

Donald Mitchell oral histories, Archives and Special Collections, Consortium Library, University of Alaska Anchorage. Joe and Carolyn Begich interview, 1994 February 9. Transcript completed by Andrea Atkins.  
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JOE AND CAROLYN BEGICH  
February 9, 1994

DON MITCHELL: Where we at?

MR. BEGICH: So can we --

DON MITCHELL: Let's turn this on for a second. And -- and for hopefully folks at the University (indiscernible) now might be listening to this. Let me date it for you. Today is -- I think I just said that. I've forgotten the date. I think it's February 9th, 1994. And I'm in Minnesota speaking around the dining room table with Mr. Joseph Begich, who was -- not only was, but still is, the brother of former Alaska Congressman Nick Begich. And we were just beginning to talk a little -- a little history of former Congressman Begich, growing up in Minnesota and his life before he came to Alaska. And I guess the first thing that we were just trying to figure out, I guess, that both of your parents are originally from -- from Yugoslavia somewhere. Which I've now learned, since the problems in Yugoslavia, that there's obviously different kinds of places to be from Yugoslavia.

MR. BEGICH: Okay. My father and mother where both of Croatian descent, and they both came from Yugoslavia. My father came from Yugoslavia in 1911. And the -- my mother -- I don't have that date here. But my mother -- and my father then was 17 years old, and he had a brother here in Virginia, which is the next -- next town over. When my father arrived, he was going to be an employee of US Steel. His brother was working there. So he just automatically went there, and then worked at US Steel and stayed at US Steel for 22 years. It was the policy and the program in those days, where the people came -- some people came from Yugoslavia and went back. They would come here to make money and go back and then to buy land. And my father's father was here first, and then he was here for two years. And the money he made, he saved and went back to Yugoslavia to buy farmland. Well, then his older brother came and stayed here for three years and then he went back to Yugoslavia, and my father stayed in the -- he never had a feeling to ever go back to Yugoslavia as -- to visit or anything. He just -- but he did keep contact with one or two of the family that were left by mayor and --

(Brief interruption.)

MR. BEGICH: -- readings and Christmas cards and so forth. And that's the way -- as he passed away, that's the way it was left. My mother came -- her father -- her father came to the US alone, and after being here for one year and getting established working for US Steel, then my mother and her mother came over. That was the only one that was born in Yugoslavia. My mother was two years old at the time. And then the -- I don't have it here, Carolyn, when they were married. What's the back of that picture, 19. Well, then my father was a single person. It was common in those days for families to have boarders. And my father was a boarder living at my -- what eventually ended up to be my grandmother and grandfather, was living there and working in the

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mine and living there, and then my mother, being the oldest of the family, eventually they got married at an early age. I think she was 16 and my father was older, about 12 years, so --

MRS. BEGICH: 1920.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah, they were married in 1920. So --

DON MITCHELL: Now, was he living up in Virginia then, or was he living all this time down in Eveleth?

MR. BEGICH: Right close to where I pointed out earlier, where the lights were as you came over to my home, about several hundred yards away from the lights was my grandma and then our folks. All of us were in a family. Nick was the last -- there was few of us boys and one girl. And two girls had died before we moved then and when they were young kids. And Nick was the last -- the youngest of the family. Living now is his the sister, the oldest one, and then my brother -- next brother, John, he's passed away. And then myself, and then Nick.

DON MITCHELL: Now, do you think that in terms of being the last in the family, that -- that that sort of being the -- being everybody's sort of kid brother, that that sort of led to his -- how industrious he always was, that everybody tells me about? Or do you think -- how do you think his place in the pecking order?

MR. BEGICH: Well -- yes. At one time, he had the benefits. For example, my father left the mines and went to be self-employed as a dairy farmer and operated a -- a dairy and went to house-to-house delivery and commercial deliveries. And Nick was the younger one, where they -- he was allowed to -- to play the basketball at the school. He was allowed to -- to get involved in all the school activities, speech. He was a -- a leader in the debate team and --

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: -- and those kind of things. Where I was just a little older, and we had to stay home and -- and work on the farm. So that became the little difference between Nick and I. He -- he had the privileges of the -- the extra activities at school, where my older brother John and I did not.

DON MITCHELL: Now, where was the farm? Was it close to town here then?

MR. BEGICH: No. We had -- we ran the -- the cows were milked here. And that was -- you see that huge hill there?

DON MITCHELL: Uh-huh.

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MR. BEGICH: With the trees growing?

DON MITCHELL: Uh-huh.

MR. BEGICH: That was the evening pasture. That is now a stripping dump. You see that -- as the mines developed, they closed that. And then the day pasture was on -- behind us. So we had -- this was 166 acres for the evening pasture, and the day pasture was 500 acres over here. And so that's where we worked the farm. And -- and so Nick being the younger one, he got to go -- and Nick was more interested in school than I was or my older brother, John. So I suppose my parents thought, "Well, at least we're going to have one that's going to do something and go on." So they kind of pushed and helped him and -- and he got to do those things, where I graduated from high school and went in the Army. And -- and when I came back, I didn't wish to take that. I had four years of free college, the GI bill --

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: -- and wasn't interested in that. I was more interested in industrial mechanic work and that type of work and went to work in the mines.

DON MITCHELL: Now, did -- I mean, obviously, when he -- he showed this interest, you just said that your folks encouraged him to do all this. Did -- did -- was it just sort of something innate in him? I mean, did someone encouraged him to -- to get involved in -- in learning stuff or --

MR. BEGICH: He was talking to some of his classmates from time to time. He was always aggressive in school. And when he was interested in that -- what was that called, Carolyn, the team? The debate team?

MRS. BEGICH: Uh-huh.

MR. BEGICH: That involved and --

DON MITCHELL: Foreignistic (as spoken) or something like that.

MRS. BEGICH: Forensics.

MR. BEGICH: Yes. And the --

DON MITCHELL: Forensics, right.

MR. BEGICH: And he was just -- he -- a go-getter and he really enjoyed himself and -- and was really aggressive. And when he really started to move after he graduated, he went on to St. Cloud

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and did wonders there, and was going to St. Cloud and University of Minnesota at the same time. And there was a big fight over that issue. Whether -- and -- well, he was always aggressive and would set a timer. When you came to visit, he had a little clock and he would say, "I've got ten minutes," and if ten minutes was up, he was on his way. He was hustling. Yeah. He was always a hustler. And Carolyn found someplace -- I kind of remember this. When he was small, he couldn't talk for a long time. And naturally, the parents were concerned. And they went to -- to take him to a doctor and so forth. And all of a sudden, he was about four years old when he took off and started to talk. And he never quit talking for -- until he passed away. So --

DON MITCHELL: All right. Now, what was it like? I mean, obviously, as kids you're -- you got to move these cows around and everything else. So what was it like growing up around here in the '30s and '40s? I assume it is a lot different from what it is today.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, yes. It really is hard to explain, because most people don't believe how tough those days were. We were poor, but -- but we lived different. We -- we had good meals, we had clean clothes even though they were patched. Nowadays, you know, when people are poor, their governments got to help. Right where this house is and across, where my workshop is, was all gardens besides the farm. And this was just for vegetables. And the people didn't look to the government for the handout. They just kind of did it. You burnt firewood and the wood -- instead of -- and you could cut a tree. All of the land around here was owned by US Steel. They were the rulers of the -- you know, the whole area. And they allowed their employees to cut wood free. But -- see, Nick got off some of those jobs, cutting the wood and -- some of the times in the summer Nick was involved in stacking wood and those kind of chores. But Nick never worked -- Nick never milked any cows. Nick never delivered any milk. I and my next brother to me did work with my father.

DON MITCHELL: Now, speaking of your dad, I'll talk about John Blatnik in a -- in a second. But obviously, at that time, in the 19- -- particularly in the 1940s when the Farm-Labor Party was getting involved up here. And I guess with the -- the Steel Workers Union was probably a pretty serious community group at that time among the people that were working for the company. Was your dad as politically -- as interested in political -- obviously, both Nick ended up in politics and you obviously ended up in politics. So that's probably not an accident, I wouldn't think.

MR. BEGICH: He was very active. Because my father could speak English. As broken as it was, he could speak English. So naturally, he had to work with the Union officers to organize the Croatian workers. When it was time for a mayor's race or political race, they contacted him because he could talk enough English to -- to understand and he could read. He could read and he could write. So he became sort of one of the -- say, a group leader or whatever. And that's how we got very act- -- he was very active in organizing the CIOU union and working with the union. And then the political life, they were very, very staunch, hardcore Democrats and would

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never miss an election. They led marches in town where, at the time, the steel companies would try to run the election. The US Steel would try to organize -- run the elections. For mayor even. And my father would be organizing -- they would be marching against those people. And those were why they had to organize the union, because there was no safety programs. Minors got killed all the way around here. You can -- Rockefeller -- as I look out this window, and if look over your right shoulder, where those trees are, those kind of poplar trees, right there was the Rockefeller mine, the underground mine. In 1916, Rockefeller got \$1.68 -- a ton of (indiscernible) royalties out of that mine. And today, the taxes are \$1.85. So you can see what Rockefeller did. So those people control everything. But yet my father bucked them. And this is one reason why, after 22 years, he left the mines and went self-employed. Because of -- he never was fired because of his union activity. But he was picked on by the foreman and the company people. But he did very well with himself as a private employer. And then in his later life, after John went in the Army and wouldn't take any deferments, then I went to the Army, he sold out and went to a small mine over here as a -- as an employee and stayed there.

