

Rufus Edmisten
Interview #3:
North Carolina Politics
Raleigh, North Carolina
August 28, 2012

Scott: Alright, Rufus. We are looking through some newspaper clippings and memorabilia that you have from your whole political career. But this particular one I wanted to ask you about. It looks like in 1972 you showed [Henry] "Scoop" Jackson around North Carolina, around the state. Can you talk a little bit about how you came to do that? Why you were doing it?

Edmisten: Senator Ervin was a great admirer of Senator Scoop Jackson. He liked him. He served with him on the Senate Armed Services Committee and he thought that Scoop Jackson was the best thing for America. He had seen him operate in the Senate. He was a fair man, a good man, and the senator said, "Would you mind going down and meeting with Senator Scoop Jackson and show him around a little bit to people here and there?" I remember I came down and I was there when he got off his airplane. He had known me from my days in Washington because, in those days, the Senate was a bit more chummy than today. It was still like a small southern town because it was controlled mostly by southerners. There was a civility then that we don't know today. I took him around to a number of different things, like the Young Democratic Club luau down in Wrightsville Beach.

Scott: What was the purpose?

Edmisten: The purpose was to introduce him to North Carolina to see whether or not he would make a viable candidate for the presidency. As I carried him around the Young Democrats, who at that time had very, very long hair and hot pants outfits and things like that [both laugh], they were more in tune with somebody who might be more liberal than Senator Scoop Jackson.

Scott: Probably particularly on the issues of national security and Vietnam.

Edmisten: The Young Democrats were for Senator [George] McGovern. They had also spoken at times that they would have accepted [Edward] Muskie or Birch Bayh but they wanted to go with Senator McGovern. I remember Mayor [Howard Lee], one of North Carolina's pioneering black mayors of Chapel Hill, said that "We like his soul and his spunk but we don't think he'll make it. So we are split right between Senators Bayh and Muskie." Senator Jackson gave a good speech. I took him to a couple more places. I

remember that the next thing I knew, the then chairman of the Democratic Party, whose name was John Church, from Henderson, communicated with me and he said, "Rufus, you know, this is a big union man. That will not go over in North Carolina. We don't support pro-union people here in North Carolina." Of course North Carolina was and still is one of the least unionized states in the nation.

Scott: Is this a right to work state?

Edmisten: Oh yes, it's a right to work state. So this was a short-lived campaign in North Carolina. I went back and reported, though the senator had already heard about it. He readily accepted that North Carolinians would not prefer Senator Jackson because of his very strong labor support. Coming from the state of Washington, with Boeing and all those industries, you are going to be very heavily labor-endorsed. I enjoyed being with the man. He was a real fun man to be around. He was just delightful. He remembered people's names. He would have been a great candidate. I think if he could have been nominated, he would have come a lot closer to winning than McGovern. McGovern was really a nice man. I met him again for the first time since the election a couple years ago as he was coming through Asheville. He stopped to talk to some folks there and he's just a wonderful person. His sense of humor is great. He wouldn't have made the kind of crazy left wing pinko president that everybody talked about. He would have been a good man. But I think Jackson would have probably, if he could have gotten the nomination, would have given Richard Nixon a run for his money. That is the trouble today with the parties. They generally nominate, the activists are the ones that go to the conventions. They are the ones that pick the primary candidates of both parties who are to the left or right of center.

Scott: The primary voters.

Edmisten: Primary voters are the most activist of all. We all know that. They tend to get people that are molded far from the center, far left, far right. I think you see that in today's contemporary setting more so in the Republican Party. The far right, it is the most right in ideology that I've seen in my career. I've been around for a little while now at the ripe 'ole age of 71 at this sitting. Henry Jackson was just a nice man. We all knew one another back in those days. I enjoyed being with him. But it wasn't his time.

Scott: I saw another clipping there that mentioned, a North Carolina reporter suggesting that given that you were escorting Senator Jackson around the state that you may have political ambitions yourself. This is '72 so you are still working, you are in Washington, you are working for Ervin. You are not on the Watergate Committee yet.

But even in '72 people were suggesting that you were going to be heading for a political career here in North Carolina.

Edmisten: There was no secret all along that I had ambitions to be in the political world. I always had admired Senator Ervin. I had watched him when I was a younger person. He would get up to make these fiery speeches. I would always go to the campaign events where people make these very flowery orations. It's no secret that I did get on the stump occasionally. You know how people make stump speeches? I remember when I was 12 or 13 years old I'd go out in the middle of the field and get on a stump and make a speech. [Scott laughs] Talk to all the squirrels and cows and horses. Some of them would stick their tails up and run! [Scott laughs] But talk about a stump speech, I really did give one to my imaginary audience out there. Sometimes it wasn't necessarily just a political thing. I liked those grand 'ole orators who had the cadence of my high school teacher, [Bill Ross] who taught us iambic pentameter. Da-da-da-da-da-da-da. If a young person today would hear somebody talking about iambic pentameter they would say, "Well, what nation is that?" [Scott laughs] Or if you were to say "Can you diagram a sentence?" They would say, "Do what?" I had it in my blood. During the time that I was in Washington with Ervin, remember that was in the beginning of 1964.

I first graduated from Carolina in 1963, '59-63, the University of North Carolina. I was married that year in August. My then-wife and I went to Washington. My aim was always to work with Senator Ervin but it didn't come to pass at that time; there was nothing available. But we had enrolled in George Washington University law school. I was searching for a job and I had contacted the senator's office. Every time that he would be somewhere in North Carolina, in my early years, I would be there. If he were close around the mountains, Morganton was about an hour and a half away from Boone, my home town. I didn't get a shot immediately. I got a job teaching school.

Scott: Right, you talked about teaching school.

Edmisten: The third grade. Did I tell you that before? At Ascension Academy?

Scott: Yes. You got a phone call from Senator Ervin's secretary.

Edmisten: I got a phone call from Senator Ervin's office and they said, "We have a vacancy." And it worked just right because that school year was over. I know that the headmaster of that school was aghast when he found out that I had been going to law school at night time because there were no activities after four o'clock in the afternoon. No basketball team, none of this, none of that. He was just aghast, Victor Summers. I saw

Victor here a couple of years ago. He's quite a guy. Where I heard that President Kennedy was shot was at Ascension Academy.

I went over and Pat Shore of Senator Ervin's office, who is now deceased, said, "There is an opening on the senator's Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights. He mentioned that he knew you and your parents and would like to see if you want to come over there." I said, "Oh my god, yes. Do I want to come!" Let's see, it would have been early in '64, I went and I was named a staff member of the Subcommittee on Constitutional Rights. In the beginning, I did a lot of things that young people do and it didn't hurt my feelings at all. I ran errands and did this and did that. Within about six or eight months I was working very closely with chief counsel staff director Paul Woodard, Marcia MacNaughton, who was the real expert on using the military to spy on civilians.

I also worked with another North Carolinian named Helen Scheirbeck, who was a Native American, we call them Lumbees, sort of the lost tribe, on a bill of rights for American Indians. Senator Ervin had gotten into his true self looking out for the rights of individuals as it applied to the Constitution. I continued my law school at night. At some point there, I don't know exactly what year it was, the senator suggested that I might want to drive him to different places. Of course, I was extremely happy about that. I knew I would have to miss some law school to do it. I went to law school five nights a week, four seasons a year, and there were times that it would involve being away. Generally we went places on the weekend.

Scott: I know he kept a townhouse in Washington, right, with his wife?

Edmisten: No, I wouldn't call it a townhouse. They rented space in the Methodist Building.

Scott: Right next to the [Dirksen Office Building]. Sure!

Edmisten: He could walk out his door, cross the street, and go a couple hundred steps into 337 Senate Office Building. It was a very Spartan apartment. I mean, the furniture was just really something that you would find out in some very plain home in the '50s. Very plain furniture because this was just a temporary roosting place. He had his old 1965 Chrysler. I always thought of it as the Willa Cather Ship of Fools. He wasn't a fool, I was! But it was such a big 'ole huge thing. I would drive that baby down the road and she'd wave along there, US Senate#1 [on the license plate]. During those years that I was with the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee, when he would go somewhere sometimes during the day, I would take him also. You obviously got to know somebody very well. I met his family. His little granddaughter at that time, she could not say Rufus,

she called me "Rooshus." [Scott laughs] The senator would affectionately call me "Rooshus."

Scott: You mentioned a time to me that we hadn't talked about in our last interviews, when you shared a bed with the senator. Can you tell us that circumstance?

Edmisten: We'll get around to that as I'm going to tell you what would happen.

I'm getting out of law school. There are still trips back and I'm working on the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee doing substantive work, helping write a report on the Indians, helping Marcia MacNaughton, doing all kinds of things, being active in law school. I was president of Phi Delta Phi, a legal fraternity. I got three U.S. Supreme Court justices to come and honor Justice Abe Fortas. But all during the time that I was with Senator Ervin, beginning in 1964, I was making contacts in North Carolina.

