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Robert Allison interview with William M. Bulger, Senate President, 1978-1996

Interview date: 2017

00:00:28,800 --> 00:00:38,480

Robert Allison: Well we're delighted to be here with William Bulger who was president of the State Senate for 18 years, from 1978 until 1995.

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William Bulger: Well thank you very much, it's a delight to be back here and I'm happy to be with you Professor Allison.

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Allison: Can you tell us what brought you into political life?

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Bulger: I think as a young person I thought of it as very dramatic and exciting and I remember at Boston College High School reading the biography of James Michael Curley. It was written by a Globe reporter named Joe Dineen and the title was, 'The Purple Shamrock', and that was one of the things, there were others, a book, 'Behind the Ballots', was the name of it by James Farley who under President Franklin Roosevelt was the Postmaster General of the United States, but I just loved the stories about politics and it was very early that I came to like it.

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Allison: Did you have any particular political heroes, role models?

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Bulger: Oh well I always liked James Michael Curley and that was he was of course from Boston, Roxbury, not far away from South Boston and he, I thought he stood up to the powerful moneyed interests in Boston. We would call it at that time State Street, and the media, the Boston Herald, the Republicans, and he, Curley, I thought was a good representative of the people in the city.

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Allison: Can you think, tell us a little bit about what Massachusetts was like at about the time you got into politics, became president of the Senate, what the state of the economy was, what Boston was like?

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Bulger: Well actually I think things were reasonably good and as I recall it, it wasn't as rocky as I expected it would be and for the most part the day to day routine was simple and peaceful and I learned very quickly that even the political foes they're human beings and they have perhaps a different point of view but they earned my respect always. I had some very good, when I

reached the Senate I was 10 years in the House of Representatives and then came to the Senate in 1970 and throughout those years I just, I came to like just almost everyone I served with.

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Allison: Had you anticipated spending 35 years in the Legislature?

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Bulger: Never, no. I thought it was going to be very quick, and then I guess I must have come to like it and the constituency seemed willing to reelect me and there was a great deal I enjoyed about it. I enjoyed being at odds with the media frequently. We are elected and we owe the people, of course I'm thinking of Edmund Burke, he said, "We owe the people our judgment, and we should not sacrifice that judgment to the opinion of the people even who elected us, never mind the media." So I was ready for the give and the take of politics.

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Allison: Could you tell us a little bit about the relationship between you, the Senate, and the press when you were in the Legislature, in the State Senate?

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Bulger: Well, in fairness, and I'm saying this in retrospect, they weren't that hostile but I had a different point of view frequently from The Globe and The Herald and so I thought my task was to always form my own judgment and, again, I'm harkening to Edmund Burke, you don't surrender that to anybody and I felt, I think, strongly about that, I'm not saying heroically, but strongly and I tried to fashion my own judgments. I'm speaking about the past now and I have to be mindful that I had to be very careful that I wasn't opening up a war front in every direction because, well especially as president of the Senate, the members had a great influence on my thinking.

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Allison: Could you tell us a little bit about your path to becoming president of the State Senate?

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Bulger: The path to the presidency?

Allison: Path, yes, yeah. Did you imagine you would one day become president?

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Bulger: I don't think I ever thought I'd become president of the Senate, I don't think so. Kevin Harrington was the president. He was a very good, strong president from Salem, and I never would have believed that I would have become president initially. As time went on he, I was, it was just, I was placed in the leadership. I think the Democratic Whip, and then you become the Majority Leader, and that happened rather swiftly I think suddenly when the Majority Leader came into some difficulties in his life and left and so I moved up to become the Majority Leader.

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Allison: Do you remember what the difficulties were?

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Bulger: His difficulties had to do with, well actually he violated the law and he was, I don't know, just it's a very sad story and I know of his family and the rest. But so I don't want to dwell on it because I'm sure he's, and they, have suffered enough. But it was again his misdeeds that brought him down. And so I was suddenly in this position of Majority Leader and Harrington I think was, he liked the task but I think he was, he had been there for some time and was getting ready to leave. And I had that feeling for a while and it became more and more appealing to me and I thought I was up to the task and I knew, by the way, that I'd be, you know, South Boston, we were I thought, again this is my own sense of things, and I'm harkening back to a different time, but I thought we were misunderstood. And so we would be frequently, I remember one time when I was talking to a lady who came up, she was with the Boston Globe, and I said to her, "You know this racial imbalance," I said, "You should bring the people from Wellesley and send the children in." And I never forget her, she said, "But that would be mixing the classes." I'll never forget it. I didn't think of ourselves as an underclass. I didn't think of the minority people as such, but that seemed to be implied by her statement.