DON MITCHELL: Sold out the farm and stuck --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. So he was very active in -- in the political arena for many, many years, local elections as councilman and mayor. And then as --

DON MITCHELL: Now, did he hold elective --

MR. BEGICH: No.

DON MITCHELL: -- your dad hold elective office?

MR. BEGICH: He never held elective --

DON MITCHELL: He never ran?

MR. BEGICH: He never ran. He worked behind the scenes.

DON MITCHELL: Now, it's sort of getting far afield, but I've gotten interested enough in the range to ask. And how -- how did the -- the -- the difference between -- I know that the -- the Farmer-Labor Party and the Democratic Party merged in 1944. Was there a big split up here between the Farmer-Labor people and the Democrats? Or how did all that play out? Because I think it was Blatnik, I think, when he was in the state legislature, elected --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: -- (indiscernible) -- I think he was elected as a Farmer-Laborer, not a Democrat, I'm pretty sure. I'm not -- I'm not double sure about that.

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MR. BEGICH: Of course, we still call it --

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. Today --

MR. BEGICH: -- the DFL.

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: The Democrat Farmer-Labor Party. It was John Blatnik and Hubert Humphrey. Hubert Humphrey then was a mayor of Minneapolis. And through this coalition they put the two parties. Actually, years back, the unions were formed, and it was more ruled by the communist. We had, in fact, Gus, the president, what's his --

DON MITCHELL: You say Gus --

MRS. BEGICH: Hall.

MR. BEGICH: Hall -- Gus Hall.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. Gus Hall, right.

MR. BEGICH: Gus Hall is Gus Hulbert from about six miles from here.

DON MITCHELL: Really?

MR. BEGICH: And organized -- and the communists were very, very strong then and organized -- they start to organize the unions and the mines. But they were blackballed and -- and fired. And the US Steel made it bad for them. And this is why most of those people moved out and became the small dairy farmers, the Finnish people. And they move out of the mines. And many of them at that time went to Russia from here. And of course, we all know now, Gus Hall ran for president on the communist party for -- for many years.

MR. MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: And then -- but my father was never involved with that group. They were -- they didn't like -- for whatever reasons -- and --

DON MITCHELL: Now, were they the Farmer-Labor people?

MR. BEGICH: Yes. And then they -- then they drifted away. And then the real Farmer-Labor people came back and then joined the Democrats.

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DON MITCHELL: Am I -- am I right, that Blatnik was originally elected before the merger as a -- as a Farmer-Labor person, not a Democrat?

MR. BEGICH: Yes. He was elected on a -- yeah.

DON MITCHELL: Okay. Well, that actually does raise the issue of John Blatnik. I had -- there are newspaper articles that we were talking before we turned the tape on. And it's probably, for the purposes of this tap, worth -- worth reviewing. I had come -- there are a number of newspaper articles that will be in my file that will be at the University when I'm through with this project, that you will see if you check this. That -- that Nick Begich, after he was elected to -- to Congress in 1970, says that the reason that he -- that he ended up doing that was because of John Blatnik. That -- he said that Blatnik, who he met when he was about eight years old, was the fellow that encouraged him to go to college, when obviously nobody else in the family had ever really tried to do that before. And that it was Blatnik who had also urged him to think about public service as a -- as a career. And I did my math, that if Nick was born in '32, and he met Blatnik -- if he could remember meeting Blatnik when he was eight, that would have been 1940, which was the year that Blatnik was first elected to the state legislature, to the -- to the Minnesota Senate. And so I guess that sort of long-winded preamble is -- leads to the question of -- of how close a friend -- do you remember your family meeting John Blatnik? And is, were -- is Blatnik and your father -- were they friends? Is that probably true? Or was Nick overstating it a little bit, or what do you think?

MR. BEGICH: No. I remember John Blatnik coming to the house. And I remember when we used to have the -- the (indiscernible) day picnics, that John Blatnik always made it a point to contact my father for various things. Again, going back to his contact with all the Croatian people, there was a Croatian lodge, and that was -- and my father was president for, like, 35 years of the lodge. And he was a contact. And then they could bring John Blatnik into the lodge and say a few words during the campaign seasons. And so he had stopped at the house many times. And I'm sure along the line he -- he spoke to Nick. Nick was always -- when he was a kid, he always had books and he was always reading in books. And where we were outside playing other games, he was -- he wanted to read. And -- and so maybe John Blatnik said, "Well, there's maybe one in this family would" -- "would continue on to college," and encourage him to continue on his work. Nick was a young, young guy when he ran a little newspaper. It was called -- that shopper?

MRS. BEGICH: Daily reminder.

MR. BEGICH: Daily reminder. And it was a little shopper that they put ads in and from the merchants on the main street, and he was delivering those around. And he had a little business going.

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DON MITCHELL: How old would he be?

MR. BEGICH: I would say Nick was with you then, in school. Probably tenth grade. So that would be -- John Blatnik kept contact very closely with the family over the years, and naturally, as -- as I grew up and got involved in politics, and we had more contacts. My brother John, the oldest one, never concerned himself with politics. He kept the best of what was going on in the country and followed money. But never really -- that was interested -- got interested in Scouts. And he spent all his adulthood working on Scout programs. And then he got involved in a church in the Scouts. So that's the route he went.

DON MITCHELL: Well, I noticed that -- I think Nick was a Scoutmaster too, or something, right?

MR. BEGICH: Nick was a -- did he maybe go Scout?

MRS. BEGICH: I can't remember.

MR. BEGICH: I think he was very involved in the Scouts. But I don't -- if he was --

DON MITCHELL: I think he was, like, an assistant scoutmaster or something.

MRS. BEGICH: He could have been.

MR. BEGICH: That could be. So John Blatnik was a close friend of the family. And many times he called him when he was in town if he didn't get to visit him. So I would say John probably encouraged him to run.

DON MITCHELL: Okay. Well, we've -- we've talked a little bit about what Nick was like growing up. I think you said that -- I guess you were three or four years older. And so I think you had mentioned that you had -- had go off in the Army by the time he was, I guess, of -- had completed his sophomore year of high school. What was he like as a kid? I mean, we've talked about this a little bit. One of the things that everybody who -- who was a friend of mine who was a friend of his tells me is that he had sort of an exhausting amount of energy. I mean, physical energy, that -- that certainly wore them out. Was that evident early on, as well? Was he that kind of a kid, or did that come on later in life?

MR. BEGICH: No. No. He was always that way. I can recall, he was always very aggressive and always running out of time. He was always in a hurry. Whatever he did, he was always in a hurry. And Nick never swore. He would say, "God blasted," and that was it, and he would go. You know what I mean? He would just go, go, go.



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DON MITCHELL: And how about -- how about becoming a politician? I -- I got here an hour or so, I was telling Carolyn, I went over to the -- just had this moment of inspiration as I was short of checking out Eveleth, because it was such a sunny day and I had time to kill. And I drove by the high school, and I went, "Ah." I stopped and I went in, and I went up to the principal's office and I said, "Do you have any old yearbooks around? I would be curious to see, you know" -- I told -- briefly told them, you know, what I was doing in town. And they said, "Sure." And I go back in this dusty closet and find all these old yearbooks. And, you know, in 1950, when he graduated, you know, he was class president. And they said in his little -- the yearbook thing, you know, what everybody -- they predict for everybody in the class. And they predicted that he was going to be President of the United States and stuff. So I mean, it looks pretty early on that he -- that he was headed -- at least he had ambition to be -- to seek public office. Do you remember when he first started talking about that? Or was it just more of a natural thing?

MR. BEGICH: It was more natural. He, to my recollection, never spoke about -- during those high school days or junior high, high school days, never spoke about office. But he did run for -- he was the president of Future Farmers of America, FFA. Those -- he was out, but he never had -- was mentioning anything about the political. But he was running for those other offices. You said he was president of the class.

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: During that school time, he was president of that -- or either in St. Cloud, I don't recall, but he was president of the Future Farmers of America. And he was head of the debate team. And so he was always seeking leadership positions.

DON MITCHELL: But he never -- he never had the -- you know, the amazing sort of presumption of sitting around the family dinner table saying, "Someday I'm going to be in Congress."

MR. BEGICH: No. I -- I don't recall that, no. No.

DON MITCHELL: Okay. Well, great.

MR. BEGICH: You see, in those days, too, you must remember, we did not have the communication that we have today. Today, you flip the TV on. If there's a car accident in Russia, you can see it now. Where we had a paper, the radio. There was no television. So we didn't have close contact with the government, state government. We hardly knew who our legislators were -- that was kind of a secret -- so Nick never spoke of congress then. Our people kind of felt like when you elected John Blatnik, after you -- the election, your job was done. John Blatnik would go and he would be the hero for the people. And no one every questioned him when he came home for different events. He would make a speech, and no matter what he said, everybody

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would just cheer and clap. Nobody questioned him why he voted no or did he vote no or did he vote yes. That was sort of a different life then. It was divided.

DON MITCHELL: Okay. Well, you just wouldn't see that many -- I mean, assuming -- I hadn't thought about that. But if it's just radio and newspapers, I mean, you don't see that many House votes that come up.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, yeah.

