bay Area. They don't live in the one section. They live, work, play, educate, cultural activities, entertain in the nine-county Bay Area. And clearly those things which are regional in nature should be appropriately addressed.

The whole question of affordable housing would be in that category. And it could be better addressed with the land use being what could be in places where there is land. San Francisco has no land, therefore the business of trying to address the housing needs of people in the Bay Area are not going to be highly beneficial to San Francisco. However, if the resources of San Francisco were available to be applied as the resources of San Francisco in the past have been available for water purposes. PUC is literally, although San Francisco, it's really a regional agency in many senses of the word based upon its ownership of operations in other counties and what have you. So there is clear evidence of regionalism, operational without the governance process and the regulatory process for control purposes. The whole business of how do you deal with what happens along your ports and along your waterfront, there should be no distinct difference between Oakland, San Francisco. Should be no distinction. Yet they are totally different in any sense of the word, although the state of California imposed, by virtue of BCDC, some controls. And statewide, with the whole Coastal Commission process, there has been some attention from a regional standpoint for some aspects of that. So regionalism for me is an ongoing work in progress that should require and command talent equal to, if not superior, to that which runs counties.

07-00:49:00

Meeker: So do you think it would make sense to combine BCDC and MTC and Bay Area state lands into maybe a single regional agent?

07-00:49:12

Brown: One super agency. One super agency. The only place where I suspect that there's anything comparable is the New York/New Jersey Port Authority. I have not studied that closely. But to have two different states somehow reach an accord on certain aspects in their transit system reflects it. It's a far more efficient transit system. Of course, the transit system has a lot to do with the bridges, it has a lot to do with a number of things. We don't have that here.

We don't have it that way here. And all of these regional acting operators would better be served under one super agency.

07-00:50:02
Meeker: But let's say a super agency had existed when you were mayor. Would that have made your job easier or harder?

07-00:50:08
Brown: It would have made my job easier.

07-00:50:10
Meeker: Really?

07-00:50:11
Brown: It would have made my job a lot easier because the battles that I had to fight, I had to go enlist assistants from some of the super agencies. When we were doing the embarcadero, we knew we were never, ever going to have water freight and water traffic again. That meant then that you had to do something else with your waterfront. Just think of how much easier it would have been if simultaneously we had included the advent of the increased water traffic into Oakland and the leveraging of San Francisco saying, "We won't do anything water traffic wise. Oakland will do all of that." BCDC would have had a different attitude, I suspect, about how they would react to San Francisco's request for certain kinds of things. There also could have been, obviously, resources flowing back in to meet the requirements of what do we do with all of these decaying piers that we have, that we are now stuck with trying to figure out how to do it in one county alone or one city alone. So there was so much that could have come up. And I would have benefited handsomely because I would have taken, just as I did with HUD, I would have taken full advantage.

07-00:51:44
Meeker: Again, I want to shift gears a little bit. This is a timely topic and I'm curious if you can talk about it in the context of your time as mayor. It's been a very hard week, right, around the two killings in Minnesota and Louisiana and, of course, the assassinations of the five police officers in Dallas. I look through newspapers and didn't find much during your period of mayor of police misconduct. There were a few little things, right, but nothing that is coming to mind. I'm curious about your relationship with the police department during your time as mayor vis-à-vis the police department's relationship with the black community in San Francisco.

07-00:52:47
Brown: First you should know that my inaugural address at the Yerba Buena Gardens included the announcement that Fred Lau, an Asian, first would be police chief, and that Bob Demmons, who had been the plaintiff against the fire department to integrate it, would be the fire chief. Right out of the box that was a message that had not been heard before. And that was followed very quickly with the chairmanships of those two committees being controlled by

racial minorities, all women, and that reflected itself throughout the chain. And then there was a confrontation with the federal government that had monitors into each of those two safety operations to find out what needed to happen from the city's standpoint to get rid of the monitors and use those resources to expand relationships with the communities of color. Instantly it was a total and complete different attitude, particularly when the cops for the first time found a mayor who said, "You tell me what you want by way of compensation and I'm going to tell you what I want if I give you those compensations." And that's what we did. And we did that day one. And I was very aggressive as the mayor about interacting with the units of public safety on a daily basis. Literally on a daily basis. There was never a completion of any week or any activity involving anybody in the public safety world that my office was not directly involved with. And so people got the impression that, yeah, he's the police chief, but the mayor, if I've got an issue, I can take it to the mayor. And so we didn't have the kind of police/citizen confrontations.

