

CURT PRINGLE

PART III: 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: Okay. So Willie Brown, mayor of San Francisco former speaker, longest-serving speaker, probably forever in California. Not your ideological soulmate.

CP: Right.

DM: But you bonded with him.

CP: Yep.

DM: So, talk about that. How did that come about and why, why did you go to Willie Brown? Why did you want to speak to Willie Brown?

CP: Because I can separate and he can separate political policy and philosophy from personal relationships, and I was very fortunate to be able to build a personal relationship with him. And I certainly had respect for him, and I think maybe there's some mutual respect there. But when I was Speaker, hey, I wanted to learn from everybody I could to ensure I did a good job in running the house, addressing the issues the way I should. In terms of running a multi-million dollar enterprise, which the Assembly is, that faces the public and has a lot of egotistical people in the middle of it. So I wanted to learn from him and figure things out. There weren't many people I could rely upon. The only two other living speakers happened to be Republicans that I didn't support in Brian Setencich and Doris Allen. So Willie had all the institutional memory on that. So yes, I called him up, I drove to San Francisco probably once a month we had lunch and he...

DM: Where did you eat?

CP: Well, mostly at the Four Seasons at his direction, that's where I made reservations. So going there and he always wanted an update of what was happening from my perspective in the Assembly. I mean, good heavens, he had lived and been certainly Speaker for 14 and a half years, but also had served in the Assembly many years before that. So that was his life, and he had separated from that to be mayor of San Francisco. So he was very interested in knowing all the political intrigue and the dynamics and issues going on. But also I wanted to get better and smarter and learn from him and, I certainly did.

DM: What were some of the lessons? Well, tell me some Willie Brown wisdom.

CP: Well, so probably the one thing that has truly stuck with me, and we see this in Washington right now, that there is always the criticism of a leader, mainly from their side in negotiations, for not getting enough. But why would you not fight for more? Why would you not get more in any negotiation? We've recently seen this in Congress, but, you always see this, and that is kind of

this internal battle within caucuses. You have someone on one side or the other saying you should have held out to get a little bit more. And I actually, I remember precisely, what I asked Willie Brown, "You were the leader of the Assembly. You could have gotten anything you wanted." I said, "Did you ever satisfy with something less in a negotiated policy issue less than your philosophy?"

CP: And he said, "Oh, of course." And I said, "How much?" And he said, "At least 50 percent of the time." So in my head, it was 50 percent of the time, someone who is philosophically aware of their complete belief system, he's willing, even though he's the most powerful legislator in California history, he is willing to settle less to get his side philosophically satisfied, more than 50 percent of the time. So, one, that was somewhat comforting because I didn't know what he was gonna answer, right? But the flip side is, why would you? Why wouldn't you push to get everything you want? Which is kind of what the majorities, or at least the really aggressive extremes of each party want. If you're in charge, we want everything. We want you to hold out till we get everything.

CP: Of course, we know that's not the case, but why would someone who really does have that power, which I didn't have, why would you settle for less? And he was very articulate and very clear, not that he ever thought about it, but he is that spontaneous and articulate. And what, he said to me is, "Sometimes it's not worth it putting in the political energy and paying the political price to fight for something." He said, "Oftentimes there are members of my caucus that are in charge of those issues, and I let them just handle it. I don't inject myself to tell them how I want it to be done, I let them solve those issues." He said candidly, "Sometimes it's okay to let the minority party win and get something." And he said, "And specifically, I wanna hold out and use the powers of this office to get the things that are really important to me."

CP: And really for me to step back, not only did I use those thoughts when I was Speaker, but I certainly have used them, in being mayor and running my business and being a part of a lot of negotiations. I think negotiators miss the point that yes, we've all been told both sides have to feel they're winning something, but the other side is, do you hold out to get everything? And if you do, you only can do that a few times. Otherwise that power that you think you have gets pulled away with those who don't wanna go through those kind of fights. And I will make sure I share those points of view with the speaker of the House. But I think he already understands it.

DM: Well, we'll see or we're seeing.

CP: Yep.

DM: So there was an incident we've spoken about recently on May 30th, 1996. A Republican Assemblyman, Phil Hawkins from Torrance, I believe, brought up legislation on the floor. So this is one of the many legislative deadlines, but you have to move bills from the house of origin into the Senate by May 31st. So anyway, this is May 30th, this is a bill that Hawkins was carrying, it looked to be the sort of law-and-order bill that Republicans would support. This would have made it a crime for pregnant women to ingest drugs. This was aimed at crack addicts and their babies. There was a lot of press attention and attention given to the phenomenon of crack babies. And John Burton of San Francisco stood up and spoke against it. Why don't you

tell us what the reaction was? Your reaction, the Assembly Republican Caucus's reaction.

