

**Garry South**

**PART III: California political turmoil - An inside view**

**Interview conducted by Carla Marinucci in Marina del Rey, California, on October 26, 2023**

**CM:** I know. When you look back at it, was Schwarzenegger's run here, sort of a, I don't know, a preview of what we saw with Trump?

**GS:** Yes.

**CM:** I mean...

**GS:** Totally, totally, totally.

**CM:** Yeah. Did Trump steal part of his playbook? Your thoughts on, and what were you going through? What were you thinking? I mean, you had worked with experienced public servants, and here comes this guy out of the movies who had no experience in... I mean, what...

**GS:** Well, again, we had hoped that his salacious background would come out during the... And it did. I mean, the LA Times did a big investigative piece, front page as you know, two different installments about women that he groped and mishandled in elevators and the whole thing during his entire career. I mean, these people were named by name. It wasn't just an anonymous charges. And one of the things we found was that when that expose came out and we're tracking every single night, the only time the recall really got close about 50-50 was after that LA Times expose hit. But what got him out of it was basically his wife, Maria Shriver, who by that time had not really taken any personal, any public role in the campaign.

**GS:** The rumor was she didn't want him to run 'cause she thought that his background would come out and all that. She basically put herself out on the front line to say, 'You can either believe all these women you've never heard of or you can believe me, his wife. He's a wonderful husband and a wonderful father.' And once she got out there on the campaign trail, attesting to his bonafides as a wonderful husband and a wonderful father, and a wonderful man, the recall thing went back up to about where it ended up.

**CM:** So it was a Democrat who saved him in your view.

**GS:** Yeah. Yeah. And by the way, when he threatened to sue me for libel in 2001, she did, too.

**CM:** Oh.

**GS:** Her lawyer, who was a well-known Democrat here, I won't mention his name, but a big Democratic donor, called me and said, 'Maria's really pissed off that you sent out this article with that smart ass cover memo. And she's talking to me about threatening to sue you for libel too on her own count.' Now, she didn't, but this is exactly the same time both of these two threats to sue me for libel was at the same time

that Arnold himself knew that he had fathered an illegitimate son by boinking his own housekeeper in his own house without protection and had hidden them in Bakersfield. And he's threatening to sue me because I sent out a magazine article about his...

**CM:** Well...

[laughter]

**GS:** She didn't know. She didn't know. She didn't find out until 2011 when he left office. But I had... I mean, I really have no sympathy for her at all. I mean, it's... She's the one who saved him in the recall by attesting to his bonafides as a wonderful human being, and a wonderful husband and a wonderful father, and on and on and on. She basically pulled him up out of what could have potentially been defeat with that LA Times investigative expose. I mean, I have very little sympathy for the woman.

**CM:** So yeah. And the recall ended up as we all know, Gray Davis being removed from office. He and Arnold have remained sort of friends in a way or what...

**GS:** They have, they have. I mean, I don't...

**CM:** But you haven't.

**GS:** I'd rather punch Arnold in the face than... But Gray, I mean, being a governor is kind of an exclusive fraternity when you think about it. I mean there's only so many governors. What are we on, our 37th governor of California?

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** I mean, whatever it is, I think Gray was 35th, or I forget. But anyway, we've only had 30-some governors of the state in our whole history since 1850. So it was kind of an exclusive club. And Gray, when Gray was recalled, he went into this thing called the Southern California Leadership Council. I think they called it. I spoke to it several times with Jim Brulte, but that was co-chaired by him, by Deukmejian, Governor Deukmejian and Governor Wilson. So two Republicans and one Democrat. And they were actually, they actually got along quite well. Gray was quite grieved when Deukmejian passed away. So, I mean, being an ex-governor is... And I told Gray, I think I shared this story with you prior, but I told Gray that the anniversary, the 20th anniversary of the recall...

**CM:** That's right.

**GS:** Was October 7th, this month, earlier this month. And I told Gray in a phone call, I said, I'm gonna put out a tweet, whatever you call it now under X.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** I'm gonna put out a tweet, sticking it up Arnold's rear end on the anniversary of the recall, talking about how when he ended his governorship in 2010, people forget this now. His approval rating was in the tank. People were sick and tired of this guy. All of his cheesy stunts and photo ops and back and forth between the right and the left, and bragging and bullying people and all that.

**GS:** His approval rating the day he left office was exactly the same approval rating that Gray Davis had the day he was recalled, 22 percent. 22 percent. And Gray said, oh, I'd ask you not to do that. Arnold and I have gotten, we're friendly and Arnold... And I said, well, that's you and Arnold. It's your own deal. It's not my deal. I'm not you, you're not me. I'll do whatever I want. I'll say whatever I want. And as you know, I did.

**CM:** Yes, you did.

**GS:** I did.

**CM:** You put up that tweet.

**GS:** And I thought it was a pretty good one. Yeah.

[laughter]

**GS:** But being an ex-governor, I mean, same with Governor Celeste, who I worked for in Ohio. I mean, he's actually quite close to John Kasich and other...

**CM:** Right. Yeah.

**GS:** You know, other people who've been governor after him. I mean, it's just...

**CM:** Well, what about, you talked about governors being sort of part of an exclusive club. Gray Davis wasn't the last governor you've advised. I mean, even though he wasn't governor at the time, Gavin Newsom, who was lieutenant governor, mounted a campaign for governor in 2010, right? Against Jerry...

**GS:** Well, 2009...

**CM:** 2009.

**GS:** 2008-2009 for 1 months. Yeah.

**CM:** Yeah. Against Jerry Brown. Now, I remember that one 'cause I covered it and I remember.

**GS:** Yes, you did.

**CM:** Gavin argued that this was gonna be a stroll down, a stark contrast between a stroll down memory...

**GS:** I wrote that.,,

[laughter]

**CM:** A stroll down memory lane, Jerry Brown or a sprint into the future...

**GS:** Correct. I wrote, that was in his speech at the state convention. And I wrote that line, by the way. And there were other staff members who objected to that. 'Cause they said, we don't wanna really go ad hominem him against Jerry Brown. And I go, he's an opponent. What are you gonna do?

