

## CURT PRINGLE

### **PART II: The struggle for the speakership: An epic political battle as Curt Pringle makes history**

*Interview conducted by Dan Morain in Anaheim, California on June 22, 2023*

**DM:** Did you know it before Paul Horcher, cast his vote for Willie Brown, for speaker?

**CP:** Well I'm sure a lot of smarter people than me knew it was certain. I mean, I am the optimist and I always believed that we can get there, so until it was done, it was something I wasn't gonna believe.

**DM:** All right. So I don't want to move on from this point if there's something else you recall from that day? That day where Paul Horcher pounded his desk and said, "Willie Brown!"

**CP:** That's one video I don't have, Dan, so if you have it please don't share it with me.

[laughter]

**DM:** Yeah, I don't have it, but I remember it 'cause I was there.

**CP:** Oh please. Yeah I was there too.

**DM:** Yeah.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** Can you recall anything else about that day, like what your plan B was, at this point?

**CP:** I don't think there was a plan B necessarily, and therefore it played out and a lot of scurrying around and not knowing how to take the next steps, how to address the Legislature when there's a 40-40 tie. Thirty-nine Democrats with Paul Horcher made it a 40-40 tie, and how to figure out what those next steps were is what took place thereafter of which you can remember.

**DM:** So one of the issues was what you had mentioned earlier. Dick Mountjoy, who was a member of the Assembly but had been elected to the state Senate and represented the San Gabriel Valley. And so the issue was whether he was still a member of the Assembly, in which case it was a 40-40 house. If he was a state senator having just been elected, was it a 40-39 house with Democrats being 40-39?

**CP:** I don't know if that was a really unique situation. I think it was. I don't know if anyone had ever been elected to the state Assembly and the state Senate on the same ballot at the same time.

**DM:** I don't know the answer to that either.

**CP:** And so people may not recall that there was a vacancy in the Senate, so Mountjoy filed to run for the Assembly to run for re-election. And then within that intervening time, there was a vacancy in the state Senate and the special election had been called and he filed to run for that seat, too. And it was judged that he could be on the ballot twice for each of those seats. And so that day he came to the state Assembly he was sworn onto the state Assembly. Winning a special election, he didn't have to be sworn into the state Senate at that point in time, so he was sworn into the state Assembly. The numbers were such, therefore, he was being faced with whenever he chose to be sworn in as a senator, *if* he chose to be sworn in as a senator, then he would be vacating a seat in the Assembly. So that certainly played in into all of the machinations of trying to figure out how do we secure that majority, or how do we secure the level of leadership that was necessary in a 40-40 house.

**DM:** So you're in a 40-40 house because the clerk of the house, Dotson Wilson, has concluded that Dick Mountjoy can continue to remain in the Assembly until he chooses to move over to the Senate.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** Which caused, certainly, some alarm on the part of Democrats, and Willie Brown especially. Do you recall anything about that?

**CP:** Well, I think you portrayed that, right. I mean Dotson Wilson was always perceived as an honorable guy serving in that clerk position and not overly biased towards the person who appointed him to that spot in Willie Brown. But that ruling, by all accounts in retrospect, was the correct ruling. And Dotson stood up for what he thought was correct and which turned out to be, but it certainly didn't necessarily please the Democrats.

**DM:** The fight went on for some period of time.

**CP:** Yes.

**DM:** And then ultimately Doris Allen fellow Orange County Republican Assemblywoman was elected speaker.

**CP:** Yeah. But before we get to that, what I do think it was interesting, and this might sound kind of off base for me to say at this point in time. But, you know, there's no question because Dick Mountjoy did in fact later resign his seat in the Assembly to be sworn into the Senate, and he did that. So there are some that could say, well, the Democrats did momentarily have this majority, and they could have really pushed that majority. But even though the agony of having 41 Republicans and not being the solid embodied majority, Willie Brown did some unusual things at that moment in time.

