

Oral History Center
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

David Sickler

A Lifetime as Labor Organizer, AFL-CIO Leader and Champion of Immigrant Workers

Interviews conducted by
Lisa Rubens and Danny Beagle
in 2014

Copyright © 2016 by The Regents of the University of California

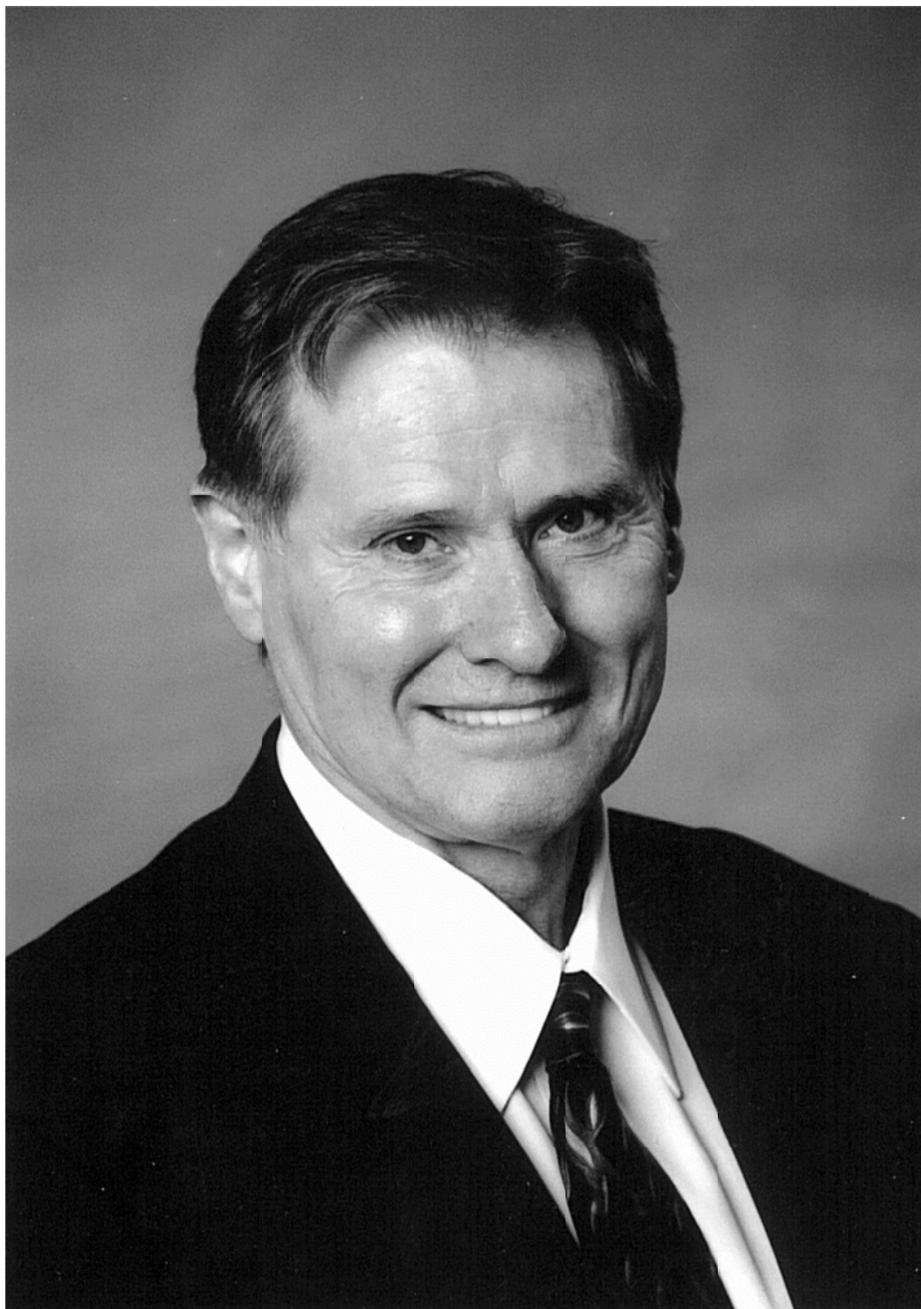
Since 1954 the Oral History Center of the Bancroft Library, formerly the Regional Oral History Office, has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

All uses of this manuscript are covered by a legal agreement between The Regents of the University of California and David Sickler signed July 15, 2014. The manuscript is thereby made available for research purposes. All literary rights in the manuscript, including the right to publish, are reserved to The Bancroft Library of the University of California, Berkeley. Excerpts up to 1000 words from this interview may be quoted for publication without seeking permission as long as the use is non-commercial and properly cited.

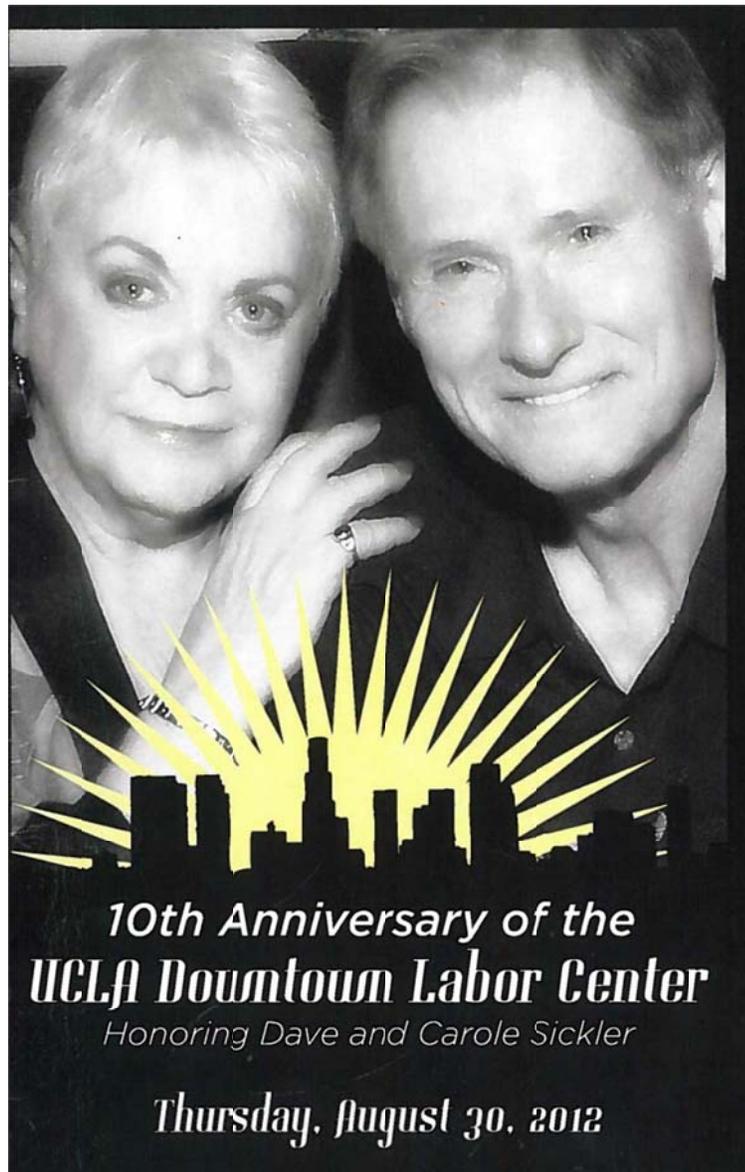
Requests for permission to quote for publication should be addressed to The Bancroft Library, Head of Public Services, Mail Code 6000, University of California, Berkeley, 94720-6000, and should follow instructions available online at <http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/ROHO/collections/cite.html>

It is recommended that this oral history be cited as follows:

David Sickler, "David Sickler and Carole Sickler: A Lifetime as Labor Organizer, AFL-CIO Leader and Champion of Immigrant Workers," conducted by Lisa Rubens and Danny Beagle in 2014, Oral History Center, The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley, 2016.



David Sickler, photo courtesy David Sickler



David and Carole Sickler

David Sickler has a long and distinguished career as a labor organizer, as a leader within the AFL-CIO and as an innovator of efforts to organize immigrant workers. At 18, he began work on the bottling line at Coors Brewing Company in Golden Colorado, soon becoming a shop steward and then business manager of Brewery Workers Union, Local 366. Following a strike in 1977, AFL-CIO President George Meany picked Sickler to head the national boycott of Coors Beer, a struggle that lasted ten years and led to a successful resolution, and became a model campaign emulated by other unions. In 1986 Sickler was appointed AFL-CIO Regional Director as well as the Executive Director of the Los Angeles-Orange Counties Organizing Committee. Following passage of the Immigration Reform Act in 1988, he established the Labor Immigrant Assistance Project and the AFL-CIO Immigrant Workers' Association. Subsequently he was the senior labor advisor to Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa, as Commissioner of Public Works, and as Executive Director of Employment Relations at the L.A. Department of Water and Power. Beginning in 2009 Sickler was Southern Regional Director of The California State Building and Construction Trades Council. He has served as Chair of the UCLA Center for Labor and Research Advisory Committee and as a member of the Board of Directors of the Pat Brown Institute.

Table of Contents—David Sickler

Interview History by Lisa Rubens	xi
Interview 1: March 24, 2014	
Audio File 1	1
<p>Acknowledging Carole Sickler and Danny Beagle’s role in the interview — Birth and family background — Developing a social conscience: understanding the political make-up of Golden Colorado and the centrality of Coors Brewing Company — Not on a high school academic track — Reflections on family life: impact of father’s accident; going to work at an early age — Variety of work experiences — Hired at Coors — The work processes and culture at Coors — Depiction of the Coors family: their history in right-wing politics; placing Coors in the context of brewing and manufacturing in the USA</p>	
Audio File 2	24
<p>Becoming interested in union politics — Becoming a union activist: learning the contract; assuming leadership; seeking labor education; importance of a mentor in Denver — Organizing at Coors: stopping a strike; negotiating with the company; putting out a newspaper; organizing over-the-road truck drivers; the role of Vietnam vets — Personal views on Vietnam</p>	
Audio File 3	43
<p>Winning significant battles at Coors — Becoming the Western Regional Field Representative for the AFL-CIO — Going to Los Angeles to learn about the Los Angeles/Orange County Organizing Committee [LAOCOC], the AFL’s leading organizing group — Trying to create an organizing program for Montana, Wyoming and Idaho — AFL-CIO President George Meany asks Sickler to head the national boycott of Coors beer — Background to the Coors strike — Specific organizing campaigns: working with the farmworkers and the gay community in San Francisco; targeting distributors; meeting extraordinary community organizers; working with outstanding LAOCOC staff</p>	
Audio File 4	65
<p>AFL-CIO makes additional assignments to Sickler and reduces time allotment on Coors boycott — Being strategically “ingenious” — Bamboozled by a 60 Minutes account of the Coors strike — Coors initiates negotiations with AFL-CIO — Going to work with LAOCOC and running the boycott: Los Angeles a huge Coors market; working with neighborhood groups, car clubs, colleges and labor representatives — Working with the AFL-CIO structure — Organizing immigrant workers — Working with HERE [Hotel Employees and Restaurant Employees</p>	

Union] — Carole Sickler discusses her career with HERE; overview of the union movement among food workers in Los Angeles

Interview 2: March 25, 2015

Audio File 5

86

Reflections on brother Dwight Sickler: role in strike at Coors; managing the boycott in San Francisco; a shop steward for the Teamsters — Discusses the high degree of scrutiny placed on unions — Sued by Coors for exposing dangerous practices — Devising strategies to undermine Coors: pasteurization legislation; supporting candidates including Pat Schroeder — Discusses Coors substantial influence in state and national politics: creating a political agenda for Ronald Reagan; establishing the Heritage Foundation — Observations on George Meany — Effect of the transition from George Meany to his successor Lane Kirkland — More stories about the Coors boycott: role of AFL-CIO and California's State Federation of Labor; Coors' response; more on the 60 Minutes broadcast; Dave's fateful meeting with Joe Coors — Interview with Carole Sickler: variety of labor and political campaign experience; family background; marriage to Chuck Hogan, head of LAOCOC; working for Bill Robertson, Executive Director L.A. Federation of Labor; becomes Program Coordinator; marriage to Dave Sickler after Hogan's death; working for L.A. Fed Executive Assistant Miguel Contreras; reflecting on important women leaders in Los Angeles; the work of overseeing twenty committees; assisting the Coors boycott

Audio File 6

107

More on Carole Sickler's work with L.A. Fed: Committee on Political Education — Impact of Executive Treasury Secretary, James [Jim] Wood — Miguel Contreras succeeds Wood; hires Fabian Nunez as Political Director; impact on Carole's position — Carole and Dave discuss the importance of LAOCOC: blocked by AFL-CIO; funded by local unions — The rise of union-busting organizations and union response to anti-labor consultants — Dave's involvement with immigration reform: reckoning with Immigration Reform and Control Act [IRCA, 1986] — Teresa Sanchez and Labor's Immigrant Assistant Project — Formation and activities of California Immigrant Workers Association [CIWA] — Aside on Front Lash, the AFL-CIO counter to Students for a Democratic Society — Dave appointed AFL-CIO Western Regional Director

Audio File 7

127

Major campaigns of LAOCOC and Immigrant Assistant Project coincide — Organizing American Racing Equipment workers — Organizing drywall workers — More on Dave's appointment as Regional Director — Working with HERE in Las Vegas; Frontier Hotel Strike — Working in Hawaii and Guam — Working on national issues such as minimum wage and NAFTA; role of Dianne Feinstein; working with Peter Olney — Justice For Janitors — Power struggles within the

AFL-CIO over succession to Lane Kirkland; incident with the Alameda County Labor Council — John Sweeney elected President AFL-CIO

Audio File 8

148

Effect of Sweeney's election — L.A. MAP [Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project] — Formation of APALA [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance] — Appointed special assistant to John Sweeney — Strawberry workers' campaign — Hired by California State Building and Construction Trades Council [SBCTC] — Discusses Carpenters Union

Interview 3: July 14, 2014

Audio File 9

162

Changes at the AFL-CIO — More on being appointed special assistant to Sweeney — Other job offers — Working with Art Pulaski at the California State Federation of Labor — Reflections on Robert "Bob" Balgenorth, President, California State Building Trades Council — More on working on immigration issues and organizing drywall workers — Relationship with Doug McCarron, President, United Brotherhood of Carpenters — Assessment of the state and national building trades: organizational structure; members' connection to their individual unions — Developments in the construction industry and efforts by non-union contractors to destroy unions — Importance of educating school board officials — Fighting Associated Building Contractors (ABC) — Service on State Allocation Board — Lessons about the construction industry — Memories of working construction with his father — Recruiting immigrants; getting federal and state funding for ESL teachers — Working with Jack Henning, Secretary Treasurer of California State Labor Federation and California State Assembly Speaker Willie Brown

Audio File 10

181

More on working with CIWA — Working with Catholic Charities — More on working with Jack Henning and Willie Brown: saving the Labor Center at UC Berkeley. More on working with the building trades; jurisdictional issues not handled at local or state level — Transcending jurisdictional issues to work on political issues and Project Labor Agreements — History of Project Labor Agreements — Women coming into the building trades — Programs to bring African-American youth into the building trades — Working for Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa; program to study implementation of apprenticeship programs — Project Labor Agreements used as a vehicle for affirmative action — Getting Project Labor Agreement legislation through the L.A. City Council — Divisions within labor on mayoral election between James Hahn and Villaraigosa — Working with UCLA Labor Center; serving as chair of Advisory Board — Working to defeat Proposition 226, Governor Wilson's attack on labor