DON MITCHELL: I mean, if it's not published. I mean, unless you're really looking for it and unless it affected your life in some way, you -- that's -- that's interesting. One of the things that we're currently talking about before -- before you got home was -- and it may be something to -- to talk with Carolyn about on the record -- was this business of going to junior college at the same time he was in high school. Because I know you were, I guess, still off in the Army at that point, or were you --

MR. BEGICH: She -- she should tell you. She went to junior college with my brother, John, older than me. And then Nick was in high -- high school at the same time.

MRS. BEGICH: But taking college courses.

MR. BEGICH: And he was -- oh, I didn't know that.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: You -- you can --

DON MITCHELL: Actually, the -- perhaps I should introduce you for the tape, too.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: This is Carolyn. Is it --

MRS. BEGICH: Yes.

DON MITCHELL: Carolyn Begich, who is -- has been married to Mr. Begich for many, many years.

MR. BEGICH: Forty-three.

DON MITCHELL: And who also grew up in Eveleth, and is going -- and I guess was a year ahead of Nick in high school.

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MRS. BEGICH: Yes.

DON MITCHELL: And Joe was in the Army. And we were talking about this business with how the junior college worked in those days, and how Nick got to go to junior college even while he was in high school.

MRS. BEGICH: Well, he -- because we were in the same building. He would just go from his classes and -- we took so many credits to graduate. We had two diplomas at that time in high school, academic and industrial. And of course, academic was the harder, and Nick took that. So he had enough credits without worrying about going full time to school. So all those that he had free, he took junior college courses. Well, the superintendent was not real crazy about that, and neither was the dean of the college. But Nick finally talked them in to letting him do that. So by the time he went to St. Cloud, I would say he had a good year of junior college just from his senior year.

DON MITCHELL: And you said you were in his political science class with him?

MRS. BEGICH: Yes.

DON MITCHELL: What was that like?

MRS. BEGICH: Well, I said I don't know who talked more, Nick or the instructor. But he seemed interested in politics then, even. Although, they -- they say in this autobiography he has, that he -- really, St. Cloud was the true awakening of Nick's political activity.

DON MITCHELL: Well, obviously there were no young Democrats up here in -- in Eveleth at that time, in high school and everything?

MRS. BEGICH: No, we weren't -- we didn't have a young --

MR. BEGICH: No. No.

MRS. BEGICH: -- Democratic club or anything like that.

MR. BEGICH: We had a Democratic club in Eveleth, but young people weren't even allowed to speak. If you went -- I don't recall ever being allowed to go to one of those conventions even or meetings or -- it was sort of -- you had to be 50 or older to get involved in -- in those days, up here, in politics.

DON MITCHELL: Do you think it was just because sort of the community being somewhat more traditional? That sort of -- more respect for old people?

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MR. BEGICH: Yes. Great respect for -- for the elders. And also, that the youngers (as spoken) didn't live long enough to know what -- really how this world should operate. And I remember when I ran for mayor, I was the youngest mayor ever elected at that time and --

DON MITCHELL: What year was that?

MR. BEGICH: Sixty-six. And I was really a young guy to be mayor, where all the mayors were 50 or older. And so there wasn't any -- there was always a strong DFL party here, but Nick never was part of that. That's where he got involved, in St. Cloud and into Democrats for -- there was an elder guy that was a Congressman when Nick first started with. He was stuffing envelopes and that kind of work during a campaign. Marshal?

MRS. BEGICH: I can't remember.

MR. BEGICH: From that area.

DON MITCHELL: From down the in St. Cloud area?

MR. BEGICH: Yes. And that's where he got involved. Well, naturally, then when Humphrey started to run for United States Senate, Nick, being active in that party, organized the -- the young people. He -- that's where his contact was. And many speeches, he singled Nick out.

DON MITCHELL: How --

MR. BEGICH: Humphrey's speeches.

MRS. BEGICH: Humphrey did.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that was going to be my -- my next question, actually. What I have -- the little I have learned -- and maybe there's more in Tom's material there. But that -- I guess Nick got out of St. Cloud in '52, and then immediately started teaching high school down there. And then in '54 was when Humphrey ran for reelection. And he, obviously, hadn't been elected in '48, and then had run in '54. And then I had heard that Nick had been very active in -- in Humphrey's campaign. And obviously, teaching school, he would have had summer vacations to -- which would have been perfect in terms of the campaign season to have some free time. Do you remember him being involved with the Humphrey campaign (indiscernible)?

MR. BEGICH: Full-time involved. Not as a paid person. But he worked with the youth, again, and -- and -- and mailings and working of that type. And when Humphrey would go to different areas to speak -- and many times he would mention Nick as one of the young, bright, upcoming Democrats in -- in the party, and so --

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MRS. BEGICH: You see, Nick organized -- or Nick was president of the International Relations Club and the St. Cloud State Democrats. And he brought then Vice President Alben Barkley to St. Cloud to speak.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah, I forgot that.

MRS. BEGICH: I forgot about that, too.

MR. BEGICH: As I mentioned, that --

MRS. BEGICH: The top state politicians at that time were Governor Orville Freeman, let's see, the governor and -- the lieutenant governor, two of the members of the congressional delegation, Senator Hubert H. Humphrey and Congressman John Blatnik.

DON MITCHELL: Because I think Tom's got Freeman wrong on that. I think he didn't get elected until '56, right? I'm pretty sure Freeman got elected in '56.

MRS. BEGICH: I would say that maybe Orville Freeman was the lieutenant governor at that time.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: Oh, right. That was --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah, that's right. Because I just heard his son make a speech, and it was in '54. His son is running or he's a candidate for governor, Freeman.

DON MITCHELL: All right. So Freeman was elected in '54.

MR. BEGICH: Fifty-four.

DON MITCHELL: Governor in '54 or -- well, I can -- I can look it up.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. Lieutenant Governor, I think.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that's -- did he -- do you know, did he travel around with Humphrey, personally. I mean, how --

MR. BEGICH: No, I would -- not in the campaign committee.

DON MITCHELL: Right.

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MR. BEGICH: He basically stayed in the St. Cloud area and did his work in that area.

DON MITCHELL: Okay. Now, the other interesting thing about the Humphrey connection is I've also seen from newspaper articles that -- that that was the '54 campaign. And then in 1955, which would have been, really, just a couple months later that -- after the November '54 election -- that he had been -- he and Nick had been elected, I guess, vice chairman of the -- of the statewide Young Democratic Farm-Labor Democrats, behind Walter Mondale, which was obviously getting up in pretty glorified air for a 24-year-old guy.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: I mean, Mondale was only 27. But obviously, he was -- Mondale, by that time, was running pretty tight with -- with Humphrey. And Humphrey was pretty much running everything, I guess, right? Do you remember all -- all of that? Did -- did he know Mondale at all? Or was Humphrey responsible for helping him up the ladder again? Or do you remember any of that stuff?

MR. BEGICH: Well, I think he got involved with Mondale through Humphrey. Mondale was a protegee of Humphrey, and -- and so that's where he got involved with Mondale.

MRS. BEGICH: But you spoke of Nick always being in a hurry. He even had his roommates register for classes and then he took those classes.

DON MITCHELL: Right. Actually, that's in the -- in a couple of these news articles, that apparently he got caught doing this? And -- because there was --

MRS. BEGICH: The dean.

DON MITCHELL: Right. Because I know when I went to college -- though, I got to thinking after I read that, that there was some -- there was a limit. And you couldn't take more than, like, 16 units a semester.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: And -- and that he had -- and he had done all of that.

MRS. BEGICH: He had them pencil it in. And then when they went to pay for it, they gave the slip to Nick, he reimbursed them and wrote his name in pen.

DON MITCHELL: Well -- and that actually raised -- one of the -- one of the -- the thing I was talking to Carolyn about in those days, during the St. Cloud years, obviously, he's taking -- rather

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than 16 units, he's taking, like -- like, say, 25 or 30. And -- and I -- I -- I pulled his -- when I was in Washington, D.C. last week, I went over to the Library of Congress, because that's the only place you can find this stuff. And I -- and he was listed in Who's Who in American Colleges when he graduated. And to find, you know, the 1952 edition of Who's Who in American Colleges, only the Library of Congress probably still has it. I -- but I looked up his -- his little, you know, paragraph and all the stuff he was doing. I mean, how on Earth could you be taking, you know, 25 units a semester and doing all of this stuff. And that raised the question, also, in the practical sense of -- of how was he living? I mean, was -- you know, was he -- you mentioned he was raising turkeys. I mean, did he have a --

MR. BEGICH: Well, when he was going to St. Cloud --

MRS. BEGICH: He used to bring eggs home.

MR. BEGICH: And he use to have riders. The car was full of riders. And then on top, he had a carrier on the car. And some place in St. Cloud, he was getting eggs from some farm, in cases. And then he would bring them here, and he had places where he would sell them here. And that made extra money, selling the eggs and -- and the riders in the car. I remember that.

MRS. BEGICH: And he also -- he lived in a house with -- I think there were eight boys there. And he did the books. And so he got his rent cheaper. But then here it's true -- it says he worked two hours in a local cafeteria, he carried 37 credit hours, and he went home on weekends.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. I remember him coming on weekends. And 1950 was the year, because I was going to Korea then, and he had a product of turkeys. My father owned land a little ways from here and had one of those big pole barns on, and they raised turkeys there. And that was a project to make money for college, I think.