CP: Yes, that was one bill that one member of the caucus, Phil Hawkins, put together and it really addressed the safety of children with an addict mother and how can those children be protected. Yet what often gets lost in a lot of those battles is both sides of that equation, too, in terms of that drug-addicted mother and what she may be going through. So in a pure law-and-order perspective, you can understand the reasoning behind the bill and how it came about, it passed through Republican committees, came to the floor, got speakers in support of it. It looked like it was solidly gonna pass, probably with some Democrat votes, when John Burton stood up to argue against it.

CP: Now, there's two things I know you know, that regardless of how liberal John Burton is, he has always been highly respected by the Republican Caucus because he's an honest broker and people know where he's coming from. He's very clear in sharing his perspective. So he's not somebody who's double-dealing or playing games. You know who he is and many of us, most of us, respect him for that. So when he stood up and gave his personal history, which many people knew, but some didn't, of being a drug addict a part of his life, and stepping out of Congress due to that and all the challenges in his life and how his life was possessed by drugs, not because he wanted to be, but because of that power on him. It really made people understand that there's two sides of this battle, certainly for the child, but also for the mother who is facing that the power of drugs and the impact on her. So our caucus...

DM: Well, you were Speaker... You were presiding over this session?

CP: Yes.

DM: Did you know that he was going to give this speech?

CP: No.

DM: So you're caught by surprise, you just assume this is one of a few hundred bills you're dealing with?

CP: Right.

DM: And it's going to go through.

CP: Yeah, exactly that was the assumption. And, hey, I'm an emotional guy, so I probably teared up at that moment and the roll was opened, and then it was closed and put on a call, which is holding that roll call available, and we recessed the caucus. So, reeling back, anybody who watches Sacramento politics knows there's virtually never been a floor speech that I can really recall other than that one, where people change their mind. Usually people stand up in a floor speech to pontificate or to get extra credit points with any of the viewers or any of the interests that are watching, right? So there are very few that really change people's mind. That one did. So we went into caucus, and the author was leading the discussion, saying, "I will drop the bill, I will withdraw the bill." So this wasn't done, pushing back on the author of the bill, the power of

John's argument was universally felt and our caucus came back, we came back into order. We expunged the record, sent the bill to the inactive file and the bill died that way.

DM: Well, so when it came up for a vote, I forget the number of votes it got, I can find this out, but you were among those who laid off. You did not cast a vote. And there were others, Jim Brulte didn't cast a vote, Jim Rogan didn't cast a vote. But there were others who argued in favor of Bernie Richter, maybe one of the very, very conservative members you were talking about, although not on every issue, continued to argue for the bill. So was there a fight within the caucus? Was there disagreement within the caucus when you went off the floor that day?

CP: So you're asking me...

DM: I am...

CP: The precise segment of a precise day 28 years ago, 27 years ago.

DM: When you're dealing with hundreds of bills. Yes, I'm being very fair.

9 CP: Candidly, at that moment how I recall that is, yes, there was an expression of hey, some of us weren't going to vote for the bill and therefore others said we won't either that even had cast their votes that way. So you had people pulling back. It didn't look like the bill would have passed. The author of the bill then spoke and said, I want to pull this back. So it was not as much of a fight, in my recollection, as you might have thought, because everybody felt this shift, and then the author felt it as well.

DM: I see...

CP: Then by pulling it back, honestly, those that may have wanted to push, it took that choice away from them.

DM: Okay, so in the Assembly at that time, 1996, you had relationships with Republicans and Democrats. Of the Democrats, who do you feel was somebody you could talk to, somebody you could work with? Who was your friend among Democrats?

CP: Who was my friend?

DM: Who was your...

CP: I had a lot of friends, man, come on.

DM: Well, okay, you were a friendly guy. But in the, whatever it was, 39 Democrats, who was the Democrat who you could trust?

CP: Well, there are many of them. I mean, Valerie Brown comes to mind.

CP: She and I served together. She was vice chair of Appropriations and we had a great rapport, she had a great staff we worked well together on that committee. We remained friends and we

remain friends today. Kerry Mazzone the vice chair of the Education Committee, I had a very, very good relationship with her. I cared about her and we worked very well together. I remember one day she had a bill on the floor and she articulated it, and Republicans bashed her on it. And I stood up and spoke against her bill, and then she, with an impassioned rebuttal, closed out the bill with a rebuttal against me in support of her bill.