**CM:** You just went for the knife there.

**GS:** Yes, I did.

**CM:** And that was the most quoted line for sure. It was in everybody's lead. What... Talk a little bit...

**GS:** Well, I have to admit that I wrote the line. I'm not trying to brag, but I wrote the line and I inserted it in that speech against the objection of some of the other staffers, by the way.

**CM:** You did. Okay. So you right from the start decided to kick Jerry Brown.

**GS:** Oh believe me.

**CM:** What was going, what was your strategy at that point? Gavin Newsom is young...

**GS:** Because now I can say it, but I first met Jerry Brown in 1976, believe it or not, in the Carter campaign. That was my first exposure to the guy. The guy had been governor for two years. He was elected in '74. Youngest governor ever. He was 34, I believe. And so when I took over the Carter campaign in Montana in 1976, remember that in that primary process in '76, Jimmy Carter, he won the nomination, but he had as opponents among other people, three Western native sons. He had Frank Church, Senator Frank Church of Idaho next door to Montana. Mo Udall, Congressman Mo Udall from Arizona, and Jerry Brown, Governor of California. And so one of the things that I decided to do was I would bring in all three of these other Western native sons and have them endorse Jimmy Carter in Montana, so that it was kinda like passing the baton. So Frank Church, that was easy. He's next door. Mo Udall, I brought in.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And I brought Jerry Brown into Missoula, east Missoula, suburb of Missoula, where I went to college, into some union hall. And it was advertised as come to a rally to hear California governor Jerry Brown endorse Jimmy Carter. And remember Brown was kind of hot. He was dating Linda Ronstadt and The Eagles were writing songs for him, new kid in town and the whole thing. And so Montana being so sparsely populated and being so big, people there really don't mind driving a hundred miles to have dinner. Right? So if we pulled people in from, again, he was kind of a star.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** Right? And so the guy we fly him in at our expense, right? And the guy gets up in front of this big crowd, big kind of sweaty, I think it was an un-air conditioned union hall, right?

**CM:** Okay.

[laughter]

**GS:** And we packed it up. I mean, people would come in 150 miles, 180 miles to see this guy, right? And the guy gets up there as is his wont and yaps for 40 minutes about himself and the five states that he won, and never mentions Jimmy Carter's name.

**CM:** Ooh.

**GS:** And people were pissed at me. They came up and said, what the fuck was that? I thought I came here. He didn't... So I went up... He wouldn't remember this 'cause he's so oblivious. But I went up to Jerry Brown and I said, and I was, bear in mind, I was 25 year old.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** I went up and I said, governor, with all due respect, this was billed as a rally where you were gonna endorse Jimmy Carter. And you never mentioned his name. You never mentioned Walter Mondale's name. You never made an endorsement. And you'll understand how Brownish this is. Right? He looks at me disdainfully and says, well, apparently you don't understand endorsement by indirection. I go, what the hell? Has anything changed? I mean, this is my first encounter with this guy. And from that point forward, it's like, he's basically just a high-tone bullshit artist. Throwing out indecipherable Latin phrases and quoting philosophers who have been dead for 2000 years, nobody's ever heard of. And contemplate your navel, Zen-like stuff.

**GS:** And he thinks that somehow if he baffles you with bullshit, you're gonna think he's really deep and profound. 'Cause you don't understand what he's saying. And by the way, nothing has changed. It's the same Jerry Brown. And by the way, I can tell you all kinds of other instances where he came in 2006, he's gonna run for attorney general. Remember he is mayor of Oakland.

**CM:** Right. Oh, yes. Right.

**GS:** So one day my cell phone rings and it's the Oakland area code, whatever that is. Right?

**CM:** Right. Right. 510. Right.

**GS:** 510, right.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And it was Jerry Brown. It's Jerry Brown. And he wanted to meet with me down here because he's running for attorney general and he wants to pick my brain, Lynn Schenk who worked for him in his administration...

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** ..and then was Gray's chief of staff, sicked him onto me and said, you gotta talk to Garry South. So on a Sunday afternoon at 4:30, he and I meet at a hotel over on the west side, right at the intersection of Sunset Boulevard in the 405. And we go to the restaurant, I go to the restaurant, there's nobody in there. It's 4:30 on a Sunday. We're the only ones in there for a while. He comes in with this little grody roller bag coming off the flight from LAX and sits down and the waiter brings water and the menus 'cause we're in the restaurant.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** Not the bar.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** The restaurant. And so Brown just sits down and again, starts talking about himself. Now, the way, the reason he wanted to talk to me is that Rocky Delgadillo, who was the city attorney, was gonna run in the primary against him, which he did for attorney general. So Brown was concerned that, you know, he would have a LA base. He really didn't, frankly.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And so he wanted to talk to me about how to combat Rocky Delgadillo and... You know how we had beat Al Checchi and Jane Harmon in the '98 primary and all that. And so we sit there and he's just blabbering about himself, which is what he does. It's all about Jerry Brown. I mean he's... You talk about Trump being an egomaniac. I mean, Jerry Brown is the original Trump, I mean, without the business background and everything else. And the waiter keeps coming back and saying, have you had a chance to look at the menu, you want to order? And Brown just ignores the guy, like he doesn't exist. And just blabber, blabber, blabber, blabber. And so now, I'm getting hungry and it's an hour's gone by. It's 5:30. And I'm saying to myself, but I said, I'm gonna wait the guy out. I'm gonna see if he has the basic humanity to say, "Oh, are you hungry? You want something to eat?" We go to 6:30, two hours. And the waiter, now the waiter has given up.

[laughter]

**GS:** The waiter doesn't even come back. Right? And two hours later, by the way, the guy's never paid me a dime. He's never used me as a consultant.

**CM:** Right, right.

**GS:** And he's picking my brain for free.

**CM:** Right, right.

**GS:** And at 6:30 he is, oh, I have to go. And he gets up and he doesn't leave a tip or anything else, and he just walks out of the restaurant. And I felt so bad I left, took a \$20 bill out of my wallet, and I got the waiter and I said, I'm really sorry, this was a business meeting. We should have just had it in the lobby. I'm really sorry, blah, blah, blah. And you know, when I got home, my wife was just really pissed and said, 'You mean that asshole sat there for two hours at a restaurant, you giving him free advice and never ask you if you wanted anything to eat?'