Even before I started driving him around all over the place, people would come to Washington and I got to know them. I would travel to back to be active in the YDC, Young Democrats Club. Anytime I went somewhere to one of those I would represent the senator. I had a habit, when you go somewhere, they would get up and say, "On behalf of Senator Ervin, Rufus Edmisten is delivering a greeting." That was the way I got to know about everybody coming and going in North Carolina and especially when Senator Ervin ran in 1968 for his last term. We were on the road. That's when I graduated law school. So I had a lot of time then. In wintertime, when I didn't have to go to law school every night—by the way, when I was going to law school, I said that someday somebody would pay for that cruel and unusual punishment to go to law school at nighttime. Lo and behold the taxpayers did for a long time, paid for my misery.

During the time when he was running for reelection, it was a simpler time. Senator Ervin never bought a minute of TV time, not a minute back in 1968. You just didn't do that. They had a Senate recording office where you would do a recording and a lot of stations used it occasionally. When his usual interviewer Hal Smith wasn't there, I would do it. I remember one day I was over there in the Senate recording room and Senator [John] Sparkman was there to do his. Well his guy didn't show up! Senator Sparkman from Alabama said, "Well Sam, can your boy here do it for me?" So they handed me a script and I interviewed Senator Sparkman for his weekly radio show. [Both laugh] I've got a picture of it somewhere I'll show you.

We got out on the road and this was traditional campaigning. Either Pat Shore, his secretary, or I would call ahead—remember no cell phones, no Internet, no nothing—you call ahead, you get one of Ervin's buddies who was in what we call the "court house

gang” and you would head down the road in that ‘ole Chrysler and you’d go to the county seat of where it was and you’d go through, you’d see the clerk, the register of deeds, the sheriff, the tax collector, anybody else that was around the clerk’s office, because that’s how you really campaigned in those days. The courthouse crowd is how you did it. You didn’t have any of those wild crazy TV things.

At night, though, you’d always end up somewhere. There would always be a rally at some armory. For instance, one night in Concord, they might have had 300 people there. It was a very special night because that’s where Mrs. Ervin came from. “Miss Margaret,” as she was affectionately called. What a wonderful lady. She was just divine. So it was Miss Margaret night in Concord, where the senator met his wife. He truly just worshiped that lady. I was the only person that she would trust to drive her, too. But neither one of them could sleep while in a car.

I would go to these places. I kept a little book in my back pocket. I remember it very well because I got some of the names right now. When you were growing up on the farm you’d go to the seed store and they’d give you a little tablet just to take notes in. It was about 3” x 6”. You’d stick it in your back pocket. “Bought so much fertilizer today.” Etc., etc. I’d carry one of those little things and I’d jot down names of people and little things about them that would come in handy later on. I kept them all back up in a box in Washington. I continually came back and forth to North Carolina for events, Democratic Party events here and there. Everywhere. All over the state. I would leave on a Friday afternoon, come back Sunday ready to go. This is all before Watergate but I’m really hitting it hard.

I was amassing a huge amount of knowledge of people in the various parts of the state because I knew that someday, there might be a chance to run for office. I liked the thrill of it too. I was asked many times to represent Senator Ervin, not to stand in because nobody could ever do that. As time went on it was sort of an unusual thing to have somebody who was “the counsel” of a big committee up on Capitol Hill, the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee, so I got a lot of invitations to come speak to civic clubs, that sort of thing. I did as many as I could. I remember many a time I’d go somewhere. I’d drive from Washington. I know one time I had to do a Rotary Club in Shelby. I left the Senate office that afternoon and got down toward Shelby, it was King’s Mountain. I was just dead tired. I had no place to stay because at that time I wasn’t making much money. I went in and washed up. I slept in the rest stop at King’s Mountain, North Carolina. Went in and cleaned up that next day, in the restroom, run in and did my luncheon meeting at the Rotary Club, hope I didn’t stink too badly. [Scott laughs] And then I had to head back to Washington because you had things there you had

to do. I worked it, worked it, and worked it. I'm still doing full time work for the senator on the Constitutional Rights Subcommittee, still travelling with him.

I remember one time in the '68 campaign, we were traveling round about Pittsburg, North Carolina. I don't know, somebody messed up. We had been somewhere and he said, "Let's just turn in." So we started hunting for a place to stay. The only thing in town was this old Blair Hotel and it was a relic of the '20s. The person said, "We got one room up there and it got one bed in it." I [thought] "Oh my god." And it's no secret that the senator liked a little Bourbon and "ginga ale" as he called it. He liked a little Fitzgerald. I would always have the supply for us because he would like to have a drink at night time to relax. He certainly never had more than two drinks. So it was always "bourbon and ginga ale" time. I looked in that room and that room was about 10'x10'x10'. [Scott laughs] There was one 'ole saggin' bed in there with a bathroom, which was about 3'x3'x3' with a claw-footed tub in there. I thought, now what in the world am I going to do? Oh my god. I had been in the same room with him for many, many nights.

Scott: Sure, in separate beds.

Edmisten: Yeah, double beds. Two beds, yeah. It's getting late at night. I walked downstairs to where this little guy was and I said, "You got those roll-aways?" "Nah, we quit that." And so I went back up. I got back up there and he was getting ready for bed. He had finished his bourbon and ginga ale and he got in that bed. He said, "Well, I think I'll go on to sleep." I thought, okay, he's going to be mad if I try to sleep on the floor. Back in those days, when you grew up, a lot of people slept in beds [together] but you don't normally sleep with—

Scott: [laughing] —a U.S. senator!

Edmisten: A U.S. senator or God! So I feebly got just enough clothes off to get over there. The senator was real bad, too, to roll and he had adenoids and he did snore a lot. It was a building shaker. You are talking several decibels. [Scott laughs] This has started. I get in that bed and it started sagging big time. He was a big man. I put about a quarter of my body on that bed. One side of my butt is on there and I've got one foot on the floor and one hand on the floor. [Scott laughs] All of a sudden he whams over there. I go into a frozen "Oh my god, I'm touching this man." So he goes back over and this goes on for a while. I think "I've got to do something." The floor was an option, but the snoring was especially heavy that night 'cause he had adenoids. So I devised a plan. I would get up real quietly and thank god there was a blanket up in this little closet. The little door looked like small people could go in it. I get that blanket and sneak my pillow

out of the bed and I go in that bathroom because I know he never gets up in the night time. I go in that bathroom and I pile my butt in that tub [Scott laughs]. I get in that old fashioned tub and I closed the door. I slept about three hours in there, very fitful. There was no such thing as a shower in those days. Ervin he took him a bath. I washed up as best I could.

I have never forgotten that! I asked people today if I could take a—I've been threatening some day to take a tour of that Blair hotel. It is still there. It's got real estate offices in it. One time it had an antique place in it. I'm going to try my best to go up there and recreate that some time. But how do you do it?

Another time that we were traveling in the '68 campaign, we were in Burlington, North Carolina, and this was a fancy Holiday Inn. The only problem there was that there was a dog show in Raleigh beginning the next day. This was a place where you could put the kennels back behind the hotel. They welcomed the dog people. We rolled in there because we were supposed to go to Saxapahaw the next morning with Senator B. Everett Jordan. At that time there was a big plant down there that they owned, the Jordans. So we are in there and it has two beds in it. We have our Old Fitz, bourbon and ginga ale. The senator was arthritic and so he got up there messing with the air conditioner. He messed up that knob some way. He turned it to "subarctic." [Scott laughs] It kept getting colder and colder and I was in that bed over there freezing. He did that, fumbling with it before we really got to sleep. I said, "Sir, can I go down there and ask them to maybe come look at this?" "No, no, no, it's alright." This stuff goes on all night long. Dogs yelping out there like crazy.

Scott: And subarctic temperatures.

Edmisten: And this temperature's got to be nearing 45, at least. The next morning he never says a word. He gets up, he was obviously embarrassed. He did something to that knob. [Edmisten laughs] Who else in the world gets to drive around with a guy like that? No pretension. I heard his stories over and over again. I would laugh every time. I could stand at the back of a room where he was talking and I could mimic every joke he told about Uncle Ephraim and the two-crossed eyed guys. The jokes he told back then would not be appropriate today because somebody would say—you're going to offend somebody. One of his favorites was about the two-crossed eyed guys. Now I'm just quoting back. This is history. They were in the town of Morganton and one of them was named Bobby Hennessy and the other one was named Manly McDowell. These two crossed-eyed men were walking down the streets of Morganton one day and they bumped into one another. Bobby said, "Manly, why don't you look where you are going?" And

Manly said, "Well, Bobby, it won't do a damned bit of good because you won't go where you are looking."

Scott: [Laughs] And everybody loved it!

Edmisten: He told it over and over again! I could laugh at it a thousand times a day. The stories were all wound around mountain living. A man who was born before the turn of the century, or was he? Yeah, I forgot what year he was born. But he would tell me when he practiced law, back in those days, when you practiced law in the early years, you either went by a horse and wagon or you took the train. So you held court week in these various little towns. From Morganton to Marion today is an 18-20 minute drive, but back in those days you took the train. All of the judges, the lawyers, the prosecutors, all stayed at a boarding house. Today somebody would question that. But he said that the woman that kept the house would have a big table and they all sat on the porch and chewed the fat. He said they wouldn't talk about their cases. At court, he'd stay there the whole week. And when court would be over, he'd come back home. His father, as you've read in the [Dabney] book and the other book captured pretty well what he told me about his father. By the way, Ervin never liked that [Dabney] book.⁵

Scott: Dabney?