- Audio File 11 203
- Working on Proposition 42 regarding funds for state transportation projects — Recalling working as a union carpenter in Colorado — Building Trades campaign to regain jobs in residential market — Working with affordable housing groups — Working on the prevailing wage issue and charter city campaigns — Reflections on Bob Balgenorth — More on working for Mayor Villaraigosa; focus on mayor’s relationship with city unions — Relationship to councilmember Bernard Parks — Appointed Public Works Commissioner; repairing streets in Santa Monica.
- Audio File 12 226
- More on street work in Santa Monica — “Perks” of being a commissioner — Working with the film industry; reducing fees and developing a better relationship — Reassigned to Department of Water and Power (DWP) and working with Brian D’Arcy, Business Manager of Local 18, International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers (IBEW) — Problems at DWP — Reflections on Mayor Villaraigosa — Relationship with SEIU and organizing security guards — Reflections on Mayor Tom Bradley — Settling grievances at DWP — Personal health issues — Appointment to L.A. Community Redevelopment Agency — Discussion about role of political consultants — Working on Proposition A in San Diego — Recalling Villaraigosa’s first campaign
- Interview 4: July 15, 2014
- Audio File 13 249
- More details on operating the Coors boycott in Los Angeles; working with Teamster organizer Many Valenzuela — Frustrations with Northern California labor movement — More on relationship of AFL-CIO to LAOCOC and organizing immigrant workers — Creating a Democratic majority in the state legislature with strong Latino presence; “ the movement the immigrants built” — Negotiations with port pilots; working with Peter Olney, Organizing Director of International Longshore and Warehouse Union (ILWU) — More on conflicts at DWP — Kent Wong, Director UCLA Labor Center, recruits Dave to run its Construction Academy: enlisting Bob Balgenorth’s support; use of Community Scholars Program; loss of funding — Returning to the Building Trades Council — More on service on the Community Redevelopment Agency; frustrations and victories; working with developer Eli Broad — Jurisdictional issue with Carpenters Union — Working with the Pat Brown Institute at California State University Los Angeles: relationship with Executive Director Jaime Regalado and Board of Directors; mission and work of the Brown Institute — Relationship with Governor Jerry Brown — Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger fires Dave from State Allocation Board

Awards and honors — Importance of wife Carole's support; working as a couple in the labor movement — Discusses the Los Angeles plant closure movement: shutdown of rubber and other plants in Southern California; social effects; AFL-CIO program on plant closure; conversation with laid-off steelworker — Strike by Professional Air Traffic Controllers Organization (PATCO); friendship with a PATCO leader; critique of PATCO leadership; Joe Coors and PATCO strike — Remembering service on Denver Labor Federation and Colorado State Labor

David Sickler: Interview History by Lisa Rubens

When the history of the American labor movement over the past fifty years is written David Sickler will be among the outstanding protagonists. He is a labor leader whose calling and life's work took him from a relatively humble background into national leadership during the years when organized labor faced unprecedented challenges. His commitment, his strategic intelligence and good humor, his straightforward and transparent leadership has been recognized and honored by the movement to which he was dedicated, by employers with whom he butt heads and by civic institutions that drew on his service.

Dave was born in 1943 in the small town of Golden, Colorado, an hour north of Denver. His father was a carpenter; his mother put aside her burgeoning career as a country-western singer to raise five boys in a two bedroom house on the poor side of town. Dave's roots run deep in the American west (His paternal grandfather had been a sheriff in a hardscrabble mining town.) Dave loved and roamed the rugged landscape of Colorado and dreamed of one day having his own horse stable.

At 17 he joined the ranks of the working class on the bottling assembly line of the Coors Brewing Company, the largest employer in Golden, Colorado. He became active in the union as a shop steward and then local president. He was voracious in studying the history of the labor movement and organizing techniques. By the time he was 25 he was leading what would become a 10-year legendary national boycott of Coors beer that demanded of the intransigent right wing and politically powerful company to provide basic workers' rights. At 35 he was the Western Regional Director for the AFL-CIO; at 40 he had led a pioneering campaign to organize immigrant workers in Southern California. By the time he retired from the labor movement in 2010, he was a force in municipal politics—particularly as Los Angeles Mayor Antonio Villaraigosa's labor commissioner—a player in California state electoral campaigns and advisor to Governors Arnold Schwarzenegger and Jerry Brown, and a heavy weight in the AFL-CIO. Along the way Sickler initiated training programs with UCLA's Center for Labor Research and the Pat Brown Institute and served on the boards of both organizations. His methods for organizing and integrating immigrant labor were emulated in a variety of unions and political drives.

This oral history was initiated by Peter Olney a longtime colleague of Sickler's who understood that recording Dave's personal history would also be a lens into significant developments in the labor movement and the changing economy and work force it contended with. Jaime Regaldo, the longtime director of the Pat Brown Institute worked closely with Olney to raise money to subsidize this oral history from friends and people who knew, worked with and admired Dave from the worlds of labor, politics and business. Their contributions are gratefully acknowledged at the end of this interview history.

Dave's wife Carole is an integral part of this interview as well. She has her own long history of working in the labor movement and in city administrations in Los Angeles independent of Dave. But when they married, they became a team. Her background, experiences and insights are critical to the richness of this oral history. I also asked my husband, Danny Beagle, who served as a communication director for several major unions, to be a co-interviewer. Beagle had worked

with Dave in various labor struggles and had recruited Carole and Dave to work with him of a radio and TV labor program, *We Do the Work*, which is discussed in the interview.

The interview was conducted at Dave and Carole's home. It is a largely chronological narrative of the campaigns Dave undertook to defend and expand workers' rights. Having been a shop steward and an organizer he provides detailed accounts of the nitty-gritty of campaigns –building carefully designed programs to enlist workers and face entrenched employers, contending with seemingly unbeatable odds, assessing wins and losses. As a close associate of AFL-CIO Executive Directors George Meany, Lane Kirkland and Tom Donahue, he was in a unique position to comment on the structure of that organization, about the personalities that shaped it and the contests over its direction and leadership. He is extremely articulate as well as respectful and judicious in reflecting on people with whom he worked. While I encouraged Dave to be forthcoming in his reflections, he insisted on removing some portions of his responses because he felt they might hurt people or cast aspersions on their reputation.

Inevitably the conversations crossed over to contemporary issues and comparisons between then and now. Sometimes stories were repeated because they illustrated different aspects of a topic. And the reader will no doubt realize that many stories and topics could have been enriched by further discussion.

Taken as a whole, the more than 16 hours of recorded dialog tells the story of the life and times of David Sickler. The interview gives us a portrait of a man of outstanding character, intelligence and commitment, who was personable, creative and successful in his life's work. Of that career, Dave rather humbly remarks, "I was paid to practice my religion." Yet Dave and Carole would be first to say that their story is really the story of the hundreds of thousands of working people with whom they interacted. While presented here is a story of individual achievements, just as importantly, this oral history serves as a lens to illuminate some of the major issues that labor faced over the past 50 years. Unquestionably it will also serve as both an inspiration and practical guide for the next generation of labor activists.

Donors Include:

Kenneth Burt
Bruce Doering
Anelle Grajeda
Tom Gutierrez
Darryl Holter
Peter Olney
Jaime Regaldo
SEIU Local 721, CTW, CLC
Sid Stolper
John Tanner
UFCW Local 770
Keith Weaver
Tracy Zeluff

Interview 1: March 24, 2014

Audio File 1

01-00:00:01

Rubens: Hi, Dave.

01-00:00:02

Sickler: Good morning.

01-00:00:03

Rubens: We're sitting here in your wonderful study, and we have your wife, Carole, here, who might join in, and Danny Beagle, my husband, who you know through a number of labor activities and particularly with the television program California Working.

01-00:00:15

Sickler: Go back many years with Danny.

01-00:00:16

Rubens: Many years. It's Monday, the 24 of March, and we're starting a life history with you to talk about your really interesting career, and to also record your reflections on the history of the labor movement, particularly how leadership and organizing changed particularly in response to a changing composition of the workforce and of course a global economy.

01-00:00:36

Sickler: I'm looking forward to it. It's been a privileged life.

01-00:00:39

Rubens: Well, I think it didn't begin as such. Let's just start with your birth and family background.

01-00:00:52

Sickler: Well, interestingly, I've lived here in California for about thirty-six, thirty-seven years now. I came within two weeks of being a California native. My mother and father got married here, in Pasadena. Lived in El Monte. Then he got called up for the draft in 1943, so went back to Colorado, where he was from, and two weeks later I was born there. But I rectified it all, some thirty-three years later, when I moved back to California.

01-00:01:22

Rubens: So you were actually born where in Colorado?

01-00:01:24

Sickler: I was born in Fort Collins, Colorado, but grew up in Golden, Colorado, about four miles from the infamous Coors Brewery.

01-00:01:34

Rubens:

Four miles? I didn't realize it was so close. Tell me a little bit about your parents. Your mother had a really interesting career, certainly, background, before she became a mother.

01-00:01:47

Sickler:

My mom actually came out to California, and my father came out here following her. She and her sister had a music act that they did, country western music. My father had fallen in love with her when she was in Colorado. Saw her and her sister, and then followed her to California. In a weak moment, my mother married him. The rest is history. I was born in Fort Collins, Colorado.

01-00:02:14

Rubens:

Did they have a name, the sister act?

01-00:02:16

Sickler:

I don't remember the name of the act at all, and she seldom ever sang, but every once in a while, by accident, us kids would hear her, and she had a beautiful voice. But she never went back to singing after that.

01-00:02:29

Rubens:

And her father had an interesting history, too, didn't he?

01-00:02:32

Sickler:

Her father was a sheriff in the oil fields. During the Depression.

01-00:02:36

Rubens:

In Kansas?

01-00:02:37

Sickler:

Yeah, and then he had a farm, and lost everything in the Great Depression. So he moved to Colorado, where he joined the rubber workers and worked at Gates Rubber Factory for many, many years until he retired there.

01-00:02:52

Rubens:

What town was that?

01-00:02:53

Sickler:

That's Denver. He lived in West Denver.

01-00:02:57

Rubens:

Did you know him?

01-00:02:58

Sickler:

Oh, yes. He died when I was nine years old. But I loved him. He was probably the most gentle man I ever met. He had a huge impact on my life. He cared about people a great deal, and he cared about life. He had all kinds of wildlife in his backyard that acted like he was one of them. Had birds that would land on his hand, and he had squirrels that would gather around him that he'd kind of domesticated. He was kind of a pre-hippie hippie.

01-00:03:27

Rubens: Was he a union man?

01-00:03:30

Sickler: Yeah, he was a union man. He was a union member of the rubber worker union at Gates Rubber.

01-00:03:33

Rubens: Not particularly an activist?

01-00:03:35

Sickler: No, I don't think he was an activist. He was really a peacenik hippie kind of guy. That's kind of where I learned a lot of my values early on, when I was a little kid, from him.

01-00:03:49

Rubens: Tell me a little about your own father, because he plays a big role in your life.

01-00:03:53

Sickler: He was kind of the opposite of my grandfather. He was the proverbial macho tough guy. Growing up with him was very tough. I was the oldest of five kids. Of course, I was kind of set as the example. So if he didn't like something that was going on, I got the ass-whipping, and then I was told I was setting the model for the rest of the kids. I tried to protest that role he wanted me to play, but that didn't work. He continuously kicked my ass on a regular basis.

01-00:04:25

Rubens: What did he do?

01-00:04:27

Sickler: Well, he did a lot of things. He broke horses. When I was young, he broke horses a lot. And he was a carpenter. Then he started working carpentry full-time and was quite good at it. He built the house that we lived in until I moved out and got married and went out on my own. He became a finish carpenter. He was very good at it. He built furniture and did fine finish work for banks and restaurants.

01-00:04:56

Rubens: When you were growing up, was he in a union?

01-00:04:59

Sickler: He was. He was actually anti-union for a long time, and was very upset when I became a shop steward for the local union, local brewery workers union. He was right-wing, very conservative, racist, the whole nine yards. So we had some real problems, he and I, for a long time. Matter of fact, he was building some of these cabinets I was talking about in my garage, and he was actually celebrating the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated. So I kicked him out of my garage, and we didn't speak very much for about another two years. But, you know, to his credit, he did a 180. He came full around. As life would have it, he ended up building cabinets for African American football players

for the Denver Broncos, and got very close with them. They loved him, and he loved them. Then he became pro-union. Then he became a dedicated liberal Democrat and voted Democrat. It was kind of a reverse situation, where I kind of educated him on issues and what happened to working people out there.

01-00:06:16

Rubens:

Just to back up for a minute, you said your father had built the house that you lived in, but I recall at some point you said there were five kids in one—

01-00:06:24

Sickler:

Yeah, five of us in one bedroom.

01-00:06:25

Rubens:

In one bedroom. Did you say you had dirt floors?

01-00:06:28

Sickler:

No. We lived in a neighborhood where a lot of our neighbors had dirt floors. We were reminded all the time that we were kind of upscale for the neighborhood, because we had wood floors. Because a lot of them had dirt or cement floors. Just a few streets over on the east side of where we lived were a lot of houses that had dirt floors, had concrete floors. Very, very poor neighborhood.

01-00:06:50

Rubens:

But still, five kids in one bedroom.

01-00:06:51

Sickler:

Five kids in one bedroom. So we had bunk beds.

01-00:06:53

Rubens:

What was the age span? You're the oldest.

01-00:06:55

Sickler:

I was the oldest. Brother next to me was eleven months younger than me. The brother younger than him was four years younger. Five years younger than myself. Then I have two sisters that were born fairly close to each other. Ten and eleven-year spread between me and them.

01-00:07:16

Rubens:

What was the religion of your family? Did that figure?

01-00:07:20

Sickler:

I really respected both of my parents for that. They insisted that we go to church when we were little, but they never insisted that we had to believe anything or become any religion. They wanted us exposed and to make up our own mind and I really appreciated that.

01-00:07:38

Rubens:

What church? Was there one denomination?

01-00:07:39

Sickler:

It was a crazy church. The Church of the Nazarene. Probably the biggest hypocrite on the planet Earth was our great Reverend Moses, by the way. Great name for a reverend, Reverend Moses. You could catch him every Sunday at the podium up there, giving great speeches on morality. But if you went to Lane's Tavern on Saturday night, likely you could catch him coming out late at night with the neighborhood hooker. That was our great Reverend Moses.

01-00:08:09

Rubens:

So how you knew this, this became something you learned about as you grew up?

01-00:08:13

Sickler:

Oh, sure. It was well-known throughout the neighborhood. Me and a kid named George Hawthorne snuck up there one night and watched him come out with her.

01-00:08:22

Rubens:

Tell me a little bit about growing up. Particularly, you start working at a very early age. Well, did you help your father?

01-00:08:30

Sickler:

Oh, yeah, that was mandatory. The one word that rings in my ears when I think about my childhood is, "David, get your shoes on. You're going with me." That usually meant you're going to haul lumber and pull nails, no matter how cold it is, no matter how hot it is. You'll be stacking lumber, pulling nails, and re-stacking lumber. That's what I did. I started finding work other places for a couple of reasons. One, he didn't pay me, and other people did. And two, I could be away from him, and that was a lot easier. That was kind of the urging that I got to get away from him and start working early, so I did a lot of things. In the wintertime, I shoveled snow, people's driveways and their sidewalks and all of that. The summertime, I mowed lawns and took care of bushes and flowers, and scraped windows, and people painted and all that kind of stuff. Did that for a long time. Delivered papers. I had a paper route, which was really tough where I lived, because houses were kind of spread apart. It was kind of a rural area. I rode a bicycle and got chased by dogs.

01-00:09:40

Rubens:

Then did you work at a livery stable?