CP: And her bill went up for a vote a couple of my friends walked over and said, "Boy, you were pretty harsh to Kerry. I thought you were friends." And I said, "Of course, we're friends, but that doesn't mean we can't have an opinion and push back philosophically in the debate." And that's why it's good to have friends on the other side to know that, it doesn't mute the debate. I would put Antonio Villaraigosa at the top of the list as one of my dearest friends and I care about him and supported him when he ran for mayor of Los Angeles. Supported him three separate times in that regard. And Cruz Bustamante, he was the heir apparent to be the leader, and we were very close and worked a lot together, and certainly put John Burton on that list.

DM: Well, so Burton was on the Rules Committee.

CP: Yep.

DM: And you were chair of the Rules Committee.

CP: And he was vice chair.

DM: And he was vice-chair, Richard Katz was the leader of the Assembly Democrats?

CP: Right.

DM: What was the significance of having Burton on the Rules Committee as opposed to Katz?

2 CP: Yeah, I don't know how the Democrat Caucus worked at that point in time, but when Willie left, he anointed Richard to be the Democrat leader. And it's interesting with Richard, even though today we are friends and we've shared some clients, we're friends and we get along very well. But he was the Democrat lead against me in 1988 when I ran for Assembly the first time. And he was the designated Democrat person in 1990 when Tom Umberg beat me. So we probably didn't have the very best relationship because of some of those political battles that we faced. So as he was Democrat leader at the time, he and I didn't necessarily work closely together. With John Burton on the Rules Committee, we did and John was an honest broker.

CP: Candidly, every day of the Rules Committee, we did a lot of stuff because everything at that moment in time was going through the Rules Committee, unlike historically when the Speaker would make an edict and people would be appointed to committees or rules would be established, or things were done outside of really that public disclosure. But when we put everything through the Rules Committee, it was all publicly discussed. And I would talk to John before every one of those meetings and I would tell him what I was gonna do. Well, he came in and said, "What are you gonna do today?" And I told him, and he said, "Okay, if you do this, we will screw you by doing this." I said, "Okay, I'm willing to take my chances." Or he would say,

"We're gonna screw you by doing this as a response." And I said, "Okay, then I don't want to do that." And he really informed me of seeing how the response would be, and I tailored some of my actions, not all of them, but some of my actions to take into account how the Democrats would respond to things, and John was an honest broker in those discussions.

DM: Interesting. Talk about your relationship with Pete Wilson.

CP: It was a fantastic relationship, to this day. Again, we can talk about the divide or the spectrum of Republican philosophy. I was a much more conservative person, particularly on social issues, than Pete Wilson.

DM: When you say social, you mean abortion rights? You mean same sex marriage, domestic partnerships.

CP: Yeah, a lot...

DM: All of that.

CP: Those were those of the day, right?

DM: Right. [chuckle]

CP: The ones we see today aren't the same because a lot of those issues they resolved and moved on.

DM: They continue in some form or fashion, but yeah.

CP: Yeah maybe and probably on tax policy and other things we may not have been completely aligned at that time. Of course, Pete Wilson, the year I was in office, supported a tax increase to balance the budget, and then I wasn't there. And a lot of conservatives held that against him for a long time. But working with him as I did, he was such a solid partner, very clear. The interaction with him could never have been better. There was a couple times that we didn't agree and he got mad at me or couple times I wanted him to do things that he didn't, that he understood where I was coming from.

CP: But the point of the matter is, he was such an honorable straight shooter, and I think we accomplished a lot in that regard. There was a time after I was Speaker that Bill Lockyer and I were negotiating a trial court realignment and a tax cut. And in that discussion, Lockyer said, "It's \$400 million for the trial court realignment," or something like that. And he said, "Curt, I'll support \$400 million in tax cuts so we can negotiate something." So I was able to negotiate a little bit more than that. And I went and told the governor and he said, "Oh boy." You know, he thought I had a good deal and I should close it right now. And I said, "No, I think I can get a little bit more." So when I went and got a little bit more in the negotiation, he said, "Oh my gosh, tell them I won't support that because I want more." So we were really good negotiating partners on the same side because we knew when to keep our mouth shut and how to be able to maximize the unique power, very unique power, of a Republican governor or Republican speaker of the Assembly at that moment in time, and I think at that moment that was the largest tax cut in

California history and the trial court realignment issues and things like that.

DM: That was in 1998, right?

CP: Yes.

DM: So that was Governor Wilson's last year in office.

CP: Right, yep.

DM: Yours for that matter, as well.

CP: Yep.