Edmisten: Dabney. He didn't like that. He rarely ever said anything bad about anybody but he said, "Man didn't do me right. Man didn't do me right." It all got back to the views that he ascribed to Ervin that he just didn't think were there.

I think Karl Campbell's book is a very fair and accurate reflection of the senator.⁶ There was a contradiction there. He was very much against, at that time, the civil rights bills, because he honestly thought that you would take away rights from one set of people and give them to another. I know the books have been pretty rough on him, even the book on Lyndon Johnson, Johnson in the Senate years, he was known as Mr. "Go and see Sam," he can help you block that on constitutional grounds. Lyndon Johnson saw him as an impediment. Senator Ervin was not for the Medicare deal because he thought it took freedom away from doctors. But then you get those later years, all those fights were in the '60s. You get those over with and you lose those battles. He would never sit around and sulk about anything like that.

⁵ Dick Dabney, *A Good Man: The Life of Sam J. Ervin* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1976).

⁶ Karl E. Campbell, *Senator Sam Ervin, Last of the Founding Fathers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007).

Then the '70s come, the early '70s, and we're talking about state power—you know, like this author I know, Katherine [Scott laughs] has so aptly caught with her book—he is starting to get into things that give him great joy because he thinks he can do something about it. You got to look at it this way. Most of the stuff in the '60s and others were being against something, trying to kill it. If you think about it like I do, these years brought on a time when you could make something happen more than just trying to kill something. Make something happen. Of course, he was fighting against the encroachment of powers by the executive branch.

He would get so furious when he thought that people were ignoring the Constitution, especially when it came to individual rights. In the car he would say, "For the life of me I don't understand these people." He often quoted, "Richard Nixon is scared to death of freedom." I guess that has been quoted in the public before. But he said, "Richard Nixon is scared to death of freedom." He had a great group of young people at that time working with him on these committees, subcommittees, the Paul Woodwards, the Larry Baskirs, the Marcia MacNaughtons, Helen Maynard, others. I had a bright set of people over on the Separation of Powers Subcommittee when I became the chief counsel and the staff director. That was a committee that he got after Constitutional Rights because they felt that there needed to be some sort of a check on this government, this state intrusion on personal liberty. I like the term "state" better. So that involved a lot of things. He particularly liked holding those hearings on separation of powers because we had these bright professors that we had hired as consultants: Alexander Bickle, a couple of them are judges today.

Scott: Miller? Arthur Miller?

Edmisten: This wasn't the Arthur Miller that is on TV. This was Arthur Miller, my old professor—I suggested Arthur—my old professor at George Washington University, who would later play a big role in some of the things that I did. The senator still traveled quite a bit. Before Watergate hit big time, i.e. going public, he still traveled and we went places. He'd be asked to go, if it was somewhere like Philadelphia, I drove him one time to Philadelphia. We used to always go down to Williamsburg. I loved that. That was three days, it was called the Business Roundtable. They invited people down there and nobody thought anything about something like that then. We would go to that resort in West Virginia, and the one in Virginia, those two, for business-type meetings where they would invite members of the Senate. They particularly liked Senator Ervin because he was a very strong supporter of the free markets. He thought that the government did intrude too much in business, although he knew that you had to regulate government when it came to personal freedoms. That's some of that contradiction you get all the time with a man as complex as Sam Ervin. On the one hand he says, let business

flourish. And on the other hand he says you can't let government overpower the personal liberties of people. I guess when you look at it a certain way, that is consistent. I want to clear up something that Karl Campbell in his book said one time, I'm rambling now, he said that, I believe that he had asked somebody like Senator Roman Hruska of Nebraska—

Scott: You mentioned this story before.

Edmisten: I did? I've got that one covered. But I never heard one racial epithet. He would call them colored people sometimes.

Scott: That was typical language back then.

Edmisten: That's what you did back then. People that try to take history out of context are just crazy. It's like some dummy up here now who want to remove the Confederate memorial from the grounds of the Capitol. I'm going to fight that until I turn blue in the grave. It's hokey. Revisionist history is just dishonest. You got to take the context of the times. Wanting to remove names off of buildings, do that sort of thing because they owned slaves and this and that sort of thing. That's insane, just insane.

I guess what we are talking about, since we've covered part of how I traveled with Ervin and kept building all these names and names and names and names. I genuinely liked it though, it wasn't necessarily [work]. I just liked knowing people. I was the constituent person, too, for Ervin. People who had met me at different places would call me directly and I would try to solve their problems with the executive branch of government. Sometimes I wouldn't take the usual stuff where some staff member writes a letter like usual "inquire you about this and that." Sometimes I'd get so mad about something I'd take a cab and go see 'em, at the Pentagon or something. I would demand that I could get in the door because I was with Sam Ervin. When you say that you are the chief counsel and staff director of Sam Ervin's Separation of Powers Subcommittee, you could get in the door. Sometimes I'd get so furious I would go see 'em. Just say, "You've ignored this. You've done this person wrong." You know, they'd be doing that kind of stuff, mess up something here.

Scott: So even before Watergate you had been thinking about running?

Edmisten: Most definitely. I certainly had. I didn't know what exactly, but I had always wanted to be in public life of some sort. There is no family history there, by the way.

Scott: Right, we talked about that.

Edmisten: My father was a wildlife protector. No family history at all.

Scott: When did you decide to officially run, then?

Edmisten: Well, that was brought about by the constant rumors that the attorney general, Senator Robert Morgan—

Scott: Later Senator Robert Morgan.

Edmisten: Then [state] Attorney General Robert Morgan, later Senator Robert Morgan, was going to run for the U.S. Senate. If he did that, he let it be known that he was going to step down to spend full time running for the U.S. Senate. Now this was in 1974.

Scott: So Senator Ervin had already announced that he wouldn't be seeking reelection.

Edmisten: He wouldn't be running. The report was out. I left the Senate in—

Scott: July, we wrote. Was it something like your resignation letter was July 2?

Edmisten: I left there and came back because it was now very plain that Robert Morgan was going to run for the Senate and would, in such and such a date, he would step down, I think about July, from attorney general. So at that time there was a Republican governor named Jim Holshouser who was from my hometown. Nice family, he went to school with my brothers and sister. He was about four years older than I was. He appointed a person named Jim Carson to fill out Robert Morgan's term until the next, the law reads until the next general election, and that would be in November of '74. So here you have an incumbent attorney general named Jim Carson, a lawyer out of Charlotte. The way the law reads, it falls upon the state executive committee, of each party, to fill that spot with a nominee.

There were close to 400 people on the committee, and they were spread out all over the state, every little remote area in the world that you can think of. More and more people became interested in this slot for attorney general. Robert Morgan had done great things for the office. He had put a huge consumer protection, other things, and I had studied a lot about it and I thought this office, next to governor, it would be in my opinion the office that you could do the most to get things done. So I came back and I announced.

So here's what you got to do. I think that I announced that I was going to run sometime in July. I had not much time. But what you got to do though, you got to travel all over the state of North Carolina and you've got to see these people in person. You cannot just say, pick up the phone and say, "I'm Rufus Edmisten." It ended up that there were 10 people running. There were several members of the legislature, there were two judges running. It was a field of some very, very well-qualified people. One of them later became chief justice of North Carolina. One is now a superior court judge. Several are in the legislature, just a whole host of people that wanted the Democratic state executive committee to nominate them to be attorney general.

I had this thing mapped out before I even came back from Washington, as soon as I knew what was going to happen. I got a list of all the executive committee members and I looked at them. I personally knew probably 75 percent of them because of all that work that I had done all those years before traveling with Senator Ervin, traveling myself, being here. I remember one time there was an executive committee member down in Sanford, and I had been down there one time doing something with the senator. His name was Fletcher Harris. Fletcher had mentioned to me that his daughter had just gotten a little horse, so I put that in my little book, my little fertilizer book. So when I'm up there in my boiler room making calls, that little room in Raleigh with a big board up on the wall with all their names, warm, cold, what their comments were, I had one person up there helping me. I remember I called Fletcher, I said, "Fletcher Harris, this is Rufus Edmisten." I said, "How's that little pony your daughter got doing?" He said, "Well how did you remember that?" I said, "You told me when I was down there in Sanford." This happened quite a bit on things that I would remember, and I obviously got Fletcher's vote. So out of all these people running—and I traveled a lot. This was a year, too, that there was a gas shortage and you couldn't just call them up, you had to go see a lot of these people. "You haven't been to see me yet." One person! This is about as hard as running a state-wide campaign.

Scott: They are scattered all over.

Edmisten: I remember with the gas shortage some of them could not get anywhere unless they flew. I had an old Mercedes diesel. Now I had to hide it because I was driving a foreign car. I had a Mercedes diesel and I could get diesel fuel. So I went to some places that none of them could get to because they couldn't get gas. I'm not going to attribute that to my winning, but unknown to all these people I had done my homework for several years. Nobody had any notion that this boy from Boone that had been up there with Sam Ervin for 10 years was going to win this thing. Well the time came for—

Scott: What about Sam Ervin? Did he help?