We also had a heavy emphasis on making sure that the justice process worked. We were benefitted handsomely from a DA who was a progressive. Hallinan. He was far left of me in almost everything. So suddenly we had a whole different deal with the person in that category. And if you had your police chief and your DA operating on the same playing page and on the same program as the mayor you've got a combination of factors that will cause a better perception by the public of who the cops are and what the cops are about, particularly when suddenly the police commission is made up of indigenous people from the neighborhood and from the community. Goes to the same church and gets their hair cuts at the same place and eats at the same place. And so it was just a whole different created atmosphere that substantially reduced the natural hostility that seems to exist in some places between law enforcement and people of color.

07-00:56:39
Meeker: Is it really that easy though?

07-00:56:41
Brown: It is. Believe it or not, it is. But you've got to be clear. You've got to be sincere about it. It cannot be something you're just doing for PR purposes. It's got to be that you really are trying to institutionalize a whole different attitude and a whole different approach. And it also means you've got to be in it twenty-four/seven. It cannot be that you are doing it only on the fly. No, you've got to be in it twenty-four/seven.

07-00:57:16
Meeker: I think about the current and recent mayors of Oakland, Libby Schaaf, and then the previous mayors. Oakland has had various problems with their police department. They also have problems with violent protestors. I used to live in downtown Oakland. And if, say, Mayor Schaaf came to you and asked you for advice on how do I deal with my police department and how do I deal with

protestors wrecking my downtown every time something happens, even in another city, what would you say to her?

07-00:57:57

Brown: Unfortunately Oakland doesn't have the infrastructure that it really needs for the mayor to be in control of the city. The mayor doesn't have control of the city. The mayor is plagued with a duality of leadership, so to speak. You've got a county board of supervisors and they don't even appear to personally know the mayor. The five members of that board don't seem to even know the mayor. And then she has a city council that clearly is not staffed by people who graduated from the University of California or from Stanford or who did any of the things that would have caused them to be available for urban planning and urban administration. And so she's got an enormous task and that is how do you begin to build enough respect for holding public office that will cause people who ordinarily would be going to become engineers or going to become doctors or going to become lawyers. You want them to think about becoming elected officials. In San Francisco we're blessed with the geniuses want to be elected officials in San Francisco and it's frankly been good. So she's plagued with those kinds of problems. It's going to take a long time culturally to get Oakland in the vein of where you have people who could have participated in writing the Declaration of Independence holding office and running office and that's the kind of persons that I'm talking about.

On the other hand, Oakland suffers also from being right next door to Berkeley. Right next door to the University of California. Right next door to the hotbed of radical student movements. And for whatever reason, there does not appear to be enough media attention now to what you do at Berkeley, so you've got to go find a place where you can do it, where you can command attention. And the radicals have now relocated their point of entry and where they want to specialize and they are doing that in Frank Ogawa Center in downtown Oakland. What would I tell her she needs to do? I would tell her that the kind of work that she will be doing in order to change this may never offer any reward for her. And that if she really intends to become, we'll say, a lieutenant governor or she intends to move on, then she may not want to engage in the laborious institutional pursuit of change that would come from redefining the leadership and from interacting with the radical operations. Unfortunately the radical operations are no longer the Black Panthers. The radical operations are no longer the Students Against Non-Violence. The radical operations are no longer under the control of the traditionals. They are more instant, almost a pop-up radical demonstrations. And that makes it really difficult for a central leader to tap in. Because as we speak, she could not call in twelve different organizations, heads of organizations, and talk about some form of proper discord in the protest operation. That's not what the radicals want to be a part of in that Oakland world. So she's got her hands full and I'm glad it's not me.

07-01:02:18
Meeker: Okay. I actually just have a few last questions. We could go on for several more sessions. Okay. I have this one question. It's not very serious but I wanted to ask it anyway. And that is I think it was in your first term and Beach Blanket Babylon did their anniversary celebration and you came on stage dressed as an emperor. Well, can you tell me about how this came about and whose idea it was?