**DM:** What did he do?

**CP:** And in fact, he is the one that pushed for an even set of committees and committee chairmanships. And during that time as we came into 1995, he is the one that set out, "Well, we'll

have a power sharing agreement." Because at that moment it was 40-40 before Mountjoy resigned. And that power sharing agreement did say there'd be this even number of Republicans and Democrats on each committee, and that all the committee chairmen would be evenly divided. So that, of course, was kind of dicey because what committees get into the Republican hands and which committees go into Democrat hands for chairmanships?

**DM:** Well, you got an interesting committee.

**CP:** It was, but the point is that the step before that is there was a date set to sit down with both caucuses' leadership to determine which committees we would get. And Brulte wanted me to be the one to determine which committees the Republicans would get.

**DM:** Why did Brulte want you to have that vote?

**CP:** I don't know. I'm thankful. But of course, there were a lot of Republicans that would lose out. They wouldn't become the chairs of committees that they may want. So there could be a lot of arrows thrown at the person who made the selections. So I was prepared for those arrows. But I really focused on that for a long time to figure out how to create this picking order, which priority committees that we would want and what I thought the Democrats would want. So that day we got together in the speaker's conference room. Willie Brown, of course, continued to preside there. And the Republicans were offered the first pick on committees. So in that election, or at that point in time, they separated ways and means into appropriations committee and budget committee.

**CP:** And the rule determined ahead of time was one caucus would chair one of those and the other caucus would automatically get the other one. So of course, our first pick was appropriations, but I did work hard to put in order what we wanted and what I thought they wanted, and how we could leverage those selections back and forth. So we selected Appropriations and then the Democrats deferred to Paul Horcher to allow him to take that pick. And he picked the Judiciary Committee, of which he then later chaired. And then we picked our committees back and forth. I wanted the GO committee, so I had that on my list to pick third. And, but they picked GO second.

**DM:** And GO, Governmental Organization committee, is significant because why?

**CP:** Oh, a tremendous amount of interests from gambling, tobacco to other issues all go (to GO). It is a collect-all, but it is an exciting committee with a lot of interesting public policy issues that always seem to bubble to the top. But sitting in that room was Willie Brown and Paul Horcher and Richard Katz. And then on the other side of the table was Brulte and myself. So after GO was picked and I wanted it third, so I substituted for my third selection, Transportation, of which really wasn't very high on my list to be honest. But with Richard Katz sitting there. And since Richard had been the long serving chair of Transportation. I thought, I'll get this on our side and maybe we could trade things later. So anyway, we did the back and forth all the way down to the bottom. Richard asked if I would swap Transportation. I said yes. And I offered a couple committees, that I needed to do that kind of like a trading some minor league players or major league players with a minor league throw-in type thing. But...

**DM:** So what'd you get in exchange for transportation?

**CP:** Nothing, because Willie Brown didn't want to do a deal.

**DM:** Oh.

**CP:** Now Richard did [laughter], but, Willie didn't. So...

**DM:** And why did Willie not want to do a deal. Do you know?

**CP:** I think he was happy with where he was or didn't want to get actually involved in shuffling around those selections to benefit one member.

**DM:** I see.

**CP:** But at the end of the day, we came back and said, these are the committees we chaired. So of course you had some Republican members very excited because they would become chairs of committee and others were very, very disappointed because they were hoping to get certain committees to chair, as well.

**DM:** So. Well, now you chaired Appropriations as I recall, right?

**CP:** Right. Yep.

**DM:** So, and that was the number one committee, either side would've chosen appropriations, because all bills go through that that spend money.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** And their first choice would've been what? Budget? Or GO?

**CP:** So their first choice was Judiciary.

**DM:** Judiciary. Oh, Paul Horcher is it?

**CP:** Right. And then our second choice was Insurance. And their second choice was GO.

**DM:** Interesting. And so, in your caucus, who won, who lost, who was annoyed with you? You were catching Brulte's flack.