01-00:09:42

Sickler:

I did, yes. I started at the age of thirteen, and actually ended up managing a livery stable. I worked at Golden Hills Riding Stables for many, many years, just right on the outskirts of Golden, Colorado, with Table Top Mountain right behind it. Which, by the way, if you just went like a mile down on top of Table Mountain, you'd overlook the giant Adolph Coors Brewery Company right below it. That big rock that you see on the bottle cap is actually a picture

taken of Table Top Mountain, where we used to send our riders up to ride horses all the time.

01-00:10:19

Rubens: You said your father broke horses. Did he introduce you to riding and that?

01-00:10:23

Sickler: Oh, sure. Yeah. Matter of fact, he bought a horse out of a bucking ring. Paid twenty-five dollars for him, because I think the horse was on his way to—back in those days, they had a meat foundry. They butchered horses up for dog meat. I think this horse, although he was very young, was just so mean and ornery, they wanted to get rid of him. So my dad bought him for me, for a birthday gift. Paid twenty-five dollars for him and told me I had to break him. So I did.

01-00:10:53

Rubens: How old were you?

01-00:10:54

Sickler: I think I was twelve or thirteen when I got him.

01-00:10:58

Rubens: Fascinating. Because I know later on, you say your dream really was to have—

01-00:11:02

Sickler: Oh, yes. My dream growing up was to actually have my own horse ranch, and breed and raise and sell horses. That's what I really wanted to do, because I had a deep love for horses.

01-00:11:13

Rubens: I think you told me then, at thirteen, you became a box boy and had your sort of initial union—

01-00:11:22

Sickler: During the wintertime, when the stables were closed, I worked in a grocery store. I was a big kid at thirteen. In those days, they didn't require any documentation for age to get employment. So as a big kid at thirteen, I got hired on at King Soopers, at I think thirty-two or thirty-five cents an hour, with whatever the minimum wage was then. But I was upset, because they would make us work at night for an hour after they'd closed for free. We had to clean the cash registers up, and we had to move boxes that were up front to the back. We had to do all this work for an extra hour, and we didn't get paid for. I went up to where the retail clerks, as they were known then—not United Food and Commercial Workers, as they're known today. There was a retail clerks local, Local 7, I went to see if they would organize us box boys. I was told they don't organize box boys. Well, first I was told if I got a petition signed by enough box boys, they would look at organizing us. So I went around to the different King Soopers stores that I could reach on a bicycle and

got a bunch of them to sign up, and then went back, only to find out that they don't organize box workers. That was kind of an effort in futility.

01-00:12:48

Rubens: You said your father was a union man. Had you had exposure to unions or—

01-00:12:54

Sickler: I did. Actually, my first memory of unions was when my dad went to a Carpenters union when I was four or five years old. I remember sitting on his lap, and it was in an ancient, old building, downtown Golden. Evidently, they were fining scabs at night. The guy had a big, round piece of wood on a desk or a table, and a big, wooden hammer, and he would say, "Twenty-five dollars fine," and he'd smack that wood with that hammer. They talked about rats. After the meeting was over, I asked my dad, "Why are they fining rats? What does rats got to do with it?" Because I had had this image of rats. So then that's when he explained to me this was people who had scabbed on their union, and they were being fined for working non-union. That was my first exposure, at four years old. Then, later on, as I was growing up, he actually had scabbed on a strike, because he drove home one night and his windshield was busted. I asked him how his windshield got busted, and he said a guy threw a brick through it. I said, "Why would he do that?" He said, "Because I crossed the picket line." I said, "Why did you do that?" He said, "So I could bring money home for you and your mother and the rest of you." That was his attitude then.

01-00:14:18

Rubens: That's a lot of initiative on the part of a thirteen-year-old, to go to the retail clerks and say, "Hey, I need some help organizing." Where did that sense of response to injustice—

01-00:14:35

Sickler: I don't know where it came from. It was there.

01-00:14:36

Rubens: Confidence you can go do something about it.

01-00:14:40

Sickler: It was always there. I was a voracious reader, and so I was reading about Cuba and the problems with Cuba, and the problems with the African Americans in the southern part of the United States, and I was outraged by all of that. I just felt, inside of me, that was injustice and it was wrong, and everybody should do what they could to fight that. I had a strong feeling of that. I don't know if I got that from my grandfather or where it came from, but it was always there. It still is to this day. I hate injustice. I want to right injustice. I don't like what's happening today in this country. It's almost worse than it was when I got started as a young person.

01-00:15:23

Rubens:

Is there anything in your family construct—I don't know, the values that your mother had, or the talk—was there talk about politics at all in the household that fueled some of this sense?

01-00:15:36

Sickler:

No. None whatsoever. I got interested in politics because, like I said, I was a voracious reader. I read the newspaper from front cover to back.

01-00:15:46

Rubens:

Was there a newspaper in your house?

01-00:15:48

Sickler:

Oh, yes, we had two. We had the *Denver Post* and the *Rocky Mountain News*, and I read both newspapers. It was difficult to find anybody to talk to about current issues in my neighborhood. Most people didn't read the newspaper. But I was always interested in those issues.

01-00:16:04

Rubens:

What about school? Let's say high school.

01-00:16:07

Sickler:

I was a horrible student. I hated high school. I just hated it.

01-00:16:10

Rubens:

Didn't have a teacher that turns you on?

01-00:16:14

Sickler:

I had one teacher the entire time I was in school, from the day I started to the day I finished, and he was the only one that I looked up to. He pulled me aside one day and said, "You have a lot of potential. You have a lot of potential. You need to apply it." But to me, going to school in those days was like going into a production factory. They put you on this belt, and they fed you a bunch of garbage, and then they spit you out at the end, and they just graduated you from one year to the next. It was totally boring to me. I didn't learn anything of what I would consider of value. I learned a hell of a lot more out of the newspapers and by reading, by going to the library. I don't feel like I learned much of anything out of school.

01-00:17:02

Rubens:

Is there anything else you think we should talk about in your family? Anything more about the influence of your grandfather?

01-00:17:13

Sickler:

He died when I was pretty young.

01-00:17:14

Rubens:

When you were nine, you said.

01-00:17:15

Sickler:

Yeah. He died when I was very young.

01-00:17:23

Rubens: I should ask this later, but also, what was the—I don't know if it was the scuttlebutt, but did you have any sense of Coors? You talked about being able to see it.

01-00:17:31

Sickler: Oh, yeah, sure.

01-00:17:32

Rubens: But before you even go to work for Coors?

01-00:17:34

Sickler: Oh, yes, yes. When I was really young, and I'm thinking I was probably about seven or eight years old, one night, my father and the neighbor were talking at the fence, and this huge, red glow off the top of this Table Mountain I was telling you about, that they have on the cap of their bottle—it was a huge, red glow. It looked like the whole mountain was on fire. I pointed to it and asked my father about it, and the neighbor said, "Oh, that's the Klan. That's the Ku Klux Klan. They're having their big burning cross rally up there tonight." As far as I know, that was Coors territory up there. They let the Klan have that to burn. Now, that's what I was told. I don't—

01-00:18:21

Rubens: Were there African Americans in the community at all? Or Catholics? They were after Catholics, too.

01-00:18:27

Sickler: I never saw an African American in my community at all. Never. But I was told that that's what it was used for. I never used it against Coors in the boycott, ever, and I refused to let any of the staff people that worked for me use it, because I couldn't document it. I didn't know it. But that was the rumor that was spread far and wide in our community, that that's what they did and that they had Coors's blessing to do it. But I never used it.

01-00:18:55

Rubens: Firstly, did your father drink Coors?

01-00:18:57

Sickler: No. Not that I know of. Although I have a memory of riding in the front of a pickup truck with him while he drove and drank beer.

01-00:19:07

Rubens: Did any people in the family work for Coors? The extended family.

01-00:19:12

Sickler: My brother did later. After I went to work there, he was able to get on.

01-00:19:18

Rubens: So it's not something that's a presence in your life particularly, other than knowing that's sort of the main employer in town, and this thing about the Klan?

01-00:19:31

Sickler:

Right. The interesting thing is—it's not because Coors was benevolent, believe me. But working in the brewery industry paid great wages. It was just a historical fact that breweries in the country paid pretty well. Unionized breweries, which almost all of them were, if they were of any size, paid very good. In the community, it was probably the best place to work. And so everybody wanted to get on at Coors. And I wanted to get on, because—

01-00:20:00

Rubens:

Tell me about that. Was there any talk ever, from counselors, that you would go to college?

01-00:20:05

Sickler:

No. Nobody ever encouraged me to go to college. No. I think they wanted me to get out of their life.

01-00:20:14

Rubens:

What are you thinking about in terms of your senior year and where you're going to go to work?

01-00:20:18

Sickler:

I just wanted to work. I knew if I could get out there and start working, I could make a hell of a lot better life for myself. I just knew that. And that was true. I started work in construction. I worked at a union construction company first when I left. That first summer I was out, I ran a livery stable for another woman that had a stable up in Georgetown, Colorado. A lot of the wealthy people would come up there because it was kind of a resort area. I rented horses to them. But then once fall came and winter came and the snow came, we had to wrap up the stables. Then I came back down and went to work for—what are they called—Pearl-Mack [Enterprises]. They were building houses north of Denver. I worked there until the following year. I think in March of the following year, 1963, I went to work for the Adolph Coors Company. They had called me to go to work for them.

01-00:21:17

Rubens:

What do you mean they called you? Had you applied already?

01-00:21:19

Sickler:

Oh, yeah, I applied. Interestingly enough, most of the people that worked there had either a German surname or an Italian surname. Of course, "Sickler" rhymes with "Hitler." I was a candidate. So they called me to go to work for them.

01-00:21:40

Rubens:

Let's start talking about what it was like at Coors. I just want to make sure, was there anything else when you think about your childhood and background?

01-00:21:51

Sickler:

Let me just say one thing. I painted kind of a tough picture of my father, but one thing he instilled in me that paid off my entire life was you had to earn your living. You are your work. You are defined by what kind of work you do. That's ingrained in me, and it's almost an automatic reflex now. I try to do the very best I possibly can on whatever I'm working on, because it's just instinctual now. He drilled that into me. You are what you produce. You are what you work. If you turn around and walk away from bad work, that's who you are. That's how you'll be known for the rest of your life. You do lousy work. That was a gift to me that he gave me.

01-00:22:40

Carole Sickler:

You didn't talk about when he broke his neck. That's why you were so poor.

01-00:22:45

Sickler:

Yeah, that's true.

01-00:22:45

Carole Sickler:

And why you went to work so young.

01-00:22:49

Rubens:

You had seen him fall off a roof, I think.

01-00:22:52

Sickler:

This is interesting, because he had done some work by a very wealthy guy by the name of Axel Nielsen, who happened to be a personal friend of President Dwight Eisenhower. Axel Nielsen had this huge ranch in Fraser, Colorado called the Byers Peak Ranch, and that became the western recluse for President Eisenhower. Axel Nielsen called my dad to build this big cabin for Ike Eisenhower, and so we felt all very privileged to be a part of that. We all moved up to Fraser, Colorado for that summer and lived in these cabins, and my dad was building and hiring people to work on the big resort. He was up pretty close to three stories high, and they were working on a gabled end.

In those days, they didn't have the pipe that you put together to make scaffolds that are much safer. In those days, all scaffolding was made out of wood. They just had this native pine that ran up close to three stories high, made out of wood. That collapsed while I was watching him work up there. Because he used to yell at me to go get this and go get that. Right below where they were working, on the ground, was a pile of broken cinder blocks and rocks and debris. When that scaffold broke—and I can still see it to this day. I remember a great six-by-six support system snapped. I watched it snap, and I watched him come straight down into that pile of broken cinder blocks. When I ran over to him, his chin—I thought he was dead. His chin was actually resting on his shoulder. That's how far his neck had been pulled out. I ran all the way back to the cabin to get my mother. She didn't know how to drive. Somehow or another, the two of us were able to get the car down to him. I don't even remember how the hell we did it. He insisted we help him

get in the car. My mother had to hold his head up, hold it in her hands. We drove him back to the cabin. I don't know how we got—hmm?

01-00:25:06

Beagle: You drove?

01-00:25:07

Sickler: Yeah, I think I drove. I think I was driving. My mom was holding his head. Some of this stuff is kind of fuzzy, but then I remember they took him to the hospital, and people were warning us then that people with broken necks rarely survived. He was put in a unit in the hospital with other people that had broken necks from diving in the wrong end of the swimming pool and that kind of stuff. Then he came home and he was in this huge neck brace with all kinds of pins and stuff on him. In the meantime, we'd gone a couple of months, and there was no money coming in, and we didn't have any food, and I was trying to work and bring whatever I could in. I think it was my mom that called the relief—they called them relief ladies then. They didn't call them welfare. They were relief ladies. The relief lady came to the house and was taking notes down, and my dad ran her off. Ran her off.

01-00:26:05

Rubens: Too proud?

01-00:26:06

Sickler: Too proud? Yes too proud. But I remember being so pissed off, because his being proud meant we didn't get any food.

01-00:26:13

Rubens: Your mother had, I think you'd said, taken in children. She earned a little bit of money.

01-00:26:18

Sickler: She'd babysit. Yeah, she babysat to make some money. She was bringing in some, I was bringing in some. To my dad's credit, he started driving a cab with this neck brace on. He got up and started driving a cab. Then he got held up a couple of times. So we went through that.

01-00:26:35

Carole Sickler: The grocery store.

01-00:26:37

Sickler: Oh, yeah. I'm not proud of that.

01-00:26:50

Rubens: You were saying about one of the reasons you had a leg up in life.

01-00:26:55

Sickler: I give credit to my mother for teaching me to read before I ever started school. Part of it was the times that we lived in. This was before television, at least for us. We didn't have a television set in our house until I think I was ten years

old. Entertainment was the radio. My mother was a voracious reader, and she would read to me every single night, and she taught me to read before I even started school. So I was born with this habit and hunger to read, and I think that's what prepared me for life, was the ability to read very early.

01-00:27:40

Rubens: It sounds like your mother loved children, too. She was a loving person?

01-00:27:45

Sickler: She adored kids, and they adored her, and she was so good at it. She was just so good at it. She was so patient and loving with little kids. They all returned the same favor. They loved her.

01-00:28:00

Rubens: Did she run interference with you and your father?

01-00:28:03

Sickler: Oh, sure. She tried to all the time, but we both got beat up in the process.

01-00:28:10

Rubens: But she wasn't going to leave him or—

01-00:28:13

Sickler: No. I begged her to, but she had these little kids, and she couldn't drive and hadn't worked. There were no places for shelters, and there was no lifeline like there is today for women that are battered. There were virtually no laws on the books. Back in those days, if you called the cops out because the husband beat the wife, the cop was probably going home that night and beating his, so he wasn't going to put a guy in jail. It was an accepted behavior back in those days. He wasn't the only guy in my neighborhood that beat his wife and kids. Sometimes I felt lucky. A couple of streets over, there was a kid whose old man would chain him to a tree and leave him out overnight. We grew up around some of those kinds of people.

01-00:29:05

Carole Sickler: The wild West.

01-00:29:11

Rubens: Maybe we'll get to this kind of boy/man macho culture. But tell me about going to work for Coors. What literally was your job? How did you—

01-00:29:25

Sickler: I was working construction. In construction in Colorado, it's seasonal. Because starting around the end of December, first of January, the ground starts freezing pretty hard, and sometimes it freezes quite a ways down, so you can't get the operating engineers to come in and punch holes to build houses. The concrete won't set up. Basically, construction companies shut down, so then you're out scrambling around, looking for work. This was around mid-part of January. Pearl-Mack shut down, so I was putting my application into all of the different companies. Most of them, by the way, were union, like

Gates Rubber Co. Then I put in an application at Coors. I got hired, I think, March 26, 1963. By the way, one of my very closest, best friends got hired the day before me, on March 25. Who, later on in this whole story, took over the Coors Brewery local after I left. But that's quite a few years.