07-01:03:00
Brown: Well, first and foremost, I have been part of Steve Silver's Beach Blanket Babylon forever, long before I became mayor. I have been very much using that as an entertainment vehicle for my friends. I brought members of the legislature with some regularity. I was a friend of Cyril Magnin's, who must have seen Beach Blanket Babylon more than anybody else in the world. Anytime I wanted tickets I just go by Mark Hopkins, where he lived, and get a fistful of tickets and take anybody I want. I saw every Christmas. And they're all special shows. I saw every Christmas show that they had ever had an occasion to do. And then when I became the mayor, Jo Schuman Silver at some point decided to put a character in Beach Blanket that reflected the mayor. She went out and bought from the guy who sold me clothing, she bought a suit reflective of what I would wear. She bought a hat reflective of what I wear and she started spoofing the mayor. And lo and behold, that became one of the popular items for the people who were there. They would laugh uproariously when the mayor was on display. And occasionally she'd have me come and acknowledge it at one of her performances.

And so for the twenty-fifth anniversary, she came up with the idea that she really wanted to include in the show Charlotte Shultz as Wonder Woman, George Shultz as Superman, and she wanted to include me in some capacity. One of her people said, "There's a guy named Phil Frank that had been writing a cartoon every week about the royalty that Willie Brown seems to try to demonstrate in his capacity as mayor." And so Phil Frank had put together a character of Willie Brown in the capacity as the king. And his highness, and with a robe and a crown and some doobins carrying me on a cart. And that so intrigued Jo Schuman and her team that they went to the people at the opera to see if they would lend them one of their king robes and they did. And that's how that came about. That was a costume piece borrowed originally from the opera wardrobe with the crown and with a scepter and I, and then they wrote a piece for me, a couple of lines for me to surprise everybody by stepping on the stage in that capacity. And I did and I got this great photograph. When I did it the first time I stepped out there and they took a shot and then she decided to make it a permanent part. So subsequently Beach Blanket, without me, had me in it in the form of some guy wearing the same outfit. For a long time it was part of Beach Blanket's deal. And Phil Frank kept writing about it and every time Phil Frank would write something really great, like he said there was an obsession with looking at myself, so, "Mirror, mirror on the wall, who is the fairest of all?" and all those kinds of things. And so it became just part

of the lure of San Francisco, was what Phil Frank would print and what Jo Schuman and Beach Blanket Babylon would display.

07-01:07:15
Meeker: Well, you know, the Phil Frank cartoons were somewhat critical, right? They were lampooning but there was a little needle in there.

07-01:07:23
Brown: Totally. Totally.

07-01:07:26
Meeker: And so it takes some bravado on your part to like adopt that.

07-01:07:30
Brown: Well, I just think that true artists are literally entitled and hopefully it's helpful that they do their interpretation because it instantly elevates the level of the individual that they are interpreting about. And I ended up doing Phil Frank's eulogy.

07-01:08:00
Meeker: Oh. No kidding?

07-01:08:00
Brown: Yeah. That's how close the family became to me. And then at some point, Jo Schuman, Charlotte Schultz and Stanlee Gatti went to Phil Frank and got permission to reprint all of his cartoons that he had done, all of the images that he had done. It's a great book. It's a great book and I'm going to give you one.

07-01:08:26
Meeker: Okay. I'd love to see it.

07-01:08:28
Brown: I'm going to give you one. Yeah, I'm going to see that you get it. You will love it. They had it printed and then we had a major event, a major dinner and I think three or four hundred people were present for that Christmas celebration. Each of them got an autographed book from Phil Frank with all of the cartoons that he had done about me. And he did one every week in the *Chronicle*. Some of them were brutal. [laughter]

07-01:09:04
Meeker: Well, it's great you can laugh at this because I think one way somebody can be successful in politics is learning how to deal with criticism. Because you're going to have a lot of people out to get you. And how did you learn how to deal with criticism over the years?