MRS. BEGICH: And they -- then he was -- you know, the dean questioned, did he have any time, you know, for anything other than studying? He was really upset with Nick. And Nick named all the organizations he belonged to. Then he was in more trouble, because you weren't supposed to belong to that many. So actually, Nick spent one more quarter in St. Cloud as punishment for carrying this -- this -- too much of a load.

DON MITCHELL: In just the summer, or he actually had to go into the next school year?

MRS. BEGICH: I don't remember that part.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that's -- that's -- you know, when I look back at my own college career, I'm -- I'm struck dumb at the idea of what it would take to do all that stuff, you know.

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MR. BEGICH: Well, and he would come here -- like, he would visit my aunts. He would take that little clock with him. And --

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. He'd -- he'd say, "Now, it's 6:30. I can stay until 6:32." Or, "I can spend five minutes," and that's it. That was it.

MR. BEGICH: We were in Washington, D.C., and it was one of those days you had to wear a topcoat. It was kind of cool. And he was going out the door, and coat got caught in the door and it ripped up the back. And first thing he did was take his coat off and throw it back in the house and say, "Jeez, we lost 30 seconds." So -- and I'm -- I'm just there -- on a project at the Hockey Hall of Fame and to visit him. I couldn't understand this 30 seconds, you know. So we went in the car, and I thought he would be able to talk on the way down to his office. And here he had his lawyer -- I don't know which one. He made one (indiscernible).

DON MITCHELL: (Indiscernible) right.

MR. BEGICH: In -- in the car. And, in fact, he probably -- and another guy, a guy from Boston.

MRS. BEGICH: Kennedy.

DON MITCHELL: Kennedy.

MR. BEGICH: Kennedy. And they talk all the way and they were dictating letters in the car. And I just sat there looking out the window wondering what -- nobody talked to me. They're all just all business, all the way to the office. There was no time to do anything. It was just rush, rush, rush.

DON MITCHELL: Well, you know, it's interesting that in terms of -- of Nick's involvement and what I'm actually, you know, working on, this -- this Native Land Claims thing. That -- that one of his most valuable contributions was that the chairman -- I don't know if you've ever knew Wayne Aspinall. I don't know if you've ever heard of Wayne Aspinall. But he was the -- he was this old 75-year-old chairman, had been chairman for 20 years of the -- of the -- of the House Interior Committee, and he just loved Nick. And the reason that he loved Nick, among other things, was because Aspinall had been a former schoolteacher, like -- like Nick, and was just that way. That if -- if you ever read anything about Aspinall, you know, if he said, "You've got five minutes," he meant you had five minutes. Or if he said, "I will talk to you at," you know, "8:30," if you showed up at, like, 8:32, you were, like, done, through. He was like, no. And you would never get back in his good -- you know, he was that kind of a guy. And -- and Alaska's former congressman, this Republican, his name was Howard Pollock. He was a very affiliable, pleasant guy. But it was just sort of this -- sort of easygoing doofus. You know, if he showed up, you know, within 20 minutes of -- of anything, that was fine with Howard. And -- and Aspinall hated Pollock because of that. And he just loved Nick like a son. And Aspinall, you know, didn't love



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anybody, except maybe his wife, you know. And -- but it was -- it's interesting that now I see that they were probably right, they're in each other's way going (indiscernible) seat.

MR. BEGICH: I know when we were up to Alaska, Anchorage, for the memorial service, the Natives was endless, endless line. We were at the high school, was it, we had the service --

DON MITCHELL: West High.

MR. BEGICH: And we stood in line. Carolyn was with me. My brother John then was in a wheelchair, and my mother and father.

MRS. BEGICH: And your sister.

MR. BEGICH: And my sister. And it was -- it was -- it was getting too tough for our people to stand in line in endless -- and the Natives. And -- that was a lot -- many were mentioned during times, you know, of the -- of the Act.

DON MITCHELL: No. He -- I haven't -- I haven't cracked the numbers completely yet. But my preliminary view is that it was basically the -- the Natives that elected him. And, in fact, you know -- and he had -- and he understood there's a constituent -- you know, aside from the fact that it was helping them out, was the right thing to do. That Alaska politics, ever since the oil in the mid '50s, the cities -- you know, basically, we have just these two cities, Anchorage and Fairbanks. And then there's all these people scattered around.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: And -- and the cities, ever since the oil, it -- it had always been a rock (indiscernible) Democratic union kind of politics. And when the oil came, the cities turned increasingly Republican, which is why we have an all-Republican congressional delegation today. And -- and so it was always, from about the mid 1960s on, there were so many Republicans in Anchorage and Fairbanks, that it was the Natives that -- you know, the Democrats had to have that as part of their coalition. And he certainly was with them from the very -- from the late '60s, in terms of their aspirations for their -- for their land.

MR. BEGICH: And when he got elected, he didn't forget them.

DON MITCHELL: No, he sure didn't. Absolutely not. Well, that raises the question on how on Earth he got to Alaska. Because, you know, certainly, having grown up here, you know, by 1955, he's the vice president of the Statewide Young Democrats with Walter Mondale. He's on -- he's on Hubert Humphrey's shortlist of -- of young up-and-coming guys.

MR. BEGICH: How did this come about when he married his student?

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MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: There was a problem then in a school?

MRS. BEGICH: No. He -- well, what -- he was dating her while he was a teacher.

MR. BEGICH: He was a teacher.

MRS. BEGICH: And she was a student.

MR. BEGICH: Yes.

MRS. BEGICH: And it -- at that time, it was not looked on in favor.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. He wasn't -- he didn't marry her. He already -- okay. Okay.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. He kind of kept his nightlife a secret for a long time. Well, remember, we didn't know.

MR. BEGICH: No.

MRS. BEGICH: And he -- he bought that trailer. And he came home for Christmas, and he had all these pictures around, and nobody questioned except you. And you said, "Well, who is this girl?" And he said, well, it was his girlfriend. But he didn't say -- you know, he didn't --

MR. BEGICH: Because we never knew him to have a girlfriend.

MRS. BEGICH: Well, we met that one girl.

MR. BEGICH: Did he take girls out in high school?

MRS. BEGICH: Sure, he did. Sure. Remember, he brought that one girl to our apartment in Minneapolis.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, yeah. But that was -- oh, yeah. That was 1951.

DON MITCHELL: Are you saying, how on Earth could you have time for girls if you are so busy --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

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DON MITCHELL: -- doing all this other stuff?

MR. BEGICH: That's why. I remember one girl.

MRS. BEGICH: Oh, yeah. He dated. He went to all the proms in high school.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, he did?

MRS. BEGICH: Oh, yes. See, you were gone. Nick was very popular with the girls. I remember that.

MR. BEGICH: See that's the part that I missed. I was away. And when I came back, Nick already was married.

MRS. BEGICH: No. No. No. No. No. No.

MR. BEGICH: No?

MRS. BEGICH: No.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, I was at his wedding.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah, you were.

MR. BEGICH: I remember.

MRS. BEGICH: You were the best man.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. But I remember this. There was one part of the family that wouldn't have any drinks.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: And I had taken homemade wine, and I was carrying that gallon around in my finger trying to get all these people to take a drink. I don't know.

DON MITCHELL: Now, did -- was it -- I think Carolyn said -- you said that he came home I guess the Christmas before --

(Brief interruption.)

MRS. BEGICH: Okay.

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MR. BEGICH: He bought -- purchased a big house trailer and moved -- had a three-quarter ton truck and took the trailer up to live in that trailer. He was --

MRS. BEGICH: Then he came home for Christmas.

MR. BEGICH: Yes.

MRS. BEGICH: And he was kind of hinting about this girlfriend he had in St. Cloud. Because he went -- then he went to St. Cloud, remember? Well, then -- when did he tell us he was getting married? It was a shock, but when did he tell us he was getting married?

MR. BEGICH: I can't recall. He -- he --

MRS. BEGICH: Well, we were living in town then. I don't -- I don't remember exactly. But I know that -- that your mother and father were shocked, because he didn't talk anything about getting married.

DON MITCHELL: Well, but -- but what about -- I guess in terms of the timing, I think you say - - you mentioned that in Tom's paper, that he went up into Alaska in, like, June of '56. So he must have --

MRS. BEGICH: Either '55 or '56 he went to Alaska.

MR. BEGICH: Tom would -- '56, if he said it's '56 -- it -- it was summertime, because I remember the trailer parked at my folks-home outside. There was grass, so it was mid-summer.

DON MITCHELL: Plus, you would have had to -- I mean, he wouldn't have left St. Cloud High School on a lurch. He would have had to finish --

MR. BEGICH: No.

DON MITCHELL: -- the school year.

MR. BEGICH: Sure. He finished his term and -- and then left.

MRS. BEGICH: Because in the fall of 1954, Pegge was a junior at St. Cloud Tech.

DON MITCHELL: All right.

MRS. BEGICH: So that means in '55, she would have been a senior and graduated.

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DON MITCHELL: She would have graduated in June of '56?

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: And so if he came -- he left the summer of '56 -- I mean, I think you said he came back and they got married in, like, December of '56; is that --

MR. BEGICH: Yes.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that still raises the question of why he picked -- I mean, A, why would he -- why would he leave -- I mean, obviously, even if -- if there was this sort of problem of -- of dating a student, Minnesota is a big enough state.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, yeah.