DM: So what was your relationship like with Senate President Pro Tempore Lockyer?

CP: It was good until it wasn't. Again, the people who are enmeshed in Sacramento politics and watching the Legislature know that the keenest battles are between the Assembly and the Senate, and that occurred. Here you have a Republican, very conservative Assembly pushing over. I think he told me one day, "Oh you had given me \$6 billion worth of tax cuts, you guys are crazy." Well, that goes back to the point I didn't stop or prioritize tax cuts that people in my caucus were promoting. So a lot of them passed out to the Senate and let him deal with them. So he poked me on a lot of things like that, but at the end of the day we had a very, very good relationship and a very respected, mutually respecting relationship. And we probably pushed and got the budget in that year when we shared power in the Assembly and the Senate, one of those difficult budgets that required two-thirds, Bill and I were on the same page to work that through.

DM: So you had as Speaker the right to appoint four members to the Coastal Commission and that of course caused a reaction from environmental advocates.

CP: Yes.

DM: What were you thinking? What was your goal with the Coastal Commission?

CP: Well, anybody who sees the Coastal Commission knows the great amount of power that the Coastal Commission has on not only coastal development but development near the coast. It goes all the way back to the coastal zone, which can be one or two mountain ranges away from the coast. I don't think the voters had any understanding of how far and how impactful the Coastal Commission could be on people in their lives that it has. So that one year was the only year in the history of the California Coastal Commission in which there was a Republican majority.

DM: 'Cause the governor had some of that.

CP: The governor had four seats, the Speaker had four seats and the Senate had four seats. So my focus was on a couple things, and one of the main focus points was there are people that have

been harmed by the Coastal Commission action. And I wanted some of those people, real live people, who had suffered under the Coastal Commission to also have a voice. So do we just want people who are activists or that are environmental activists or otherwise, or do we want some degree of balance, not just in terms of the votes, but in terms of the voice? So yes, I appointed two people who had disputes with the Coastal Commission over the years. And I actually had first offered one of those seats to Fess Parker, because he was building the Red Lion Hotel or built the Red Lion Hotel in Santa Barbara and had a tremendous dispute with the Coastal Commission. And in that regard, I thought he would be a good one to be on the Coastal Commission and he turned me down. I talked to Clint Eastwood about it too. But the long short of it is I had two appointments where I could appoint just people without a political portfolio and then you were required to appoint two other people who were from elective office. So those two had large appointments I made to folks who had battles with the Coastal Commission in the past.

DM: What did Clint say to you?

CP: Well, there was some very candid discussion with a lot of four letter words. At that moment in time, he was not a fan of the Coastal Commission, and I think he said something like, "And these people want everybody to have access through my property to the beach, might as well open my front door and let him walk through my living room." I think is exactly what he said to me, and yet he wasn't interested in serving in that capacity.

DM: So during your time as Speaker, tobacco came up as an issue. One of the issues was at the time the Wilson administration, the Health Department, was putting up ads having to do with anti-tobacco ads funded by Proposition 99 that California voters passed (in 1988). You didn't think that was a very good idea. But talk about those ads and why you took a stand.

CP: Well, for a number of years before I was Speaker of the Assembly I served on the conference committee on Prop. 99 funding. The tax was passed into law in 1990 and it was prescribed to be used for certain purposes. I believe that a lot of those purposes became very political as opposed to the purposes the voters intended. So I believe I added language in the budget that none of the money can be used for political purposes, And for some reason the Democrats at the time thought that it was terrible to prohibit tax dollars from being used for political purposes. That was one of the amendments that I had put in the budget, I believe, in 1996. But short of that, I believe advertising on health effects, how using those health dollars to go towards health-related issues are much more important than putting anti-tobacco messages in pinball machines or to do studies of political campaign contributions and to determine who gets money from the tobacco industry, which is available publicly for anybody. But to use taxpayer dollars to write reports like that are not helping people quit smoking and understanding the health effects and health impacts of smoking.

9 DM: So, you took a stand against?

CP: Yeah.

DM: To reel that back.

CP: Right.

DM: And how did that turn out?

CP: I think we succeeded for a while.

DM: For a while.

CP: Right.

DM: So...

CP: But you know, it is interesting in 2023 to talk about tobacco because that whole public policy issue has evolved so much. Some people who were total anti-tobacco folks back in the '90s do, and should, take credit for that. But it was a different issue there's a lot more people smoking. But also a lot of people that made that choice, not because they're stupid but made that choice because they wanted to do that. I always felt instead of playing political games with that issue to keep it in a focus of health-related issues and smart people can make a smart decision. And from my perspective, I think a lot of people have in this state.