**CP:** Yes. Exactly. Well, you can run down the list. Those committees that we chaired in 1995, all of those committee chairs pretty much were happy. The vice chairs that were Republicans in 1995 were probably less happy.

**DM:** I see. Okay. Right. So you're chair of Appropriations?

**CP:** Yes.

**DM:** Willie Brown is still in control of the Assembly, but he's decided to run for mayor of San Francisco. No doubt his days as speaker would be numbered, and Doris Allen is elected. She is a fellow Republican from Orange County. So, you must have had a relationship with her. Why don't you tell us about Speaker Doris Allen. What led up to that?

**CP:** Well, I'd rather see her from Assemblywoman Doris Allen's perspective. My wife's first job after she graduated from Biola with a degree in political science, was as an intern in Doris's office. So we knew Doris Allen and her husband and much of her staff. And so there was a more personal relationship that was underneath that, of which not many people would've assumed going into that election in 1994 or '95 when she was selected as speaker.

**CP:** Doris Allen, I think, was the only elected official to come to my wife and my wedding in 1984. So yes, there was a longstanding relationship. And as I said, when Dick Longshore died on the day after the June primary, the very first call I got was from Doris Allen to say, "Curt, you should put your name in that hat for that appointment." So, there was a long established relationship with her. So that became even a little more entangled and challenging when the Democrats, along with Doris Allen, voted for Doris Allen to be speaker.

**DM:** Well, so back up, when Mr. Longshore died and Doris Allen urged you to put your name in to become the Republican Party nominee, did she use her influence with the party to get them to endorse you?

**CP:** She used her influence. I mean, she of course had a vote on the central committee. A couple people who worked for her were central committee members and yeah, they voted for me.

**DM:** Okay.

**CP:** And they were important votes for that. I mean, I only won there by one vote.

**DM:** Really?

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** Okay.

**CP:** Exactly.

**DM:** Okay. So, she had no small amount to do with your first victory in 1988.

**CP:** Right, exactly.

**DM:** Anyway, fast forward to 1995. What happened?

**CP:** Right. Well, but this was, if I should say and I don't wanna speak ill of Doris, but she was a different person and she was selected by the Democrats, really, so that the Democrats could control her and maintain the Democrat majority and the Democrat status, and the Democrat rules that were there. Even though there was a Republican majority, they were able to co-opt her with a tremendous honor of being speaker.

**CP:** So, she was that. However, she was running it the way it had been run in terms of the institution. And some people thought, okay, Republican's lost. Now there's a Republican speaker, so that's it. We should roll over and align behind her. And I was the one that said, absolutely not. I mean, that part of electing a Republican majority was also moving forward with the Republican agenda and addressing some of the issues of the house that were contrary to how Willie Brown had run it.

**CP:** So, I and a number of folks really worked hard to push back on the narrative we should align behind Doris Allen, and we didn't. And we created an opposition at that point in time. And as you know, immediately a couple people including, Congressman Dana Rohrabacher and a few others as leads, filed recall papers against Doris immediately.

**DM:** Immediately after she was elected speaker.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** And that was an incredibly contentious election...

**CP:** But it was a quick one though, Dan. I mean, think about this. She was elected speaker, I think on like June 4th or June 5th of 1995. She had a recall qualified within a couple months, and that's pretty remarkable in terms of the public sentiment of a Republican from a Republican district basically caving in to the Democrat interests and the Democrat power. So the voters in her district responded very quickly.

**DM:** And the main Republican candidate was Scott Baugh, who ultimately won. But it became quite messy because Dana Rohrabacher's wife helped place on the ballot – well, I don't know what you would call her -- but a friend of Scott Baugh's to run as a Democrat, which as I understood it, all but ensured that he would win the recall. And there were implications for you, you had staff members who were involved in that. So talk about that. Tell us from where you sit, what was going on?