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Allison: Her perception from the Globe.

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Bulger: So and I think she wrote editorials for the Globe, and she's otherwise a very, very good person but her point of view was coming through very clearly to me that we were lesser beings and he, they, I think she may have lived in Wellesley or some other such place and so it gave me a forum. I then would easily disparage the folks from Wellesley, it's very unfair too by the way, I recognize that too, this, making it so general. And I have to say that too that when I went to those places I was always very warmly received. People would, some would take issue with some political point of view of mine, but generally it was quite friendly and almost I say it now as though I was surprised by it.

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Allison: Now do you recall much comment about a guy from South Boston being president of the Senate?

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Bulger: I don't, no I think by the time I was moving into the presidency I think they were a little bit accustomed to me. And I had become a little bit known by virtue of the St. Patrick's Day Breakfast, which I really liked, and I was the, whoever's the senator from the senatorial district there in South Boston is the toastmaster and somehow I took to that. I liked it, it was an entertainment, and it was also a way to have people see me as I would like to appear, a little bit on the light side, light headed maybe, humor and the rest. So and that became a way for me to introduce myself to a wider audience.

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Allison: Now what did you hope to achieve or accomplish in your tenure in the Legislature or as Senate President?

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Bulger: Well, I haven't thought about that for a while, but I think my hope was that the people, generally, would recognize that I was mindful of the fact that I was elected by them and once again not beholden to the powers of the media, and so I strived always to assert my independence. It probably was overdone, I had very good friends in the media, I remember David Wilson from the Boston Globe, he lived in Kingston, I visited him and his wife, Connie Wilson, and they were good friends, and he was a very conservative columnist, and, but even then, I had to always be chiding him for his role as a writer at the Boston Globe. And, oh, I probably in retrospect I have to confess that I think I overdid it. I didn't want to have too friendly a relationship. It meant, perhaps, that I was again beholden and that was something I didn't want to be. Somebody who calculated his every move in an effort to remain on good terms with the media. "Your representative owes you not his industry only, but his judgment, and he betrays instead of serving you if he sacrifices it to your opinion." Now that's Edmund Burke. I think it's a very good assertion of what a person should be. Judgment and you try to make the best judgments you can and, and I think that that point of view is appreciated by my colleagues and they elected me over and over again and I was, the Republican members were a minority. There's 40 members in the Senate and I think there's only 6, 8, maybe 10, but they were very good people. Their leader was John Parker from Taunton and David Locke ultimately from Wellesley, and both men I regard as very good friends. I still remember John Parker from Taunton, he was very mild and when I first had the gavel in my hand I started to strike the gavel and, oh, I became just too assertive, too happy with my newfound role and I still remember John Parker standing up, "Mr. President, please, just remember who you are and who you serve and remember that all of us are in the same body as you." Something was very, he admonished me but very politely and in a friendly fashion and I still remember it because I thought that was a very sage suggestion from him and I appreciated it, I think I was therefore thereafter quite mindful of it and we would have differences. I still remember May Parker, his wife, they, just the two of them and their family and she was coming down this corridor with lunch for him. I said, "My, isn't he being treated quite royally here," and she said, "He's everything I have." John Parker, and I used to tell him all the time, "You're everything that May Parker has." I don't want to stay on the subject too much, but they were as I say very good friends. And I think they helped to set a better tone than I think I would have been more reckless. I think they, I think he would settle things, and you know, "Why, don't rush that" he'd say, from his seat on my left, right next to the roster. "I want to be able to understand what we're doing here," and pretty good advice and I'm grateful for it.

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Allison: What, when you became president of the State Senate, what surprised you the most about this position or the office? You know you had been in the Senate--

00:16:38,760 --> 00:16:40,280

Bulger: I had been in the Senate for a while.