07-01:09:27
Brown: Well, some people say your arrogance is what equipped you, because you always had a different view of yourself and you never let anybody shake your view, no matter what the circumstances were. I enjoy any form of humor, whether it's about me, against me, or with me or any other person. I really

love to laugh, because I think when people are doing the humorous things there's nothing mean-spirited about it whatsoever. Has no meanness in it. And it comes with a great amount of respect. A great amount of respect. Phil Frank started doing his cartoons, for an example, and he moved up to the tower at the *Chronicle*. And when they finished doing whatever remodeling they were doing, they were going to have the ribbon cutting and the opening of the tower. And he said, "I don't want but one person to cut that ribbon and that's Willie Brown." And that confirmed to me that there never was a time when he disliked Willie Brown. There was a time when he had his own view about Willie Brown's conduct, but he had profound respect for me that on the occasion of his elevation to his new digs he wanted that to happen with me. And when we did his eulogy we did the bear. If you recall he had the bear. We did the park ranger. We did all of those. But they all were under the frequency with which he lampooned or wrote about Willie Brown. And that said volumes for me, because no one else—this gifted, talented cartoonist, nobody else could command as much of his attention as I apparently did.

And it was the same with the columnist Herb Caen. Everybody desired to be mentioned in his column. Annually my name appeared in Herb Caen's column almost twice as any other person. Period. And that was all a part of how I think one has to be in order to ultimately be influential at building consensus on what you may desire to have happen for your city. And the perception of who Willie Brown really was is what sustained me because you could not define me without there being competition for the definition. Period. If I'd been unknown, if I'd been kind of a mystery, I'd kind of been anonymous, you could get away with what Trump does to people. Lying Ted or Little Marco or Crooked Hillary. Well, you couldn't do that with Willie Brown. It just couldn't stick. People knew too much about me. They had their own attitude and they would know whether or not the one you were trying to dump on me was applicable. And I think Herb and Phil designated His Willieness, and that has stuck to this day. And His Willieness, people know what that means.

07-01:13:52
Meeker: I think I know the answer to this but would you apply a two-word description to yourself?

07-01:13:57
Brown: [laughter] No.

07-01:14:01
Meeker: I had to ask.

07-01:14:05
Brown: [laughter] A one-word description.

07-01:14:08
Meeker: What would that be?

07-01:14:11
Brown: I said this once, I think either Phil or somebody else just like you pressed me, "What would you say?" Awesome! [laughter]

07-01:14:22
Meeker: Well, I want to ask you about the 2003 election. Newsom, Matt Gonzalez representing the Green Party and kind of the progressive side of the board. Ammiano comes back, as well, but doesn't make it into the finals. Did you play much role in this?

07-01:14:42
Brown: Oh, yeah. Very much so. Very much so.

07-01:14:44
Meeker: Yeah. Well, tell me about your thoughts on this election. What was at stake?

07-01:14:49
Brown: A part of my legacy was at stake. Definitely a part of my legacy was at stake. Because I knew that Newsom would not remove all of those people that had dedicated themselves and their resources to serving on boards and commissions. And fortunately it's now, what, almost twelve years later, since 2004 when he was sworn in, and you go to the port. Kimberly Brandon is still on the port. You go to the airport. Linda Crayton is still at the airport. Eleanor Johns is still at the airport. I can go through five, six, seven, ten commissions and people that I put on those commissions are still there. They're still there. Steve Kawa was number two in my office. He's now number one under Ed Lee. Ed Lee worked for me in three or four different capacities. He's still there. And so I would tell you that the whole business of what occurred in 2003, those people are the beneficiaries of the foundation of 2003.

What did I do in 2003? Clearly my administration, as any lame duck, so to speak, administration, would be suffering from all kinds of allegations. Inefficiency, non-performance, et cetera, and we were. We were pilloried. I had to point at Newsom and Newsom had not done himself a whole lot of good because he really was standoffish from the members of the board of supervisors. It was almost like he didn't want anything to do with them. He was not very productive as a board member, et cetera. He was, obviously, from a social standpoint above every other member of that board. And so when he's running for election he's using my electoral team to run his campaign and it becomes clear that Gonzalez was the forerunner to Bernie Sanders. Gonzalez was the forerunner to Trump. Gonzalez was the forerunner to all this new stuff, what occurred, the EU rejection. Gonzalez, back then, he was the center of what you would call the protest. We didn't have the tech world yet. But whatever tech process existed, whoever wanted to do that, they were looking at Matt Gonzalez. And so he was kind of the nature boy for the new media, for what would become eventually the social media, so to speak.