01-00:30:30

Rubens: What's his name?

01-00:30:32

Sickler: Kenny Debey.

01-00:30:34

Rubens: Oh, I read about him.

01-00:30:35

Sickler: Ken took my place after I left the local to go to work for the AFL-CIO. But I worked ten years inside the brewery, and it was not an easy job. In those days, there was no air conditioning in the summer when it got blazing hot. There was no heat in the winter when it got freezing cold. My first job was to work in the basement, where the bottles came back from bars, and restaurants and they got recycled. I worked in an area where the bottles would be taken out of the cases, put on a conveyer line, and then sent into what was called soaking machine. These big machines had caustic soda mixed in with very hot water so it would eat the label off of the bottle. But it was an extremely hot, dirty, filthy place to work.

01-00:31:25

Rubens: Are you wearing gloves and apron?

01-00:31:27

Sickler: Some of the jobs, you had to wear gloves. But the job I had, you couldn't wear gloves, because once the bottles were pulled out of the box, there are these fillers. Have you seen these fillers that separate the bottles inside a box? They're made out of a slick, thin cardboard. My job was to pull those out and stack them, because they reused them. They were taken back upstairs and put back into new boxes to separate the bottles that had been refilled and sent back out to the bars and liquor stores and whatever. But it was a nasty job, because in those days, when these boxes were kept in bars, waitresses and bartenders had a tendency to take ashtrays that were full of snuffed-out cigarettes and dump them in those boxes. Almost every box had ashtrays full of ashes and cigarette butts. So as you pulled those filters out, it would just throw a big cloud of cigarette ash in the air, and that's what you breathed. When you went up to the restroom to wash up before you ate lunch, all of us that worked that job had black streaks underneath our nose, clear down to our lip, from breathing that stuff in. That's what that job was for a long time. I think one of the reasons I got involved in the local union was the guy that was breaking me in on the soaker machine, a guy by the name of John Gargano, who I guess had been targeted by management. Now, I hadn't even put my ninety-day probationary period in, and he was showing me how to keep the

pressure off those bottles so they didn't all buckle up as they went into this soaker machine. He had this big steel rod that you ran across this conveyer belt to hold the pressure back on these bottles. So he's showing me how to do this, and supervision comes down, and they're watching him, and pretty soon they take him away. They take him upstairs and they reprimand him.

01-00:33:27

Rubens:

For?

01-00:33:28

Sickler:

Not showing me how to do the job right. Which was pure—excuse my language—bullshit. I was outraged by it when I found out that—because it was clear to me they were setting this guy up, and I was outraged by it. So I went upstairs to protest him being disciplined, and to tell them that his instructions to me were absolutely right on the money, and I was doing as he told me to do it. The supervisor turned to me and he said, “You’re not off probation. Get your ass back downstairs or you’re fired.” I just looked at him. I went downstairs and I started asking around, “Hey, I understand I’ve got to join the union and pay my initiation fee here right?” “We do have a union here right?” “Where’s the shop steward?” I wanted to go to the shop steward and see if they would support Gargano. He said, “No, there’s no shop steward here. There’s been no shop steward in this department. Now, this was a huge department. It’s the biggest department in the brewery. It’s the bottling and can department.

01-00:34:28

Rubens:

About how many?

01-00:34:29

Sickler:

Close to 600 workers in this one department. Not a single shop steward. I said, “Why?” They said, “Because they busted our union in 1957, when we struck.” That’s when I found out they made the officers of the local, back in 1957, apologize for going on strike before they’d let them come back to work, or let any of the workers come back to work. So we had a busted, defeated local union we were dealing with. I was still pissed off about this whole affair with John Gargano. Even though I wasn’t off probation, I wanted something done about it. I went up to the union office in downtown Golden. I’m telling the business manager at that time about this whole incident, and that I was an eye-witness, and that it was unfair. I’m sitting across from his desk, and he makes a call to the personnel department. There’s some pleasant exchanges between him and whoever is on the other line. Then they have some discussions and he brings this whole issue up, and then hangs up the phone and says, “Forget it. Guy’s an asshole.” I said, “He might be, but he’s innocent of what they’re charging him with.” “What are you going to do about it?”

01-00:35:51

Rubens:

You’re nineteen years old? Twenty?

01-00:35:53

Sickler:

Nineteen. Yeah, nineteen years old. That stuck in my craw. I went back in, and I'm bitching and moaning to everybody that would listen. This guy, Ken Debey, I mentioned, is sitting with me one day. As we're talking, I can see he has the same philosophy I have. Strong union guy. He'd come from San Diego. I think was a member of the machinists union when there was a big, General Electric plant down there. I'm bitching to him about it, and he goes to all the union meetings. He says, "Well, you're just bitching to me about it. Why don't you do something about it?" Time went by. But finally, with no shop steward, I decided to run.

01-00:36:47

Rubens:

This is a few years later?

01-00:36:49

Sickler:

Yeah.

01-00:36:49

Rubens:

Let's freeze that for one minute. Tell me a little more just about the climate at Coors just before you get involved in the union. A, you mentioned there had been the strike in '57. It was a three-month strike, I think, three-and-a-half, and totally defeated. The union became, basically, a company union. What was the official union name? It was the—

01-00:37:21

Sickler:

It was called Brewery Workers Local 366. No it wasn't a company union even though it was dominated by Coors but there were some damn good union men there.

01-00:37:23

Rubens:

Were they affiliated with the international?

01-00:37:25

Sickler:

Yes, they were affiliated with AFL-CIO. They were technically called the Brewery, Flour, Cereal, and Soft Drink Workers of America. That was the formal title. That's another whole big story about when they merged with the Teamsters. I was totally opposed to that merger, because— but we'll get into that later. When I went to work there, that was the International Union, and they were of little or no help to our brewery workers there.

01-00:37:54

Rubens:

But everyone had to belong to the union?

01-00:37:56

Sickler:

We had a union shop. Our union had to collect the dues physically from each member.

01-00:38:07

Rubens:

Coors didn't allow check-off?

01-00:38:08

Sickler:

Coors did not allow any check-off at all. They felt it would be more difficult for the union if it had to physically collect the dues, but more importantly the members might resent the union more if they had to pay each month. The contract was bad so Coors thought the members would question “why am paying dues for this lousy contract?” then maybe the members would start a decertification election and vote the union out. If you read the contract on the surface, it was written by Coors. For example, they had twenty-six reasons for immediate discharge, with the twenty-sixth reason stating, “Anything else not listed above.” Same as management rights. They listed twenty-six, twenty-seven reasons, or explanations, what management rights were, with the twenty-sixth reason saying, “Anything else not listed above.” That was just to stick it into us.

01-00:38:44

Rubens:

There was a lie detector test?

01-00:38:47

Sickler:

Oh, yeah. You had to take a lie detector test.

01-00:38:49

Rubens:

For what?

01-00:38:49

Sickler:

This was another reason I hated them so bad. You couldn't get a job without taking that lie detector test.

01-00:38:57

Rubens:

What are they asking you?

01-00:38:59

Sickler:

They start out asking all the kind of normal, employment-related questions that you would think they would ask, but then it didn't take them very long to get into extremely personal, invasive questions, like, “Have you ever stolen anything from your mother or your father? If you have, what's its' worth? What's the total worth that you've stolen from them? If your father worked at Coors, and you knew he stole anything from the company, would you turn him in?” Questions like that. But then it got even worse. Then they wanted to know intimate details about your sex life. “Have you had any homosexual experiences? What kind of sexual activity have you been engaged in?”

01-00:39:46

Rubens:

And this is a verbal interview?

01-00:39:47

Sickler:

Yes. I really hated them when I got through. I felt dirty, like I needed to take a shower, and to punch somebody for that. Because when I left that room, that company knew more about me than any other person on this planet knew about me, and I hated that, and I never forgave them for that. Then I found out they did the same thing to everybody else, only nobody wanted to talk about

it. But once we started talking about it, the flood came. People all had same experiences, some worse than I had. They would stop the lie detector and tell you, “We’re not looking for angels. We’re just looking for truthful people. If you don’t answer the questions, you have no prayer of getting a job here.” That was the threat that was held over your head to get a job there.

01-00:40:40

Beagle:

Just out of curiosity, suppose you had said, or suppose one said, “Yeah, when I was twelve years old, me and a buddy went out and looked at each other’s penises and touched them.”

01-00:40:51

Sickler:

I don’t think he would have been hired, because they were so paranoid about gays. I mean, really paranoid. They had a written policy against hiring homosexuals. It was a written policy. They actually started a foundation that would help gays get over being gay. They actually believed you could convert homosexuals to heterosexuals.

01-00:41:17

Rubens:

Why were they so concerned with this? Do you know?

01-00:41:22

Sickler:

Crazy. They were whack jobs.

01-00:41:24

Carole Sickler:

Didn’t they also ask you disgusting questions, like, “Have you ever had sex with your mother?”

01-00:41:30

Sickler:

Yeah, they asked you those. They asked those kinds of questions.

01-00:41:35

Rubens:

Invasive. Now, also, talking about their foundation, they were very upfront about their politics.

01-00:41:44

Sickler:

Oh, yes. Yes. Extremist. They were very hooked into the John Birch Society. As a matter of fact, as soon as I started working there, I started getting, in the paychecks they sent, a publication called *News in a Nutshell*, which was produced by the John Birch Society. What the John Birch Society would do was scan the entire country for the most outrageous articles they could find that had anything to do with liberals or unions. If John Doe in Indiana was found guilty of pilfering money from the union treasury, and that was printed somewhere then they blew that whole article up. So by the time you got through reading *News in a Nutshell*, if you didn’t know anything about unions, you were totally convinced they were all corrupt. Or they would attack liberals. They were always after Teddy Kennedy, and they were always after Pat Schroeder. I worked her campaign in 1971 to help get her elected. She was one of the first liberal congresswomen to get elected and Coors was paranoid about her.

01-00:42:57

Rubens:

I think I read—you may have told me—that the company called a meeting to excoriate the '64 Civil Rights Act and encourage people to—

01-00:43:10

Sickler:

This was a year after I started there. This was outrageous! This was almost like inciting a riot. Bill Coors told us—“If this law passes, I’m going to have to immediately fire ninety of you in this room and replace you with Negros.” That’s what this law is going to do.” He said “you better call your congressman and tell them to not vote for that Civil Rights Act”. That, to me, was like inciting a riot. Making people feel that a black person is going to cost them to lose their job.

01-00:43:49

Rubens:

They had created the Heritage Foundation.

01-00:43:52

Sickler:

They were the creators of the Heritage Foundation, yes. They’re the ones that provided the seed money and hired Paul Weyrich to run the Heritage Foundation. All this crazy, whacko stuff that’s coming out with the Koch brothers and all of them, Coors was one of the original founders of that whole operation. They were embedded so deep in the John Birch Society that it was ridiculous.

01-00:44:13

Rubens:

Now, at the same time, there was a kind of company paternalism. Maybe they go hand-in-hand. The sense, so I’ve read, that they were very proud of their product and really wanted the product to be top-notch. I don’t know if they commended their workers for working hard and producing.

01-00:44:38

Sickler:

No. I didn’t see it. I didn’t see workers getting rewarded for working hard. They had an inherent distrust of us, all of us. One of the brothers had been kidnapped and held for ransom.

01-00:44:51

Rubens:

One of the Coors brothers?

01-00:44:51

Sickler:

Yes, and killed.

01-00:44:54

Beagle:

Adolph.

01-00:44:54

Sickler:

Adolph Jr. I’m trying to remember. He had been kidnapped and held for ransom and then was murdered. They used that as justification for the lie detector test.

01-00:45:09

Rubens:

Was it a Coors worker that had—

01-00:45:11

Sickler:

No. It was somebody else. But they had an inherent distrust towards, it seemed like, every other human being outside their own little crazy family clan. They had an inherent distrust of the workers. They didn't like workers. If they could have put grease zerks [fittings] in our elbows and our knees, and just came around once every six hours and grease us up, they would have loved that. They would have gotten rid of us and just used machines to replace us, they would have loved that. They didn't like having us around.

01-00:45:47

Beagle:

Dave, there's this whole thing in the Baum book where he talks about Bill and some of the other guys knowing everybody's name. A kind of paternalistic sensibility. Coors will take care of you. If you went to work for Coors, you could work there your whole life.

01-00:46:03

Sickler:

They had that attitude, but the attitude was, you could work here your whole life, but we don't trust you while we're here, and you better work your ass off really hard, and you better not ever make a mistake, and don't look to us for retirement support. And if you want medical assistance, you'll go to our doctors, and if our doctors say you need to come back to work even though you can only hop on one leg, you better get your ass in here and work. That was the kind of paternalism that was there. It was not a kind paternalism at all. It was not.

01-00:46:36

Rubens:

Before you become involved in the union—we're going to get to that very shortly—did you know any of the Coors? Did you have any personal—

01-00:46:47

01-00:46:50

Rubens:

Did people like to gossip about them?

01-00:46:54

Sickler:

About the only gossip that I heard was how kind of inclusive they were, and that they had this power hold on the whole city of Golden and their distributorships. A lot of their distributorships didn't like being muscled around by Coors. They were heavy-handed with their distributors. Not like their own workers, but still heavy-handed with their distributors, so there was grumbling by them. But they were making big money and they sold the beer faster than they could get it so nobody rocked the boat.

01-00:47:34

Rubens:

Is this a period of expansion? How big was their enterprise?

01-00:47:38

Sickler:

It wasn't expanding much. They were in eleven states and were expanding into Texas when we started the boycott in 1977. The boycott worked so well.

For example, here in California, we cut their sales by more than 50 percent. . We took them from 43 to 44 percent, depending on what month you measured it, down to 14 percent by the time we ended the boycott. In a state with thirty-two, thirty-three million people in it, you cut the market from 43 percent to 14 percent, you're talking about a lot of money and a lot of beer. They had to expand into a lot of other states to try to make up for the loss just in California.

01-00:48:27

Rubens:

So when you're starting out, though, do they still have the natural gas and coal?

01-00:48:33

Sickler:

Oh, yeah. This is a company that was so paranoid about being beholden to anybody else and wanting absolute, total control over their whole environment that they were self-contained. They had their own water, they had their own power, they had their own barley, they had their own coal, they had their own glass factory, their own can factory, and their own paper factory. You name it, they controlled it. They had their own railroad. I ended up organizing the truck drivers and Coors had their own trucking company.

01-00:49:10

Rubens:

None of those were union but the brewery?

01-00:49:13

Sickler:

Yes just the brewery but in 1969 I organized the truckers and they became a part of the Brewery Workers.

01-00:49:17

Beagle:

Glass and paper.

01-00:49:20

Sickler:

No. We had a campaign at the can plant and we lost it by sixteen votes. That was heart-breaking. During the organizing campaign the company kept pointing to our brewery contract and asked the can plant workers "Why would you real problems join a union with such bad contract? It's like buying a car without a motor". In 1973 I organized the Ball Manufacturing plant that made bottle caps for Coors. The two plants I organized, I was able to win those campaigns and get contracts for both. Ball Manufacturing in '73 and the over-the-road truck drivers in '69.'

01-00:49:50

Rubens:

Tell me one more thing. At some point, you have an accident at Coors. Is this before you're shop steward?