Edmisten: I never asked him to on that one. It was very plain. A lot of them said, "You work for Sam, that's enough for me." He said very good things. A lot of these people were people that he had known for years, some of the older ones.

I remember the time came for the state meeting of the executive committee and that's when you go see who is going to vote for whom. I don't know the exact date, I think it was July 27, something like that. It's held at the old Sir Walter Raleigh hotel, down the street here, very close to where you are staying, one of those nice little hotels. They held the meeting in the Virginia Dare ballroom. The way it works is that there is a vote taken and every time, the lesser vote getter gets out. You eliminate somebody each time. Remember, there were 10 candidates.

Everybody had been predicting how many votes they were going to get. It was real funny. I often would say to people, "If everybody gets what they say they are going to get, then there is about 5,000 people on this committee!" There were only 400 people! Somebody said, "Well I got 230." And the next one said, "I'm pretty sure I'm over half of 'em." You know, there are 10 of these characters. Let me tell you what I did. That chart I had up there: "warm," "warmer," "absolute on blood." What I did, for some people that swore up and down that they would vote for me, if I knew a little something about their history I would put "doubtful." I would have had on the first ballot, one hundred and some, but I had excised enough down to where I predicted, I think, 76 votes. I came within three votes of that first ballot. That's a far cry from those, remember there are 10 people dividing up 400 people.

Scott: Right, it's not what you need but it's enough to keep you around.

Edmisten: I was number one. And the psychologist thing is that if you drop down any one time, you're gone. I remember the next day, after I had won the thing, the *News Observer* had an article which said, "Edmisten crowd hi-tech." We had walkie-talkies. All day long, you'd take a vote and they'd take about an hour. There were six ballots. And each time I'm leading. One time I get about four votes ahead and it was getting shaky. Then you start making coalitions. I remember one particular person, I said I will consider your brother being chief deputy. Consider. Back in those days you promise it. They came over with me. The black delegation after Mickey Michaux] got out, they got on my side. On the last ballot I won it against a fellow mountaineer, Herbert Hide. There were only two people on the ballot that year, it was an off year. You had Robert Morgan and I'm on the ticket. I'm the nominee. And I went about it campaigning like crazy for my first race. Nobody could touch me. The hands I shook, the things I did.

Here is something that the newspaper said, "The happy anointing of Rufus Edmisten." So I campaigned like crazy against this incumbent, Jim Carson. I'll never forget his campaign ad. He had been in the army and he jumped out of an airplane and he hit the ground and in this squeaky voice he said, "I'm Jim Carson and I'm running for attorney general." The stupidest ad I have ever seen in my life. I didn't have anything to say about it. I thought about what I had learned in law school, *res ipsa loquitur*, the things speaks for itself. This guy jumps out of an airplane and hits the ground and all this stuff falling around him and he says, "I'm Jim Carson. I'm running for attorney general." Apropos of nothing. It's like a huge mosquito jumping out of an airplane. So I whipped the stuffing out of him. Robert Morgan won his seat. Robert and I were the only two campaigning. I remember one time Robert got real mad because I was still smoking that pipe. He said, "Why don't you put that damn pipe up?" I didn't. Then he eventually quit asking me.

I got sworn in on the coldest day in the world, in November. I didn't have to wait until the usual time in January when everybody is inaugurated. I got sworn in right away and I'll never forget that there is an article here that says "Edmisten won by out-profession-aling the party pros." I like what they said about that. This guy wrote that I got it down to a science: "Throughout the meeting there were legislators clustered around another candidate feverishly discussing strategy trying to figure out how to overcome Edmisten. In the face of this Edmisten remains strong, pressing firmly for more votes as the balloting progressed, never relinquishing the lead as the pros had originally anticipated." I am paraphrasing.

Anyway, that was my first election, not with the people as a whole but it was a masterful campaign, if I say so myself. Masterful because I had planned it out. I decided that even though some of them swore an oath of blood on their mother's grave, that I put them down as doubtful. I got sworn in—

Scott: You won handily with 60 percent of the vote.

Edmisten: Yes, yes. Sworn in on the coldest day in the world and my hometown Boone was so proud of me that all my aunts and uncles got on this old rickety bus and the blasted thing got as far as Winston Salem and broke down. They couldn't get here. It was the coldest day in the world. I thought, oh lord, what have I done.

That was a lot of fun and I was on the road.

Scott: Tell me what an attorney general does.

Edmisten: Attorney general is the guardian of the people's rights. Not only does the attorney general guard the people's rights, it has to do some things that are unpopular. The attorney general of North Carolina condemns all the land, all condemnations for roads, public things, this and that. One thing that I remember, my name went on everything when you condemn somebody's property.

Scott: Eminent domain and those types of things?

Edmisten: Yes. I had a lot of threats. People would get real upset about that. I didn't like that part of it. But then I became very much going into the consumer protection. I had some rocky starts. My office filed a civil trust violation against Southern Bell telephone company. I learned some lessons from that. I just got blown out at a press conference. Should have been able to handle myself better, my staff didn't—I didn't require enough of them. I worked heavy on consumer protection.

I had a rule in the office, I'll never forget this. The day that I first got into the office, I was in the conference room and I looked around the room and there were these guys there that probably had a total of 250 years of legal experience. I had never really gone to court. I had done a lot of things they hadn't done. But it was pretty heavy when you're before a nationwide audience on TV and you're questioning L. Patrick Grey and hoping to not make a fool of yourself.

I was intimidated, but I couldn't let them know that. It was all gentlemen at that time, all males. I said, "Look, you got the experience here. I've done some things you haven't done. I'm going to defer to you. I want you to do a favor for me though. I've noticed over the years that when there is a decision between the state and the citizen, the attorney general's office always goes for the state. I'm going to change this." I said, "It may be hard for some of you to take, but I'm going to demand this." Trying to show them I'm the boss. I said "When we got a controversy here between the citizen and the state of North Carolina, and all things are equal, you rule for the citizen." Stone silence. They are looking at me like "You are out of your mind." Well it took about two years and that finally set in.

Another thing too, I said, "I'm going to tell you something. I've just been through a campaign and I suspect I'm a little bit better than you at the politics." I said, "You leave the politicking to me and you do the law work and the consumer protection and we'll get along just fine and you'll find the citizens of the state will prosper." They come by my office now and tell me "I'm so proud to work with this office." Somebody did that just two weeks ago and he's a veteran and he said "You know what. I never forgot that, you

telling us to leave the politicking to you." I rarely overruled anybody unless they were doing something that was gouging the citizens. I fired two or three people in my life. One of them was because a guy kept treating this nice old lady that ran the elevator, back in his early days he'd come in feeling bad and he'd say something ugly to her. I kept telling him, "You got to stop that. You got to stop that. I'm going to fire you if you don't quit it." He did and I fired him one day. He made her cry.

I enjoyed that. And then '76 came along and I was reelected, handily. Huge margin, I remember.

Scott: Sixty-eight percent.

Edmisten: Oh it was? And then we're into—see that's '76-'80. Then '80 we go again and that was a good election year too.

Scott: Sixty-two percent.

Edmisten: All during that time there were some things that I did working on that I was very proud of. I got consumers a lot of money. I helped save the New River, that was very important to me. The New River is the second-oldest river in the world. It runs from south to north. The Appalachian Power Company wanted to dam it up and supply power to Ohio. I didn't quite think that was very smart, didn't like it. Then we finally won that but it was because a lot of the contacts—I had this whole batch of letters where as attorney general I had written to old friends like Senator Kennedy and others asking them—and they put personal notes back, I knew this wasn't staff because some of the things they put they only knew. Kennedy had made a note somewhere about sorry we don't smoke cigars together anymore, that's in here somewhere, I think it went to Carolina, I don't know. Along with the help of Senator Ervin who went up there, the river got designated a scenic and wild river. My part of that was I got an injunction against the Appalachian Power Company that held all that in abeyance while that work was going on by citizens' groups and Congress. I was very proud of that.

I was proud of standing up for the little guy. I would always say to myself that these corporations have all the power. What's that word you use, populist? Lots of things like that. Business is always nervous about attorney general although you try to tell them that if you don't have a clean marketplace you can't do business.

Scott: Let me ask you something about how an attorney general decides to take a case. I'm sure there are many, many cases that you could take as attorney general.

Edmisten: Well, the way it works in North Carolina, in all cases the attorney general's office handles all the appeals, criminal appeals. You can't pick and choose on that, except once in a while, I did on one time. Hundreds of cases are appealed in the criminal system. Back in those days, everybody in there at one time or another gets to argue a case in front of the supreme court. Now they've got these so-called solicitors general. I think my system was by far the best. I remember one time the chief justice, Susie Sharp, was one floor above me and she was very, very old school. A biographer of hers later found out that this old spinster was having affairs with several people. A delightful book. We all thought, Susie Sharp? It came out a couple years ago—a fantastic book! She'd written all of these diary entries, but they were in code and this woman had uncoded them. She was having an affair with her law professor way early and then several judges, people that I know that were Senator Ervin's buddies. This book just came out a couple years ago. I knew almost every person mentioned in that book. You ought to get it. Susie Sharp. I wish I had it in here.