[laughter]

**GS:** And I said, yep, that's exactly right. And then he keeps calling me, 510. Right. "Hey, hey, Jerry Brown." And the third time he called me, I said, "Hey, hey, Jerry, do you wanna hire me? 'Cause you know, this is what I do for a living." Right? I didn't have a rich old man who left his money to me. Right? I mean, this is what I do for a living. People pay me for this. "You wanna hire me?" Never heard from him again. I mean, don't those two experiences tell you everything you need to know about Jerry Brown? And by the way, here's a worst story, right? Leading up to the 2010 gubernatorial campaign...

**CM:** Yes.

**GS:** I was working for a consortium of tribes, Indian tribes.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And they wanted me to use my connections to bring in potential candidates for governor in 2010 to meet with the tribal chairs.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** There were five tribes in the group. So I got Bill Lockyer and Steve Poizner, all these... Gavin Newsom actually, I brought in, right?

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And so Jerry Brown, who's attorney general, comes in... This tribe is located up by Mount Shasta.

**CM:** Okay.

**GS:** And so he came up in his state car with a Highway Patrol driver.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And all of these tribal chairs had come in from all, most of 'em were from down here, by the way. They'd flown in.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** For this meeting, all excited to meet the attorney general who's gonna run for governor. And so we have dinner with, they're five or six tables of five or six each. And after dinner, the chairman of this group introduces Brown and we're all still sitting down. Brown just turns his chair around to face the rest of the group and says, "Driving up here, I drove by Williams, which is where my, you know we have a ranch up there, a family ranch up there, is where I'm gonna retire. And my great-grandfather bought that piece of property when he came out here in a Conestoga wagon in the 1890s or something. Probably shot a lot of your relatives on the way out here."

[laughter]

**CM:** He didn't really say that.

**GS:** He did! Who could make that up? And these tribal chairs are like, did I just hear what I thought I heard? And he thought it was funny. I mean, I'm telling you, this guy, I don't care how many times, I don't care if he was elected governor 17 times of California. This guy is a frigging weirdo, pure and simple. He is a frigging weirdo. I never voted for him for governor. I didn't vote for anyone else either. I could not mark that ballot for Jerry Brown.

**CM:** Okay. And so when Gavin decided to run, here's this young...

**GS:** Did I express my opinions about Jerry?

**CM:** You did.

**GS:** Okay.

**CM:** But we're not done. Because as you... Gavin running against him was seen as obviously a heavy lift, but he framed it as a race between the past and embracing the future.

**GS:** Yes. People, people...

**CM:** Choose the past or embrace the future, which...

**GS:** People embraced the past.

[laughter]



**CM:** They did. But you obviously learned a lot about Gavin.

**GS:** I did.

**CM:** That was your first time really working with him. Tell us a little bit about that, because I remember covering Gavin as he went around the state doing town hall meetings.

**GS:** Town halls. Yes.

**CM:** What were your thoughts about this young candidate at that time? What did you see in him?

**GS:** There were two things that went wrong with that campaign. One was that Jerry Brown got into the race and there was no way, remember, this was a closed Democratic primary. It wasn't top two. So we had to get more votes than Jerry Brown.

**CM:** Oh, yeah. Right.

**GS:** Or we didn't go on. That's before the top two. And we couldn't figure out how to get more votes than Jerry Brown. The second thing was on the finance side, he had run for mayor of San Francisco twice, but they have \$1,000 contribution limits.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** I believe. Right?

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And so the campaign staff and the structure was set up before I got there. I had nothing to do with that. And what he did was he basically took his campaign finance staff from his mayor's races and put them in charge of the campaign for...

**CM:** Right. For governor.

**GS:** Raising money for governor.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And there were two problems with that. First of all, they had no contacts outside of San Francisco. They were local yokels. I mean, they'd done a good job raising money for mayor. But secondly, he didn't have a donor base outside of San Francisco. And all the donor base for people gave him a thousand bucks. Well, at that point, I think the contribution limit for governor was \$28,000.

**CM:** Yeah. Right.

**GS:** Right? And what we found was that you couldn't necessarily take \$1,000 donor and make them into a \$28,000 max-out donor for governor. So there was a mismatch between his local donor base he had used for his race for mayor and the staff he had used to raise that money and running for statewide office. It was just, we couldn't raise the money. They just didn't have the contacts.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And again, the second thing was just Jerry Brown, known statewide, had been governor twice and was attorney general, had run for president three times. We just couldn't figure out how to get more votes than Jerry Brown.

**CM:** Well, what did you see about Gavin? What did you learn about Gavin as a candidate from that race?

**GS:** Two things.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** Number one, he has a mind like a steel trap, and you've seen it as governor. He's dyslexic. He's seriously, seriously dyslexic and has been since he was a child. Very, very hard for him to read. But he does, he reads with a lot of strenuous effort. And my theory is because he has to put so much effort into reading, he retains every shard, every tidbit of what he reads, it goes into his head. And it's not just up there as a bunch of random stuff. It's codified. It's cataloged. He can pull things out that happened 17 years ago that the average person would've totally forgot. He's got a mind like a steel trap. Secondly, he's very charismatic. He's good, a lot of reporters say he's too long-winded. And to some degree that's true. But when we did these 24 town halls all over California, I went to a lot of them.

1:45:44.**CM:** Yeah, I did too.

**GS:** I knew the pitch, but I went there because I wanted to see how the crowd reacted to him. And at a lot of political events like this, people start filtering out, gotta go to the bathroom, right?

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And they leave. The astonishing thing was he got up there and he held these crowds, sometimes 100 people, 150 people, 250 people. He held them for the duration. Some woman with a crying baby would leave, but other than that, I was always sitting by the back door or the exit.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** He held that crowd spell bound. And I thought to myself, there's something special about this guy. He's got a mind like a steel trap. It's not only all the information he's got in his head, but he's got it processed, cataloged. He can pull it out at will. And not only does he have the information base in his head, but he can spew it out in such a way that it keeps people spellbound. Gray wasn't in that category.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** As you know.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And it's very smart. But not, didn't hold any crowd spellbound. And I just said to myself, this time's not gonna work, but I'm telling you, this guy's gonna be governor of California.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And...