01-00:50:01

Sickler:

No, it was about the same time

01-00:50:04

Rubens:

Let's talk about that just for—

01-00:50:07

Sickler: One of my jobs in this old bottle house—eventually I ended up moving upstairs to the bottle department, where I sighted bottles. Part of my job was

01-00:50:17

Rubens: Sighted?

01-00:50:18

Sickler: Yeah. You sat in a chair, and there was a bright light behind this little picture frame kind of arrangement. Bottles would come by on a conveyer and would light up the inside of the bottles. Your job was to look in there and make sure the bottle didn't have any debris, or what we used to call bird cages. These were glass fibers that were protruding inside the bottle. Those all had to be pulled off. Then you would rotate every so often. Every half hour or so, somebody would rotate with you. Then part of your job was to relieve others for lunch break and pee breaks. I was relieving the filler operators. This was where the bottles came in on a conveyer and went around this big filling machine and got filled with the beer, and then capped, and then went by the sighters. I was doing the filler operator job one night when I was injured. The grates were off the floor, probably about eight, ten inches, and broken glass was constantly falling down through this grate and onto the floor. You had broken glass all over the floor. One night as I stepped off the back of the grate, I stepped down on the bottom half of a broken bottle that had a spear-like wedge of glass that came up to a very fine point. It was actually like a spear. I stepped down on it full force. It went right through the bottom of my rubber boot, all the way up inside of my foot. The glass broke off inside the foot. So they had to take me to the hospital. They had to dig all the glass out of my foot. It was a major problem for a long time, because when it started to heal, the nerves that were severed formed a ball, what they call a neurofibromis. The way the doctors explained it to me, it was like a ball of nerves that had kind of fused together up in there. It gave me a great deal of pain for a long, long time.

It was about that time when they were calling guys up for the Vietnam War that I got drafted. I told Coors I was leaving. Said goodbye to my family, the whole nine yards. I get down there. We're getting ready to get on the bus. They called me into a room and said, "You're not going. We're not going to take you." I said, "Why?" He said, "Because of that foot of yours. If we take you, then we're going to be responsible for it for the rest of your life.

01-00:53:33

Rubens: Were people having accidents? What was the accident rate?

01-00:53:35

Sickler: Oh, yeah, there were accidents all the time. I carry scars on my arm—

01-00:53:38

Rubens: Not even you, but around you. Were the working conditions dangerous?

- 01-00:53:43
Sickler: Yeah. In other areas, it was even more dangerous. We had a guy killed while I was there, over where they bring the chutes in that dump the grain, where it gets brewed. One of those big chutes came loose and swung over and crushed a guy against the wall and killed him. There were lots of places where you could get seriously injured.
- 01-00:54:08
Carole Sickler: When they hired women.
- 01-00:54:09
Sickler: Oh, yeah.
- 01-00:54:11
Rubens: The union's not doing anything about that?
- 01-00:54:13
Sickler: What's that?
- 01-00:54:13
Rubens: The union's not really doing anything about that, at this point, about the work conditions?
- 01-00:54:19
Sickler: No.
- 01-00:54:19
Rubens: Not then?
- 01-00:54:20
Sickler: Not then, no. I was kind of the one that started fighting back against Coors.
- 01-00:54:28
Rubens: Let me ask you one other thing. When you talk about going from the basement to the sighting, was there a culture of upward mobility in the factory? You start out in one place and then you—are there better jobs that—
- 01-00:54:42
Sickler: Yeah, there were. There were. General brewery worker—they call them GBW—general brewery worker was the bottom rung, and then as you got seniority—we did have seniority rights in our contract, and they were pretty good. As you gained seniority, you could bid on better jobs. You'd get better departments, cleaner work, and a better atmosphere to work in. There definitely were those rights within the contract.
- 01-00:55:08
Rubens: And higher pay?

01-00:55:09

Sickler: Some of the jobs paid higher. Yeah, definitely. General brewery worker was the bottom rate, once you got off probation, and then you had this process of climbing up.

01-00:55:20

Rubens: What did you get paid when you started there?

01-00:55:23

Sickler: Believe it or not, it was considered a pretty good rate. I believe it was around \$2.56 an hour starting on probation in 1963.

01-00:55:31

Rubens: Was this on par with other breweries around, or was it—

01-00:55:35

Sickler: No. That was always a thorn in my side; it was below the rates paid by all other unionized breweries in the United States. The whole contract was subpar compared to any other breweries across the country. As a matter of fact, when we were trying to organize the container plant, which had 2,000 employees in it, that contract was used to discourage those workers from joining the union. I'll never forget it until the day I die. They used the term, "Would you buy a car without an engine in it?"

01-00:56:19

Rubens: I'm sorry; I'm not quite getting that.

01-00:56:21

Sickler: They said that our union, because of the poor contract that we had at the brewery, that it would be of no use to them in the container plant. That's what they were saying. What they didn't know was we could use a great deal of that contract they wrote against them, and I did. I won a lot of grievances and arbitration cases against them, based on the contract language they actually wrote. They wanted to take the classifications of assistant lead man, and lead man out of the bargaining unit. I filed a grievance against them and won a quarter-million-dollar settlement against them, and they had to back off. They had to back pay all those people in those classifications and leave the assistant lead man and lead man in the union bargaining unit. NOBODY thought I could win that grievance except me!

01-00:57:02

Rubens: All right, let's stop here and change the tape, and then we'll pick up with you becoming shop steward.

Audio File 2

02-00:00:00

Rubens: Dave, were you attending union meetings before you—

02-00:00:05

Sickler: Yes.

02-00:00:06

Rubens: What were those like?

02-00:00:08

Sickler: Mainly the old heads that supported the union for years would show up. We'd get probably about, out of the entire membership, maybe thirty at a union meeting.

02-00:00:25

Rubens: The members were the entire—

02-00:00:30

Sickler: They were adding people all the time, but in '1966 & 1967, we probably had at least a thousand or more members. We'd get about thirty at a meeting, and a lot of those were people who had really supported the union through thick and thin. A lot of the members stayed away from the union because it was the kiss of death after the failed strike, and Coors really put the pressure on the officers of the local union, made them persona non grata. It was really tense, even when we went to work there. To me, when I was nineteen years old, 1957 was ancient history. But in perspective, it wasn't. There's not that many years between 1957 and 1963

[Interview interrupted by a telephone call]

02-00:01:29

Rubens: By the way, Dave, did the union have activities, socials?

02-00:01:38

Sickler: Not much then. Not when I got involved, they didn't. The union members were still licking their wounds. It was really difficult to be pro-union because Coors was flexing its muscle and they had such a popular product that they had to ration it.

02-00:02:00

Rubens: Did Coors do anything to promote good will within the shop? Did they have softball teams or family day or something?

02-00:02:17

Sickler: No the only activity I can remember was bowling teams.

02-00:02:26

Rubens: How long was your day, by the way? How long were you working?

02-00:02:30

Sickler: People didn't have much time for relaxation. When I started to work there, we were working twelve hours a day, seven days a week, and rotating shifts. It

was a body-killer as well. You'd work two weeks, midnight to noon, and then rotate noon to midnight for two weeks. You'd do this for a long time. People were dropping like flies. Guys in their fifties and sixties were having heart attacks. I didn't know too many guys that lived very long after they retired because that plant took such a physical toll on them. They were shipping beer out and they couldn't make it fast enough. It was selling like crazy! Matter of fact, there was a very famous movie with Burt Reynolds and Sally Fields all about smuggling Coors back East, called—I'm trying to remember.

02-00:03:25

Rubens: Something and the bandit.

02-00:03:26

Carole Sickler: *Smokey and the Bandit*.

02-00:03:26

Sickler: Yeah, *Smokey and the Bandit*. And it was all about smuggling Coors to the East Coast. That's how popular their beer was. They basically had no advertising department. They basically had no public relations department to deal with the public and the sale of the beer. It was sold itself. That was a real benefit to the boycott. I took real advantage of that. Because they had no clue. They did not know how to react to the boycott, because boycotts never had worked before. As a matter of fact, they used to grind it into us at the bargaining table. They would taunt us. "Oh, yeah, please strike us, and while you're at it, please boycott us, because it increases our sales." I wanted in the worst way to make them eat those words.

2-00:04:14

Rubens: Tell me how you get involved. How do you become a shop steward? Become involved in leadership.

02-00:04:20

Sickler: The harassment continued. They would time us on our breaks. They would time us when we took a pee break. It was constant harassment. It was constant looking down our throats. People were really upset. I finally got sick of it and said, "Okay, I'll run for shop steward." People were asking me to run, because I was shooting my mouth off at the lunch table. Ken Debey was one of them and he said, "Stop yapping about it and do something about it. Run." I said, "All right. Will you support me?" He said, "Yeah, I'll support you." So I ran. My luck. A guy I went to high school with in Golden, Colorado, graduated a year or two ahead of me and he decides he's going to run against me. I'm thinking, oh, great, I've got to run against the guy voted most popular guy at Golden High School. It was a real race. But we had enough new people, new blood coming in, guys who didn't want to put up with Coors's bullshit, and who wanted to do something about it. So it was a good thing. The race really got the people in both the bottle can department energized.

02-00:05:38

Rubens: Did you have to campaign?

02-00:05:39

Sickler: Oh, yeah, I campaigned my ass off. I had Kenny and others helping me. I won by six votes.

02-00:05:50

Rubens: How many people voted? What percentage?

02-00:05:53

Sickler: It was a great turnout. It was a nail-biter right down to the end—we were counting ballots late that night. I think it was the most excitement that that local union had had in a long time, and people were starting to feel energized about the local taking Coors on and finally standing up for them. One of the first things I did was start a newsletter. *News on Tap*, I called it.

02-00:06:22

Beagle: Dave, let me just interrupt you for one second. When you ran, when you had this campaign, was it a campaign based on two different approaches? Craig saying, “Hey, let’s get along with the employer. They’re really wonderful people,” and you saying, “No, we’ve got to think about that”?

02-00:06:36

Sickler: No, Craig was taking a “let’s fight back” approach, but the mistake that Craig made was he didn’t have any detailed program for the local. I did! I wanted to help develop shop stewards in other departments. I can’t tell you how much time I spent reading the contract and the bylaws of the local and the constitution of the international. When somebody had a question of me about the local, I could answer it. I knew what the bylaws were. Somebody had a question about the contract, I had an answer for them. I basically knew that contract by heart, and I knew how to pair up language. How to strengthen a grievance out of one section of the contract by reinforcing language in another section of the contract. I would use those. I would pair sections of the contract together to strengthen a grievance on a particular issue, which was really helpful. Coors had no clue. They were so arrogant, most of them never read the contract. “We don’t have to read the contract, we have the right to do anything we want to do, they would say. Says so on number twenty-six of management rights. That was their attitude. Well, no, they couldn’t. Once I beat their ass in arbitration a few times, they finally started taking it serious.

02-00:08:09

Beagle: So Craig was basically running as, “I’m the most popular guy; vote for me”?

02-00:08:12

Sickler: Basically that, yeah. And from my perspective his attitude was “I’ll fight them and I’m smarter than Sickler, so trust me. I can do it.” A lot of guys liked him because he was a very likeable guy.

02-00:08:23

Rubens: Did he fall in behind you, though?

02-00:08:26

Sickler:

No, he just kind of played in his own little orbit out there and quit after a few years.

02-00:08:34

Rubens:

So what do you do? So there you are. You're shop steward. Do you get any time off for that or are you—

02-00:08:41

Sickler:

We had the right to represent the workers. So the first thing I had to do was convince workers to take me as their shop steward with them when they got called in for discipline or for any other reasons. It was a massive education part on my part to reach out to all of the members in our department. "If you get called in on anything, you request me. Don't you say anything until I get there." Because in the contract, those people had the right, to representation. So I said, "You don't tell them a damn thing until I get in there with you." There are a couple of really funny episodes that happened along the way. Coors loved to hire these ex-farmers. They hired this one guy who was the slowest human being I'd ever seen in my entire life. He would start out from the parking lot going into the plant with the rest of us, but wouldn't get there until way after we were in there. Then when we were going home, he would leave the same time we did, but he didn't get to the parking lot until we were on our way out of the parking lot. The slowest-moving human being I ever witnessed in my life. My dad used to say, "You have to drive stakes to see if the bastard's moving," and I felt that was the case with this guy. Anyway, they put him in the worst possible job for him. They put him in a job where he had to be lightning-fast to keep machines from shutting down. It was on a conveyer belt, where if a bottle tipped over and jammed up the line, it would go back and trip the micro switches on the fillers and shut the whole operation down. So people were scrambling around, trying to keep bottles from breaking and boxes from buckling and all that kind of stuff, while he was shuffling his way to the conveyer built to unleash the jam. We had a type-A, hyperactive supervisor. Not really a bad guy, but just dumber than a box of rocks. He'd hyperventilate when anything went wrong on the line. So when he'd watch this guy shuffle across the floor to unjam a conveyer, he went ballistic and called him in the office. Of course, I got called in to represent him. I'm sitting there, and this supervisor is ranting and raving about how much it costs the company every time we have to shut a line down. "This is how much it costs, and this is how bad it is," and blah, blah, blah. The guy I'm representing, who is this ex-farmer, says, real slow, "Elmer, I only got two speeds, and if you don't like this one, I know you ain't going to like my other one." I just about fell out of my chair and laughed. I laughed so damn hard, because you could see the blood from the neck go straight up to the top of his head. So he let him go, and I stayed behind. I said, "Elmer, this is your fault. It's supervision's fault. You should never put this guy in that position. He's physically incapable of doing that job. Put him in a job where he's not going to cause that problem. You want a shortstop out there. You don't want a catcher. But that's the kind of mistakes they made all the time. I never got

over how funny that was. He was not afraid of supervision at all. He just explained his speeds.

02-00:12:08

Rubens:

You're talking about educating, including the *News on Tap*. Are you putting that newspaper out yourself?

02-00:12:17

Sickler:

Oh yeah I wrote it. I did the newsletter myself for a long time.

02-00:12:21

Rubens:

How big of a piece was it?

02-00:12:23

Sickler:

It was only one page, but what I liked about it—was, and I wanted to make the shop steward special, so I would showcase a different shop steward every month. Kind of a little background of their life story and the job that they did, where they worked, their concerns about their area, but then also what they liked to do as a hobby. A little information about them as a family, that kind of stuff. It got to be pretty popular. Then I had a cartoon. We had a great cartoonist in our membership. Wonderful. I told him one time, I said, "I want you to do something." Because a big issue then was hair. If you remember back in the late sixties, the style was long hair, and all of the guys in the plant wanted long hair, including me. Coors was demanding that we all get the military haircuts, where the white line above the ear had to show. We were all rebelling against that. They were handing out letters of reprimand, hand over fist, because of the violation of our hair code. I had this artist in our membership draw a picture of the constitution, with sideburns on the constitution, and a big razor blade ready to come down on the sideburns of the constitution, and in the blade handle wrote "supervision." That cartoon was very popular with the membership; it was kind of a rallying cry. It wasn't too long after that that Coors kind of dropped the issue and didn't enforce that rule anymore. It was just overwhelming. But they saw the workers rally behind that particular issue.

02-00:14:06

Rubens:

Were you getting more shop stewards positions?

02-00:14:10

Sickler:

Yeah. Jumping ahead, when I became business manager, I agreed to take the job only because the membership could vote for shop stewards, but I wanted the right to fire them, because a bad shop steward is worse than having no shop steward. The shop steward position in our local union, for a lot of years, had been a stepping stone to supervision. Coors was smart enough to see somebody who was popular with the other workers, and they would manipulate it so they became a shop steward. Then from shop steward, they became a lead man. Then from lead man, they became a supervisor, and then on up the chain.