Anyway, she called me up there one day. She says, "Rufus"—she plunked a brief down in front of me, and it was a death penalty case. This lawyer was so bad—for the defendant—he's so bad he had copied the Constitution, a portion of the U.S. Constitution, something else and then obviously he should have been disbarred immediately. She says, "We can't let this stand." You know I have never told this before in my life. She said, "Your office is going to do the brief for both of them." That's unheard of. You can't—today, the judges would find that a terrible conflict. I got up to my chief deputy and I said, "You're going to write a brief for this guy, too, as well as the one that is being written for the state." So the chief justice and I conspired to write a brief for this poor guy that had this sorry lawyer down there. She reported him to the bar. His conviction was not overturned, but he didn't get the death penalty.

There were a lot of discretionary things, though. I brought some environment cases using the nuisance law, to close down a place one time that had all these chemicals placed in this one that was running out and polluting things around it. You use the nuisance law. I was trying to think of some unique thing to go after that. I was big on anti-trust. I was big on the environment. That's where you had all the discretion and the statutes in North Carolina give you very broad powers to intervene in any proceeding, state or federal, that you may deem necessary. That's why I got so involved in the New River thing, because the Federal Power Commission was doing that and it's a very powerful office.

Scott: The attorney general's office?

Edmisten: Yes, and the one frankly that I enjoyed the most.

Scott: In those cases where you do have the discretion whether or not you want to intervene, how do you decide?

Edmisten: Is it something that nobody else can handle? Is it something where some defenseless person is being unfairly taken advantage of? Does the state need you to do this? Is there eminent harm coming from somebody somewhere? When Roy Cooper was asked to intervene in this Duke lacrosse case—before the attorney general of North Carolina could prosecute something he's got to be asked by the local district attorney to do it. And also before the SBI [State Bureau of Investigation]—which is under the attorney general, that's a very powerful agency [to conduct] state driven investigations, extremely powerful—but they have got to have a request by some local law enforcement to go because you know the state police out here running around and the attorney's got to have some discretion there.

I used to ride with them a lot. I had a car that had more buttons and radios and stuff on it that I can probably send it halfway to Mars. My call number was 1100. I spent a lot of time in law enforcement because my background was in law enforcement from my father and my brothers. It was a hard job but an enjoyable job. Then, you know, here we're headed toward governor in '84.

Scott: When did you decide that you'd be running?

Edmisten: In those days, back when I was first attorney general, the governor served only one term. Well I think it was in 1980 that Governor [James] Hunt got on the state ballot a constitutional amendment to change the term from one to two. I know that Senator Ervin opposed it because he thought that one term is enough. A great history of me and Governor Hunt, I got along with him even though we were totally different people. See, the attorney general is separately elected. People always used to think, well, you work for the governor, don't you? No. You have what you call the council of state here. The council of state are all the elected officials—attorney general, secretary of state, labor commissioner, insurance commissioner, state auditor, lieutenant governor, superintendent of public instruction, nine of us all together, separately elected. But the one who works the most closely with the governor is the attorney general. Sometimes the governor wants rulings that you can't give.

There was tension there at times. One time I remember the governor wanted to form a department of public safety and crime because in those days the governor didn't have any law enforcement under him. He wanted to create one. He sent some emissaries over to see me while I was head of some agency. He said the governor wants the SBI to

go under the new department of crime and safety. I just flew—I said, “You go back and tell the governor that I absolutely will oppose that every step of the way. I’ll fight it on every courthouse step. I will tell the people of the state that he wants to create a police force.” I won that one, and lots of things like that. It would take me 20 days of interviewing to go into all the things that I did when I was attorney general.

About mid-way through the second full term I knew that Hunt couldn’t secede himself. Everybody in the world wants to be governor. It piled up. You used to have one term only. So they all piled up for the ’84 race. I had 10 opponents the first time when I ran for attorney general. Lo and behold, 10 again running for governor. Four or five of them were nuts.

I announced and started hard and heavy. That means you don’t get to be attorney general again. When you are filing in January of 1984, you are still attorney general. I had been working at it for three or four years anyway. Every meeting you go to, doing things you can do. The same stuff I had done before. I’m just rambling.

Scott: Let me ask you about the primary here. Who gets to go into the runoff in a primary?

Edmisten: Back when I ran, any statewide office back then you had to have over 50 percent on the first go around. So that makes it very—not possible with 10 people—and five of them with pretty good name recognition, lieutenant governor, the commissioner of insurance, the mayor of Charlotte who had been a senator all those years, all those folks. Everybody knew that it was totally impossible. We all knew that.

Scott: So how do they decide who goes into the runoff? I see you got 30 percent of the vote in that first primary.

Edmisten: The next guy got what, 28 percent?

Scott: I didn’t see that.

Edmisten: I think he got 28, I got 30 percent. Campaigning for governor is something in my life that I’d rather just push away. It was not fun. I hated it, to tell you the truth, because you are under such high pressure. I always disliked it very much when the press rode around with me. It was just unpleasant. “Gotcha” [journalism] was just starting to happen at that time. I made speech after speech after speech. I shook hands. I probably was the last guy in this state to go out and shake hands. They don’t do that now,

it's all about money. You go somewhere and you say I've got to have a fundraiser. No, I can't come unless you have a fundraiser.

Scott: How did you raise money?

Edmisten: People just believed in me. I had prison guards give me a thousand dollars in those days. That was enormous. Some prison guards! I raised for that time a huge amount of money, a couple million bucks. We won the first primary. I got the 30 percent and I think the next guy up was 28 percent or something, was the mayor of Charlotte, Eddie Knox. That means that he and I headed into the second primary.

Scott: So it's the top two?

Edmisten: Top two. And then you have all of these coalitions to build with all these other candidates. The lieutenant governor hated me because he had been under investigation by my department prior to that and he always said I was out to get him so—

Scott: He wasn't going to join your coalition! [Laughs]

Edmisten: No, no. Senator Lauch Faircloth, by the way, was in that race. He was a Democrat then. He came in third. Then the lieutenant governor was four or five. He had been tainted by all these investigations. You had the primary in May, the first Tuesday in May. Then you had one month until June, a month later you had the second primary. God it was bitter. We even had times when some of my supporters got in fights with the Knox crowd. One time I was up in Asheville and I came back to the airport to get on the plane. I campaigned on a plane, a little Barron. I noticed some kind of a scuffle out there. Well some of these Eddie Knox people got out there to heckle me and one of them punched one of my fellas and they just got in a regular fight whacking on one another with posters and signs and this and that. [Scott laughs] The SBI always traveled with me. I said "I think I better go in there to the bathroom and you go out there and diffuse that." He got out there and got that straightened out and I said, "Let's get out of here."

That year we had a couple of near misses with the wheels not coming down on the plane. I lost my campaign manager in a plane crash. This is in between the first and second primary. I lost my long-time campaign manager Charlie Smith.

Scott: He passed away in a plane crash?

Edmisten: In a plane crash leaving Asheville. The plane had five people on it. They had been at a fundraiser up there when I was in Charlotte. They took off. The

pilot—we had leased the plane—thought he was cutting off the landing lights. He cut off the engines. The plane crossed the road and crashed, falling on the tail. He was in the back. They got him to the hospital. When I heard about it I rushed from Charlotte to Asheville. My agent was doing 100, 120 [miles per hour] with the lights on, going crazy. He got up there because they didn't say that Charlie was going to die but I got up there to the Hendersonville Hospital outside of Asheville. I walked into that waiting room and this doctor walked out and just in a manner that I have never found anybody to be that cold, said, "He's dead." I said, "Doctor, what, what?" He walked away. I never got his name, it's always haunted me. Here's my man, and I'm two weeks away from the second primary. I was so badly shaken up that I had to take two days and just go home absolutely—I remember the press had always liked my manager. Charlie Smith had been around for years. They eulogized the guy and then I got back out on the trail for the next two weeks. I remember we did a memorial for Charlie over in the [state] capitol and I just broke down all to pieces. I couldn't get it out.

Then we had the second primary and I eked it out, by either 51 or, what did it say?

Scott: Fifty-one, almost 52 [percent].

Edmisten: Fifty-two. I eked it out on him. The night of the victory I remember I was over at my hotel and I called where he was to say, "Eddie, I want to thank you." He was not cordial at all. Very mad. In the meantime Governor Hunt had been running for the U.S. Senate against Jessie Helms that same year that I ran. He lost that fall. When I beat Eddie Knox, Eddie Knox had become very mad at Jim Hunt. He thought the current governor, the sitting governor, should have endorsed him. That was a stupid thing to think because I had as many people of Governor Hunt's team that were for me as there were for Eddie Knox. It was stupid. I never asked Hunt to endorse me. That's impossible. He was running for U.S. Senate. I offered to help Eddie Knox raise some money. Jim Hunt made some overtures. Eddie Knox was madder at Jim Hunt than he was me. So Eddie Knox joined up with my opponent, he picked sides and endorsed Jessie Helms, my opponent, because he was bitter. Not many people have much respect for his politics now for doing that. Both Jim Hunt and I ended up losing in the fall. I lost worse than Hunt did because the Eddie Knox people would never come with me. I couldn't battle for independents and Republicans because I was trying to get those people. The governor thing was not good.