DM: Gambling was another issue that became increasingly prominent. Gambling from a libertarian point of view, who cares, right? I mean, is that your view? If people wanna spend their money.

CP: To a certain extent, right?

DM: People wanna spend their money, it's up to them.

CP: Yep.

DM: But your caucus wasn't necessarily with you on that, or at least some members weren't, right?

CP: So in other words, I was much more open to Indian gaming, and I know the Wilson administration didn't share my point of view on a lot of the Indian gaming issues.

DM: Right, right. And so you had his view, I'm not sure it was the same as maybe Bruce Thompson's view. Bruce Thompson being an Assemblyman down in Fallbrook who was very much opposed to gambling at all. I don't know that Governor Wilson was opposed to gambling, he just didn't think it should be full on. Well hopefully, we'll let him speak about that.

6 CP: Oh, good.

DM: But well, so how did you navigate that issue?

CP: Well, you know, that in my opinion was a purely philosophical discussion of, you know, we

can have different points of view on something like that.

CP: You know, it was Ronald Reagan signing the federal law that allowed Indian gaming and that law basically said whatever is legal within the state, those same gaming opportunities are provided to Indian tribes within that state. The Wilson administration and Dan Lungren, the attorney general, fought over those issues for most of the time I was in the Legislature.

CP: But if you read what Reagan said, "Indian tribes certainly are sovereign nations and have those rights." And I was not one to try to be intricately, technically opposing elements of Indian gaming. Those were rights. I mean, the Indians were very, the native American community was very clever in how they used the laws in terms of using some elements of the lottery system to open up different gaming opportunities for them.

CP: And, you know, today things are different. But I would also say Pete Wilson was very clever when you look at the number of gaming tribes in California. It's a small percentage of the overall number of tribes in California, and what Pete Wilson finally agreed to is to empower all tribes with a right to slot machines and then allow those tribes that are in gaming areas to be able to support tribes in poor areas, or less accessible areas.

CP: I mean it really, as weird as it may sound, is one of those public policy issues that isn't necessarily Republican or Democrat, or this is that pure line here and this is what we're fighting on. It's one of those issues that through at least 10 years, or 15, you had a clear negotiation and trying to figure out that best course, and we ended up where we are today.

DM: And is that for the good or ill, or do you feel like gambling is where it ought to be in California?

CP: I do to a certain extent.

DM: Or do you care?

CP: I probably don't care all that much but I did spend time with Schwarzenegger when he was preparing to be governor on this issue, and he certainly started out with a much more anti-Indian gaming perspective. But he saw the opportunity for the state in terms of compacts he could make that also provided additional funding to the state. So there's a lot of components of that issue that are very, very interesting.

DM: Back to this interview you did with Greg Lucas.

CP: Okay. Now I didn't read that one, so you...

DM: He asked you to pick three bills that were illustrative of your accomplishments during your year as speaker.

CP: Okay, let's talk about...

DM: And you said a 45 percent tax cut to California business, public school class size reduction...

CP: Yes.

DM: And electrical restructuring deregulation.

CP: We call it deregulation. Then you could at least use that term now.

DM: Deregulation, yeah. In retrospect, do you think those were your three big accomplishments as speaker?

CP: Yes. Yeah.

DM: And...

CP: Today, with wildfire issues and things like that, we can understand the impact of the California Earthquake Authority and how important that was, because we were facing a similar situation in 1996 that homeowners could not get homeowners policies because of the risk of earthquakes. That was established and created what was necessary to ensure that homeowners could get homeowners policies. So that's also a significant one. And there are many, many others, but I'll stand by those three.

DM: Start from the first one, 5 percent tax cut for California business.

CP: As you know, we are seeking personal income tax and banking/corp tax cut, a corporation tax cut. That tax, the business tax cut, is important. We are losing business today from the state, from a regulatory burden and a tax burden and I think we just need to be smart. And we used that opportunity when we had a majority in that house to address that. I wish we could have done the same with personal income tax. Candidly, the Democrats were willing to support a business tax cut, but not a personal income tax cut. And I'm sad to see that if you look at it from that point in time, the amount of money running this state government from personal income tax was almost 50 percent back then, maybe a bit less.