00:16:40,280 --> 00:16:47,380

Allison: --now you had seen Senate Presidents--

Bulger: Sure.

Allison: --and now you were the president, so was it all that you had expected, or were there?

00:16:47,380 --> 00:20:26,700

Bulger: I enjoyed it very much. It was very, a good job but I think, I think I was uncertain about the direction we had to take at times and you didn't always learn it from your colleagues. They're looking to you at this point to give a degree of leadership and so you do have to do some thinking. Some serious thinking about the issues of the day. Excuse me, I've got to take a little, thank you. But and also you had, members we come in all shapes and sizes and the very best can have their off days. I remember one senator was undergoing I think a really a long term nervous breakdown, he was having a very hard time. And his mother, through her other son, the senator's brother said that I should be a little patient and they were going to try to get him some help and for that reason I had to be very careful, he would stand up and disparage everyone including and especially me, and he, but he was having, there was no question from his behavior that he was undergoing some sort of huge stress and I had to be very careful because the fear was that if I named him in the Senate he would be off the payroll, and lose his you know right to whatever kind of help he should have as a member of the body. And he had a terrifically hard time of it and that was trying. I remember one of the senators, I won't name him, but he was impatient with me because he thought I was too tolerant and I remember standing up, I remember his words, they were pretty harsh. He said, "Where I come from, if we have a nut we crack it." And the poor guy who he's speaking about really was undergoing terrific stress, and the fellow who was really expressing his impatience with me because he was tired of the antics, of the senator who was having this difficulty, was really admonishing me. And he had, I think he was correct but I also knew it was a balance to be achieved and by the way that's, balance, we're always seeking to achieve it. We have a point of view on one side and on the other, and can we be fair with everyone. Now this is not an instance of just difference of opinion, I recognize that but I think I owed a duty to both the body as well as to the individual senator and somehow I had to strike a balance. Is that too much?

00:20:26,700 --> 00:20:40,740

Allison: No that's very good. That does bring up, again, your leadership style, how would you characterize it, what do you see as most effective about it, least effective about it?

00:20:40,740 --> 00:23:12,200

Bulger: I hope that it was very inclusive and I hope that no one ever felt that he couldn't approach me with a particular problem, sometimes the matters that come before the body are very local in nature. You don't know what the situation is in some isolated area or something. So you had to be really willing to listen to the point of view that's being expressed. And I think that I tried always to do that, I hope I did. Perhaps if you check around you'll find someone who would disagree with that but I think most would agree we kept an open door for everyone, and,

excuse me, bear in mind the Senate is only a 40 member body. You come to know everybody in here. It's small and it can almost be something of a, I say this in the best sense of the word, a club. How do we deal with this? There's a whole array of points of view out there, and we have to find a way to sort it out and come to a just, rational conclusion. And meanwhile you're being chided by members of the media, they have a stronger point of view, they have no reason not to, and they can be very impatient with you and even offended by it. Maybe justifiably at times, but nevertheless it can be quite antagonistic. I will say I'm speaking of that as though it were an everyday habit but it's not the case, just most of the time at the people with whom you'd be dealing here, they come to know you and it really I think it gets easier.

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Allison: So it, the Senate functions differently from the House then.

00:23:17,060 --> 00:25:59,860

Bulger: True. The Senate does indeed function differently from the House. The House, originally I think there were 240 members and later a constitutional convention limited to 160 members but even there that's four times the number in the Senate. And it can be quite hurly-burly and the speakers in turn they can be, John Forbes Thompson was speaker, from up in Ludlow, he's a very good man, he was in the Second World War and he had shrapnel in his legs as I understand it and he would, I thought he was a very good person, John Thompson, and he could lose patience with me when I was over there because I think I would, I said, "Ludlow?", I said, "I can't even find it on a map of Massachusetts." "Well it's there!", he'd say. And there was, and I stood way at the back of the chamber I remember and would engage in little sporadic debates but I enjoyed it and the members because it could be a tedious day, humdrum, you'd be dealing with budgetary items, it can be dry, important, but dry, and occasionally I would succumb to the temptation to bring a little more life to the body and you know ask the person, there was one fellow his name was Harrison Chadwick, he's a very good man, but I had great fun with his two last names, like Endicott Peabody, and that meant, and I'm just you know unfairly stereotyping. That meant they were Yankees and therefore they were here, and I know I chided, I think it was Bill Weld one time. I said, "I know who your forebears came over on the Mayflower." "Oh no", he said, "that was the help, we sent the help over on the Mayflower to get the place ready." Weld had an answer for everything. And he had a wonderful sense of humor, and I think that's, I'm saying it again but valuable.