**CM:** You knew it then. You felt that...

**GS:** Oh, I totally knew it. He just... He was way beyond the typical politician I ever worked for. He was just brilliant. And again, I think part, one day I went during his race for governor, I went to San Francisco to see him, and I went into the mayor's office and his door for his personal office is shut. And I just assumed he wasn't there. So I made calls and all that. And pretty soon I came out and I asked his secretary, I said when is he coming back? And she goes, oh, he's here. I said, well, he's in there? He goes, yeah, he is been in there for three hours, but the door shut. So I knocked on the door.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** Opened it up. Here he is sitting in his shirt sleeves at his desk with books, briefing books like this on his desk, pouring through these briefing books. And one, again, I hate to pick on Gray Davis, but Gray was famous for losing briefing papers and books. Right? The standing joke among the staff was, if you gave Gray Davis a briefing book going in a revolving door, he would've lost it by the time he got out the other side of the revolving door. Now, totally the opposite with Gavin Newsom, when you gave him a briefing book, he went through it with post-it notes with liner, with high lining, red high liners, yellow highlighters. You could tell he had gone through every single page of this and had made notes to himself and had put Post-it notes and stuff in it. Very impressive in terms of the seriousness he took with briefings and learning the information.

**GS:** And that's just not like most politicians that I've dealt with. Most politicians, you give them like, okay, here's your five talking points. Right? And sometimes they'll use 'em all in five, and sometimes they'll forget the fifth one, but I've had candidates who were famous, you'd give 'em the five talking points and they'd get, they'd repeat the numbers, number one, and then number two, and then number two, it's like, the staff is saying, oh God, keep the... You can't count to five?

**GS:** Newsom is the opposite of that. Newsom has, and you saw his debate with State Senator Brian Dahle, who was the Republican. Ate him for lunch and didn't do it aggressively, didn't do it like, you're so stupid. But just every single complaint that his opponent leveled against him, he had the answer to it. And he did it in a very smooth way, filled with facts and history and the whole thing. Very impressive.

**CM:** So, and...

**GS:** There's no doubt about the fact the guy could be president of the United States.

**CM:** I was gonna say, what...

**GS:** Whether he will or not, I don't know.

**CM:** What is his game plan in your view? As we're doing this interview, he's just coming off a big trip to China where he's been met with by all the top officials there. He's getting international attention. But you yourself have written that a governor of California getting to the White House is a pretty heavy lift in this political atmosphere.

**GS:** I believe it is. And I don't think it's just in this atmosphere. I think it's been the history. Remember Jerry Brown tried it three times and failed. The problem is that California is in a love-hate relationship with the rest of the country. By that, I mean, people love to come here to Lake Tahoe and to... And to ski in the Sierra Nevada mountains and go to the beach and go to Dana Point. And they love to send their kids to Stanford and UCLA, but they also love to hate California. It's la-la land. It's the land of fruit and nuts. It's the left coast, the whole thing.

**GS:** And when you think about it, we have been a leader in a lot of policy areas. I mean, for example, the catalytic converter started in California. Now, it's a statewide, it's a national mandate, but it started here and then it spread east. And so the perception a lot of Americans have, it doesn't matter whether you're in Iowa or Michigan or New Jersey or Maine or Florida, is that California is a little bit loopy, a little bit loony. And some of it we deserve, because we are a little bit loony.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** But... And by the way, the recall of Gray Davis just personified this, 135 candidates running to replace him...

**CM:** Porn star.

**GS:** Including a porn star who promised to sleep with whoever voted for her. A sumo wrestler. A porn magnate, Larry Flynt.

**CM:** That's right. Gary Coleman.

**GS:** Gary Coleman, a dwarf. Yeah. I mean, it was like, what is this, a clown car?

[laughter]

**CM:** It was a clown car.

**GS:** And so, to put it in mathematical terms, the standard deviation politically between California and the rest of the country is pretty immense. It really is.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** Even in Democratic controlled states like Illinois or Michigan or New Jersey. And when a governor of California goes out there to run for president, he or she takes all the baggage of California with him or her. Right? And the crime problem we have here, which is magnified by Fox News and all the other... And so I just think that it's no disrespect to Gavin Newsom because I think he could well be president of the United States. I mean, he certainly has the capacity, he's got the charisma, he's got the standing, he's got the personal force, force of personality. But I just think that having a governor of California run for president is a difficult task. And by the way, it's never happened. Not only has there never been a Democratic president from California, there has never even been a Democratic nominee for president from California. Ever. Jerry Brown tried it three times. And I mean, so we're talking since California was formed as a state in 1850, there's a lot of history there. There's never been one.

**GS:** And it's not just accidental mind you, it's because we're viewed as this weird place out on the West Coast, where the weather's always nice and we don't get hurricanes and we don't get snow storms and on and on. And by the way, this is not just Democrats. I mean, Pete Wilson tried to run for president in 1995 after his massive victory for re-election. In '94, he beat Jerry Brown's sister by 15 points. Right?

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** He decides he's gonna run for president. Now, he was a moderate Republican. He was pro-choice...

**CM:** Pro-choice, right.

**GS:** Anti offshore drilling, signed our indoor smoking ban, the first state to do that. So he wasn't in cahoots with the tobacco companies. So I mean, if you look at his record as governor, he was a pretty moderate Republican, particularly in the context of today's right wing MAGA nuts. Right?

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** So he tried to get his bonafides, his right wing bonafides by [Prop.]187, and a ban on affirmative action and a ban on bilingual education and the ban on... But when he went out as governor of California, even as a Republican to other states, it was like, whoa, wait a minute, governor of California, no way.

**CM:** Not gonna happen. Right.

**GS:** They don't understand how the average person lives in Dubuque, Iowa. So it wasn't, it's not just Democrats. I mean, we have a recent example of a Republican, now, I worked with Reagan. But even when Pete Wilson tried it as a Republican who had tried to augment his conservative bonafides by all the

things he did here in California on affirmative action and illegal immigration and all, that didn't sell at all as you know, I mean, he collapsed. I mean it was...