CP: And today it's over 70-75 percent, and I do think that personal income tax structure is also harming to the growth of California. My business is an LLC, so all revenue doesn't go to a corporation tax, it goes to a personal income tax. All the revenue generated from my business. A lot of small businesses in California do operate that way. I want to be competitive with neighboring states. I remember the Speaker of the Arizona Legislature came to me in a snide way at the time, I put that maybe not snide joking to say, "Okay, you cut the California tax." And I said, "Yeah, we have to get below you." And he said, "We'll cut ours by 5 percent too." My response is, "I'll be glad to race to the bottom if that's the way you wanna do it." But the point of the matter was, there are neighboring states that are competitors to California were much more competitive in so many ways from regulation, tax policy and the cost of power.

DM: Class size reduction.

CP: Yes, as you know, that budget that was passed in 1996 was the greatest increase in public school funding of any budget of its time. There's no budget that had a greater increase. And it's because of the economic benefit to the state. Certainly, Prop. 98 required money to be spent for education. So the question was, do we spend that money by giving it directly to school districts, or do we target it into priority areas? And Governor Wilson and I felt we would target it into a class size reduction program for K through third grade, 20 kids or less in the classroom, and give incentives to school districts who wish to do that.

DM: And the teacher's union initially was opposed to that. You remember that?

CP: The teacher's union was at the time running campaign ads for class size reduction. They were asking for more money to be spent in education and to address class size reduction. And then when the governor and I chose to put all that money into class size reduction, that's when, if I recall, the teachers balked at that a bit and didn't want all of that additional money to go to class size reduction.

DM: And then electrical regulation.

CP: Yeah. But can we talk about that (class-size reduction)? We all can look back on things that happened and see those, what they call the unintended consequences of many things. And I didn't know at the time, and if you recall, we put a lot of money into class size reduction in 1996, but then we had to tweak the law a bit after that. And there was a lot of tweaking. For example, you want a whole bunch more classrooms with 20 kids instead of 36 kids in each classroom you need to have more classrooms. Some of that tweaking was that you could have 36, 40 kids in a classroom if you had two teachers, different things like that, so we were able to tweak that. But also, many people in Los Angeles Unified were upset about that program because elements with their collective bargaining agreement with UTLA I believe at the time said that teachers can select a school to go to based upon their seniority.

CP: So when there were open spaces, all these open slots in different areas of LA County, LA Unified School District a lot of teachers from the inner city left their positions that was allowed under their collective bargaining agreement. And therefore that bill that was intended solely to do good, solely to focus on how do you get more money to help in reducing those class sizes and helping those kids that need that particularly in the young ages. You know, there were some negative aspects of that. And I'm not one to totally overlook that. I certainly understand it and it saddens me to think that a lot of these quality teachers and senior teachers left inner city jobs and a lot of new teachers, or even probationary teachers without their teaching credentials, came into those inner city jobs as teachers with less experience and less ability to serve that population. And probably was detrimental to kids that you are focused on helping. Anyway...

DM: Yes. Well.

CP: I drift.

DM: Yeah. Well and then electricity, the deregulation of the electric system.

CP: Yeah.

DM: Which led to problems in 2000, right?

CP: Yeah. So we can all point to those things but let, let's just reel back and look at the circumstances at the time. And it's always interesting to be able to say, as I just said, these unintended consequences of certain actions. What we did in electrical deregulation was great. It did good things. It was important. You gotta keep in mind our power cost in California was higher than all neighboring states. It was impactful to our economy and impactful to energy or business development. But also at that time we had 36 percent of power generated in California if my memory is correct that was in excess. So here you have excess power, yet our prices are high. That's not really a market principle and that's really why both Democrats and Republicans joined together to say, "Hey we gotta figure out ways to bring security to this system."

CP: In other words, have the state have a little more ownership and operation of the transmission system. So it can't be gamed, but also to have the price be based more upon the available power and the cost of that power. What happened after 1996 is the economy soared. That 36 percent excess power we had in the state got gobbled up. It got used. Business grew, opportunities to use power grew. There was a decision that was made and I pushed for electrical deregulation which really focused on the demand side, the power that's there and how that worked and the pricing of that power that's being generated in California. What we didn't focus on was the supply side. How do we get more power when needed into the grid?

CP: Many folks said, "Hey we can't battle that. That has environmental policy to it. That has a whole bunch of other issues." We have 36 percent of our power is excess power anyway. We have time to get to that. And in fact, that decision was the bad decision in electrical deregulation. It wasn't to deregulate power, it was not at the exact same time to make it easier to build power plants and to put more power into the system. So because we only looked at this side and the economy took off and power usage grew so quickly. And you still had to put new power online, it was gonna be a 10-year process. You could never get that additional power supply to the level to cover the demand because they were not operating in tandem.