And Newsom was old school. He was blue book San Franciscan. He was Pacific Heights, A-list social status and what have you. Recall that every person of color that I had nominated and appointed to a board or commission, when they had to go before the board of supervisors, I suggested to the folk in Newsom's campaign, go look at the votes. I would guess that Matt Gonzalez, as one of those progressives, has rejected every one of my recommendations and you'll see that many of my recommendations were African American. He had never voted for one African American that I had proposed to appoint. And that little factor literally became a major issue in the campaign. They had successfully, for them, rejected one or two of my people. Black. So suddenly, without saying racist or anything of that nature, just the bare facts made Gonzalez different from Newsom. Matt and I are friends. He literally today would say that had not occurred. He may have been able to do better than he did. I don't think so, because I think the one component that Newsom had adhered to from Jack Davis, my campaign manager's direction, was to bank your winning margin before election day. And he did.

07-01:19:55
Meeker: What does that mean?

07-01:19:57
Brown: Absentee balloting. Newsom beat Matt Gonzalez by 14,000 votes. No, by 10,000 votes. Matt Gonzalez beat Newsom on election day by 14,000 votes. That means Newsom had 24,000 absentee ballots, or thereabouts. Gonzalez has fourteen. Newsom benefited from two things. He benefitted from the wisdom of banking absentee ballot voting and he benefitted from the board of supervisors having voted as progressives against the mayor's recommended appointees but it translated into ethnic rejection.

07-01:20:54
Meeker: How do you go about banking those absentee votes before election day? What's the process?

07-01:21:03
Brown: You simply start your solicitation of people whom you know will vote for you for sure but who in the past have been hesitant to be consistent in their actually casting a ballot. So you put a ten-person team together and every day of the week each member of that team will be required to produce a certain number of absentee ballot applications. Any time they don't meet the standard you're requiring you replace them with somebody else who will. So you set your goal of 25,000, let's say, absentee ballots. If you have solicited the application, you have made sure it was filled out, you made sure it was sent in, chances are they voted for you. And that's what we did. We started the process of early voting. We even went so far as to get an investigator for it. We had decided that in the public housing projects I'm going to get 80 percent of the vote only if they actually voted. So we had a separate operation for public housing and we did it two ways. We did it either absentee ballot or we did it through the management of the individual public housing units. Or we

did it with A. Philip Randolph Institute every day driving people to city hall from the public housing projects, having them cast their vote early in the basement of city hall, then taking them for a hotdog after they finished and taking them back home or taking them back to where they were picked up from. And we did that religiously. That's how you do it. You come up with a plan and a program.

Now you do it even more efficiently and effectively because you can use the electronic communication system. Period. We didn't have the electronic communication system. My last time ever on the ballot was 1999. And we didn't have that. It was not available to us. So we had to use the practical paper method and we did that. Now you can actually produce an absentee ballot application and get that done easier by way of the social media context and the person who masters that is going to be enormously benefitted by virtue of being able to do that. A fellow named Ace Smith, who runs Hillary's operation just did that to Bernie Sanders. Bernie Sanders had no real access to absentee balloting, although he had great command of the social media. He didn't translate it into an absentee ballot process. In some states they are now going written ballot. Oregon, I think, is 100 percent written ballot. I think we'll eventually get close to that in California. But we were the pioneers when we didn't have electronic means to assist us.

07-01:24:34
Meeker: What was the basis of that investigation?

07-01:24:37
Brown: That investigation was a very simple one. They said there is no way that public housing projects could be as efficient at their voting as we had produced them to be because they matched Pacific Heights. Unprecedented. Unprecedented and they couldn't believe it could be done. That's how we did it.

07-01:25:04
Meeker: So they weren't saying that you were giving them free food in exchange for a vote or something like that?

07-01:25:08
Brown: No, no. But they were trying to prove that there was nothing legal about the ballots that were actually cast. They were trying to suggest that somehow there was some skullduggery going on that produced those ballots. Not unlike what they most recently did in the Ed Lee campaign two seasons ago when they said that the number of people being assisted in Chinatown for vote purposes, and we got investigated for that. So we got investigated for everything.

07-01:25:31
Meeker: Well, I think the last thing I want to ask you about is your newspaper column. You've talked about Herb Caen a couple of times and I know that you were

very good friends with him. One might argue that you are now the new Herb Caen.

07-01:25:54
Brown: No. Not even close.

07-01:25:56
Meeker: Not even close?