I had a really hard time when I lost. Real hard time with it because it's hard for the average person to understand right now that you put your whole life in it, you have devoted years to achieving this and you don't win and you feel like you let down a lot of people. For about two or three months I couldn't walk past the capitol, I was so upset. We

had bought a little building over here, a nice little building. I went over there immediately and I started practicing law. In North Carolina if you don't win for governor, they're not too good to you. You've got to force your way back in to society and the political world, which I did, after I got over my grief. I just popped right back up.

Scott: Let me ask you something that I like to ask people who work in politics. How have you personally balanced your personal life with your public life and the demands of being in public office and running a political campaign? How do you balance that with being close to your family and finding time to spend with your family?

Edmisten: You don't. Linda was not particularly fond of my running, but she was magnificent on the stump. She's a real articulate, beautiful woman. And smart as hell. She would appear at forums for me. She formed a historic preservation crowd that was for me. We didn't have any children. I don't recall in one year that I ever had a sick day. You just couldn't do it. You couldn't be sick! I was doing something every day. I was on that plane or in a car going somewhere and you didn't do as much. Nobody who is running for something can really continue doing their job full time anyway. You've just got to let the other folks do it. They understood that while you are running for governor and you're the attorney general somebody else is doing most of that work for you because you're—it's hard to admit—but you're essentially campaigning on state time. I don't want that statement taken wrong, but it's just the way it is. You continue to do your job. I was in contact with my staff at all times. You forget, it's so intense running for governor in this state, and now anywhere, that you forget the things that are important to you. You never get to put your hands down in the dirt, like I did when I was attorney general. I gardened a lot. That's one of my big things. You keep in mind that your head is so focused on "I want to be governor" that you will do virtually anything that you have to. I know that for one solid year I decided, "Okay, I'm not going to drink any whiskey because I can't afford for my mind to be cloudy." And I never did for one year. I made up for it!

Scott: [laughs] In those months after?

Edmisten: Oh yeah. I made up for it. It's hard work. You see these smiling faces out there. I want to tell you one time—I'll never forget this either—I was over in Durham after I had won the primary. I don't remember who had got me there but I went to this local chicken slaughter plant. This literally happened. I went through there and this guy with one of those chain gloves that's made out of steel because they are afraid they'll get cut. I saw that hand coming toward me and it was like I knew he was going to cut me if I did it. But if I jerk away this guy's going to—he wants me to suffer because he is in there in that chicken plant with guts and stuff all over the floor. Smell awful. Yeah, I take his

hand. It cut me obviously because it's made out of steel. I had them rush me over to the Durham General and got a shot.

Scott: Because of the birds.

Edmisten: Yeah, it could have been anything. That guy, I could see in his eyes, not the hatred of me but "you got this suit on buddy and you're walking in here and I'm working in these guts all day long. I'm going to show you what it's like buddy." He put that hand out there and I knew what was going to happen. He squeezed it. [Gasps] I remember that. I said, "We need to go get a shot." And we did.

Tough stuff. The toughest thing I ever did was run for governor. Then you have the loss and I think my political history is over. You can either stay there and wallow in your own problems or you get out of there. I remember the first political meeting that I went to about a month after I lost. "By god, there is Rufus Edmisten." Money is the thing. I owed money. When that race for governor was over, I almost owed \$250,000 notes signed by me, my family, and a number of my friends who each pledged for \$10,000. I'm the only guy in history who paid back every dime. I spent a year—I had a Christmas party one time after the election and people came in and they brought their pennies, they brought their sacks of nickels and dimes.

Scott: It's like that scene from "It's a Wonderful Life" when the town comes in and helps them out!

Edmisten: There they were. I would go to places and raise funds. I remember one time I went to this little place in Stanley, North Carolina. I had these guys that were good friends of mine. We were at this steak house in Stanley. Here I'm trying to raise a little bit of money. A steak house, when you owe money, is not the right place to go because I was paying for the food. It should have been something like nachos, and stuff like that. [Scott laughs]

The two of the biggest boys in Gaston County are at that thing. They eat a side of beef a-piece. I come back owing \$27 and even taking something up there to auction off! I still came out in the hole. Twenty-seven dollars! [Scott laughs]

Other people paid, I cleared that up. When you lose, try to raise money then! You're not worth anything to anybody! [Scott laughs]

Scott: Let me ask you about something that got covered a bit in the press at the time you were running. I don't know how much of a factor it was while you were running, but I'd love to hear your opinion.

[Side conversation]

Apparently over the course of this campaign, you went in during one of these stops and said something about being sick of eating barbeque. Can you tell me? This is something that happens to people all the time and then gets caught up by the media.

Edmisten: Well it gets more and more and more and more.

Scott: So what happened?

Edmisten: Bring the Bob Gardner barbeque book back here please. It will be up there, Bob Gardner. So the staple of food in North Carolina is what? Barbeque. You got east and western, you don't take sides or you get killed. You've got vinegar based in the east. Out west it's more of a ketchup, tomato based, different kinds. I'm out at a forum. I'm at a forum at the North Carolina Recreation Association and I give my speech. After it's over with, somebody said, "You get enough barbeque to eat?" I said, "Matter of fact, I'm sick and tired of it." I said, "I hope I never see another bite in my life." I was kidding! Firestorm! [Scott laughs]

Next day: "Edmisten Attacks Barbeque." [Scott laughs] I get a telegram from my manager, Wilbur Shirley, who says, "Have you lost your mind?" NC pork producers sent me a note saying, "We're through with you."

Scott: This is getting serious?

Edmisten: This is getting serious. So I call a press conference and I said, "I know I said something that was intemperate. Obviously, the devil made me say that. I have already been to one of these things you call an exorcist. I have been to one of those fellows and they have exorcized me out of my demonic notions about barbeque. I'm back on barbeque at least three times a day." Wherever I go now, a few of the old timers, it's like the day I judged the barbeque cooking contest for the Board of Governors barbeque bash. They say, "Guess who's judging barbeque down there!" This guy here, Bob Gardner, and every book that's been written about barbeque.

Just start right there: "While barbeque serves," start right there.

Scott: "While barbeque serves a useful political purpose it can also be taxing on the body and soul over the length of a campaign. Rufus Edmisten, a mountaineer, admits his 1984 campaign for governor began to skid after he was overheard calling barbeque 'that damnable stuff!' Some 30 years ... no man has ever been elected governor of North Carolina without eating more barbeque than was good for him!" [Scott laughs] That's great.

Edmisten: So it's a standing joke. They still write articles about it. I got one right now that I saw yesterday about that barbeque thing. Cut that off and I'll go get it for you, the article.

[end recording]

Scott: One interesting thing about this article, which is really well-written, by Jim Jacobs, he does talk about the changing political climate in North Carolina during the same time that you are running for governor. In the 20th century, [James] Martin is only the second Republican to be elected governor. The politics of the state are changing at this time. What was going on?

Edmisten: It used to be that if you got the Democratic nomination, you were governor. The other time was in 1972 when McGovern was on the ticket. It just messed up things so badly. My colleague from Boone, Governor Jim Holshouser ran and won. It wasn't supposed to happen. I think that he was more surprised than anybody else that he got it. He's a nice guy, a good friend of mine now. Things were changing.

In 1984 Jesse Helms that year came ripping through North Carolina. We had Walter Mondale on the ticket. North Carolina was getting more and more conservative. Walter Mondale was seen as extremely liberal. I remember being co-chair of the NC delegation, the convention delegation out in San Francisco, and people here saw a lot of things out there happening that people had different lifestyles out there. One time my mama, I talked to her on the phone and she said, "What are you doing with those kind of people?" She saw something in the background where guys were holding hands and things like that, kissing. Just strange stuff to her. It was changing, and combine that with Ronald Reagan taking the state by almost 60 percent, I think, it was just a phenomenal amount. If Jim Hunt, governor for life, could not win, then I couldn't win.

This state was changing. The state is changing more and more. Right now you have four Republicans in the statewide office. The majority of the supreme court is Republican. The legislature is overwhelmingly Republican. The senate is veto-proof and the house almost, unless Democrats join. I think it will pretty well stand that way. We

have a governor's race right now that is very—I guess at the time when we finally get this thing done we'll know that it seems to be trending more and more and more toward—it was changing back when I ran. The old Democratic Party no longer exists. The old Republican Party no longer exists. That's nationwide. I lament that fact because it doesn't allow for any kind of cooperation. I think we discussed this in an interview about how people could get together and not be condemned. Now you get primary opposition if you say that you want to work with somebody else of another political persuasion. North Carolina has definitely changed. Of course I hated being the one to lose. It's a hard pill to take, but you get over things. There have been a lot of bumps in my life but it's all how I've handled them.

Scott: You paid off your debts and you were in private practice for a few years, but then you ran for public office again.