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And Kamala Harris, I mean, we have another...

**CM:** Well, that was gonna be my next question because, you've put out some very controversial views in your essays, in your...

**GS:** Me? Are you kidding?

**CM:** Political... And one of them recently was a memo to Democrats, beware of Kamala Harris in 2022 and beyond. You said, despite her obvious intelligence, Harris isn't just, isn't very good either as a candidate or as a communicator. So, why, what's your sense of...

**GS:** I respect Kamala Harris as the first female vice president, the first black vice president of the United States. You have to respect her, whatever happens to her, whatever her historical status is there and will always be there.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** But one of the fallacies in campaigns in the campaign world is that when somebody runs for office and runs badly, they learn lessons from it. And the next time they run a brilliant campaign, it ain't necessarily the truth. Now, sometimes circumstances conspire against you. It's not the right election year or some issue pops up that...

**CM:** Right. Yes.

**GS:** That is a problem. But my analysis of her failed, that failed miserably, by the way, her campaign for president in 2019 and 2020, is that it had more to do with her as a candidate and the way she set up the campaign than it had to do with circumstances. I mean, she put her sister in charge of the campaign. There are two problems with that. One is Maya, I never met her, I'm sure she's a fine woman, had never run a campaign in her life. She'd been some policy advisor to Hillary Clinton. She didn't know anything about the mechanics of campaigns. And the second thing is, when you put a relative, a close relative in charge of your campaign, it causes a big problem with the staffers and the consultants getting bad news basically to the candidates saying, you didn't handle that well, you screwed that up. We gotta change this. We gotta stop doing that because you're taking it to her sister of all people. Right?

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And you never know whether it ever filters to the candidate because the sister is, they're the sister. And so it's a huge mistake to put your close relative in charge of a campaign. It just is, particularly for president.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And Joe Biden, I mean, Joe Biden's sister, Valerie, I believe is her name, ran his campaigns for the Senate in Delaware. But even he was smart enough when he ran for vice president and then president, he's not gonna have a sister running that campaign. I mean you can't have a close relative, particularly not a sibling running your campaign because they're too protective of the candidate and they protect the candidate from the bad news they need to hear about how they're screwing up, not doing things right. Need to change this, change that. So, I wasn't involved in that campaign, but my analysis of it was I knew a lot of people who were, and I've talked to them after the fact, and they kind of agree with me that the problem with that Kamala Harris campaign for president was not that some circumstances conspired against her or she, whatever. But it was her and how she set up the campaign and how she ran the campaign and her messaging was horrible. I mean, we've talked about this. Progressive prosecutor. I mean, what does that mean even? I mean, it's like saying compassionate bill collector, it's like it's an oxymoron to most people. I mean that was what she put, that was the title she put on herself.

**CM:** Yeah. Yeah. And you also think she was kind of... She was a weak candidate for other reasons.

**GS:** Yeah. I don't think her communication skills are good. And I swear to God, I don't want to diss her necessarily. I just don't think her... I've watched her give speeches. I've watched her do press conferences. I mean, and I said in the article, which I'm sure she took great exception to, but every time I listen to her, and I do this because I'm in politics, so I have to listen to people even if I don't like them. Right? Even Donald Trump sometimes. But every time I hear her make a presentation, a speech, a press conference, it just doesn't seem like it's coming from inside of her. It seems like practiced, rehearsed, gamed out kind of statement. And I don't wanna get too gross about this, but we have an old saying in Montana, 'Wouldn't say shit if they had a mouthful of it,' and what that means is, they just won't tell the truth. They just won't, they just won't call a spade a spade. Right?

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** And I just never get the feeling with her that everything that anything she says is really coming from the bottom of her heart. Now, I may be wrong, it may be all genuinely her, but the impression I get from afar is that she's not a very good communicator, but that's a death knell for somebody running for president.

**CM:** I mean, and now, we have so many questions, but I wanna kind of go into almost a lightning round kinda thing, where...

2:00:12.

**CM:** We go through some...

**GS:** How many seconds do I get?

[laughter]

Speaker 3: We have about a half hour left.

CM: Oh, okay. Good. Yeah. That's why I want to...

GS: Oh my gosh.

CM: But I wanna hear your thoughts on how you think, Donald Trump and his kind of go for broke style, this civility, the insults, the lies, et cetera. How much has that just changed forever? The job that you do and the jobs that political consultants do, has this, are the rules gone now or would you get into this field today?

GS: No, I would not. And by the way, I haven't. The last campaign I was involved in was 2016. I won't do them anymore. I get a lot of offers. And I turn them down.

CM: Because?

GS: Because, well, for two reasons. Number one, when I started off in politics in the 1970s, there was no cable television, there was no internet, there were no blogs. Every market had three stations, NBC, CBS and ABC.

CM: Right, right.

GS: Right? And some radio stations. And so we used to, when we bought TV spots, we used to do what we called a blockade, which meant that you would buy the same spot on all three of the stations at the same time period.

CM: Right.

GS: Right. The same day part 7:00 to 7:30. Right?

CM: Right.

GS: So you were assured that anybody, any set of eyes watching television during that time period was gonna see that ad, was gonna see that ad.

CM: Right.

GS: You can't do that anymore. I mean, it's like a thousand different cable... I mean, you can't penetrate the market anymore. And everyone's like in their little cubbyhole, right?

CM: Right.



**GS:** I only watch Fox, I only watch MSNBC. I only watch Rachel Maddow. Right? So you don't have the ability anymore to communicate kind of across the board to voters. And it's complicated messaging.

**CM:** Right. And social media is...

**GS:** Geometrically. The other reason that I don't do it is because back when I started off in this, candidates, not always, but they would kind of take the high road and like operatives like me would take the low road and...

**CM:** That was your job. Right?

[laughter]

**GS:** Yeah. Stick the shiv in people and all that kind of thing. And now, it's candidates to do it. But I gotta tell you that, I was never a big fan of Phil Angelides. Right? Who was the treasurer and then ran for [lieutenant governor], and I ran the campaign against him in the 2006 primary.