DON MITCHELL: I mean, he could have moved.

MR. BEGICH: Well --

DON MITCHELL: I mean, why Alaska?

MR. BEGICH: -- he almost became the principal in Eveleth. How -- had he become the principal was -- he never would have -- he would have stayed. He probably never would have made, you know, the story that he did by going to Alaska and then on to Washington. Because it was a one-vote short on the school board, and -- for the principal of the high school. And then it wasn't long after that he went to Alaska. And as I said earlier, he went to Alaska on some arrangement through Hubert Humphrey, on a Federal Labor Relations project. And as he told me later on, that it was a dead-end job, he would be brain dead in two years. There was not enough activity. So he went back into the school system.

MRS. BEGICH: See, he says here in Tommy's paper that he decided to go to Alaska, and that's when he and Pegge were engaged, but he kept his secret from his parents. Because your mother and dad were displeased with his decision to quit what they saw as a good job in St. Cloud and to move to, of all places, Alaska.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. Well, actually, I mean, you know, even going back quite a few years, Anchorage isn't what Anchorage was when we were there. You know --

DON MITCHELL: Sure. Mid-50 -- I mean, '56, when he got there, oil had just been discovered there, close to Anchorage. There were probably only -- '56, there were probably 13,000 people.

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MR. BEGICH: I also recall when Nick was in Washington, I was there. There was some work being done on the oil pipeline.

DON MITCHELL: Right. Well, see, that's where --

MR. BEGICH: And Nick was fighting an environmental issue of some -- I don't really -- I know it had to do with the environment, and he was being opposed by some big-time lobbyist and the oil people. And I remember Nick, that one day, being very upset and said that they were going to just destroy Alaska to get the oil out. I remember that. But I don't recall the real issues of the time.

DON MITCHELL: Right. Well, actually, what was interesting -- one of the reasons, in addition to the fact that it was the right thing to do to help clear up this problem about what land the Native people owned, was that this confusion about who owned what land applied to all of the land that was along the route for the -- for the pipeline. So the oil companies -- that was one of the reasons they got sort of the religion about helping the Natives out, as well, is because until they -- they got rid of the Natives and settled this mess about who owned what land, they didn't have clear title all the way down for Prudhoe Bay to get -- to start building the pipeline. So that was -- and, in fact, to the next big -- after -- you know, Nick settled land claims in '71. And then in '73, after his death, was when Congresses then had to address the sole pipeline issue for the oil companies. But they couldn't do that until they first finished the -- the situation with the Natives. Did -- the -- the one thing I was going to ask -- I was saying about a second ago, when you're talking about -- about his going to Alaska and Hubert Humphrey. Did -- I had heard -- Guy Martin, this lawyer who had been a young lawyer working for him, had -- we were having dinner last week, told me that he thought that he recalled that Nick told him once that Humphrey had suggested that he go up to Alaska because there might be more political opportunity up there. Did he --

MR. BEGICH: That was the -- I don't recall that.

DON MITCHELL: (Indiscernible).

MR. BEGICH: But that could be part of it. And this way, would -- having a job before he got there, at least, you know, he had established himself. And then from there on he could get either more of those -- because I wasn't there at the time to -- you know, to hear any of this. But I would suspect that that was part of it.

MRS. BEGICH: He left for Alaska on June 23rd, 1956.

DON MITCHELL: Okay. That'd been right after school.

MR. BEGICH: Yep.

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MRS. BEGICH: Yep. And then he came back in '57, and they were married December 29th.

DON MITCHELL: So that --

MRS. BEGICH: So that's about right. Because they were married the same day as we were.

MR. BEGICH: I was just going to say, December 29th?

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. They picked the same day as ours.

DON MITCHELL: Oh, you guys are right in between Christmas and New Years.

MRS. BEGICH: Yep.

DON MITCHELL: That's --

MRS. BEGICH: Terrible time.

DON MITCHELL: Now, did -- do you recall -- I know that he first -- well, and actually, the other interesting thing about that, if he came up to work on this dead-end job with the Labor Department. That -- that -- I know that his first job was in the school system, was being a high school counselor out at the high school where they had the memorial service for him later. And a good friend of mine was one of his -- one of his charges. I don't think he really put him on the right path to life, or at least my friend didn't avail Nick's instructions. But -- but that was 1956, '57. So he must have not lasted -- I mean, he must have had -- had enough of that Department of Labor job within literally weeks in order to have gotten a job by the school year.

MR. BEGICH: As I recall, there was -- he and another person in the office -- and when he got there, the other person kind of disappeared. And neither one of them had nothing to do. And I sensed then that he -- he wanted out immediately. This wasn't the place for -- and I couldn't see him sitting that long every day, doing nothing without moving very quickly. So --

DON MITCHELL: Now, did -- once he went up there, were -- how close of contact did he stay with -- with you folks and your parents and all that?

MR. BEGICH: He came at least once a year.

MRS. BEGICH: Who, Nick?

MR. BEGICH: Nick.

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MRS. BEGICH: From Alaska?

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: Oh, yeah. They drove.

MR. BEGICH: They drove at least once a year. Because --

MRS. BEGICH: He was working on his Ph.D. in North Dakota. And they would come and stay here.

(Brief interruption.)

DON MITCHELL: I think where we were was -- I think I was -- I was just going to ask is we've gotten Nick up to Alaska. And -- and he got up in '56. And he -- the first time he ran for anything up there was -- at least as near as I can figure out, was 1960. He ran for the State Senate and lost. And then in 1962, I believe, ran for the State Senate and was -- no, I'm sorry. I got -- do I got that right? Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: 1963 here and another --

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. And was elected in '62. Yeah, that's right. Ran in '60, lost the Republic -- I'm sorry, lost the Democratic nomination to a woman named Irene Ryan and -- who was the incumbent, who had gotten herself in trouble with labor, actually, and then in '62 was elected. And so I guess my question was going to be, do you remember, on any of these trips when he came home during that era, of -- of -- of telling people that he was going to be running for office and what he was trying to do? Was he headed for Congress at that point? Or was he just trying to get involved with state politics or --

MR. BEGICH: No. He was -- at that time, he was just getting involved in state politics. And it was maybe the third term. I think he was elected four times to the Senate.

DON MITCHELL: He ran for a four-year term. So he was elected in '60 -- he was elected to the Senate in '62, and then he was reelected in '66.

MR. BEGICH: Six.

DON MITCHELL: And then he ran for Congress.

MR. BEGICH: And lost.

DON MITCHELL: And lost against this fellow I was telling you about.



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MR. BEGICH: And then the next time around, he -- he ran and -- and won.

DON MITCHELL: Right. And -- and the reason for that, actually, Pollock -- particularly with how Republican the state had gone, Pollock, I -- I mean, who would ever know? But I don't think he could have beat Pollock. But Pollock, happily, sort of overreached and decided to run for governor in '70, so he left that seat open. And since Nick had -- had set up his organization the election before, he was really --

MR. BEGICH: Because the week that he went down with -- Hale Boggs was majority leader.

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: The following week, or -- or maybe the following other week, would be Kennedy was going to come up there in support. At that time, Nick had his sights on United States Senate. And the -- the polls then were favorable to him, 70 percent that he would win. But he was trying to build that up, and this is why he was traveling with Boggs and those people, to build this up. So the Senator was fairly old at the time. And they were -- he was either going to step down.

DON MITCHELL: Well, no, actually --

MR. BEGICH: Or he was going to take -- take him on as -- you know, and run against him.

DON MITCHELL: Right. No. Actually, the -- that's an interesting story I was telling -- at least, what I know about it -- Carolyn and I were chatting about it before you got home. But the old senator was Ernest Gruening. You may remember Ernest. And there was a fellow whose name was Mike Gravel. And Mike Gravel, who was about Nick's age. And I guess Nick was a couple years older, I think, than Gravel. And Gravel beat Gruening in 1968.

MR. BEGICH: Okay.

DON MITCHELL: In Democratic primary, had been elected to the Senate. And so Gravel was up for reelection for 1974. Now, Gravel, who is an amazing charterer anyways -- it's amazing that someone can be elected all the way to the United States Senate with having so many people, including people in your own party, who hate your guts. I mean, Mike was just one of those people that just -- he just -- I sort of like him because he's such a scoundrel. But he's -- he's just -- he does not -- one of the things about Nick -- maybe that's sort of a long-winded way to the get back to it -- is that everybody who knew Nick told me that -- that Nick had all these people up in Alaska who were incredibly, personally loyal to him, that really believed in him personally as a human being. And there was nobody who believed, ever, in Mike Gravel personally. You wouldn't follow Mike Gravel to go get your -- your car full of gasoline at the corner store.

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And he was so disliked that the story that I -- that Gravel told me was that -- I don't know if you remember Jack Brooks, but he was a congressman. So he was sort of like a Blatnik kind of charterer from Texas, who was one of Lyndon Johnson's lieutenants and who was a big committee chairman by the early '70s. And Gravel told me last summer that -- that Brooks, who hated Gravel, like everybody else, who -- you know, Brooks was a Democratic -- had come up to -- to Gravel the summer after the plane had gone down and said, you know, you are really lucky because if that plane had not gone down -- you know, the fix was in. We were all -- Nick was -- was coming for you. He was going to take you on in the 1974 Democratic primary. And he was doing this with, basically, the blessing of sort of the national Democratic party because of how much everybody dislikes you. And -- and that's just what I was speculating. Now, if Nick had been elected to the Senate in '74, and we had had 20 years of Nick Begich and Ted Stevens as Alaska senators, what that would have done for Alaska history, that's a lot different from what happened. But I guess having -- I mean, would -- did -- he sat down -- was -- was it pretty clear that he wanted -- he had his eyes on the Senate, in terms of how he talked when he came home?