**CP:** Well, I think you hit it on the head. One thing you'll learn about politics is the more you get involved is there's really not one person in charge. [laughter] There's a lot of folks that have ideas in doing their own stuff. And in that recall election, I was serving in the state Assembly. I was chair of Appropriations until Doris kicked me off from being chair of Appropriations. And we were pushing through a budget. I was the author of that budget that year in 1995-96, so I had a number of other things going on. So I wasn't involved in the elements of that, but there were people who worked for me that did get involved in some of that Republican effort and it's disappointing that they did. They certainly were saddened that they got looped into that and that situation, but thankfully that issue is behind them, as well as behind me and Scott Baugh.

**DM:** Yeah. Well, so the candidate, the shell candidate, I guess, was Lori Campbell.

**CP:** Yeah.

**DM:** And Scott Baugh ended up getting charged with crimes, as did Rhonda Carmony. I guess she pled guilty and a couple of your staffers pled guilty as well. When you say you got past it, I mean that remains a blemish on their lives. In retrospect, is there anything you could have done that could have stopped it?

**CP:** Well, I could have said, "Don't do something I'm not aware you're doing." If I had known they were doing it, there was very clear edict in my office not to be involved. And the people who worked for me knew that in any of those efforts. I was supporting Scott Baugh, and I had endorsed him, and I worked for his election, but I did not participate. And no one in my office was permitted to participate. There were a couple that did, in violation of my direct request, and sadly they did that. I know this point forward, they've still been upset that they participated when they shouldn't have. But you can say Scott Baugh got charged. Yes, he did. But all of that was thrown out, and there was never anything proven or shown that he violated any law in that regard. So I believe there was a very politically aggressive district attorney that wanted to show that he could run for attorney general and get support from both Republicans and Democrats, because he went after Republicans and Democrats.

**DM:** And that Republican, that district attorney came from Orange County, a Republican county at the time. Okay. His name was Capizzi.

**CP:** Yeah, Mike Capizzi.

**DM:** Mike Capizzi. So why did Doris Allen bump you off Appropriations?

**CP:** Well, I mean, as I said earlier I was pushing back strong on not aligning with Doris just because she was a Republican. She was not a Republican speaker selected by Republicans and she didn't necessarily bring about a Republican agenda. She allowed for the Democrat agenda to continue in most regards. So of course, I think I was viewed probably as her greatest nemesis in the Legislature at the time. So how to punish me and send a signal that all Republicans should be fearful of her is why she yanked me on that Thursday afternoon off of being chair of Appropriations and moved me outta my office and put me in the second smallest office in the Capitol. And that was all fine.

**DM:** Where was the second smallest office in the Capitol?

**CP:** On the fifth floor across from the elevators.

**DM:** Oh, that one.

**CP:** I don't remember the numbers. I've try to wipe that from my memory. But from my point of view, the way I look at it, is you never want your opponents to feel they won, even when they take a swing at you like that. So that Saturday and Sunday when I was home, I did this: I typed

up a flyer to have an office open house. And I printed it up. So when I showed up on Monday morning, I asked my staff to put this flyer in every one of the press mailboxes and distribute it to all the lobbyists and take it to every member Republican and Democrat's office to come that afternoon at 4 o'clock for an open house, an office warming. I told the governor (Pete Wilson) what I was doing, and he thought it was interesting. And I went to the sandwich shop at the corner that I always used to go to, Tony's Deli, and asked them to put up a couple tables, one with soft drinks and chips, the other with sandwiches.

**CP:** And we had a flyer that was distributed, inviting everybody to the office opening. And the only real reference there to kind of poke was the little tagline on the bottom, said, "Please no gifts. There's just not enough room." But other than that, we took over the hall in front of the elevators to prove the point. None of that stuff, be it sitting on committees or where your office is, matters, and that we are still focused on the ball. There were a couple of Doris Allen staff people though that were standing at the corners writing down people's names. And until, of course, the hall was full of people. And then when the governor came up to attend the office open house, of course, you know how the issues of the Capitol are, the governor very seldom comes up into the legislative areas. So he came up with all of his staff, and so it was a good time and positive and uplifting for the team to stay focused.