Edmisten: Yeah. Well my old friend, Thad Eure, who had been secretary of state longer than I had lived, he had been secretary of state for something like 52 years and when I ran for secretary of state I was 48. I think he was one of the founding fathers. He never made any mistakes about barbeque like I did! [Scott laughs] Plus I was only kidding, but I can't convince them to this day that I was only kidding. It makes too good of a story to say otherwise. Then I got back on the barbeque circuit again and got the nomination in 1988. I had been practicing law and lobbying a little bit and unhappy, not happy with what I was doing at that time.

I got the nomination. I beat three people, one of them is now Congressman Brad Miller. I think I won that primary by about 65 percent. Then I had a Republican opponent who was getting closer and closer to winning. He had a lot of money. We used to kid. I didn't beat him but by about 51 percent or something like that. Then secretary of state was a totally different role. You didn't make things happen like you did when you were attorney general. However, I took the office and I made a lot of different things. I got to regulate securities. Not that Mr. Eure didn't work hard, he was a wonderful man, he just did things the old fashioned way. I modernized the office. I became the vice chair of the economic development commission and traveled the world. The secretary of state's office has more to do with business than any other thing it does because it grants all the corporations and the filing of the UCCs and that sort of thing. It can have a lot to do with economic development. It regulates securities, ponzi schemes. I did those things. Obviously, having the experience of being attorney general, so I got to where I was enjoying that job. I traveled all over the world. The second term comes in '88-92 and you know we are getting to the bad part here? It's '92 and we're going along and then I had made some bad choices—I got everything I wanted past the legislature. Every single thing that I went for, I got done.

Scott: So you were drafting legislation?

Edmisten: Oh, yeah. We got all kinds of legislation passed to do different things. I was so perfect for the job. I had been attorney general, candidate for governor, etc. And then I'm going to admit on paper here that that old disease that gets people in politics, hubris set in and I hired some people that I shouldn't have hired. I was doing too much, letting it be a place where people in the legislature could tell me to hire certain people. I let too much of that happen.

Mind you, I'm taking the credit for some bad things that happened while I was there. There was a whole series of articles about that I had abused the office. I had people working at my home, that I had hired too many relatives. There were innuendos about this nice little girl who is still our family great friend. This was getting near the end of the term so they commenced an investigation on me from the old agency that I used to head, the SBI. Of course I was living in absolute misery hoping I wouldn't wake up some days because here, after this long career, the agency that I used to operate is investigating me. Thank goodness after several months of that I had a letter from the district attorney, and I carry it in my briefcase all the time, that said that after all this investigation, hours of investigation, so many agencies doing this and that, the district attorney finds no evidence of any criminal wrongdoing on the part of the secretary of state's office. With that I decided I wasn't going to run again. I'd already decided I wasn't going to do it before any of this happened because I needed to get out and make some money. I said "I'm just through with this." I actually left office in 1996 so that they could have a clear shot of somebody else doing it. I was extremely unhappy. I felt disgraced. I felt that I had let down my family, everybody. The thing about it though, I remember leaving that office on a Friday afternoon and with the strength of my dear wife, I opened up on Monday an office immediately.

Scott: A private practice?

Edmisten: Right over there in the Raleigh building. Here you had gone from being all those things in Watergate, you'd gone from being attorney general, candidate for governor, secretary of state, having the nomination—no other person in history had the three nominations. Lot of them had more offices than I did, but not the nomination for three of them. And then you are walking out of that building over there. I remember having an interview with Steve Ford in the *News-Observer* and I said, "You know there is no longer any room for characters in this business." He wrote a long article on that.

Scott: What did you mean by that?

Edmisten: In my public office I was always a character. I was always doing things that were not the usual person that is totally programmed. If I wanted to do it, I did it, sometimes with not too good of consequences. Then you have another one of those real dips in your life. I'll admit this was the worst one. But you know what? When I left I knew, Katherine, when I left that Friday, I remember the day. I remember the circumstances. I told my office goodbye and I said, "I'll remember all of you. Thank you." The governor appointed someone to take my place. I said, "This is not going to whip me. This will not whip me." So like that note from Bill Clinton that I showed you, that's what he was talking about. It was many years after that. He just gotten all messed up and he was talking about himself. It's not going to whip me. I said, "I think I have enough friends who will stick with me." I convened my core people together, I got about 20 people together. Immediately some of them started getting retainers for me. Within two weeks I had General Motors and Philip Morris as clients, making almost twice what I had made as secretary of state.

It took a long time to get over this. I again had to go back out and prove that "you can't keep this boy down." That was the hardest point of my life. That was the biggest challenge of my life, except whipping Guillain-Barré Syndrome, which last Thursday was five years ago. I'll tell you about that in a minute. My business just kept growing. I moved out of over there into a place that I had bought over here and still own. I bought this building. It's paid for. I have a thriving lobbying/government affairs office. I'm still very involved in a number of things. I've made more money than a person should. I'm very involved in the political life of the state, not as much partisan as before. I have a show out here that is called "The Weekend Gardener," quite often. It plays for 3 hours on Saturday morning. I appear in something called NC Spin, which is a TV program of current affairs and it's a non-rehearsed show about current events.

Scott: Mainly state-related?

Edmisten: Mainly state-related, sometimes national, but mostly state-related. I have the [NC] State Capitol Foundation that I have been a member of for almost 25 years.

Scott: How about Super Kids?

Edmisten: That is next. The Extra Special Super Kids will have its 18th season this year. It is the thing in which I am the most interested of all my charities because it started out as a Rufus Edmisten birthday party every year. It was actually a fundraiser. Once I was out of public office, I said we can't let this go because I still have, thank

goodness, a great and devoted following of people. We decided to make it a non-profit for kids who have overcome a tremendous amount of adversity in their lives. We say, if you stay straight, graduate from high school, we'll help you go to college.

It started in a very funny way. I was sitting at my desk in the secretary of state's office one day and I got a call from a principal that I had known throughout the years, Johnny Shepherd in Kinston, North Carolina. He was the principal of the state's poorest elementary schools, there in Kinston, North Carolina. Very, very poor kids. He said, "I got a real problem." I said, "What's that Johnny?" He said, "Tomorrow our group was supposed to come to Raleigh and somebody stole our bus money." I said, "Johnny, what is your group?" He said, "They are the extra special super kids." I said, "What does that mean?" He said, "Well, they have done something. They come from single parent families and they've overcome adversity and made good grades. One guy found a ten dollar bill in the hall and turned it in." I said, "I wouldn't have done that." I said, "Johnny, give me about ten minutes and I'll call you back." I picked up the phone and I called 3 of my friends and I said, "I want \$100 from you, \$100 from you, \$100 from you." I made up \$400 and I asked one of my boys—I guess they'd put you in jail for this today—one of my agents, I had sworn agents when I was secretary of state. It was all that hubris stuff. I sent the car down there with the money and they got their bus back up and came up here.

In the meantime Johnny had sent me the names of the kids because I was going to do a little surprise for them. We made up certificates to say that they were extra special super kids. It was on good parchment paper. This was good stuff. They came up here, I met them, too. I had an office in the capitol, which you'll see in just a minute. We went into the house chamber and these are, mind you, middle school kids. They had coats on that were six inches below their waist. They had shoes on that were way too big. They all dressed up. It was a big day. None of this sassy, nasty stuff. There were about 21 of them. I said, "March down this aisle here and I'm going to hand you this certificate and you shake my hand with your other hand." There were hands going every which way. I'd call the names and they'd walk down the aisle. Then I called up a buddy of mine who owned a Hardy's franchise downtown. I said, "You are going to feed 21 kids at lunch, and for free." He said, "What?" I said, "You are going to feed them."

So that was the genesis. I decided that that program made kids so proud, I started statewide and we've had a program for 17 years where we have kids who are chosen by their teachers and their peers. They have all overcome some kind of adversity, some of it really bad, parents being killed and all kinds of things. We lose a couple here and there. But we say, "If you stay in school, you stay straight, we'll help you go to college." We

can't pay the whole tuition but I do a lot of job hunting, leveraging, and we have about 27 very good stories. One of them is a dentist. One of them is a pharmacist.

We hold our annual gathering on the 4th Thursday in October at the Farmer's Market restaurant. I really put the heat on people to come. We raise about \$40,000 a year. How far can you go with that? It's amazing what I do with it. I'm very, very, very proud of that. We've got a principle of over \$400,000 that we don't touch. That's the—here I'm a lawyer and I can't even think of the word—that's our safe money. We don't touch that unless we have to. I worry about the thing continuing because I won't be here forever. The director is a wonderful man named Lloyd Hunter who is older than I am. That is a great pleasure to me.

I have the best life now that I've ever had because I have done these things. I can give the best speech on hubris that you've ever seen in your life. I've done all those things. I don't want to have to do them again. Providence, luck, fate, has a lot to do with everything in anybody's life. I don't want to go back and re-do any of that stuff. I would not do some of the stupid things that I've done. But the big lesson is that you are not going to keep me down long.