MR. BEGICH: Yes. Yes. And I recall that quite clearly, that that's what they were -- to build up the constituency so next time it would be that much easier. And to bring in those type of people, the majority leader and -- and at that time, Kennedy was at the peak of, you know, his foundation.

DON MITCHELL: I think he was (indiscernible) in those days.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. And to show the influence. You know, you always do that, even in the state politics. The speaker goes to all these fundraisers for the new Kennedys that are going to take on some long-term Republican. And speaker goes and the majority leader goes. And they would bring -- I was a full chairman of the Labor and Management; and they used us on the names on the cards, and you go there to show influence. That he's not even elected, and look, he's got all these big people coming in. That's the name of the game, is the way -- to show your constituents that you have connections. So when you go to Washington and St. Paul, you're going to have people that you're going to be able talk to and -- and help (indiscernible) what -- is the bottom line is. You know, that's --

MRS. BEGICH: He -- he was -- he ran for the US House in 1968 and was defeated.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MRS. BEGICH: By Howard Pollock.

MR. BEGICH: Pollock.

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DON MITCHELL: Pollock, right.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: Right. Right. Well, the other thing, did he ever mention -- you mentioned you were back visiting him from -- on this hockey thing. Did he ever mention how he felt about this Alaska Native land problem that was so important during his --

MR. BEGICH: They were all worked up over that. Wherever he was and -- and Jean and Kennedy and -- and Martin (indiscernible) comes back. That's all they talked about. That was the issue. They were all worked up over that. And they were -- and I didn't personally understand it.

MRS. BEGICH: At that time.

MR. BEGICH: At that time. And had we did that in Minnesota with our Indians, we wouldn't have the problem we're having right now in Minnesota with these gambling casinos and all this. The big -- you came in through Hinckley.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: Big time.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. I drove by. Is that an Indian casino, right there on the highway there?

MR. BEGICH: Big time. Big time. Big time. Well, there's one in Cokato, too.

MRS. BEGICH: That's the one he drove past. You can't see the one in --

MR. BEGICH: Hinckley is -- when you came through Hinckley. Do you remember Hinckley? About half restaurants and gas stations.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: Toby's.

MR. BEGICH: (indiscernible) big -- big time gambling there. Big --

MRS. BEGICH: (Indiscernible).

MR. BEGICH: -- trailer courts and (indiscernible) hotel. I mean, big time.

DON MITCHELL: So it's like going to Nevada?

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MR. BEGICH: Oh, yeah. It's big, big time. Big, two, three bars. I mean, it's first class.

MRS. BEGICH: We have one right here --

MR. BEGICH: We have one up here. We have one in downtown, in Duluth, and we have one in Cokato that you missed. You know, but not a penny of property taxes. Not any taxes at all. It's -- yes, the employees are paying income tax. But the property taxes and none of those -- no incomes taxes for the company or the casino. So had we passed the law then and -- and given them all a -- bought their rights out and give them their right, now they would be paying taxes on those properties like anybody else would. And that's -- we should have done that. And now they're -- in Minnesota is going to be a huge court case over a big Mille Lacs -- that's close to the metro area. Thousands -- well, this time of the year, there will be 5,000 dark houses up, ice fishing houses, on the river. And the Indians are claiming almost half the lake. So it's going to go to court, and I'm sure the Indians are going to win. So see, if we had bought over -- paid them for their land values, if we followed the Alaskan bill and -- and -- I never got involved in that. I was -- I -- I never did complete the things I really wanted to do. But I was involved in all the labor issues. And they were -- it was -- they're analysts because the Republicans were trying to beat us always. And I never got to the insurance companies. It's -- it's blood what they're doing to our people. But there's nothing -- their lobbyists call the shots. They control the legislature. We could have broke them if we -- we spent more time on them. So I -- what -- and the Indians here -- the Natives were always my friends and never opposed me on any issues, so I never really got involved. But I can see now, if we settled, that it would have been better off.

DON MITCHELL: Right. One of the good things as it turned out -- you know, one of the good things about the Alaska situation was because it didn't get settled for so many -- I mean, most of the basic decisions about what -- what would happen with Indians, you know, in Minnesota and the Dakotas and all the rest of all, all of those decisions were made really in the 19th Century, about what land they would own and how it would be set up, which is how you've got these casinos and all this stuff. And nobody ever -- you know, if they had settled the Alaska thing back then, they would have done it exactly the same way that -- that they did it here in Minnesota. And it was just because nobody -- you know, there weren't enough white people up there really to make it worth everybody's political pain --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: -- to go through it. And so by the time you got to it, when Nick was in Congress, you could take a different approach, only because it was happening so late, early in American history.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

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DON MITCHELL: And to that extent, Alaska has really gotten it right, has gotten a break because the Native community has been much more integrated, you know, in a political and economic sense into the economy and the politics of the state. Do the Indians vote up here, by the way?

MR. BEGICH: Yes.

DON MITCHELL: Do they?

MR. BEGICH: Yes.

DON MITCHELL: Because I know in South Dakota --

MR. BEGICH: They vote Democrat.

DON MITCHELL: Do they?

MR. BEGICH: Yes. They vote, I would say, 99.9 percent Democrat. We have no problem with them supporting our party.

DON MITCHELL: That's the way it's always been in Alaska.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: They've always been Democratic. Well, I think in terms of my list of questions, I think -- oh, I think the other thing I think would probably be worth getting on the tape, just for -- for future references. I think I had asked something about how Nick had missed the Korean War. And I think Carolyn told me that he -- he had busted his leg playing baseball?

MR. BEGICH: Very bad. And -- and -- it was at the school. It must have been what they call American Legion ball. It was summer ball. And he broke his leg, and it never was right. It had a really -- a bad, bad bow to it.

DON MITCHELL: Was he, like, in high school or something or --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. It would be during -- Legion always plays in the summer.

MRS. BEGICH: It was --

MR. BEGICH: It was for the school program through the recreation --

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MRS. BEGICH: I think it was the summer that he graduated, either the summer he graduated or (indiscernible) --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. He was at St. Cloud. He had crutches.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: And his foot -- leg was never set properly. In fact, he was talking at one time lately he was going to have it -- they were going to redo it.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. But he didn't have time.

(Brief interruption.)

MR. BEGICH: He was going to have it redone. And that's why -- that's why he -- I don't know if he had a status of -- at that time, it was 4F or what. I don't recall. Unless -- it could have been, too, because he was in school.

DON MITCHELL: I was -- that's -- I got to thinking about it after I wrote you, that I think -- didn't teachers pretty much have --

MR. BEGICH: Student, period. Student --

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MR. BEGICH: -- period, you were exempt.

DON MITCHELL: Right. But then after you -- after he was teaching school -- because I think Meyer was sort of Vietnam. And I remember that -- that -- at least until about halfway through the Vietnam War, if you were teaching school you were deferred.

MR. BEGICH: Well --

DON MITCHELL: But the leg thing would have --

MR. BEGICH: I don't ever recall that he was drafted or anything to do with that. He never was called, right? Nick?

MRS. BEGICH: I don't know. I think they knew -- some way they knew --

MR. BEGICH: Or was he --

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MRS. BEGICH: -- he had that bad leg.

MR. BEGICH: -- was he classified as a 4F? That's what they called them then.

MRS. BEGICH: He was classified as not able to go. I know that.

MR. BEGICH: Oh, okay. Then that would be it.

DON MITCHELL: That would be --

MR. BEGICH: I know it was real bad. It -- it was really bowed. And he was going to have it redone, broke over and reset by somebody, but he never had the time. He was going to college over here in the Dakotas.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. And he was going to do it then. And when he get real tired, he'd have to use a cane -- oh, you have the cane.

MR. BEGICH: I have the cane, yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: And he said, "Well, maybe once I get into Congress." Well, then, you know, it just -- and some days it didn't bother him. But boy, when he went -- you know --

MR. BEGICH: He started to limp after.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah, bad. It was getting worse. I think eventually in his life he would have had to --

MR. BEGICH: See, it was affecting his knee too.

MRS. BEGICH: Knee.

MR. BEGICH: Because his leg was so bowed, he was putting weight on different ways. And --

MRS. BEGICH: There's the other spelling of Bihik, get results with that --

MR. BEGICH: So --

MRS. BEGICH: Your first page there.

DON MITCHELL: B-I-H-I-K, great. Now, before he had that accident, was he a pretty good athlete? I noticed he played in all the sports.

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MR. BEGICH: He played basketball. He did very well in basketball. I know, because I remember my mother writing to me while I was in the Army that, you know, he was a pretty good basketball player. And he played baseball and he played hockey. But he was the only goalie to play out without -- without skates. He played goalie with some type of a shoe.

DON MITCHELL: Now, is that -- that's not against rules? I mean, I'm not a hockey player.