00:25:59,860 --> 00:26:13,080

Allison: How would you go about assembling your team, you know committee chairs, office staff, the people you would rely upon to help keep the Senate functioning?

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Bulger: Well, of course, I had been the Majority Leader and as president I would be appointing Democrats to the chair of the committees, but there were all sorts of very worthy candidates on the other side and there's plenty of room for them. And they could be very active and valuable in the positions and I think I always listened to them, where would you like to go, what would you, and we had before my arrival there had been problems with the Senate Ways and Means

committee and so I placed Senator Patricia McGovern from up in Lawrence, she was in charge of the committee of Ways and Means and she did a very good job and I knew she was a wonderful person. As was from Concord, Senator Chester Atkins who later became a congressman but each of those were my choices for Ways and Means and in each case it's the same, please make sure that everything is just run properly here so that whatever had transpired before, some scandalous episode is never our experience. And I had as I say very good people in those positions, both McGovern and Atkins.

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Allison: Were there any scandalous episodes during your tenure?

Bulger: Any?

Allison: Were there any scandalous episodes during your tenure?

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Bulger: I don't recall, there could very well have been.

00:28:03,100 --> 00:28:06,360

Bulger: If you have anything in mind--

Allison: I don't.

Bulger: --I'm happy to address it.

00:28:06,360 --> 00:28:14,180

Bulger: But I don't think we, I think we were spared that, I think.

00:28:14,180 --> 00:28:17,780

Allison: Now had Chester Atkins and Patricia McGovern been strong supporters of yours?

00:28:17,780 --> 00:29:11,090

Bulger: Yes they were. They were both very friendly to me and that's, yeah you, that's another thing people might say, 'So and so would be a perfect,' but you can't punish your allies. Those who were with you have to have some kind of priority in the consideration, however contentious or unlikeable that might be for people it's true, and you have to keep in mind those who assisted you. You should indeed be favorable too. Whatever the world says.

00:29:11,200 --> 00:29:18,880

Allison: Now what were some of the bigger challenges you or the Senate faced during your tenure?

00:29:20,980 --> 00:29:25,700

Bulger: Do you have anything that you could remind me of at that time?

00:29:29,700 --> 00:29:32,860

Allison: Any big issues in the state, the state budget?

00:29:32,860 --> 00:30:08,840

Bulger: The state budget was always a big issue and you know they will say that of me, they say, "Oh if you're his friend, he'll give you a bridge even if you don't have a river," and they'll be joking with the fact that you'll be listening to people but you do have to heed the wishes and warnings of folks in the body, but nothing comes to my mind at this moment.

00:30:08,840 --> 00:30:17,600

Allison: Ok. Now what did you hope to achieve when you became Senate President? Did you have an agenda or things you hoped that would happen?

00:30:17,600 --> 00:33:39,440

Bulger: Well I always wanted, I wanted people out there to know that we were truly representative of their points of view and I wanted to increase their confidence in the body and what happens, isn't it Churchill you know, "politics is more exhilarating than war, in war you can be killed only once." The fact is people make errors. Not necessarily you know terrible grievous ones but enough to cause embarrassment to themselves and a great deal of unrest in the world beyond. So that's a constant concern. I would also say, a little bit critical of the media, they have to make it interesting too. It's a business for profit. They have to sell their product and the larger the circulation, the higher the rates for the advertising revenue, right? The, so and what sells? Negativity and sensationalism. And so there can be huge distortions. But I would say that if how and I still recall thinking how, I remember asking Mary Newman she was a member of the House of Representatives, actually from Cambridge. I said, "Do you think we're a little worse than everyone else? About the same as everybody out there? Or better or what?" and Mary Newman used to, she would think about questions and answer them and I still recall she, she said, "You know I always say," she said, "it's only an opinion, but I think perhaps the run of the mill we're a little above." I was happy to hear that, she had been here longer than I and she certainly was a very sage observer of things but that was her opinion at that moment and I was happy to hear it. I had the same feeling myself. But our faults, they're all part of our human nature, they're there too and they're going to be well noted. And, but it can be distortive. Because I think, I think the fact is most of them, most of the men and the women I served with I think they're very, very good people, each of them coming certainly at the outset with an intention to do good things and to be good public servants and there can be some who can become wayward, we're human beings but as a general observation I thought they were really virtuous.