**CM:** Right, right.

**GS:** With Steve Westly.

**CM:** Steve Westly. Right, right.

**GS:** And by the way, another guy that I've never voted for ever was Phil Angelides. And here's why. People forget this now, but when I took over Gray Davis' lieutenant governor's race in 1993, Phil Angelides had just given up the party, the Democratic party chairmanship, and had announced he was running for lieutenant governor.

**CM:** Oh yeah. Right.

**GS:** And when I came on, Gray said to me, one of your first jobs is to get Angelides out of the race. I've got a couple of million in the bank, but I can't afford to spend it in the primary. I've gotta use it for the general, hard raising money for lieutenant governor. Phil's a multimillionaire. And I'd never met Phil Angelides. I knew he was state chair at one point, but I'd never met the guy. And bear in mind, I'd only been in California for two years. I'd never worked for Gray Davis. I wasn't here when he was in the Assembly or... And so one of the first things I started hearing was a couple of reporters called me and said, "You know, I don't quite know how to bring this up, but does Gray have mental problems?" And I said, "What are you talking about?"

**GS:** The rumor about Gray was, the scuttlebutt was he hollered and screamed at staff and he threw staplers at people. He never did that with me, but I don't know. Maybe. And I said, "Well, that's a bizarre question." The guy's pretty bright. He's an Ivy League graduate with a law degree. And they go, "Well, here's what I've been hearing, which is, I don't know if you knew this, but when Gray was in the

Assembly, he had cranial surgery because he had a tumor that developed behind one of his eyes." I forget which eye.

**CM:** I didn't know that. No.

**GS:** And it turned out it was not malignant, but they had to take it out 'cause it would've affected his vision. So they literally shaved his head, cut his skull open, and took this thing out.

**CM:** Oh wow. I didn't know.

**GS:** And he was out of the Assembly for several months, and when he came back, he had a wig until his hair grew back. Now, I didn't know any of this. And these reporters said, "Well, Phil Angelides is saying that when Gray had his cranial surgery, they damaged the frontal lobe of his brain. And he's supposed to be on antipsychotic medication and he's off his meds, so that's why he's throwing staplers at people." And I said to myself, that's the scummiest damn thing. And Angelides is saying this himself. He's not even having an operative do it. Like tried to plant it with somebody, is Gray off in the head? And I thought to myself, this is the biggest scumbag I ever heard in my life, accusing an opponent of having brain damage?

**CM:** How did you confront that?

**GS:** Well, I went to Gray and he explained the whole thing to me and I said, no, it was a benign tumor. It was behind his eye. It wasn't his brain.

**CM:** Did you ever confront Angelides on that, or?

**GS:** No. I never did.

**CM:** How did you get your revenge?

**GS:** Here's what we did. What I decided to do was, we decided to do add-on questions of polls that I knew were going out, candidate polls, Dianne, I forget who it was.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** So we did these add-on questions we would buy for fairly small amount of money saying, if the election were held today, would you vote for Gray Davis for lieutenant governor or Phil Angelides? Now, it was not fair because Gray had already been on the ballot three times. For controller twice, US Senate in just the year before in '92 and was a statewide elected official. But we creamed him. It's like 67 to 12, something like that.

**GS:** And then Willie Brown, who was always a big fan of Gray's and had served in the Assembly with him, we had Willie Brown take these polls out to Greek funders and others that he knew and say, "Your boy ain't gonna make it. He's gonna be creamed. He needs to get outta the race." So several months later, behold, he gets outta the race and decides he is gonna run for treasurer. So we got him outta the race. We

didn't really have any opposition in the '94 lieutenant governor's race on the Democratic side. But that was also the first race I ran against a woman because Senator Cathy Wright was the Republican nominee from Ventura County.

**CM:** What'd you learn about running against a woman?

**GS:** Well, yeah, that's a good question. Gray was almost apoplectic about getting another female opponent because of what happened to him in the primary race against Dianne Feinstein the year before.

**CM:** Right. Had to be very careful.

**GS:** So he put me on notice. I already got in trouble for going after a woman. I don't want you to... And so we decided, look, we can't... She was a dingbat. God rest her soul, she's died. But she really was not very smart. She was really stupid. And in one of the hearings that we got the tape of, I forget what committee she was on in the Senate, but this is when the smoking ban was up for a vote that Pete Wilson signed, she's on a committee and there were anti-smoking advocates testifying about what this is a good idea and the whole thing. And talking about how people on this panel, they'd done their research about how much tobacco money had gone to these members from Philip Morris.

**GS:** And at one point, she grabs the mic and gets close to the mic and says, "We take their money because people like you don't give us money. People like you don't give us money so we have to take tobacco money." And this is all on tape 'cause it's videotaped. And so we got that out that she was a captive of the tobacco lobby. But the other thing was, people give me credit for the experience money can't buy slogan that we used for Gray...

**CM:** Yeah. Right. For Gray Davis. Right.

**GS:** In 1998, which was pretty good.

**CM:** Yeah.

**GS:** But the one I'm most proud of was really that one because we decided to use as a slogan when we did our ads against her, on everything you care about Wright is wrong. W-R-I-G-H-T, W-R... And people got it.

**CM:** People got it.

**GS:** They said, "Well, I've seen your ads. Wright is wrong." That's funny. That's really good.

**CM:** I was gonna ask you, what's the best campaign's slogan you ever came up with?

**GS:** Well, it was clearly the experience money can buy.

**CM:** Yes.

**GS:** But the second most one, the one that I'm most proud of is, on everything you care about Wright is wrong.

**CM:** Okay. What about the most fun campaign you've ever run? I'm gonna do now the lightning round kind of thing. Most fun campaign.

**GS:** The most satisfying campaign I ever ran was for my brother running for the state Legislature in my home state, my hometown of Montana, because a Democrat had not been elected out of my home county, which was heavily Republican. At least it was so thought in 20 years, during my entire lifetime at that point.