MR. BEGICH: Well --

MRS. BEGICH: He didn't play in high school. He played one of those --

MR. BEGICH: He played for one of those city teams. But he played goalie without skates. Yet, he skated. Because I remember when we were kids, he skated.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that -- that sort of has exhausted, I think, my list of questions. One of -- I think, unless there's something there that I have -- have forgotten.

MRS. BEGICH: You must have found someplace in your research where he had to give up his job, superintendent of the school?

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. That, actually, when the -- the Republicans did that to him. When -- when it looked like he was -- he was --

MRS. BEGICH: Going to be an up-and-coming Democrat.

DON MITCHELL: Right.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: Somebody -- some -- some smart guy figured that -- figured that one out, and then forced him to choose between --

MRS. BEGICH: Yep.

DON MITCHELL: -- between that teaching --

MRS. BEGICH: Oh, I remember how -- remember how upset your mother and dad were when he gave up that superintendent's job?

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: Oh, they just thought he was crazy.



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MR. BEGICH: You see, our parents thought so highly of school, that it was the whole goal to make sure we all went to college. Like I said, I didn't like it. I ended up doing very well. I worked in the mines, and I only worked a year or so and I became foreman, then shift foreman, then general foreman. And spent 30 years in the mine, and 29 years as supervisor. So I made -- made as much money as anyone going to college or more. Had a lot of college people working for me. So --

DON MITCHELL: You were a management person?

MR. BEGICH: Yes. Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. But you --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. Never gone to the union.

MRS. BEGICH: You took a lot -- you took -- they -- they brought in professors from Perdue and --

MR. BEGICH: Oh yeah. I had a lot of courses --

MRS. BEGICH: -- Notre Dame.

MR. BEGICH: -- management courses.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: And if you were to put them together, that college we have in the city is --

MRS. BEGICH: Metropolitan State.

MR. BEGICH: -- Metropolitan State, I would have graduated four times from there, but I didn't. You know -- so I was interested in that line.

DON MITCHELL: Well, now I guess the last thing -- particularly not so much because of -- I've got much more Nick Begich material than I could possibly use for my project. But I think it's -- one of the reasons I wanted to do this is because I think it's important, if all this stuff is going to go up to the University, you know, for people to listen to ten years from now. Do you think there's anything about Nick that we haven't talked about that you think --

MR. BEGICH: Well, one thing. I think if Nick had continued to live and got elected to the Senate, I think at one of those candidates running for president, Nick would have been vice

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president. Because it's like anything else. Those that are very active -- now, you can go to Congress and -- and be a nothing and do nothing. But if you go to Congress and you accel just a little bit, and all of a sudden you become closer to the speaker and then to this, and all of a sudden comes election, he could have ended up as a vice president of -- of this country. And I think that, personally, because of watching, I -- I served 18 years in legislation. And I watch a new guy come, and he'd fall into the same circle of the guy that's been there for 20 years. He'd kind of cross his hands and wait for lobbyists to take him out for dinner. But then you'd see a new guy come in, Jim, Carolyn, kid that came in --

MRS. BEGICH: Oh, Ferrell.

MR. BEGICH: -- Ferrell, a young attorney. Go, go, hustle. And I start to use him so much because he was so good. And nights, after work, he'd be doing work for me as a lawyer but through the Labor Committee. You know, I think to myself, boy, if I was -- had a governor candidate, I'd put him there. And that's how those aggressive ones move on. And Nick was that type. It wasn't long, he moved to Colorado. But so -- and he got to know the speaker, the one that just retired. He was aggressive.

DON MITCHELL: O'Neill.

MR. BEGICH: O'Neill. He was aggressive. He was in (indiscernible) O'Neill. He was very aggressive. Those -- those are the people that move ahead.

DON MITCHELL: Actually, you mentioned it now. I mean, that's -- you know, as Woody Allen has said, quite correctly in my view, you know, 80 percent of life is showing up, you know. I mean --

MR. BEGICH: Right.

DON MITCHELL: -- that's so -- few people actually bother to show up.

MR. BEGICH: You go to Lions meeting tonight, and -- and you show up every meeting, you're going to be president, right?

DON MITCHELL: Exactly.

MR. BEGICH: And especially if you speak up a couple of times, you're going to be the president. And that's how Nick was. Nick was the guy that continued to hustle and move and --

MRS. BEGICH: Well, just like they -- they talked about that. And in (indiscernible) I'm remembering this from memory, these things. He -- he lived in a -- in this house. This woman

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was a widow, and he convinced her to rent to the boys. They were all Rangers. In fact, she was a Republican. But she --

MR. BEGICH: We met her.

MRS. BEGICH: Remember? And she got to be -- Nick got to be her favorite. So the boys were talking in here how he got -- you know, they're -- part of their rent was, you know, something was in the house, they took care of it. But Nick always the one that took care of the books or took Maggie shopping or something. And he always cooked on Friday nights because nobody was there. Everybody went home.

DON MITCHELL: Well, yeah. That's one of the other things, by the way, that -- that someone mentioned to me that they -- they found quite unusual about him, was that he seemed to be somebody that -- that older people wanted to mentor. I mean, that's -- and he had this talent. A number of people told me this. You know, I mean, it wasn't like sucking up, but I mean in a pejorative way. But it was -- it was like, you know, older people that could help him along, you know, whether it was Tip O'Neill or Carl Albert or whether it was people in the Alaska legislature who wanted to. You know, I mean, he just had something about -- you know, like this business with Aspinall I was telling you about. You know, you really wanted to -- to do this thing for the Natives because he wanted to make Nick a success on this. You know, he wanted to help him.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: And he just sort of attracted older, you know, sort of more experienced people.

MR. BEGICH: I did see --

DON MITCHELL: Did you notice that?

MR. BEGICH: -- where that would be, yes. And I could see that, how that'd be true, even for mine. I was a chairman, and this new freshman came on, Jim Ferrell. And such an aggressive guy. And he kind of -- I kind of liked him. And I made sure I got him decent appointments and -- and spoke to the speaker about this. And yes, I could see if you're -- if an elder person likes the younger person, you can really move quickly. And that's what Nick -- of course, Nick respected elders.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. And before Nick went to St. Cloud, they've always had a group called the Rangers, because there were many -- well, I would say one-third of St. Cloud was (indiscernible) Range students. The -- the Ranger's Club was primarily a party club, but it got to be political. I mean, they were the politic --

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DON MITCHELL: It was kind of like a social experience?

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah. They were the political stronghold of the St. Cloud campus. In fact, it got so that they were involved -- he had everybody going out with literature for state candidates.

MR. BEGICH: Well, my seat mate in the legislature for 16 years, named Battaglia, I never knew went to college with Nick. And he would tell me all these things about the car and the chickens and all this. And Dave said he don't know how he got involved, but he was stuffing envelopes for something he doesn't even know -- remember who he was doing it for, but -- for some campaign. Nick got him to work on this campaign. So he was, of course, very aggressive, always liked.

DON MITCHELL: You know, one of the other interesting things that -- speaking of your -- your theory about -- about vice president. I've never gone that far just because small state guys usually don't. You know, are -- always ultimately hit -- hit the wall because they're from small states. But I always sort of saw him as -- since I've been playing with this, if he run against Gravel and -- and won in '74 for the Senate, probably, certainly being majority leader, being George Mitchell today.

MR. BEGICH: Well, look at President Clinton.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that's true.

MR. BEGICH: He came from -- with the -- what that's --

MRS. BEGICH: I think.

MR. BEGICH: -- the city that was smaller than Wal-Mart? What's his name, the -- the -- the guy from --

MRS. BEGICH: (Indiscernible)?

MR. BEGICH: (Indiscernible), said he was smaller than a (indiscernible) of Wal-Marts.

DON MITCHELL: Right. That's true.

MR. BEGICH: I watched our Governor Perpich serve from here, right here. A Croatian, just like we are. And serve the Minnesota longer than any governor in the history of the state. And he was another one, go, go, go.

MRS. BEGICH: Five minutes and -- I mean, Nick -- he could sleep ten minutes --

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MR. BEGICH: Yep.

MRS. BEGICH: -- and feel as good as you would if you slept all night.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah. There was a difference about them people.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. It's just something in the -- I understand, like, Bob Hope is that way. The reason that he's, like, in his '90s so good is because he's one of those people that can -- that can sit down and go to sleep for 20 minutes in an airplane and actually go to sleep the way you and I would go to sleep in our bed and --

MRS. BEGICH: Yep.

DON MITCHELL: -- then come out in an hour. And then there's some people that have that makeup in their --

MRS. BEGICH: And that --

MR. BEGICH: And Governor Perpich, in a -- say, about this time of the day, if he had a piece of apple pie or a -- and a -- and a glass of milk or chocolate, four more hours he added right on. He was gone just like you gave him a shot of something, right until 10:00. He would never stop, slow down or anything. And on the airplane, he'd doze off, sleep for ten minutes, he'd wake up, just like a new guy, ready to go.

MRS. BEGICH: And then if you traveled with him, he was up and down that aisle. How can you study (indiscernible) get where you were going.

MR. BEGICH: 6:00 in the morning was breakfast meeting. We're in San Francisco. 5:00, somebody's pounding on the door, "Who's there? Who's there?"

"Rudy."

"Rudy, what do you want?"

"Don't forget the 6:00 meeting."

"It's only 5:00. Get the hell out of here," you know?