**DM:** I see. Paul Horcher meanwhile also was recalled.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** And he was replaced by Gary.

**CP:** Gary Miller.

**DM:** Gary Miller. Right. Who went on to become a member of Congress.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** Yeah.

**CP:** So I think, what was that? Was that in... That was like March or maybe a little after March. But that recall happened and then the Doris Allen recall happened.

**DM:** Okay. So Gary Miller replaces Horcher, Scott Baugh replaces Doris Allen. Republicans have a clear majority, but it's really a narrow majority.

**CP:** Yeah. Well, but also put in that mix that Willie Brown got elected mayor, and then he resigned from office when he was sworn in to be the mayor.

**DM:** Right. And there was an interim after Doris Allen was recalled, there was another speaker, Brian Setencich. And, what was your relationship with Speaker Setencich or Assemblyman Setencich, he of Fresno.



**CP:** Oh, it never was that strong, because he was a little quirky in that regard. So Doris was facing a recall, we're addressing the recess at the end of session in September. Brian was elected speaker in the same fashion. He and Doris and the Democrats all voted for him. They knew there was going to be a recall election in the fall in which Doris would most likely be removed. So they wanted to make sure there was someone in place in that job before they return in January after the end of the winter break. So Brian served as speaker for 72 hours of time the Legislature was in session. So three days. We went out in recess and then we came back in January of 1996.

**DM:** And then he ultimately lost that seat as well. To Robert Prenter, as I recall.

**CP:** Yes.

**DM:** And, were you involved in that election?

**CP:** Sure.

**DM:** Sure.

**DM:** You were happy to get rid of Brian Setencich.

**CP:** Sure.

**DM:** Okay, Prenter didn't last all that long either.

**CP:** That's all right.

**DM:** That's all right. Okay. [laughter]

**7 CP:** You know, for me in the circumstance, I mean, Robert Prenter was a fine young fellow, but the voters in Setencich district removed him, So that happened in the primary in 1996, well in the general in 1996, but how that really happened was Setencich was still a Republican. And, no Republican filed against him, and he got the Democrats not to have any Democrat filed against him. So basically he was on the ballot by himself. And when he faced the election in November, Robert Prenter was a write-in candidate and was able to be the write-in candidate. And maybe I have that wrong. He might have won as a write-in in the primary, but whatever the case, it was, a surprise attack and successful.

**DM:** And that was a campaign also again, I guess funded by Howard Ahmanson, as I recall. There was some relationship there. Be that as it may, you come in. Clearly, you're the Republican leader, Brulte has been elected to the State Senate. So that leaves you, Brulte is running for the state Senate.

**CP:** Right.

**DM:** Right.

**CP:** Well, yeah.

**DM:** In '96. Right, exactly.

**CP:** As he was termed out. Yeah.

**DM:** And so this leaves you with a clear path to become Speaker. How clear was your path?

**CP:** Yeah. It was as clear as mud. I mean, there, because Brian Setencich was still Speaker through those three months, he was out visiting with many Republican members and promised many of them many things. There's no question, I'm not universally loved. [laughter] So particularly at that point in time, you know, I have a perspective. I usually share my perspective. And there was certainly some Republican members that who are not fans of mine, or me of them. So how to unify all of them because you had to have all of them. And to vote for me that was a challenging task. I'm one that is happy to ask for help. I asked for help from the governor to try to make sure we could encourage every Republican Assembly member to vote for me for Speaker. The tagline was "Vote for the Republican's choice for speaker." Whoever the caucus chose, I knew I had an overwhelming majority of the caucus, but maybe not all of them strong. The governor was very supportive and made a lot of contacts. The chair of the Republican Party of California sent letters to folks asking every member to pledge to vote for the Republican selection for speaker.