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Allison: Can we talk a little bit about the legislative process, how the legislature works, and what if it shifts at all during your tenure, if you remember any changes in the way the House, the Senate worked?

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Bulger: I think the House during my seasons there became a little more democratic if you will.

00:34:10,340 --> 00:34:12,120

Allison: Is that with a big "d" or a small "d"?

00:34:12,120 --> 00:34:52,000

Bulger: The small "d". It was initially I think Thompson, Second World War, a good, very good man, but iron fist. The iron, I think he was the 'iron duke', and he was, he could be tough, and if you would stand up to be recognized or something, he'd gavel you right down. And so, he was personally tough and also a tough speaker.

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Allison: Can I ask about? He vacationed in Florida once, didn't he? Do you remember the story of the speaker was in Florida?

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Bulger: Yeah.

00:35:01,320 --> 00:35:08,960

Allison: And he was under attack, criticism for that.

Bulger: Yes he was, the speaker was in Florida. Was I defending him?

00:35:08,960 --> 00:35:10,680

Allison: Yes, saying that he deserved his rest.

00:35:10,680 --> 00:35:31,120

Bulger: He deserved rest. Because something, I was being facetious I guess. And telling them how badly, how much he needed a rest, and the hard days he put in and so on. And I think he told me later, "Do me a favor, don't defend me anymore." Something like that, it's ancient history.

00:35:31,120 --> 00:35:35,160

Allison: It is. So it does change after Thompson, it becomes more democratic?

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Bulger: I think so. After Thompson, who became speaker?

00:35:40,380 --> 00:35:41,100

Allison: I can't remember.

00:35:41,100 --> 00:35:49,600

Bulger: Oh gosh. But there were, I forget who became speaker. Oh, David Bartley!

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Allison: Right.

00:35:49,980 --> 00:36:54,180

Bulger: I think Dave Bartley, and he, Bartley, came from out west, Springfield, and he had a much more even hand. And Bartley was good, I think he, Holyoke, very good person, and on this side of the Legislature, the Senate, the speaker was also from up that way, Holyoke, I just had his name, that's terrible, but, but a very good Senate President also, and they were both from Holyoke. I used to criticize, I said, "It's not even in Massachusetts." And they, "you should be in Albany." Things like that, picking on the people from out in the west. Western Massachusetts had a very unfavorable view of the Boston/Eastern Massachusetts.

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Allison: And you helped alleviate that?

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Bulger: And I helped, no. No I worsened it, talking about the, I don't know, what are the hills out there? The Berkshires. And I said these are people they're right out of the hills, I said many of them are wearing shoes for the first time, they'd be standing to give a speech in refutation, and, but they're great folks, Maurice Donahue is the President I was trying to, but they were very good, and I also must say blessed with a sense of humor.

00:37:42,570 --> 00:37:46,480

Allison: Do you find others in the state legislature had a sense of humor? Does that help with anything?

00:37:46,480 --> 00:39:20,340

Bulger: Oh I think so. I think generally people they get elected they better have a sense of humor. It can be very tough. It, you know, the critics, it can be hurtful, much less to yourself than for people around you. I think, and you've come here voluntarily, and you know in advance that there's going to be a great deal of that, that goes with the job but the people around you they don't expect it, they think you're quite wonderful and no one should disparage you ever. But that's part of it, but I also say I'm talking about it now as though it was a major matter. I must say that most of the people I served with took it very much in stride and, they may have a column or an editorial cut out from their papers, "look at what they're saying." They'd be surprised at it. But, that's what sells. Don't you know and, you know, we've, it's part of it. It'll be forever thus, it's a democracy, and people have their rights and also they have the right to be wrong.