02-00:14:50

Rubens: Supervisor means management by then?

02-00:14:52

Sickler: Yeah. In a lot of the departments of the brewery, that was a stepping stone to management. So I wanted to put a stop to that. We had five shop stewards in our local union that I wanted to fire immediately, because they were stooges for the company. I got rid of them. I forget exactly how many shop stewards we had when I took over as business manager, but then when I left, I think we had 106 shop stewards. Probably four or five were so good, they could have replaced me. I got rid of shop steward meetings. We didn't just sit around and chew the fat. I turned the meetings into classes. I trained shop stewards. Shop stewards had to pass a test on the contract. If they couldn't pass a test on the contract, I told them, "I don't need you as a shop steward if you don't know what the contract says and how to use it. Your job is to study that contract. I'll give you a test. If you pass, then you're eligible to be a shop steward."

02-00:16:02

Rubens: Let me just get clear about something. You were shop steward for what division?

02-00:16:07

Sickler: Bottling.

02-00:16:12

Rubens: The job of the shop steward is to represent the worker in any grievances, and to also initiate reforms.

02-00:16:22

Sickler: To show you what the management attitude was towards our contract, we had a clause in our contract that protected our bargaining unit, except for 5 percent. Five percent of our bargaining unit work could be done by supervision. For example, in cases of emergencies, which was fine. But in the brewery business, beer production is measured on barrels of beer produced per man hour. That's the measurement stick. If your shift produces so many barrels of beer per number of employees, the next shift is measured against that as well, because each shift is supposed to have the same number of employees. Well, if you have somebody that's quit or been fired or off sick, and a supervisor fills in for that employee for that entire shift, your barrels of production go way up, because you're working with one less man per barrel of beer. So your numbers on the sheet are going to look better. We had supervisors that loved to take advantage of that fact, so they would fill in as a worker. They'd rotate around, fill in. On paper, their barrels per man hour looked very good. They loved to do that. I caught a supervisor doing it. What I did was I had all of the workers carry little notepad with a pencil. I went out and bought every one of them a notepad—fit in the pocket—with a pencil, and their job was to write down when that supervisor came on their job and when he left. By the end of that shift—and this was day after day as I was clocking this guy—I had written proof and witnesses, that this was the work he'd done

in violation of that section of the contract. So I filed a grievance. Well, they were going to fire me for filing the grievance, because I was insubordinate. Now I'm a shop steward, so they bring in and one of the big shots for that whole department was sitting there telling me how they're going to fire me. I said, "Okay, that's fine. I'm just going to let you know that when I leave here, I'm going to go straight out to the hall and I'm going to tell my business manager what you did. We're going to file a grievance. Then from his office, I'm going to go down to National Labor Relations Board, and I'm going to file a NLRB charge against you, for firing me because I was doing my job as a union shop steward. That really caught them by surprise. They didn't know what the hell to do. They asked me to step out, so I stepped out, and then they called me back in and they said, "All right, we're not going to fire you, but we are going to give you a reprimand and a five-day suspension." I said, "No, you might as well fire me. Because if you do the five days and the letter, I'm still going to go out to the hall, and I'm still going to go down to the National Labor Relations Board. So you might as well just fire me and get it over with." They didn't know what the hell to do with me, so they sent me out of the room again. Then they brought me back in again and said, "All right, forget about it, but consider this a warning." I said, "I'm just telling you, if that warning goes in my file, I'm going out to the hall, I'm going to file a grievance, and I'm going to go down to the National Labor Relations Board and file charges against you." "Get out of here."

02-00:19:54

Beagle:

Can I ask one question? Having read the book on Coors, though, one of the things that struck me is that they didn't care about the NLRA. The NLRA didn't scare them. They knew how ineffective it was.

02-00:20:07

Sickler:

Yeah, but they were scared shitless of taking their own contract and using it against them. They knew, in black and white, they were in violation of their own contract. It was their contract that they were in violation of. That's what scared them. I showed them in the book. I said, "Here it is in the book." My right to file a grievance on it is in black and white in that contract. That's my point. My point was to get our stewards to understand their rights under that contract and their rights under the National Labor Relations Act, and to take an aggressive, positive attitude towards it. They were so defensive. Everybody was so used to just having the shit kicked out of them all the time. Excuse my language. But they were all beat down. Then when the members saw me fight back like that and be victorious, then people started saying, "Hey, maybe the union can do some stuff here." And we did.

02-00:21:16

Rubens:

How long are you shop steward before you become business agent about?

02-00:21:22

Sickler:

I was steward from '66 to—oh, maybe longer than that. Maybe '65. Until '71.

02-00:21:33

Rubens: Oh, a ways.

02-00:21:35

Sickler: Quite a while.

02-00:21:36

Rubens: During that time, are you starting to get any labor education? You're involved with going to Denver?

02-00:21:43

Sickler: Absolutely, yeah.

02-00:21:44

Rubens: Okay, let's talk about that.

02-00:21:46

Sickler: As soon as I became active as a shop steward, I also became active with the Denver Area Labor Federation, the Central Labor Council in Denver, and then ultimately with the State Fed. I became a delegate to the Central Labor Council and started going every month to their meetings. Then I got exposed to the Labor Center for Research at Boulder University, and so I started taking classes by a wonderful guy out of the UAW, and took those classes for quite a while, and then a couple of classes at Denver University.

02-00:22:23

Rubens: That was Walt Lawrence.

02-00:22:26

Sickler: Walt Lawrence, yeah. A wonderful human being. Still alive, but very ill, to this day. I learned so much from him.

02-00:22:36

Rubens: How do you have the time to take these classes? I didn't get this clear; when you're shop steward, do you work your full shift or do you have some time off?

02-00:22:47

Sickler: No, no, no, I worked a full shift, yeah.

02-00:22:51

Rubens: Then how do you get to—

02-00:22:52

Sickler: We'd take it on the weekend. Whenever we got time off and they were having these classes, we'd go. We had a clause in our contract that let us off for union activity, and so the business manager would pay my lost wages and then send me to these classes, me and a couple of others. Kenny Debey as well. We attended those classes. That's how we started hooking up with this whole wonderful labor network that was out there, and then really saw the possibility for unity and strength by working with the council and working with other

unions, and then the State Fed. I loved that whole structure. That whole apparatus was amazing to me once I discovered it. I thought this was just the greatest thing that ever happened.

02-00:23:50

Rubens: Good people in those—

02-00:23:52

Sickler: Oh, wonderful people.

02-00:23:53

Rubens: Where are they coming from? What are their industries?

02-00:23:57

Sickler: Manufacturing was big in Colorado. Colorado has always been looked at as kind of this anti-union state, because it had the Colorado Labor Peace Act there. But when I left high school, I could have went to work at five or six major companies, and they were all union. Gates Rubber had the rubber workers union. Denver Gardner was a steel plant. Steel Workers had that. Paid great wages. Could have gone to work in one of the refineries that the OCAW had. Was a great union place. Samsonite was organized by the rubber workers. There were lots of manufacturing jobs to be had then that paid great wages. You could make a good living out of it. Those guys were all very strong, pro-union people. Plus, Pueblo, which is just down the road from Denver, maybe seventy-five miles or a hundred miles, gave birth to some of the greatest union activity in the United States, in its history. That's where the Ludlow Massacre was. The CF&I steel mills produced some of the brightest, smartest trade unionists that ever lived. A lot of them went on to become state senators and state legislators, because they got their political activity out of that local union. In many ways, I was nurtured and educated by the steelworkers in Pueblo and the Oil, Chemical, and Atomic Workers, OCAW, out of Denver, because their International headquarters were right there in Denver. I got great political nurturing from those two unions.

02-00:25:40

Rubens: And then the people you're meeting at the Denver Labor Fed and the State Fed, these are good people? They're not do-nothing people.

02-00:25:46

Sickler: Oh, they were wonderful. These were all dedicated trade unionists. They were spending their own time, most of them on their own nickel, going to these meetings late at night, signing up for committees, working hard on behalf of their local unions and the people they represented.

02-00:26:03

Rubens: Was there a kind of excitement? There's a sense that things are happening. We're talking about 1970.

02-00:26:13

Sickler:

Actually, there was a lot of excitement by watching the Coors local start to come alive, because the other locals were more alive, but the brewery workers were not that alive. As a matter of fact, we had pulled out of the State Fed because the Building Trades were making fun of our contract with Coors. The head of the State Fed had actually promoted a boycott on behalf of the Building Trades and was trashing our contract. Bob Pipes, who was my business manager before me, was a wonderful human being and trade unionist! He's actually the beginning of the renaissance of our local union. He is the first one that grabbed me and encouraged me to become involved. He was the one that nurtured me and put me out in the field to organize, and sent me to all these classes, and pulled me out of work and paid my way to go to all these different conferences and then when he came down with cancer, he called me and asked me to replace him as business manager.

02-00:27:12

Rubens:

Let's talk about that. He has you become business—

02-00:27:17

Sickler:

Yeah. He got terminal cancer.

02-00:27:20

Rubens:

You're appointed that position?

02-00:27:0822

Sickler:

The board had to appoint me to fill his term and the membership had to approve it. Bob took me into a board meeting and asked the board to support my selection as his replacement.

02-00:27:36

Rubens:

This is the union board?

02-00:27:38

Sickler:

Yeah, it was our executive board. Then that recommendation had then to go to the membership, and the membership had to ratify it with a vote. So he did that. I was supported by the board, and then voted by the membership to fill his term. Unfortunately, a couple of months later, he died. I filled out his term, and then I had to run again for my own term.

02-00:28:05

Rubens:

Was that a pretty easy—

02-00:28:07

Sickler:

No. That was a hard-fought election, because there was another very popular, smart guy by the name of Frank Krupka, who I had tapped once I started filling in for Bob, I didn't have time to do the newspaper anymore. I mean the newsletter. So I tapped this guy named Frank Krupka, a very bright guy, to do the newsletter. He did, and he did a fantastic job. But he decided he wanted to run for business manager, too, and I think he would have done a credible job.

But I beat him. I didn't beat him by a hell of a lot, but I beat him. Then the next time I ran after that, I ran unchallenged. Nobody ran against me.

02-00:28:49

Rubens:

Do you have a campaign for that?

02-00:28:52

Sickler:

I did. I did have to campaign, sure. I ran on my record of wins and losses with arbitration and grievance cases, with the caliber of the shop stewards that we had developed, our strengthening relationship with the rest of the labor movement in Denver and around. Also, my campaign to strengthen our union by organizing. By this time, we had tried to organize the can plant and lost by a couple of votes. I did organize, single-handedly, the over-the-road drivers. Got a contract for them. I did organize Ball Manufacturing plant that made bottle caps for Coors, and after a 6 month strike got a contract, and I think a good contract. First-time contracts are not easy to get, and not very many of them are very good, but I got what I thought was a damn good contract. So I ran on those victories and won.

02-00:29:58

Rubens:

One of the things you had done was bring more people into the union in terms of union action, union activity.

02-00:30:04

Sickler:

Absolutely. We're gaining more popularity all the time. This started to bother Joe Coors. He saw this strength welling up in the membership and how strong the brewery workers were getting. He wanted to invoke the Colorado Labor Peace Act. He was going to force our local to vote on whether or not it could have a union shop or not. Under that state law, a local union had to vote 75 percent of its eligible membership to vote in favor of having a union shop where you could be forced to pay dues. That was before you could even bargain it. If you won that election, that didn't mean you got the union shop. It just meant you could go to the bargaining table and bargain for it. Try to get 75 percent of any body of people that are eligible to vote—it wasn't 75 percent of the people voting. It was 75 percent of those eligible to vote. So everybody who did not vote became a no-vote. That was the challenge that we faced. I ran it like an organizing campaign. Maybe it was unethical. I don't know. But it worked. I put up butcher paper on every wall in our big membership hall. Every single union member's name was on that wall. Next to their name were three codes. Yes, No, and Undecided. I had the shop stewards go around. The shop stewards job was to go around and sell the yes vote, but take an accurate analysis of where we stood. Especially the undecided. I wanted to know who was undecided. The pressure built so high in the plant that people were calling up, saying, "I heard I was registered as undecided! That's not true! I'm for the union!" There was a lot of pressure. We won that vote!!!! It's not because the people were terrified or intimidated. Coors had a lot more intimidation than I could wield. But people believed so strong in it, they were coming back from vacation—this is the other kicker.

This damn vote was held during the week they shut down for maintenance, so that's when people go on vacation. It's Christmastime. A lot of them are out of state. We actually had members come back early from vacation and from other states with family to vote in that election.

02-00:32:38

Rubens: What year are we talking about?

02-00:32:41

Sickler: What's that?

02-00:32:41

Rubens: What year are we talking about when this is—

02-00:32:43

Sickler: Must be '73 or '74. As a matter of record, we won that vote by 96.7 percent of our eligible membership. It blew Coors away.

02-00:32:56

Rubens: You then go into contract negotiations in '74, and that seems like that was a very successful—

02-00:33:02

Sickler: Yes it was! Ken Debey called it the best contract he'd ever seen since he was there. It was good. But it was also controversial, because if you read the book, *Citizen Coors*, we had some involvement by an AFL-CIO field rep who was encouraging the president of the local and all of the board members to strike, to push for a strike, over a nickel raise. Over a nickel raise? Which was insanity. We had picked up a lot of stuff in that contract, and I wanted to get it settled, and he was pushing for a strike. I had a personal conversation with the president of the local. I said, "What the hell are you doing here? You know we're not going to strike." "No, we're not going to strike on this he said" and I said, "Well, what are you doing? You can't push this. You can't bluff unless you're willing to back up a bluff. You can't do this." Sure enough, they decided to do it, and Coors called them on their bluff. So, I had to deliver the news that we were not going on strike! The members were pissed and going crazy. They were all worked up into a frenzy to strike. Now, keep in mind, we'd been building them stronger and stronger, month after month, year after year. They had just come off this vote, 96.7 vote and they felt like Hercules. They felt like they could finally take Coors on and whip them. They were in the mood for war, and I knew this was insane to go out on strike for a nickel when we picked up so many other gains. So I had to get up and back them down. The members went crazy and came into the hall to raise hell with me so I went three days without sleep. I collapsed in the office. Sam Guffy, on our executive board, pulled me out of there and took me to his house, and I stayed there until I started to recuperate later that afternoon. I went back to the office and took over. I kept them from striking, because it would have been suicide. It was stupid.

02-00:35:09

Rubens:

You get strength and seniority, workers' input on setting shifts, limitation on reprimands, statute of limitations, and a pay increase. So why did Coors go along with that? Because you'd built up this—

02-00:35:30

Sickler:

I don't know this for a fact. There was a decent guy by the name of Russ Hargis, who was their Industrial Vice President. Russ and I got to where we trusted each other. He was a decent guy, and he was the head of negotiations. The two of us pounded out this agreement. That's the way I did a lot of my business, was over coffee and different places. It wasn't at the bargaining table. It was pretty well decided by the time we got to the bargaining table.

02-00:36:32

Beagle:

Just to talk about that contract, was it you figuring out—you knew who Russ was working for. You knew what he was facing. He knew what you were facing. So you have a relationship where you're saying, "Russ, I want to make you look good, you want to make me look good. Let's make this work."

02-00:36:52

Sickler:

Or, "This is what I can sell and this is what I can't sell. This is a throw-away result. We got a couple of members that it's a big deal with, but it's bullshit. Don't worry about this one."

02-00:37:03

Beagle:

"This will drive Joe Coors out of his tree. I can't do this."

02-00:37:07

Sickler:

Right. We had those kinds of conversations.

02-00:37:08

Rubens:

This is '74, a good contract.