**DM:** Who was the chair then?

**CP:** I believe that was Shawn Steele or Mike Schroeder, but they both were chairs of that time. Now that rankled some folks to say, we're not gonna be told what to do by the party. But nonetheless, I asked Newt Gingrich personally, and he made personal calls to some Republicans that were contemplating running for higher office, that this would really be important. And there were a couple of them that I was worried may not be a vote for me at the beginning. And I asked Haley Barbour was the chair of the Republican National Committee. I asked him to get involved. And this was a big focus. Republicans won a majority in 1994 of the state of California, and yet the Democrats were able to maintain power through '95. And will Republicans in the largest state in America have a Republican majority demonstrated by having a Speaker of their choice. There were a lot of people far beyond just California borders, or for that matter, the borders of Orange County or Garden Grove, that got involved.

**DM:** My wild guess is that you knew exactly who you needed to work over. Who'd you have to work over?

**CP:** Well, I'm gonna be very candid with you up until the line, and there's certain people, living and dead today, that I didn't know if I could count on their votes. And but again, my whole focus was to make sure I did everything to address every one of those. But the point of the matter is, Dan, again, kind of one of my mantras is you always get your votes and you get an extra one in case of the double-cross. I didn't know at that moment in time if I could ever get a Democrat to vote for me. So what I decided to do is instead of the first vote on returning to up or down vote on Curt Pringle, I set it up so that the first vote upon returning was to pass new rules and

basically put all the power of the speakership into the rules committee, much like the Senate had been operating in.

**CP:** And have it prescribed very clearly that the majority party would have many members with their designee being the head of the Rules Committee and the Democrats, or the minority party, having so many members. By doing that, and on that day, I think, it was June 2nd or January 2nd, possibly January 3<sup>rd</sup>. No, I think, it was January 2nd, that we changed the rules in the Assembly to adopt a set of Republican rules. And with that, we certainly got all the members of our caucus to vote Yes, because that empowered Republicans. It wasn't an up or down vote on me. It was a way to address that. And if you remember that night, we did everything we could to demonstrate that we were in charge.

**DM:** Well one of the people who voted for the rules was an Assemblyman by the name of Dominic Cortese, who had bolted from the Democratic Party to become a Reform Party member.

**CP:** Yes.

**DM:** And how did that come about? I know that there was an allocation of money to the Reform Party Caucus, which was of one.

**CP:** Yeah. Well, candidly, none of that was discussed or involved, because I really didn't get around to setting budgets for the caucuses till probably February-ish. But Dom proved to be an independent person. Certainly he was a Democrat for a long time, and his family continues to be. But the point is he chose to leave the Democrat Party and not by my encouragement. If it was me encouraging, I would've asked him to be a Republican but he wasn't gonna go that far, I'm sure. But he joined the Reform Party and I think he had such an ethical core, at least my perception is that's exactly who he was. I believe and I'm gonna stand by the fact that he did it for proper reasons, saw the Republicans were the majority and should be in charge and he was willing to support that.

**DM:** So he was your vote, he was your backup vote?

**CP:** He voted for us, for the rules.

**DM:** Okay. All right.

**CP:** On that regard, I didn't think there would be a Republican that would vote against Republican sets of rules. We did have an extra one. Yes.

**DM:** Yeah. Well, but he would've been an extra vote for a speaker then presumably.

**CP:** But he wasn't.

**DM:** Okay. All right. Was there a Democrat who was willing to support you, do you think?

**CP:** There's certainly two of them that I had worked. Right.

**DM:** I see. Okay. You wanna say who they were?

**CP:** No, not at all. But the point of the matter is, we already had the rules. And by having the rules I still had one, one Republican that was playing games with me that said he might not vote for me for speaker. He hadn't made a commitment to me. So of course that required me to pull in a backup or at least work to have a backup.

**DM:** I see. Okay. Anyway, you become speaker.

**CP:** Yeah.

**DM:** So every day is a new day, every speakership fight is different. But I couldn't help but think about Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who I'm sure you know, I'm sure you're friends with him.