00:39:20,880 --> 00:39:32,130

Allison: Very true. Now you mentioned Governor Weld, I wonder if you could talk a little bit about your relationship and the Senate's relationship with the different governors during your years in office.

00:39:32,130 --> 00:41:41,840

Bulger: I got along very well with Governor Weld since you mention him. I thought he was a very good governor. And I, as I say, he had a very good sense of humor he, I remember one time, he just for the fun of it I think he had a can of beer or something at two o'clock in the

afternoon or something and I said, well I got outside the chamber at the governor's office and the press was out there and I say, "Was he you know misbehaving?" "No, no I didn't notice that." And I got back to my office and I called him and I said, "I know you're only having a little fun, but don't do that because somebody, they're asking," and I said, "you don't even, I didn't even realize the press was outside." But he did tell me, and I always appreciated this, he says, "I knew you'd never say a word." And he's very good, and by the way he didn't abuse it at all it was just part of the, I used to think of him as sort of a big college kid from Harvard and enjoying whole political realm and the life and everything, he was very respectful of it, he worked hard at it, but in the meanwhile I have to say he always enjoyed it. He was pretty kindly to people. I think he was a very good person and well I know him to be a very good person, and that was true of Michael Dukakis, we joked about it with even Kitty his wife, and everybody would say Michael is a stiff very, and there's some validity to that, but a very good person, Dukakis, and we were good friends and--

00:41:41,840 --> 00:41:43,360

Allison: You had served in the House together.

00:41:43,360 --> 00:42:21,670

Bulger: Yes we did, and I told him how my teacher at Boston College would say, "If you know the ancient Greeks", he taught ancient Greek, "you don't have to know anyone else." And I'd say "But what about Michael Dukakis?" "He's a new Greek." He disagreed. The old professor was very conservative. Michael of course was liberal. His only difference with Dukakis was political. But, but it was a good experience.

00:42:21,670 --> 00:42:28,200

Allison: What kind of relationship did the Senate have with the House in your time, what can you tell us about that?

00:42:28,200 --> 00:44:04,520

Bulger: I think it was pretty good. Bartley, I got along very well with Bartley. McGee, he was very good, he could be volatile, Tom. Tom actually he was in the Second World War, he was on Iwo Jima. I always remember him telling me that somebody came running up the beach to tell him that a kid, I think the fellow's name was like O'Brien from, whatever it is, the parochial school in Lynn, he's just got killed on the beach and McGee telling me about it he said, "I just couldn't believe it you know", but it was St. Mary's in Lynn, and McGee, he had stories to tell about the war. Some of them were just horrific. I remember him saying that, again Iwo Jima is very small island and he told me that the, when they had pushed ashore, the Japanese were on the other side of the island and they knew they were doomed and they were leaping off cliffs with a hand grenade and perishing in the fall. But he said that we could see them from a distance and I think he must have been really horrified by it because he would speak of it from time to time.

00:44:05,400 --> 00:44:18,040

Allison: You think this generation that saw that, endured that, survived that what they--

Bulger: I think so.

Allison: --then see in the 70s, 80s, 90s is much less shocking or gives it a certain perspective?

00:44:18,040 --> 00:45:06,800

Bulger: There's no question, they, he, he was not inclined to tell war stories but he would lapse into that description or what I've just given you from time to time. He must have really felt for, and of course I think he even said at one point or another and you know every one of those people has parents, siblings, wives, he knew that. He must have been a very young person at that time. But he, anyway ancient history.

00:45:08,440 --> 00:45:14,380

Allison: Now can you recall any significant constitutional conventions during your tenure?

00:45:14,940 --> 00:46:51,910

Bulger: Yeah, we had, we would hold constitutional conventions, the Senate marches over to the House, the Senate President presides, and then we deal with matters of, there was one for example to abolish the Governor's Council. There's, the Governor's Council of course was a body that was elected to keep a check on the governor when the governor was appointed by the King of England, as you know the governor is no longer appointed by the King of England. He's elected and therefore there's probably less need for a Governor's Council, on the other hand, all of us know members of the Governor's Council and it's a very minor job I guess but it's one that they don't want to give up. And so we would, I don't know, I think I voted to keep it, and I think I would give the argument that it's not necessary, I agree with that, but it does no harm. I said they're nice people, they go there each day and they do very little, they have very little power, and why offend them, and by the way once again I'd be hearing from them, "Don't defend us, let somebody else do that." That was, but the Governor's Council it was all gone now isn't it?