CP: So that's my defense of that. I don't think it's a bad system at all, but we probably should have addressed supply. And one of the things Gray Davis did was put some emergency acts in place that allowed for the development of peaker plants. And as the mayor of Anaheim we did that. We built four peaker plants that generate five megawatts each only when there is a power emergency to do it. But those things got licensed and up and operating very quickly and that came through as emergency powers which should have been... those type of rules should have been put in place in 1996 for the development of power.

DM: Okay. Well, so November 1996.

CP: Yes.

DM: You have a 41-39 majority that flips in November of '96. I believe it's 43-37 Democrats. So

you lose your speakership. Was there anything Republicans could have done in 1998 to stop that from happening? Or was this just the beginning of the change in California?

CP: Well, the answer is yes. The Republicans could have done something different. And I believe and maybe it's because I lost three seats that I have to find someone to blame other than myself. [laughter] That is, that the voters stopped voting. Republican voters stopped voting when the Dole campaign declared they had lost. So just like...

DM: They declared they had lost before our polls closed.

CP: Before our polls closed. So just like the Democrats lost when the Democrat candidate for President declared that he was gonna lose to Ronald Reagan.

DM: That was Jimmy Carter to Ronald Reagan.

CP: The same thing happened to Republicans in 1996. And to put it in context, maybe I'm slightly off by my numbers, but we lost one seat by 36 votes. We lost one seat by 172 votes and we lost another seat by like 2,500 votes. So in this state, this big huge state, in every single one of the 80 Assembly districts we lost three of them by a combined total of 3,000 votes or less.

DM: But who's counting?

CP: But who's counting.

DM: Right?

CP: Who remembers that way back then? But the point of the matter is, yeah, we lost three seats and that was the difference.

DM: But the trend continued. So you remained as Republican leader.

CP: Right.

DM: In '97 and I guess '98, right? But then you start running for...

CP: Right. I think I stepped down after the budget in '97 as Republican leader.

DM: But then you started running for California treasurer in 1998 and you lost, and '98, became a pretty big Democratic year.

CP: Right. But I only lost by a million votes. The way I like to spin that is I had the closest margin of any an incumbent statewide office Republican. So, come on, gimme a little credit on that.

DM: You had an interesting endorsement in that campaign too.

CP: I had a lot of interesting endorsements.

DM: Like who?

CP: Well, let me see here. I think back in the primary system, there were four Democrats running for the Democratic nomination, one being David Roberti, the former president pro tempore the Senate, and another guy by the name of Albert Robles, and another fellow by the name of Merv Evans. And all three of those Democrats endorsed me against Phil Angelides. Of course, it had probably more do with Phil Angelides than me, but I was the Republican nominee. And the, Republican that I ran against, Jan Goldsmith, also endorsed me. So, that is full proof that endorsements really don't matter. At the end of the day, I lost to Phil Angelides, and that's the way that happened.

DM: Well. But that was really the Democrats won. Gray Davis won as governor. They won pretty much up and down the ticket that year. Is there anything sitting here today that you see as a path for Republicans to reclaim at least some power in California? Now, I understand Gray Davis was recalled in 2003 by Arnold Schwarzenegger, but I think everybody would agree...

CP: When did you come to that understanding?

DM: Everybody would agree that Arnold Schwarzenegger was a pretty unique political figure in California.

CP: No question about it. No question about it. But there may be more unique figures. So are you saying, is the Republican party forever dead in California? I'd say no.

DM: Well, I'm not saying that. I'm asking is it forever dead? [laughter]

CP: Yeah. From a very optimistic person who believes public policy is what drives this, and I've had esoteric debates with friends of mine. Does politics drive policy or does policy drive politics? I'm a believer in you gotta stand for things. You gotta articulate those things, and if those are in alignment with voters, voters will support you. So I believe a party to be relevant has to continually talk about public policy issues that are important to the people. And I believe right now, many of those issues as it relates to, everything from parental rights to an economy, to supporting small business, to school reform, many of those things are paramount to people who vote, and we need to make sure we articulate positions in that regard.

DM: So do you see the path back? I mean, is there going to be a Republican Speaker, in your lifetime? I mean, assuming you live another 40 years. [laughter]

CP: In my life at this moment in time, I'm not all that involved politically. All I want to do is see good people get involved and to be able to articulate public policy positions. So I'm not giving up that hope. It does seem somewhat daunting and just like me and talking to you about legislative steps incrementally towards a positive outcome, I think that's the only way that Republicans can regain legislative significance, is that incrementally.

DM: Okay. What have we not covered?

CP: Being mayor?

DM: So why did you wanna run for mayor?