02-00:37:12

Sickler:

The last contract I negotiated.

02-00:37:17

Rubens:

When are you picked to be an AFL-CIO rep and go to Montana?

02-00:37:23

Sickler:

We had another big fight. Well, let me back up. We had a big fight internally in our international union, because they were merging with the Teamsters. Now, keep in mind, this is '72, and '73. Yeah, not '71. The international cuts a deal behind our back, lies to us. They went to us for a per-capita increase in '73, under the auspices that they needed it to organize because the Teamsters were taking a lot of our members away from them. They were raiding us in a lot of places, and they were organizing new plants in our jurisdiction. So we needed to fight them. Well, I was fighting the Teamsters anyway. I had to fight them when I organized the over-the-road drivers. We could never prove it was the Teamsters, but let me just say this. It was on the

front page of the *Denver Post*, so it's documented. Somebody tried to set a fire to my house, on the wood side, under a gas meter, while I was organizing over-the-road drivers and I believe there was a Teamster following me as I made house calls and signed up truck drivers. They called my business manager, saying, "What the hell are you doing? You've got somebody out there organizing over-the-road Drivers—what are brewery workers doing with over-the-road drivers?" My business manager said, "We're doing the same thing with over-the-road drivers that you're doing brewery workers." Fair trade. My business manager said, "Keep at it." So I kept at it.

02-00:39:22

Rubens:

Who gets involved with that? Obviously police, but is anyone investigating?

02-00:39:27

Sickler:

Yeah, cops. The cops came out, but nothing ever happened out of it. But this happened while I was doing the organizing. It must have been a slow news day, because it made the front page of the *Denver Post*. Anyway.

02-00:39:40

Rubens:

The brewery workers do merge with the Teamsters.

02-00:39:43

Sickler:

The international merged. What they did was, with this phony per-capita increase, they wanted to bring our dues up so it was level with the Teamster dues, so it could be just a lateral move. Well, when I heard about it, I blew my stack, because if you remember, back in 1972, the Farmworkers were not only struggling against the growers, the Teamsters were attacking them. So it was a struggle with the Farmworkers and the Teamsters. We were supporting Farmworkers. We had had Cesar out to talk to the membership. We had Dolores out several times. Cesar's brother, Richard, came out a number of times and spoke. There were times when my membership would get up and make a motion to donate more than we had in the treasury to the Farmworkers. As secretary treasurer, business manager, I had to get up and say, "Sorry, brothers, we don't have that much in the treasury." That's how much our local union was supporting the Farmworkers. When this power grab came with the international, our members said, "Hell no." We had a smart, young attorney that we'd hired to represent us on a number of cases against Coors, by the name of Wally Brauer. We called Wally and said, "Look, we don't want to go along with this merger. I need you to come out here and figure out a way for us to protect our assets." At the same time, by the way—let me back up—about the same time this happened, George Meany sent a letter out to all of us that were local unions and said, "If you don't want to go with the Teamsters—now keep in mind, the Teamsters were not a part of the AFL-CIO. They were out. Meany said, "If you don't want to go with this forced merger, you have a home here at the AFL-CIO. We will make you a directly-affiliated local union." The AFL-CIO had this apparatus within its structure to do that. It was like a soft landing for us when we didn't have a home. That was a good resting place for us to either stay permanently, or if we

wanted to search around for an international union we could merge with, we could do that. That's how I came in contact with Alan Kistler, who was the director of organizing and field services. He came out to talk to us. He then became aware of my organizing work and some of the stuff I was doing with the local, plus Denver Area Labor Federation and the State Fed. He started talking to me about coming onboard as an AFL-CIO field rep. This was in '73, and '74.'

I had to start a campaign internally with our membership not to go Teamsters. The Teamsters had the bad-ass reputation. There were a number of our bad-ass members who thought we should have a bad-ass local union with the Teamsters. I was opposed to it, and the board was opposed to it, so we campaigned for directly-affiliated local union status. They brought in federal mediation conciliation service to conduct the election. We had to have two votes. We had to have a vote whether or not we were going to decertify the old international union, and then we had to have another vote that we were going to go directly-affiliated local union status with the AFL-CIO. We had those two votes conducted by the FMCS, and overwhelmingly, members voted against a forced merger, and voted for this independent status that we had. This shows you how ridiculous I was as an organizer. They asked me what we should call ourselves. I don't think I can even remember the full name. Brewery, Can, Trucking and Allied Production Workers of America. I didn't realize how much money it was going to cost me to put on a head letter. We just kept it Brewery Workers. Anyway, then we became part of the AFL-CIO, and that's when I then started working with Alan Kistler and a number of the other people in the AFL-CIO.

02-00:44:05

Beagle:

Lisa, do you want to ask Dave about the organizing of the over-the-road truck drivers and the bottle cap guys?

02-00:44:15

Rubens:

Sure. We have about fifteen minutes on this tape. Then we'll need to talk about Dave organizing in Montana.

02-00:44:23

Sickler:

Montana is kind of short, because I wasn't up there that long.

02-00:44:25

Rubens:

Tell me about the over-the-road truck drivers. Who are they? What did they do?

02-00:44:29

Sickler:

Coors started their own trucking company. They were going to deliver their own beer to the distributors with their own trucks. Most of the workers that had experience out there were Teamsters. Once we found out what the list of the Teamster workers were, I started making house calls with them to get them signed up, and I got them signed up. At that time, the biggest issue with

those Teamster drivers was, could they depend on a pension? I told them we would negotiate a pension that was equal to the Teamsters' pension, because if you'll remember, back in the seventies, early seventies, there was a lot of concern by the rank and file about Teamster money invested in Vegas, so there were a lot of guys who were worried about getting their pensions.

02-00:45:24

Rubens:

And mob connections, they were concerned.

02-00:45:26

Sickler:

Yeah. We were able to negotiate the mileage rate for them and get them pension. That was the easiest organizing work I'd ever done. The Ball Manufacturing plant was really tough. We won that. Now, keep in mind, UAW had tried to organize them a couple of times, failed. The Steel Workers tried to organize them. They failed. I think OCAW had tried to organize them. There were at least three or four unions who tried to organize them and failed. They were physically across the street from our local union hall. We had a couple of guys come in one night and said, "We want to join the union." I said, "Well, it ain't that easy." I said, "Here are some cards. You go get these cards. You get the majority of these cards signed up and if they're legit, then we'll talk about them." The next day, they came back with them all signed. I said...Oh, okay. I'm a pretty new business manager right now. I've got my hands full with Coors and all that other stuff, but this has got potential. I didn't know what I was biting off, because it ended up a six-month strike.

02-00:46:46

Rubens:

How big a company? How many workers?

02-00:46:48

Sickler:

A hundred and sixty-three. One of the ringleaders against the union that led a bunch of scabs across the picket line was a neighborhood friend of mine I grew up with, I had known from the time I was five years old. Needless to say, a big split in the relationship with him. It really got ugly. I didn't know when I was organizing those guys that a number of them—I think probably twelve, thirteen, fourteen of those guys—had been ex-guerilla fighters in Vietnam. These are like Green Beret-type guys. They had a bad attitude anyway coming out of Vietnam. When we ended up on strike, the attorney that was representing management was Coors's attorney, a guy named Bud [Erwin] Lerten. They thought this was just going to be an old, by-the-book kind of a strike. They'd wait us out, we'd die out on the picket line. Well, somebody starts blowing up cars and trucks.

02-00:47:57

Beagle:

Your guys?

02-00:47:58

Sickler:

I don't know that for sure but everybody assumes it's you guys.

02-00:47:59

Beagle: Who were ex-Green Berets?

02-00:48:01

Sickler: Some of our strikers. The Colorado Bureau of Investigation got involved. Now, Coors is telling the press that it's me. I'm training these guys to do this. They're telling the press and they're telling the CBI all of this bullshit, and the cops and everybody else, that I'm the guy responsible for all this guerilla warfare, and that there would be no problem out there if it wasn't for me. I hated to get up in the morning and turn the news on, for fear of what had happened. So I called the guys together. I got them in the office and I closed the door, and I said, "Look, what the hell are you guys doing? Somebody's going to get killed. This is crazy shit." They said, "Dave, we're keeping you out of this. Stay out of it. We're not going to lose this fight."

02-00:49:08

Carole Sickler: Language.

02-00:49:10

Rubens: It's all right.

02-00:49:12

Sickler: The Company actually put in concertina wire and hired off-duty Denver police. They were up on the roofs with shotguns, and these floodlights came down. I had seven-day, twenty-four-hour picket lines out there. The scabs inside would get cans, aluminum cans, and fill them with rocks that were up on the roof, and throw them down at our picketers. A couple of the guys came in and had pretty good bruises on them. I said, "I know how to fix that. Tomorrow, when the stores open, I'll go up and I'll be back, and we'll take care of those guys tomorrow night." So I went and bought all the wrist rockets I could find, and I bought loads of marbles and steel balls. I said, "You guys stay out there and just let those guys get brave and throw that crap, and then just unload on them." I was right, because you could hear them screaming when they'd get hit with one of those marbles. But then my guys went crazy, and they blew out every window in the plant with those wrist rockets. It was crazy. Finally, the truck that got blown up, that scared the hell out of everybody. So the CBI comes to me, and I said, "Look, man, I've got nothing to do with this! I'm telling you, I'm not instigating this!" The guy said, "Oh, no, here's what did it." Their general office was separated from the plant. Their general office was up by Youngsfield in Wheat Ridge, and it was blown to the ground. Just blown to bits. So the CBI comes to me and they said, "Look, we've got to talk to you, because this has to stop. Somebody is going to get killed." I said, "Look, I'm not ordering this." The guy from Colorado Bureau of Investigation says, "Sickler, you're not smart enough to do this stuff. We know it's not you. These guys that are doing this and we don't know which individuals are doing it, but it has to be some of those guys from Vietnam. Those guys who were in combat. They were trained to do this stuff and we think it's them. We know that's who's doing it. We don't have any

hopes of ever catching them doing it, because they're that good. But you're the leader here. You've got to pull this thing down." I called the guy that was the industrial relations rep at the plant, and I said, "Look, I got a visit from the CBI." He said, "I did, too." I said, "Well, do you want to stop it before somebody gets killed?" He said, "Yeah. I think it's time." So we went into negotiations and we negotiated a damn good contract. Good contract. But I couldn't sell it. I brought the contract back. They got the union shop. We got a nice raise. We got all kinds of stuff in there, stuff that they would have bought immediately had we had no strike. When I got management to agree to this, I thought, oh, this is strawberry shortcake time, man. This is wonderful. Couldn't sell it. I ended up calling John Zancanaro of the FMCS [Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service] out of San Francisco. Had a reputation as being one of the most successful mediators on the planet. He is a one-armed guy. I called him, and he flew out to Denver. I picked him up, took him out to the hall. I explained to him what we were dealing there with the guys. He got up and tried to sell it, and man, they went down his throat. They were ripping him up. He was taking his jacket off, and then he was taking his tie off. Finally, we were able to sell it by just a few votes.

02-00:53:18

Beagle:

Why was it so hard to sell it?

02-00:53:20

Sickler:

They wanted to put that company out of business. They hated them by that time. But we got a damn good contract. Then, after I left the local and the brewery workers struck Coors that group eventually decertified the local. Which was sad because that was a huge win for us. A lot of people had said that it was the most violent strike since the Ludlow Massacre which wasn't true because so many strikers, women and children were murdered in the Ludlow Massacre.

02-00:54:04

Rubens:

This is such a fascinating story about these Vietnam vets and their animus and their ability to use the skills they learned in Vietnam. It's been on my mind since you mentioned earlier in the interview that you had been ready to enlist in that war. I understand your main incentive was to be with your buddies. Did you have no critique of the war then. Were you not political?

02-00:54:40

Sickler:

I was, but if you'll remember, in the early days of the Vietnam War, it wasn't unpopular. It was not unpopular at all. In '64 and '65, there was a lot of support for the war in Colorado. We kind of believed all the bullshit that we were being fed. We didn't know until '67, '68 how wrong it was, and the lies that we were told.

02-00:55:01

Carole Sickler:

I think it was different in Colorado than California. California protested early on.

02-00:55:09
Sickler: Maybe. I can only relate to Colorado. In Colorado, even the college students weren't protesting in '64, & '65.

02-00:55:17
Rubens: Were not?

02-00:55:18
Sickler: No. Not that we were aware of.

02-00:55:22
Rubens: The other thing is that you did not have a deferment. You had gotten married after you got out of high school, is that right?

02-00:55:32
Sickler: Yeah.

02-00:55:37
Rubens: Had you built your own home then at that point?

02-00:55:39
Sickler: No. I was, at that point, just renting.

02-00:55:45
Rubens: So marriage didn't give you a deferment?

02-00:55:51
Sickler: They weren't taking married guys for a while, but then they were taking everybody. In '65—I think it was '65—I got the draft notice, but they were just taking about everybody.

Audio File 3

03-00:00:01
Rubens: You had just told that wonderful story about the militancy, and the almost craziness, of the folks at the Ball Company, and then your attempt to mediate. You were the one to put a brake on things. It made me think about how now, anyway, you have a very affable nature. So many of your stories evidence that, and that you had a way of really getting along with people. Was that true? Would you have ever said you were a hothead in these early times? Then, underlying that, how do you talk about what kind of personality you had and how you were perceived? Not by the company, but by your—

03-00:01:08
Sickler: By my members, I think I was perceived as somebody who fought really hard for them. I think I was perceived as somebody who had a vision for the local, and somebody that was successful in a lot of that vision and making the local stronger, making people believe in it. I think some of the feedback I got from a lot of my members was, "You make me feel powerful. You make me believe in myself." I think that was probably the best gift I was able to give the membership, because they thought things were possible.

03-00:01:57
Rubens: Were you also one of the guys?

03-00:01:59
Sickler: Oh, sure. Absolutely.

03-00:02:00
Rubens: Did you go fishing and hunting?

03-00:02:02
Sickler: I went fishing and hunting. Went ice-fishing. Went hunting. Went target-shooting. Did all that stuff. I was on a bowling league. I did all that stuff.

03-00:02:14
Rubens: Genuinely enjoying it, not just—

03-00:02:16
Sickler: Oh, no, of course. No, no, no. I had some really good friends. Carole is my best friend on this planet. Next to her is Kenny Debey. We're really close, like brothers.

03-00:02:34
Rubens: You've had this success. Six months was a long time for that strike to take place.

03-00:02:40
Sickler: Was. It was.

03-00:02:45
Rubens: At what point, then, are you tapped to go to Montana?

03-00:02:50
Sickler: They started talking to me in '74, bringing it up, asking if I would I be willing to move. They didn't get the green light to hire me until '76. I was hired on May 9, 1976.

03-00:03:09
Rubens: So you had a while to be thinking about it.

03-00:03:13
Sickler: Yeah, it was bittersweet, because I didn't want to leave the local. It had really grown. It kind of blossomed. Especially after that victory vote on the Colorado Labor Peace Act, when we voted 96.7 percent of our membership's eligibility to support the union. That's a ringing endorsement for the union. I don't care what union you talk about. It would be very difficult for most unions in this country to get a 96.7 percent of eligible voters out of their membership to vote to pay dues and belong to the union. That was a great victory. It was also a great defeat for Joseph Coors. Joe Coors went insane after that vote. He's the one that pushed for the vote. He's the one that actually believed he was going to break our union with that vote, and he actually helped build it, because we put his face on that campaign. This was a

vote for our members against their greatest enemy, Joe Coors. Our people stuffed it down his throat. So they felt powerful. It was hard to leave the local at that pinnacle. It was at its pinnacle of strength. We'd just voted for the best contract in our memory in '74. We had won a major grievance. They had just announced in '74 that—no, it was later than that. I'm sorry, early '76, just as I was leaving to go to the AFL-CIO. We won that quarter-million-dollar arbitration case against Coors when they illegally tried to take the lead man and assistant lead man out of our bargaining unit. They just arbitrarily did it. Nobody thought we were going to win that arbitration case, but we won it.