07-01:25:57
Brown: Herb Caen was so talented. He was unbelievably talented. You understand that he wrote six days a week. Only on Saturday did he miss writing. He wrote five columns a week and those five columns commanded a piece of the newspaper that had a Macy's ad right next to it and it was the first thing everybody wrote and it was three dot journalism and it covered everything under the sun that went on. And sometimes he would write complete essays on one subject matter. He was a huge advocate on behalf of newspaper writers and newspaper workers. Period. And he would literally infuse much of what he was doing with that working newspaperman's mentality. And I think that he was as gifted as anybody that's ever tried to write on anything and I was glad to see that he got a Pulitzer Prize in New York in April of '96 for his more than fifty years, at that stage of the game, writing a daily column.

My limited once a week column sometimes reflects how I think Herb would have done it but is nowhere near what he actually did. And I frankly benefit from having participated in some of what he was doing, because he would call me two or three times a week and get my interpretation of some event or some activity, particularly in the political world. And we ate at least once a week, most times three times a week, together. We ate every Friday lunch together. We did football games, baseball games, and basketball games. High school, college, and pro together. We did opening nights, the symphony and the opera and the ballet. Of course, neither one of us would stay for the whole program. [laughter] We constantly would hang with the comedy clubs, particularly the Holy Zoo that was out on Clement Street. It was an open mic and Robin got his first start. And we would every week do a clothing shakedown, so to speak. So I had a lot of time with Herb Caen.

07-01:29:06
Meeker: A clothing shakedown?

07-01:29:97
Brown: Yeah, we'd go wherever the newest thing was being done with Wilkes Bashford store or wherever. But we didn't call it shopping. We called it the shakedown. [laughter] And the many years that I had the benefit of interacting with her. I performed his last marriage. He married Anne and I did that ceremony. And I sometimes have fun telling people about how I met Herb Caen, because Herb Caen was writing already. I was just a kid running for public office and Mary Ann Conrad was a PR person and kind of adopted me

to help me kind of win an election. And she was a Republican and her husband was a republican. Hunt Conrad. And they were big landowners down in Bakersfield or some other place of that nature. Big farmers. And she was very close to Herb Caen. They played tennis together once or twice a week at the tennis club up on—I think it's on Bush Street here in San Francisco. And when she told him about this young black guy that she had run across and she wanted to introduce me to him and Herb agreed that she could bring me back. Bardelli's was the restaurant on O'Farrell Street where Herb had lunch once or twice a week. He'd walk over from the *Chronicle* to have lunch once or twice a week. So she took me to Bardelli's to introduce me to Herb and to have lunch with Herb. Halfway through the lunch Herb dismissed her. He just said, "You've got to go someplace. We're off for the rest of the afternoon so we can just bullshit and that's how I started." And then it never stopped. It never stopped. We had a ton of fun together. And whenever he would see me someplace he would look for a quote. And he said once one of the best quotes I ever gave him was I showed up at a restaurant with a buddy of mine, Judge Dearman and a good looking woman, airline stewardess I had just met and we were taking her to lunch. And Herb did not know John Dearman but he saw this good looking woman, he saw me, and he saw this other black guy. So he sent a note over. "Who's the beard?" asking about—because I was married. "Who's the beard?" I said, "Don't be so conventional. She's the beard." [laughter]

07-01:32:16
Meeker: San Francisco, right. [laughter]

07-01:32:18
Brown: Yeah, that's right. And he never forgot that. That was back in the sixties. He never forgot that. He'd tell that story full-time. [laughter]

07-01:32:29
Meeker: So it sounds like your column in some ways is a tribute to his memory.

07-01:32:34
Brown: It is. Truly is. I try my best. When folk read my diatribe, I as I call it, they think of Herb maybe. And if they do that's a real compliment because that's what I intended.

07-01:32:54
Meeker: I should let you get off to your wedding. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

07-01:32:58
Brown: No. All done.

07-01:33:01
Meeker: Well, I think that's good. We could go on for hours but I think it's probably prudent to wrap it up here. Thank you for this. This was really fun for me and it was a good education, as well.

07-01:33:15
Brown: You're a good interviewer.

07-01:33:16
Meeker: I appreciate the time.

07-01:33:17
Brown: Very good interviewer.

07-01:33:18
Meeker: Thank you very much.

[End of Interview]