00:46:51,910 --> 00:46:52,620

Allison: No they're still around.

00:46:52,620 --> 00:47:02,220

Bulger: Oh they're still here? Oh I forgot, oh my gosh I forgot, they're still here, but they, they're very, it doesn't do much.

00:47:02,220 --> 00:47:13,560

Allison: No, but why offend them? So you've talked a little bit about the relationship with the minority party. I wondered if you could tell us a little bit more about how the minority party functions in the Senate?

00:47:14,760 --> 00:50:04,260

Bulger: Well first of all, be mindful of the fact always that it's a very small number of members, and therefore everyone knows each other quite well. And the, there's no barrier by way of party. John Parker was among the best friends I think I ever had. And I admired him, had great respect for him, and he was a worthy opponent. He would, if I was moving too fast, and he

couldn't catch everything that I was saying, he'd be on his feet and inform me that I should slow down and be respectful of the members. It's our business as much as it is your business. He was like a teacher, and he had a little more age, mileage on me and so I had to be respectful. And David Locke, he could be more rambunctious, but again, he was the Assistant Minority Leader and again a very worthy opponent and colleague and he would be very outspoken, but he'd admonish less the Chair I think, and certain other members if they were becoming overly rambunctious, overly dramatic about something, he'd say, "Let's tone this down, and follow reason, whither so ever it takes us," and he would council that very firmly though. He was a very strong individual, Locke. And I used to chide him because he came from Wellesley, and that's where the federal judge who was interfering with the Boston schools came from. And I would tell him I like foreign travel but I would never go to Wellesley. I thought I was above it, so I'll just fly right over it. Wellesley, and every now and then I'd run into somebody from Wellesley and they'd say, "You know I don't like what you say about Wellesley." Occasionally and, but again generally, I will say this that people have a good sense of humor and I know I'm repeating myself, it's a, we're the only ones who can laugh, right? And it's an important quality.

00:50:04,900 --> 00:50:23,530

Allison: It is yes. Now you already have spoken a good deal now about your relationship with the media and the Senate and can you tell us a little bit about how you or your staff would interact with the press?

00:50:23,530 --> 00:53:26,600

Bulger: Well first of all, I thought it was very important since I disagree with the press on many things, their points of view I didn't appreciate and so I thought it was very important that we remain independent of them. I thought frankly that some people who are elected forget who elected them and succumb to this inclination to be beholden always to the media, the media it's a strong voice, it's the only voice really, we don't have as large an opportunity. If we criticize them, they take it, they can take it very, very seriously. I remember joking about and David Wilson telling me that they didn't like it at the Globe because I had mentioned the masthead Bill Taylor, Davis Taylor, John Taylor, and the June Taylor Dancers, which were the people who were featured on the Jackie Gleason show each day, each week, so I and I still remember David Wilson said, "You know, they hear every word you say and they're not forgetting it." He wasn't really begging me not to do it, I think he had a quiet enjoyment of it but he was just cautioning me that they were not happy about it. That even intrigued me because I thought they were so powerful, so mighty over there on Morrissey Boulevard or on Washington Street at first. They just, why should they be so touchy but I think they are sensitive. And there's validity to what David Wilson would tell me. On the other hand, the only serious thing I want to remark is that we should not be run by them. Constitutionally we're elected by the people. We should be mindful always of the people that elected us, even when they themselves may disagree with a point of view that we think is a valid one and one that we should pursue. We should be respectful and mindful of their interests, and that's what we're seeking to protect and guide and, their interests, and it can be, it's a very interesting subject and it was a very frequent subject even in this room talking about how people out there felt. We had to, again, be

respectful but we also should be aware that, as Edmund Burke says, "We owe them our best judgment."

00:53:28,700 --> 00:53:40,160

Allison: Good. Now let's think a little bit about your legacy, your accomplishments. Looking back what would you say is your biggest accomplishment?