**CP:** Yep.

**DM:** And the slim majority he has, your majority was even slimmer.

**CP:** Right. Make sure we put it in context, there were only two times in California history in which a Speaker was elected with 40 votes, when Willie Brown was elected speaker in 1988. Because Lloyd Connelly had not been sworn in, so the house was only 79 members. So Willie Brown got elected speaker with 40 on the ruling of Dotson Wilson, I believe, or Brian Connelly, who was a preceding clerk. And then when I got elected speaker, I only got elected speaker with 40 votes.

**DM:** And...

**CP:** So that's, yes, that's pretty darn slim.

**DM:** Pretty slim. So you have to... And you've got all these...

**CP:** You might want to edit that pause out, you know?

**DM:** Well, no you...

[laughter]

**DM:** So you described yourself in interviews at that time, an interview with then Chronicle reporter Greg Lucas, now State Librarian, as being "very conservative."

**CP:** Yeah.

**DM:** And then you said you had other members of your caucus who were "very, very conservative." So, that was...

**CP:** That was a quote of the time?

**DM:** Exactly.

**CP:** Wow.

**DM:** Exactly.

**CP:** I was right then.

**DM:** Yeah.

[laughter]

**DM:** Right. So you had to balance, you had to figure out how to deal with people who were very conservative, people who were moderate. Jim Cunneen, Brooks Firestone, others.

**CP:** Steve Kuykendall.

**DM:** Steve Kuykendall.

**CP:** Yep.

**DM:** And the people who were very, very conservative, who were presumably to the right of you, at least on certain issues. So how did you balance that? How do you do that? Were there deals you had to strike?

**CP:** Well there are always deals, that's the legislative process. And some people miss the fact ... In a lot of people's playbook, it's a legislative process between the Rs and the Ds. Once you're in Sacramento you realize a lot of the legislative process is a battle between the Assembly and the Senate, but there's always the underlying battle within a party. And, I don't know how it is today when you have such an overwhelming Democrat majority but I would assume that's still there. That there are people that want to talk on the very moderate side of the Democrat philosophy and the others on the very, very extreme progressive side, and I get that. So I don't believe the battle I faced [was] how do I balance a caucus, on from environmental issues, to coastal preservation issues, to abortion issues, social matters.

**CP:** Our caucus was a broad caucus with a broad policy focus, but there were things you could align on. And therefore my battle always was to let those other issues where there really was contention within the caucus to not have any caucus involvement or push from leadership for everybody to align. But in fact, to find those points of alignment where we really could define what Republicans believed in. And a lot of just the administrative actions that happened on the floor to get our team to solely be in support there. And where you wanna vote on philosophical issues, you get elected to your district and you have your prerogative to vote where you wish.

**DM:** Right after you were elected, you did what many politicians do when they win, you did something for a little bit of symbolism. You put three, described as luxury, Cadillacs up for sale

and made a point of saying you would drive a 1991 Dodge Spirit. So why'd you do that? These were Cadillacs which were bought by former Speaker Willie Brown, but of course they were bought by the Assembly, I believe now, but...

**CP:** Right. Exactly. Well...

**DM:** Why'd you do that?

**CP:** First off, let's talk practically. When I served for eight years I did not have the sergeants drive me around anything, the Assembly Sergeant at Arms do provide that service. I never used it. I drove myself. I'm independent, I like to drive and I don't like to be bothered by other people telling me what to do. So just because I became Speaker in 1996, the car I drove for the three years preceding that and the three years after that was the exact same car. So there's no need for me to have somebody chauffeur me around. Other people can choose how they wish to get around. For whatever title they have they can make those choices. But since I didn't need those cars, one stationed in San Francisco, one stationed in Los Angeles and one stationed at the Capitol, I didn't need those cars. So I sold them.