7 CP: Well, yeah, that's a good question. I mean, I moved to Anaheim in 1996, the year I was Speaker, and I ran for mayor in 2002 when incumbent Tom Daly was termed out of office.

DM: Became an Assembly member.

CP: Soon thereafter.

DM: Yeah.

CP: You know, to be honest, I was really cautious. I mean, one of the things you don't wanna do when you carry a title of a legislator or a speaker is to run for something and then lose. So you never know. And this position that a lot of elected officials think is that everybody knows who they are and, that will command a strong voter turnout. But in fact, name ID is...

DM: As in Mayor Xavier Becerra, for example.

CP: ...a fleeting thing, right? I mean, it's not something that people remember. So I do remember back in 2002, I did a poll and I think my positive name ID was like 25 percent or 30 percent. So to think I served in the Legislature from this area for eight years, and then a speaker for one, it's really important to be aware of your situation. I chose to run, and I'm glad I did. I believe it was a very good opportunity to serve this community and do some unique things, not have a partisan label on my head and doing them, but in fact, being able to do things that I thought had a broader appeal and didn't necessarily need to follow a partisan appeal. And also candidly, Willie Brown, I believe, is the only former speaker that after speakership ran for mayor and was elected mayor of a major city.

DM: Well, you were obviously included.

CP: I would say that I was number two.

DM: Number two.

CP: And, yes.

DM: So he followed you.

CP: Antonio was number three.

DM: Okay.

CP: And Karen Bass was number four. Because it really hadn't been done that way.

DM: Yeah.

CP: And it's really a significant thing to have this statewide legislative awareness and being able to serve on the local level. One of the more interesting angles was when people in the city government would say, "Oh, we can't do that because the law doesn't let us do that." And from my historical position, I'd say, "Okay, let's change the law." And there's different ways you look at doing your job when you do have understanding from a legislative and a local government perspective.

DM: Well, you really started, you grew up at a time when Orange County was the heart of Republican politics, the heart of Republican politics. This is where Ronald Reagan came to launch his campaign, and Richard Nixon lived here. And these candidates from all over the country come to Orange County to raise money. And while certainly Republicans can win office and do win office from Orange County, it's certainly purple if not, and parts of it are quite blue. So what do you attribute this to?

CP: Well, what I attribute it to is Republicans are not clear in what they stand for and what they wanna get accomplished. When people come to my office here to talk and maybe seek my endorsement or my support in the political office, I have boiled it down to, past the pleasantries, I ask, "What are you gonna accomplish with... In the job?" And I'm not giving them more than five beats. If they can't respond to what are they gonna accomplish with the office they get. And, hey, I'm a man of faith, so I believe that God gave me a franchise and time to accomplish something. Didn't give me a career, didn't give me a re-election. I got an opportunity with a certain amount of years to get something done. So being in the Assembly, those were only two years at a time; being Mayor of Anaheim, it was four years.

CP: So what are you gonna accomplish in those four years? On the local level, it's a lot easier for me to point right now to areas of accomplishment we were able to do in this city, in those four-year franchises. And I think people who run for office, if they don't think about that first anymore, they should never get in this business, be it from the local level or the legislative level. In the legislative level you have to rely upon a lot more people. On a local level, when I had a five-person council here, I only had to rely upon two other people to change things dramatically. From building the train station or focusing on big transportation projects or supporting renewable power efforts in the city, as Anaheim's the second-largest city owned public utility in California. To rezoning the area outside my window here to allow for 18,000 residential units to be built here in the Platinum Triangle around Angel Stadium. There are some big things we were able to accomplish. And right now, I think that's what a Republican Party needs to do, or Republican candidate, if they want relevancy in a Republican county or in a Democrat county, talk about what are you going to accomplish that people can see and understand.

DM: You don't attribute Republican losses to demographic changes?

CP: No, I don't.

DM: Because why? Because no matter your party, you ought to be able to speak to everybody.

CP: Yep. That's exactly it. And if you can't, that it's not a party worth being a part of. [chuckle] There are some Republicans, and they've talked to me about younger people or people of a certain ethnic background, they're never gonna vote Republican. I don't buy any of that. I don't buy any of that. I believe optimistically that what are you going to do? What can you tell these people if they elect you regardless of your color, regardless of your political affiliation. What are you going to do to address issues that are important to them? And if you can't articulate that, then there's no sense of getting involved.

DM: Okay. That's a pretty good place to end.

DM: Mr. Speaker, Mayor, thank you so much for spending all this time, for your insights and your recollections of history. On behalf of Open California, thanks to a grant from the state library, this has been a really interesting time for me, anyway. I hope for you.

CP: Thank you, Dan.