**CM:** Wow.

**GS:** There hadn't been a Democrat elected out of that county, and no one thought a Democrat could get elected out of that county. But one of the things that happened between '72 and '74 was single-member districts, because the Supreme Court had issued its one man, one vote rule. So every state and my county had two different representatives that you could vote for two. So it had to go to single-member districts. And I happened to know really well the chairman of the redistricting commission that's carved up the state and I knew my little hometown well enough to know that even though people in Montana didn't register by party, so you didn't have any idea who was Democrat or Republican. But I knew the city well enough 'cause my dad had been a councilman there, and so was my brother. I knew the city well enough to know where the Democrats probably were. And so I impressed on my friend, I said, here's how you divide this up to get what could be a Democratic seat out of what was originally a multi-member district of two.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** And so he did, he did, he designed it exactly the way I proposed, and so my brother runs, and I ran, I took two quarters off school to run his campaign.

**CM:** I was gonna say you must have pretty young.

**GS:** I mean, the way people campaigned in this small town was they would have matchbook covers made up with, Joe Blow...

**CM:** Oh the good old days.

**GS:**... Joe Blow for state representative. And then take it around in little boxes to the restaurants and put it on the checkout counters and all that. No one had ever really campaigned. We had billboards, we had radio spots. My brother went door to door, literally door to door with campaign brochures and all that, and we kicked ass. We got 60 percent of the vote.

**CM:** Wow.

**GS:** That was satisfying because it's my hometown. It's where no one thought a Democrat could get elected.

**CM:** And it was your brother.

**GS:** I did it. I mean, not to brag, but I mean, I raised all the money. I put the campaign together, I did all the design and everything else. So, I mean, it wasn't a big...

**CM:** Right. But that was the most satisfying what.

**GS:** Because it was personal to me. It was my brother and it was my hometown. And I proved after 20 years that a Democrat could in fact get elected in Miles City, Montana.

**CM:** What is a campaign where you wished, your biggest regret? Is there one you wish you had a do-over?

**GS:** Well, I'll tell you my biggest regret was the Steve Westly for Governor campaign in 2006 against the hated Phil Angelides. You remember all this because I think I came to you.

**CM:** Yes.

**GS:** We found out through our Oppo that Phil Angelides had been personally sued by the Democratic Attorney General of California, along with other people, because he had an apartment in a condo complex on the shore of Lake Tahoe that had gone out and dredged the boat docks outside of the... Illegally...

**CM:** Correct.

**GS:** Had dredged the boat docks outside of the condo and taken that sludge out of the middle of Lake Tahoe and dumped it in the cleanest lake in the world.

**CM:** If I remember right, because I covered this story. Wasn't that the location where the Godfather II..

**GS:** Correct, it was the Mansion which was torn down and then...

**CM:** Where the big...

**GS:** A condo was built exactly the same place Right in Godfather III.

**CM:** Was it Godfather III?

**GS:** Where they'd moved to California? Yes.

**CM:** Yes. And the big scene that, no, it was Godfather II, the big wedding scene, confirmation scene where it's on the shore of Lake Tahoe.

**GS:** Yeah, that's the same, same. But that house was torn down, right?

**CM:** Yeah. That house was torn down.

**GS:** And so I tried to plant this story, with all kinds of reporters, including the LA Times.

**CM:** Yeah, including me.

**GS:** And the problem with it was this had never been in print. It was all original source material.

**CM:** Right, right.

**GS:** No one had ever caught onto it and none of his previous campaigns had they caught onto it. And the way it worked back then was you had to get the story in print, so you had outside validation.

**CM:** Yes. Right.

**GS:** That it wasn't just some, salacious rumor that was being spread by your opponent.

**CM:** Well, the standards were much higher than they were today when any blogger could go out on Twitter and...

**GS:** They were. And so I tried to no avail to get this in print and it never got in print until we'd actually went up with the ads. And the problem with the ads was even when we focus grouped the ads, 'cause we went on the air with it and denounced by the Angelides and the whole thing, was that people said, 'Well, I've never heard of that before. I mean where did that come from?' What I should have done and what I thought about doing and didn't do this is one of the things that I really rue about that campaign, was I thought about going over to the Reno paper in Nevada. Hate California. Right? Share Lake Tahoe and plant this story in the Reno. Is that the Gazette? I don't know what...

**CM:** Yeah, yeah. Right.

**GS:** Reno Gazette, I think it is. I think that would've been a cakewalk to say, 'Hey, I got this stuff about a guy running for Governor of California where he screwed up Lake Tahoe. Right. And got...

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** ...got sued by the attorney general, the Democratic Attorney General of California for screwing up the cleanest lake in the world. I think it would've been front page news and I just didn't do it. I just didn't go up there and do it. And so it never got in print until we put the spots on the air. And then the Angelides

fight back was this is ridiculous. It was a timeshare. The condo rules were you couldn't have a timeshare. I mean, he was totally lying through his teeth. To try to get out of it.

**CM:** Right.

**GS:** But when I look back on the big races I ran, I mean, that was really the biggest mistake that I ran. But what other little stories? See the Kelly bumper sticker up there?

**CM:** Yes.

**GS:** Kelly period.

**CM:** Yes.

**GS:** Well, this is one of my messaging strategies that went off track. That was the first campaign I ever did. 1972. A friend of mine who was an attorney in my hometown, Democrat against the sitting Republican Speaker of the House of Representatives. And again, it was a two... It was a multi-member district, so you could vote for two. We decided that Pat Kelly was my friend who was running, Democratic attorney. We decided that the only way we could possibly win this was to have Democrats vote only for Pat Kelly. And not use the other vote to vote for one of the two Republicans, the incumbent Republicans. So we came up with a strategy of Kelly Period.

**GS:** And so I designed that bumper sticker that says Kelly Period. We're thinking that somehow would communicate to people the Kelly Period strategy. But what happened was it backfired because people were saying, "Well, you know, that's only one word. That's not a sentence. You don't have to have a period after that. That's only one word. You know, why did you put a period after the..." It's like, okay, well I learned my first, don't try to be too cute by half.

[laughter]

**CM:** To kind of wrap this up, I mean, given all the changes in politics and how social media has changed campaigns, how Trump has changed the... What would be your advice to somebody who wants to get into this? I feel like this is the 'Godfather,' this is the business we have chosen, but what would be your advice to somebody? What would you... You said you wouldn't do it today, right?

**GS:** No, I can't. I won't.

**CM:** Okay.

**GS:** I can't.

**CM:** So what's your... I mean, would you at all recommend people get into this business anymore given what we know?

**GS:** No. I would suggest they become a concert pianist or an architect or something, because this is kind of a sleazy business.