00:53:41,380 --> 00:55:53,780

Bulger: I'm not sure how to address that. I don't think much of, about it. I hope that, I hope I had an appreciation of public service and elective office. And I hope that I encouraged others to see its value and to recognize the need for people to come forward and to, you know, to deal with the vicissitudes of public life and I hope there will always be people who are willing to do it and always be mindful that a great deal of hurt is almost inescapable. It has to come, and all of the, I'm talking about the criticism as though it's something bad. The fact is, it's not. Some of it is misplaced and the rest like any observations. But it has its place in the whole realm. There's a matter of fact, there's a need for it. People should scrutinize what we do, and they should have their say in any public forum where they wish to make their feelings known. It's just, it goes with the territory. I will say this, there's a sense I really believe there's a sense in most people who are elected that all of this is so, and we should expect it, and nobody should be surprised by it, or be upset that there's going to be criticism, some of it valid some of it unreasonable.

00:55:54,780 --> 00:55:59,640

Allison: Now do you have any big regrets, disappointments in your tenure?

00:56:00,660 --> 00:59:21,900

Bulger: I can't think of anything, but I'm sure there are things. I wish, I wish I had been more able to be critical of the court system, the federal court system particularly. When they get into broad decisions there should be a, the judicial decision should be pointed I think in dealing with a particular, but when a, the federal court, as it did in Boston, gets itself into areas that it's really it shouldn't be, it can do things however noble the purpose that things that could be so counterproductive. I thought they did that in Boston. The school system, I think, it just became overwhelmingly non-white because of white flight and that was so foreseeable. If you're going to tell people, "Well if you live here we can ship your children all over the place based on skin color," and so and people are fearful, they don't want to stand up and say, "Well I those are my children I want them to go down the street to school or I want to have the final say in it," and, but if they're going to be characterized as something racist or worse, then they almost have no choice but to leave, in fact some many of the people who were the most I said liberal leaning in the city of Boston, as soon as the federal judge overstepped I think his proper power, as soon as he did that, they left. They were the first. Ironically the ones from Charlestown and South Boston, who were very widely disparaged, they remained in the face of it and made the best they could of it and huge sections of Dorchester they just disappeared overnight, and that always, I used to chide them about that, I said, "You have a great deal of rhetoric about your liberal point of view but your behavior is contrary to it. You should be here." And I still remember, I'm probably going back to something I said, but telling one of the liberals, "Well

can't you even get people to come in from Wellesley?" and, "Well that will be mixing the classes," in that view, and I had never thought of ourselves as classes at that time, but that was the point of view advanced by those who disagree. But it's ancient history, isn't it?

00:59:22,900 --> 00:59:30,420

Allison: It is. What advice would you give to future presidents of the State Senate?

00:59:32,280 --> 01:02:17,920

Bulger: I would say first of all, you're very fortunate if you've been elected by your colleagues to this job because the, your constituency here is small, and you can be in touch with each and every one of them, they know what you're doing and even they'll be obviously moments of disagreement. If they understand the basis of your disagreement it's very unlikely that they're going to hold it against you. That they have a point of disagreement and I would say just make sure that you keep a good rapport going between yourself and each and every member. It'll contribute to the, you know, the peace of the place, the body, and it'll be reassuring to these folks that there's at least a rational basis for your different point of view. They're very, again people who are elected to office, they're very respectful of people's strong holds on different points of view. They are respectful of it. They have strong views themselves and they understand it. I think that's why we can have legislative bodies, it keeps us from war. If people didn't, it would be chaotic. If in fact there weren't people who could come together, and in a very rational, grown up way, meet and seek to resolve huge differences there would be, it would be a tragedy if in fact people who were out in the world didn't have the communication and thought they had to, they had a basis to fight seriously, physically do battle, over the differences. It's the legislative body that sends, that receives people who are sent by all of these constituencies, and there's an effort by worthy people to resolve differences. It keeps our democracy going.

01:02:20,600 --> 01:02:22,520

Allison: Thank you, anything you'd like to add?

01:02:22,520 --> 01:02:24,760

Bulger: Thank you for the interview.

01:02:24,760 --> 01:02:26,120

Allison: Thank you.