**3 DM:** And well but it was a symbolic shot.

**CP:** Of course, I'll take all the symbolism.

**DM:** Right.

**CP:** We audited the Assembly books at the same time, we had a little more freedom in where people's offices were, it was not just a reward and punishment of office space. So yeah we did a lot of things to shake it up.

**DM:** Can you recall who took your old office on the fifth floor?

**CP:** Probably Setencich.

**DM:** And there's an even smaller office up on the sixth floor.

**CP:** That was my original office when I got elected. So that is the most unfair office. It's next to the cafeteria on the oven side of the cafeteria. And I was placed there in 1988 when I unexpectedly won that seat, the first seat. So that was very, very small, both the member's office and the auxiliary front office. So when I became Speaker, I made that a library. I believe the Judiciary Committee library. So I eliminated that as Assembly office because it was too small. So I took away that ultimate punishment, just so you know.

**DM:** I think they've moved the books out of there, at least they did at one point.

**CP:** And found somebody [laughter] to send there. Okay.

**DM:** Oh, yeah.

**CP:** All right. But not when I was Speaker. Just put it in context.

**DM:** Well so you came in and you had priorities. Recall what your priorities were. What were three things you wanted to do as Speaker?

**CP:** Well, yes. I still had a focus on the California economy, small business development and to encourage that and we did that and focused on those things through tax cuts and regulatory reform in a great way. But also my most significant priority was to allow the members of my caucus to have priorities and to be able to address the issues that they ran on and that were important to them.

**DM:** So that's a double-edged sword because.

**CP:** Yep, exactly.

**DM:** Because while you...

**CP:** I won't show you the scars from what edge. Okay. So, [laughter]

**DM:** Yeah. Well, among the issues you pushed in that year of '96 was a 5 percent business tax cut.

**CP:** Yes.

**DM:** When you go back to read the stories that were written about your first year of speakership, that's mentioned not nearly as much as the paddling bill that your fellow Orange County Republican, Mickey Conroy carried.

**CP:** Yep.

**DM:** So you had these sorts of bills that you... Well, paddling, tell me about the paddling bill. That comes to the floor and you wince.

**CP:** Of course I winced I mean for all the reasons you pointed out. So here I have a member of the Assembly that comes up with a bill that most of the people in my caucus don't want to ever see. I don't want to be the Speaker that tells members, when I don't have any votes to spare, to drop their priorities and drop their bills. So, yes, I let a number of bills progress to the floor that it were not things I wanted our caucus to be identified with, but unfortunately they were.

**DM:** And this was a bill that got national coverage. This was a bill that would've permitted public school vice presidents, vice principals, I don't know who, to paddle miscreant children. Not a good idea.

**CP:** I actually thought it had to do with graffiti.

**DM:** And well there was also paddling for graffiti. There were two paddling bills actually.

**CP:** Okay.

**DM:** So anyway, so you had to deal with this, and this is because you have...

**CP:** I had to deal with it.

**DM:** ... because you have not a vote to spare.

**CP:** Among other things. Everybody knew my philosophy and what I supported and what I didn't. The Republican Caucus of 1996 was not a Curt Pringle philosophically-founded caucus. It was a Curt Pringle, the leader of a caucus of people who have a variety of ideas and concerns, and a caucus that had freedom. I won't be identified as a freedom caucus, but a caucus that had freedom to be able to do the things that those individual members wanted to do on a public policy basis.

**DM:** Well did you ever have a conversation with the Assemblyman Conroy, who I'm sure you were friendly with, "Mickey, don't do this."

**CP:** Yes.

**DM:** And what did he say?

**CP:** No.

[laughter]

**DM:** Okay. All right. You wanna expand on that?

**CP:** No, no. I'm fine. Good heavens, he was an Assembly member from Orange County that got national press on a bill that he had this idea to carry. So...

**DM:** Okay.

**CP:** He was unwilling to step away from that and I wasn't in a position or interested in pushing everybody around into conforming with everything I wanted.