[laughter]

**GS:** Now, I of course myself have not been ever sleazy, but it's, I mean people ask me, I have a 17-year-old son. People say, "Well, are you gonna encourage him to get into politics?" And I go, "Stay as far away from it as you possibly." He wants to be an emergency room doctor, by the way. He's gonna go into premed, which is a far more useful profession than what I got into.

**CM:** I mean, yeah. Are you concerned that...

**GS:** No, I've had fun. I have to tell you, you know, you've seen me.

**CM:** Yeah. Yeah.

**GS:** I've been a happy warrior at what I do, but I don't, I wouldn't recommend it to anyone.

**CM:** No. Are you concerned that giving the misinformation, the fake news, it's out there on social media, AI, artificial intelligence...

**GS:** You can't control the factors...

**CM:** What's your stance about how... Yeah. What's your...

**GS:** You can't control the factors anymore. And again, going back to the 1970s where I think there were like three TV stations in every market, right? ABC, NBC, CBS, I mean, then you could monitor in campaign offices back then, we would have three TVs and we had a monitor who would watch all the news shows, right? The local news shows on the three channels to make sure that there was, whatever was said. And they'd watch 'em simultaneously. Right? And now how can you possibly monitor everything that's out there? You can't, I mean, there's all kinds of crap out there, accusing you of this and accusing you of that and fake pictures and PhotoShopped photographs that have you in a picture that you didn't... You weren't, I mean, it, you can't control the factors anymore. It's totally outta your control.

**GS:** So, I mean, you can sit in the campaign office and be as brilliant as you want to try to be and say, "Okay, we're gonna do this. We're gonna do that. We're gonna communicate this. We're gonna..." You don't have control over the factors anymore. They're totally outta your control. They're outta your hands. And that not only makes it difficult in campaigns, I think it's very problematic for democracy. I really do.

**CM:** How is this gonna affect the quality of the candidates? When you're looking at candidates who have been elected, Marjorie Taylor Greene.

**GS:** Yep.



**CM:** Boebert, Matt Gaetz, et cetera. Are you concerned about who's going to run for political office?

**GS:** I totally am. I think that, look, we've had crooks and charlatans who've been in office for a long time, going back to the beginning of the Republic. But I think that when solid people look at a political career, they wanna run for something, they're a businessman, they're a professor or whatever, I think they look at the abuse that is heaped on candidates these days through, in the internet and artificial intelligence and all the things they can do to you. And now you've got people protesting in front of people's houses. You've got doxxing going on where people are putting people's addresses, home addresses, where their kids live on the internet and all that. I just think people look at it and say, "You know, I'm not gonna subject myself to that."

**GS:** It's never been easy being a candidate. I mean, everything is under review. All your peccadillos and all that come out. But back when I started in this opposition research was very difficult because there wasn't any internet. And in fact, in one campaign, a candidate graduated from some college, I believe in New Hampshire or Vermont, and made all these claims about everything he'd done in college. And we actually flew somebody to that site in Vermont or New Hampshire to go to the library in the college and look through the yearbooks, the annual yearbooks, to find his name in there to see whether any of this was true. I mean, that's how complicated it was. Now, all you gotta do is Google and like 4,000 [hits] and everything lives forever on the internet. It never goes away. You can try to purge and everything, but, so it's just far more destructive and far more problematic in this day and age to run for office. And I don't know why people do it unless they're a total egomaniac or they're a crook and they wanna make money, or they have brain damage or I don't know, whatever.

[laughter]

**GS:** To my credit, I've never worked for a brain damaged candidate, including Gray Davis.

[laughter]

**GS:** But it used to be fun, honestly, it was fun because there was a certain amount of civility that was, if you... Even though things could get dirty and bare knuckles and all that, but nothing sank so low that you would start accusing somebody of something they didn't do. And just making it up outta whole cloth. I mean, you have to have outside validation. It had to be in the newspaper. It had to... Now, it's just a free for all. I mean, you can make up anything, say anything and you can get reverb on it and get it reposted 4,000 times. And what do you do about it?

**CM:** So, last question. You still have hope for democracy in this kind of situation?

**GS:** Well, I fear for our democracy. I really do. And I gotta tell you, if Trump gets re-elected in 2024, you can kiss the democracy that we've known goodbye. This isn't some 20-year prospect here. I mean, this is right on the brink of the 2024 presidential election. And now you have an election denier who led the entire house, the Republicans in the house to deny the results of the 2024 election. His name was at the top of the list on all the file, try to decertify the election and deny his Speaker of the House. I mean, who

knows what happens, but I think we're on the precipice of very dangerous time in American politics. And I'm not a doomsayer generally. I mean, I've seen presidents come and go and party control come and go.

**GS:** But even with Republicans I didn't vote for, whether it was Reagan or George Herbert Walker Bush or George Bush, you got the feeling, okay, things are gonna shift dramatically in one ideological direction, but you never got the sense that somehow the whole democracy was gonna be undermined. But that's where we're at. And it's hugely dangerous. I mean, it's... There's stuff happening out there in the public mind. I mean, how can somebody like Donald Trump twice impeached, now four indictments still be equal in the polling to Joe Biden? [Editor's Note: Trump was convicted May 30, 2024, of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in New York.]

**GS:** Now, you can say a lot about Joe Biden. He's old, he looks old. He sounds old. Who knows if he lives through a second term, there's all of that going on out there. But you can't look at him and not say he's a decent guy. He's a family guy. He's been through personal tragedy. His wife and his daughter were killed in an auto crash right after he was elected to the Senate. I mean, what's Trump? A scam artist, and here he is running even with the sitting President of the United States. We'll see what happens. But my grandparents on my mom's side, my great-grandparents and my grandmother were born in Canada. And Canada's looking more attractive to me.

[laughter]

**CM:** Hey, Garry South. We could continue this forever and maybe we will have another time too.

**GS:** We could.

**CM:** Pleasure to talking to you today.

**GS:** Oh thank you.

**CM:** Thank you so much for your time.

**GS:** It's a pleasure to talk to you. Alright.

**CM:** Thank you so much.