Oh, then 10:00 at night, we got to have a meeting to see how -- what we did during the day, where we screwed up or what -- you know. And then I came home from San Francisco, and three days, I never saw the wharf.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: Everyone goes -- we saw nothing. The hotel, (indiscernible), the hotel and (indiscernible).

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MRS. BEGICH: We had to go back so he could see it.

MR. BEGICH: Had to go back so we could see it, Carolyn and I did.

MRS. BEGICH: He was really something.

MR. BEGICH: Rudy was another Nick, go, go, go.

MRS. BEGICH: But you know, it's funny, when -- when Nick's plane went down, and we used to talk a lot about where he could be or -- I think his mother never really believed he was dead because she did not see a body.

MR. BEGICH: Nope. And she would never leave home, hardly, because --

MRS. BEGICH: Somebody might call.

MR. BEGICH: -- somebody would call. And I would say, "Mom, if somebody's going to" -- "if they call and no" -- "and there's no answer, that important issue, they will find us."

MRS. BEGICH: So then we would talk, and she'd say to me, "Well, do you think that maybe he was always in such a hurry because he knew his life was going to be short?"

MR. BEGICH: Well, maybe.

DON MITCHELL: Except that there are, obviously, lots of people just like the governor who were in that kind of a hurry --

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: -- and whose lives --

MR. BEGICH: That search was all run through by John Blatnik, was coordinated, his office. Our contacts rarely had people in his office. And all of our contacts, when we flew the family up, it was John Blatnik made all the arrangements for the airplanes. And when we left, the mayor of St. Paul and Governor Anderson were there to see us off. And it was all John Blatnik had arranged on both ends, you know, everything.

DON MITCHELL: You know, as I said, it was a couple of years before my time. But I understand from talking to people that I guess the conventional wisdom is, probably, they might have gone down over water; which is why --

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MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: -- they couldn't pick them off the glacier because they missed it. If they gone down in the glacier, they might have -- at least people would have found, you know, some evidence of the (indiscernible).

MR. BEGICH: Is it listed on the ABC?

MRS. BEGICH: Cokie Roberts.

MR. BEGICH: Cokie Roberts is daughter and (indiscernible) of (indiscernible).

DON MITCHELL: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: I was surprised, they said she was 51 or 50? She just had a birthday here a month or so.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah, I can't remember what it was.

MR. BEGICH: I thought -- I thought she was a little, little girl.

MRS. BEGICH: She wasn't, though.

MR. BEGICH: Well, no. She's 50. That's 22 years ago. She was a big girl.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. Now there's --

MR. BEGICH: Do you think they had a granddaughter up there? There was one little girl with Ms. Boggs. I don't know if --

DON MITCHELL: There -- there's a picture in the Anchorage papers of -- of, you know, Lindy Boggs and Pegge and the kids, you know, during the search thing. And Cokie Roberts was there, and she looked -- I'm 47. She looked about, you know -- she looked like, in those days, like, in her 20s. You know, sort of the 20s.

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: Well, that's what Joe thought too. There was -- there is another daughter. But she -- or there was another daughter. She died of cancer.

DON MITCHELL: Right. (Indiscernible.)

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MRS. BEGICH: And the -- the son must be younger, too. Cokie may have been the oldest child.

DON MITCHELL: Yeah. Tommy Boggs is probably -- oh, he's got to be in his mid 50s.

MRS. BEGICH: Is that --

MR. BEGICH: He's a big-time lobbyist.

DON MITCHELL: Oh, big, big, big, big, big, big, big, big, big, big.

MR. BEGICH: But he looked like (indiscernible) --

DON MITCHELL: Like he is everything that you would -- I had dinner with him one night, and everything that you would --

MRS. BEGICH: Bring up, he's (indiscernible) --

DON MITCHELL: Everything that you disliked about the present system. I mean, I become -- it's far beyond the Nick Begich story. But I'm convinced that you can't do anything until you -- until you deal with campaign finance reform.

MR. BEGICH: That's what -- that's what --

DON MITCHELL: (Indiscernible.)

MR. BEGICH: -- is killing the Minnesota legislature. And imagine when you get to Washington.

DON MITCHELL: Well, (indiscernible) --

MR. BEGICH: Those lobbyists are dying now because they're going to try to say -- you know, about financing, it's really, really sad. They've got tickets in their pockets for every play, and they're some reason why our people switch. Now, I went on -- I never took those kind of deals. But my God, see, there are people that get elected. And then they -- they feel that now, for some reason, they are smarter -- no -- they're smarter than everyone else. And they're -- they're a different class now. And when they hung out with the big-time lobbyist, they really think they're getting way up in this world, and that's all they're doing is biting the bullet. I sat -- my seniority in the last seat by the aisle in the -- in the -- in the House -- so I could watch the show. The lobbyists go to the little room on the side and hand a slip, and then you go out -- legislatures -- each comes up and gives you a slip and they go out. Well, I would stand and watch exactly what we were discussing and watch the insurance company, or the banks and the insurance company, taking out people. They're not going to step out the door, which was right behind me, you know, the big -- big doors for the chamber. And I'd stand out there and watch -- make sure in mind,



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what lobbyist it was. And I'd come back, and then I'd go up and talk to the speaker, and I says, "I don't know if we should vote on this, because we lost this vote, this vote, this vote." And that was -- it was a shame as far as being those guys -- Democrats. I'm talking -- I -- the Republican votes, we knew exactly. When an issue was up, lose it. But these were the Democrats. And then that night, you would see all these Democrats going with the -- with the lobbyists.

MRS. BEGICH: Why do people change and are so impressed with money after they get there?

DON MITCHELL: Well, I think --

MR. BEGICH: I don't have lobbyists, but they were the labor people. Yeah. Once in a while, they'd bring a pizza and beer in my office. That was the big time. You remember when (indiscernible) bought one of those coolers those -- the big -- the junk ones?

MRS. BEGICH: Styrofoam.

MR. BEGICH: Styrofoam. And so we had ice for the -- to keep the beer cold.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: And they'd get pizzas, and one time we had hamburgers. I mean, that was the kind of people we worked with.

MRS. BEGICH: And it was -- and you worked in your office.

MR. BEGICH: In my office, yeah. Yeah.

DON MITCHELL: Well, I don't know. I never -- I never stood for public office, but it's -- but having hung around all these years now with -- with people that have. It seems to me that the first problem is that there are some exceptions to the rule. But generally speaking, both -- at least in the Alaska legislature and my experience in Congress, is that the first order of business for everyone who has an election certificate is to continue to have an election certificate.

MRS. BEGICH: You're right.

DON MITCHELL: And -- and that's where it all goes haywire. And --

MR. BEGICH: Yeah.

MRS. BEGICH: But do you think term limits are going to solve that?

MR. BEGICH: No.

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DON MITCHELL: No. I think -- I think term limits are -- are a sort of socially neurotic response to the campaign finance problem.

MRS. BEGICH: Yeah.

MR. BEGICH: Exactly. Exactly. Exactly.

DON MITCHELL: And if -- if a reelection was an authentic -- if an election was an authentic referendum on incumbent performance -- I mean, if it was square deal, then it wouldn't make any difference how long a guy served.

MRS. BEGICH: That's right.

DON MITCHELL: If a guy came back every two years or every six years, and he truly had to stand on what it is that I've done and --

MRS. BEGICH: That would be fair.

DON MITCHELL: Right. And that if a majority of his electorate didn't like it, and he was gone. Then if he authentically reflected his people's thinking, or at least a majority, if he stayed there for 35 kazillion years, that's what -- that's what representative democracy is all about. But if everybody knows that the fix is in, that once you're an incumbent because of the money, that it's not a square deal. If you won't deal with the money, then the only thing left for people that aren't very sophisticated about the real problem in the system is this term limit stuff, which I think is very mischievous. I -- I think it's terrible.

MR. BEGICH: Well, I won 13 two-year elections, consecutive. And there's two things. One, don't forget where you came from. And two, answer your constituents. I used to go on the radio on a regular basis. I wasn't afraid. And I'll tell you, "No," and I'll tell you, "Yes." I was very what -- and when constituent writes a letter, don't take it and send it up to constituent service where you've got a well-educated young girl or young boy writing answers. So when you get the letter, "What did he say?" He didn't say yes, he didn't say no. But he -- he's going to look at it. I wrote two paragraphs. Thank you for writing. And your concerns -- House filed, so and so. I disagree with you. I'm sorry to inform you, I disagree with you. I'm voting no. Unless there's a major compelling reasoning for me to change mind, thank you for your concerns. Boom, that was that. But I answered everyone. And when I came home, people -- look at now, I'm embarrassed by people come -- "You should run. We're so sorry to lose you." I really feel, you know, like, if I'm hiring people to say that. You know, I went on the radio. The people are, "We miss you. You got to do your work." And now I had contact with the biggest lobbyist at Chamber of Commerce, Workers Compensation. You know, they -- and Unemployment

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Compensation. They -- they bought the votes. They literally bought the Democrats right from under our feet. Nothing we could do about it. That's why most money has to change.

DON MITCHELL: What does it cost to run a --

MR. BEGICH: We run about 20,000, 18 to 20,000, we ran a race.

MRS. BEGICH: Fifteen.

MR. BEGICH: Fifteen.

DON MITCHELL: Well, that's --

MR. BEGICH: And even though we didn't have a phone --  
(End of audio recording.)