What about got me was five years ago, August 21, five years ago, I started feeling bad, like I had a horrible cold or something. I know it felt like the worst hangover I had ever had in my life. I hadn't had a thing to drink. I got to the top of these stairs up here in my office and collapsed. I went down to see my doctor who is just down the road and he said you've got Guillain-Barré Syndrome, which I had known about it. It's a horrible thing. It shuts you down, paralyzes you. So they rushed me to Rex Hospital where for one week they changed my blood, they gave me these treatments of hemoglobin, I think. Then I went through two, almost three months of rehabilitation to learn to walk again, talk again, it almost paralyzed my lungs. That was the most severe crisis I ever faced despite all that stuff. Here I am. So there you go, there is life. And there are many more adventures down the road, I'm sure. One of them, I won't be running for public office. Too nasty now, far too divisive. I've probably been vetted more than anybody.

Scott: What do you think are some of the biggest changes that you've seen in politics during your political life?

Edmisten: The absolute nastiness of the folks that are hired to destroy reputations. Both sides using the "dirt researchers" I call them. Consultants have totally ruined lives. It's not reality. It's not reality. It has taken democracy away from people. The worst decision ever handed down, next to *Plessy v. Ferguson*, was *Citizen's United*, which has altered totally the scope of America. If you are rich you get to buy somebody.

The biggest problem I have is that Congress is mainly bought now. I'm talking about your institution now.

It's mainly bought because most of the time those people who get huge contributions do the bidding of those that give them the money. As I said, *Citizens United* either has to be overturned or another Watergate is on the horizon soon. There's no question about it. You start back with Watergate and all the things that led up to it. It all comes back to lots of money lying around. I remember one time I questioned Maurice Stans and he flipped off \$1 million like it was nothing in the Watergate hearings. Huge amounts of money. I think Woodward and Bernstein recently wrote their article that said we're back where we were. It's worse than we thought. Very few of the Watergate things are around except the Freedom of Information Act has worked pretty well. They'll drag it out on you but that's one of the results of the Watergate hearing and some of the other things that were mentioned in the Katherine Scott book.

Scott: [laughs] This is turning into a plug for my book—I love it!

Edmisten: [Laughs] It's been a good life, warts and all. Ringside seat and the question is, what's next?

Scott: Next year, for example, is the 40th anniversary of the creation of the Senate Watergate Committee. I know this won't be the first time that you've participated in one of these Watergate commemorative events. Back here you've got a really cool signed thing that is an invitation to come back in 1992, to bring all the characters back from the Senate Watergate Committee and just talk. I know you've done these before. One of my questions is, what are the lessons from Watergate that you want to keep reminding us of?

Edmisten: That huge unaccountable globs of money corrupts. As Ervin said, "Power corrupts, unless it's checked." That you cannot give government officials unbridled power because human nature is designed to control information to make yourself look better. Were it not for a goodly number of public servants, the press, independent groups like the ACLU, and other interested groups, then we would have a very different form of government now. I fear that we're headed, in the wake of *Citizens United*, that we are headed towards a plutocracy where the moneyed interests are going to control about everything. I remember back when I first ran for attorney general, a \$50 contribution was really big. I was so happy about that! That was big money. And little people giving you money. I would have people send in \$4.50 and things like that. Now, really, between the bundlers—the people who collect all the money and then go get credit for it—the little guy has no voice whatsoever. It's a charade. It's all about TV, the social media, who is going to listen to any kind of speech somebody goes out and gives now?

The lessons are this: you have to control the unbridled amount of money or you lose democracy. You have to make sure that you don't bridle the press because as much as they have annoyed the hell out of me over the years, they are sometimes the only way to let people know. There seems to be now, even if I say it and I know it's not true, if I just keep saying it, it will become true. Both sides get by with that. If you say it long enough, it becomes the truth.

I can give you examples on both side right now, it's ridiculous. There's this ad that the Obama folks have put on there about that woman dying. That's very tenuous. The absolute crap that Obama has now done away with the work requirement. That's silly! The governors, and most of them Republican, asked for that waiver so they could do what they wanted to do. Obama deferred to local government, is what he did. I'm just listening to some of the things.

We're very excited about the 40th anniversary of the beginning of the Ervin hearings. We'll gather up a lot of people. The North Carolina museum of history is going to have something on it. We hope we can have some seminars and things that will interest the public.

Scott: Do people still have a sense for Watergate, do you think? When you talk to groups, how do they respond?

Edmisten: They do, if they are old enough they do. Even now, if history is taught to any degree whatsoever, even if it's from young people, but anybody who is over 50 years old and especially people who were in college, always remember Watergate because they say, when we got out of classes the first thing we did was go to the TV room. I remember when I was in college, you had a TV room, you didn't have TV in your own room. You didn't have a telephone, you had a pay phone in the hallway. Everybody that I've talked to says, "When we were in college that was our entertainment." It's amazing—I've talked to you about it before—average people were watching it. You had mechanics, you had others, being able to talk about Watergate. Nothing since can touch it. Every time they've had one, I remember my friend Fred Thompson and Senator Glenn tried to have a biggie about government intervention, but that didn't work. Iran Contra hearings looked like a convention of clowns to me rather than a hearing. They had so many people back behind the stage it looked like a bunch of owls looking out of the holes from a tree. That was a colossal failure.

Scott: Do you think Congress is capable of having an investigation like Watergate?

Edmisten: Not with the bitter partisanship that you have now. I don't know of another Howard Baker today that you could have where you had a party of the opposite of the executive branch. There were several Republicans who tried to stymie the Watergate hearings, but Howard Baker said, "No, you have to go where the truth is." I don't think you've got a Howard Baker today with the courage to do it. And whether they would do it on the Democratic side or not, I don't know either. I doubt it the way everything is so polarized. Different era, different time. Certainly there is no Senator Sam Ervin!

Your book best describes what brought all this on. There has been no event in government history that is any more important than Watergate because it took down the first president to ever walk away from there. It got the first president served a subpoena and the Supreme Court to say to the president unanimously that you can't yell executive privilege to cover up criminal activity. That's pretty heady stuff.

I think some bad stuff came out of it. I think that special prosecutor act was not like we wrote it, I can tell you that. The way that thing evolved, you had both sides out there running down people. That Whitewater thing was a disgrace. I'm no admirer of Ollie North, but that fellow who chased him all these years and spent millions of dollars. Ken Starr is a disgrace. Those things where you take people and you give them an unlimited amount of money with no ending date on it and tell them to go out and spend. They went out in Arkansas and put their children in school and joined clubs and this and that because they were after Bill and Hillary Clinton. And just as bad on that guy who was after Ollie North. He spent millions and millions. Congress has got to understand that you turn people loose like that and they've got to keep something going.

Scott: Is there anything that you think we ought to have covered that we haven't discussed?

Edmisten: When I read through this someday there will be about 15 million things that we should have covered.

Scott: We'll have an extra interview at the end.

Edmisten: I wonder what this was here [reading]: "Will judicial independence in North Carolina become the something dream?" I don't know what I wrote. I put it in the record, but I don't know why.

Scott: It was important.

Edmisten: It must have been.

Scott: Rufus, I want to thank you sincerely for spending this much time with me. It's been a real pleasure. You are a fantastic storyteller [both laugh] and we have learned a lot about the behind the scenes work in the Watergate Committee that we did not know. That's an important part of the institutional history.

Edmisten: I want the Senate Historical Office to know what staff people like me were doing during all these times, the tumultuous times, because we all know my having been a staff person and having been elected, run, eleven times, it is the proper staff that makes us get something done or maybe not done. When somebody's not elected because of bad constituent service, it's because the staff is not involved. That's why in any of my offices I had a rule that you are going to answer any letter that comes within two days. You know I'm using the term "letter" now. And you must answer the telephone that day. Now with advent of all this email stuff, I don't know what they do now.

I also want the Senate Historical Office to know that we had fun back in those days—a lot of fun! I think I told you about these parties, these grand parties of Senate staff. Fun times, there would be 300 or 400 people there. We would take buses to the races in West Virginia, just all kinds of fun, fun things.

Scott: That's what members lament now, the passing of the time when members and their staff would spend time together. That's staff from both parties, right? Getting to know your counterpart.

Edmisten: He shall remain unnamed, but there is a senator with whom I served in one of my state offices who is up there right now. I saw him about a half a year ago, he said, "This place is crazy. I don't see anybody. I walk from here to the floor. I go home on Thursday. I don't know much of anybody. No, we don't socialize." I told him what we did back when I was there. Oftentimes Senator Ervin would take us all downtown, he loved to eat at this Chinese restaurant downtown. He just loved it. Not a lot of that happens that I know of because they are having fundraisers. Nobody has fun. The other day I had the grandest time. I went up to see two of my friends, Congressman Walter Jones, Jr., and Congressman Howard Coble. We were just having fun, the three of us. Now they are Republicans, but we were just having fun and they are like that.

Scott: Let me just thank you for everything. It's been a lot of fun and we've learned a lot. We can always add more to this interview if you think of something as you

read through our transcripts that you'd like to add. Of course, our office is always open to you so you can come by and add something any time you like.

Edmisten: Thank you very much. I want to thank the Senate Historical Office for allowing you to let me ramble on. The word you use is "gab?"

Scott: You like to "gab." You are a good "gabber."

Edmisten: Yeah, gab. Thank you Senate Historical Office for allowing me to get a lot off my chest.