03-00:05:09

Rubens: Was there already talk of strike?

03-00:05:13

Sickler: Oh, sure.

03-00:05:16

Rubens: Had there been a reevaluation of the contract before you leave?

03-00:05:20

Sickler: People were really pissed off at Coors, and they felt powerful.

03-00:05:28

Rubens: What are they pissed off about?

03-00:05:30

Sickler: They were pissed off about Coors's attitude after their vote. Joe Coors came down on top of them with a vengeance. Had his supervisor's kind of increase the observation of our union activists, our members. Then when they got into contract negotiations, Joe Coors wanted a complete take-back, and he wanted concessions from the union. So the members were really pissed off, because we had made gains in '74. Had that major victory with the Colorado Labor Peace Act. Then they go into negotiations. I've already left the local when they're going into negotiations. Then they come to the table with proposals like, if a shop steward files a grievance, that shop steward has to take a lie detector test, to make sure that he believes the grievance is valid. That's intimidation language. That's the kind of attitude that the local went into after I left in bargaining.

03-00:06:34

Rubens: What's attractive to you about being field rep for the AFL-CIO?

03-00:06:39

Sickler: What was exciting about it?

03-00:06:40

Rubens: Mm-hmm. What drew you to do it?

03-00:06:42

Sickler:

What was exciting about it to me was I was picked because of my organizing skills. The AFL-CIO wanted me to go to Montana and put together another Los Angeles/Orange County Organizing Committee program for the Mountain States. Not just Montana, but Montana and Wyoming and Idaho. Those three Rocky Mountain states. They wanted me to put together that kind of a structure for organizing. The first day I spent on staff was on an airplane to Los Angeles. The first day of my job reporting was to the Los Angeles/Orange County Organizing Committee. Her husband was in charge of the committee.

03-00:07:25

Rubens:

Carole's husband?

03-00:07:26

Sickler:

Yes. Chuck Hogan. So I reported to Chuck. Chuck was to show me around, show me the structure, all that kind of stuff. We really hit it off. He heard bad rumors about me told to him, and I had bad information about him. I came out to Los Angeles not trusting him at all, and vice versa. I came out, him not trusting me. But the more we got to talking, the more we found out we had in common, and our philosophies about trade union movement were the same, and organizing was the same. The Los Angeles/Orange County Organizing Committee was the cutting edge of organizing in United States. It was the centerpiece of organizing for the AFL-CIO.

03-00:08:15

Rubens:

When had it been established?

03-00:08:17

Sickler:

It was established by constitutional action in 1962.

03-00:08:21

Rubens:

Oh, that early? Okay.

03-00:08:22

Sickler:

Carole was the first secretary for the organizing committee that started in '62.

03-00:08:26

Rubens:

We'll pick up some of that history and Carole's history when you become assigned there. But you're talking about getting prepared for Montana. You come and meet him.

03-00:08:36

Sickler:

They sent me out to train me here about its structure, how it works. In a nutshell, what it did was bring all the affiliates together to agree on targets. X, Y, Z. You bring everybody in the same room. All the different affiliates would stand up and say, "I want to organize this plant over here." If everybody signed off on it in the room that was their target. Nobody was to interfere with it. Everybody was supposed to help if they could. They would send organizers to do house calling, all that stuff. Picketing, hand-billing, all that stuff. If it

was contested, then that was set aside and it was mediated. There was an agreement that whoever had the most cards signed up and who had the most strength in that particular unit generally were given the green light to go ahead and organize it, with the understanding, if they failed, then they turned the target over to somebody else, and all their leads and all their strength and all that stuff, and then they would help in turn. So it was kind of a mutual aid society that LAOCOC was built around. The reason they did it was because, in Los Angeles, the unions were killing themselves. Unions were interfering with each other. They were intervening in all the elections, so nobody was winning. A lot of the unions had the attitude that “if I can’t get it, I’m going to prevent the other union from getting it. That was the attitude. And unions were raiding each other. Somebody had a shop. Whoever the agent was wasn’t servicing it, so the people were upset. An agent from another union would go in and say, “Get rid of them. Take us.” That kind of stuff was all going on in Los Angeles. The organizing committee put a stop to all that stuff.

03-00:10:18

Rubens:

We’ll get back to that, but tell me about you’re going to set this whole thing up in the Montana, Idaho—

03-00:10:24

Sickler:

They wanted me to put this kind of structure together in Montana and Idaho.

03-00:10:30

Rubens:

What were the industries specifically that you were organizing?

03-00:10:33

Sickler:

The industries, unfortunately, were a lot of manufacturing, like we had in Los Angeles. The biggest unions up there were actually, at the time, lumber.

03-00:10:46

Rubens:

Mining.

03-00:10:47

Sickler:

Yeah, mining. The Laborers were pretty strong there, so a lot of the building trades were fairly strong there. AFSCME, believe it or not, was very strong there. They had all the public workers, basically, in the state, and that’s another long story. I ended up helping AFSCME fight off a Teamster raid, statewide. I had to travel the whole state of Montana to fight off a Teamster raid. Then I ended up helping with legislation with the State Fed. Before I could even start putting together an organizing structure for the three states, the brewery workers were set to go on strike. I get a call for the last day of negotiations.

03-00:11:38

Rubens:

Negotiations of?

03-00:11:39

Sickler:

Between the brewery workers and the local.

03-00:11:42

Beagle: The Coors?

03-00:11:43

Sickler: Yeah. I get a call from Alan Kistler. He was the AFL-CIO director of organizing, and field services. He said, "I want you to fly in there and see if you can get some kind of an agreement so there's no strike." I said, "It's not going to happen. I can tell you right now it's not going to happen. Coors doesn't want it to happen. I'm not going to change that." He said, "Well, go in. Just sit anyway. Just go in and report back to me what's happening." I attended the last round of bargaining. Coors was dead set on a strike. They were dead set on it. They were going to make it happen, and they did. Not right away, because a lot of charges were filed, NLRB charges were filed. I think the last negotiation was sometime in January. Ultimately, by April, the local pulled the pin and went out on strike, and the membership was pissed that they had waited that long. I was there the night they pulled the pin and went on strike.

03-00:12:47

Rubens: Is this '76?

03-00:12:48

Sickler: Seventy-seven.

03-00:12:49

Rubens: This is '77? April. Okay.

03-00:12:51

Sickler: Yeah, '77. Once it looked like a strike was inevitable—and you have to understand, as militant as I was and militant as I am, I was anti-strike. I'm anti-strike because workers give their job back to the employer, and I'm opposed to that. What I wanted the local to do, and what I encouraged them to do—but I was opposed by other forces in the AFL-CIO, namely a field rep—I wanted the local to take all the members out for one day, send everybody back in except fifty selected people. I wanted to be part of the selection process of fifty people. I wanted to take those fifty people and train them to boycott. I wanted the local to go back and make Coors finance its own boycott. I wanted the members to be assessed for the full salary, the full wages, of the brewery workers I would take into the field to boycott Coors. Fifty boycotters, and I'd train them and strategically place them in different places within Coors market, the eleven States they were marketing. They were just getting ready to go into Texas, which was a huge market. But the local, and most of the board, had it in their head that they could defeat Coors in a strike. Nineteen unions before us had tried—no, eighteen. Excuse me. We were the nineteenth. Eighteen unions before us had struck Coors and got crushed. All eighteen of them.

03-00:14:39

Rubens: Excluding the one at Ball and the—

03-00:14:43

Sickler: Yeah, but that wasn't really Coors.

03-00:14:46

Rubens: Fifty-seven certainly was.

03-00:14:48

Sickler: Yeah. They had two thousand non-union employees at the can plant. They had a thousand-plus at porcelain. They had a huge construction unit. You had all kinds of people that were screaming and begging to go to work at Coors, who would cross the picket line. I knew, with those numbers, it's crazy. There's no way we could beat Coors with a strike. The only way we could beat Coors was economic pressure, with a boycott. I had studied boycotts. I studied the Farmworkers' boycott. I'd studied the rubber workers' boycott, the R.G. Sloan boycott, the Levi Strauss boycott. I studied them all. What I tried to do is incorporate the strategy of the best ones to use against Coors. Where I had an advantage was Coors's arrogance. That was my greatest advantage. They were so cocky, they actually thought the boycott would help them increase sales, so they did nothing. They just sat on their ass while I boycotted the hell out of them.

What I did was, different from the boycott in '57, was I put Coors's face and their politics out there for everybody to see. By this time, Coors's politics had come back to haunt them. They had Latinos against them. The GI Forum had its own boycott against them. They had African Americans against them. There was an African American boycott. They had women against them. There was a women's boycott against Coors. There was a student boycott against Coors, because when Joe Coors was regent, he tried to shut down SDS and banned their newspaper from the campus. This outraged students who didn't even support SDS. The boycott and anti-Coors attitude became nationwide. There were lots of people, nationwide, that hated Coors for a whole lot of reasons. My job as an organizer was to pull them together.

03-00:16:53

Rubens: The strike happens, despite your best efforts. Kistler, the AFL, they're not saying to the brewery workers, "Hold back"?

03-00:17:30

Sickler: No. They gave them full autonomy.

03-00:17:35

Rubens: You had been in Montana and the region probably less than eight months. You were trying to set the thing up. You mentioned this Teamster raid. Should we just tell this one story? Is this happening during that eight-month period?

03-00:17:49

Sickler: Yeah.

03-00:17:51

Rubens: So you're putting things in place.

03-00:17:54

Sickler:

Yeah. Well, getting started. In the meantime, AFSCME, a huge union, and its state leader, located in Helena where I was living and working, called me and asked for help on this de-cert. I said, "Well, there's only one way I'm going to help you, and that is if you're willing to admit the mistakes that your local has made with these people. They're not decertifying you for no reason."

03-00:18:24

Rubens:

What kind of organization was this that was asking?

03-00:18:27

Sickler:

These were state workers, mainly. They plowed the state roads and all of that. That was one of their big units, statewide highway units. I said, "I know what's happened. I can tell you what's happened. You've had agents that you pay full-time to go out there and talk to those people, and they haven't returned their phone calls, they haven't talked to them, they haven't worked on their issues or their problems, and people are pissed off. They think they've been neglected, and they think they've been abused. And the Teamsters are telling them that they won't neglect them and they won't abuse them. So if you're going to have a chance of winning this, you and your union has to admit you've made mistakes where they're legitimate."

03-00:19:11

Beagle:

Dave, were the Teamsters going after every state worker or just road people?

03-00:19:18

Sickler:

No. Every state worker. They were going after every unit. It was a huge deal. It was a huge deal for the State Fed. So the State Fed wanted me to get involved. With the proviso that they would apologize to the workers for where they were wrong—if they weren't wrong, then I needed proof they weren't wrong. I needed some kind of documentation to validate why they did what they did. But I said, "There's no way in the world that this many workers could be this pissed off because you didn't do anything wrong. If you're going to have any credibility at all, you're going to have to own up to that. I can support you and ask them to give you another chance, and why you're better, you know better, you can do a better job, and you're going to take care of whoever was supposed to take care of them and get them out of the picture. If you're not willing to do that, then I'm not willing to help you on this, because I can't. It's a waste of my time." To his credit, he agreed to do that, and he did, and we saved the unit. We saved the unit. But it just took an immense amount of my time driving all over Montana, going from union to union, trying to save them from being decertified.

03-00:20:39

Rubens:

Meanwhile, all this was going on at Coors, and the strike happens, and then how does the boycott come about?

03-00:20:50

Sickler:

Way before the strike happened, I'm talking to the local, and I know that's what's going to happen. That's where we're headed. Because they come in with those ridiculous, crazy demands, set totally up to piss the membership off, to get them wired up and ready—because they knew they were already willing and ready to go on strike. And they wanted to put them on the street, because once they put the local out on the street and we gave the jobs back to the employer, they were in the driver's seat. It's stupid. So I tried to convince the local of that, but they were convinced that they had so damn much power now that they could beat Coors. We were powerful for about two weeks. Then, when no paycheck is coming in, and the wife has got to pay for the fridge and make a mortgage payment, or the car payment—and Coors is replacing our folks by the hundreds there is tremendous pressure on our members to cross.

03-00:21:11

Rubens:

And then the healthcare. Wasn't that a big issue?

03-00:21:46

Sickler:

Yeah, healthcare was an issue. Anyway. I knew they were going to cave, because that was the m.o. That's how they killed all eighteen before us, unions exactly the same way. And our guys took the bait. Anyway, I started planning for a boycott well before that. What I advised the union to do was, in writing, ask the AFL-CIO for pre-boycott sanction, which was unheard of. Pre-boycott sanction gave us a little leverage at the table, but more importantly, gave us advanced time to prepare the field with pre-boycott sanction. With pre-boycott sanction, we could go to central labor councils and state feds in those eleven states where the beer was marketed and say, "We already have pre-boycott sanction of Coors beer by the AFL-CIO in case we pull the pin," whenever that is. At that time, I had no idea what the date was. But I said, "It's going to be sometime fairly soon, down the road." That's what we did. Then I had the top officer—well, not top officer, but president, who ran the meetings—had him go out into the field with another guy and visit the Central Labor Councils and the state feds and advise them that we were getting ready to pull the pin at Coors, and get them prepared for a boycott, get them talking about it. That worked. It started getting the field ready. People started paying attention, and we prepared material about all the crazy positions Coors took against Latinos and women and minorities, and the lawsuits against them for discrimination and all that kind of stuff. We got the conversation started, so when we actually pulled the pin, nobody was shocked. People were ready to go for the boycott.

03-00:23:51

Rubens:

Were you already titled the national—no. You were doing this as a field rep?

03-00:23:58

Sickler:

I was doing it to help the local get prepared for a boycott.

03-00:24:01

Rubens:

Okay, and for the AFL--

03-00:24:03
Beagle: Did you run into people saying, “Oh, yeah, Sickler, you’re coming here because your guys back in Golden are dropping the ball, don’t have the guts to hang out there, and now you want us to do your work for you”?

03-00:24:14
Sickler: No.

03-00:24:14
Beagle: You didn’t hear that?

03-00:24:15
Sickler: Never heard that. Never heard that. No.

03-00:24:20
Rubens: So the strike happens. How are you appointed the—

03-00:24:27
Sickler: I got a call from Alan Kistler, telling me that President Meany wanted me to head up the boycott against Coors.

03-00:24:36
Rubens: And so do you turn the reins over to someone else to be the field rep? You were putting stuff in place, but.

03-00:24:42
Sickler: No. In Montana?

03-00:24:43
Rubens: Yeah.

03-00:24:44
Sickler: I left, and nothing took my place. Zero.

03-00:24:47
Rubens: Too bad. Meany is calling you. I think you said in a pre-interview that you then went back. You prepared a massive report. Had you met Meany before?

03-00:25:04
Sickler: No. I’d seen him, but I hadn’t personally met him until I went back for the report. That was a hoot.

03-00:25:15
Rubens: Talk about that.

03-00:25:17
Sickler: Well, when I first came in the room, the photographer was there. He wanted a picture of me and President Meany standing together. Now, he’s shorter than Carole. He had this cigar out of his mouth. He’s out of New York. So he looks up at me and he says to Alan Kistler, he says, “Where the hell you hiring them these days, the Celtics?” Which cracked me up. I sat down across from his desk and I started to tell him about Coors. He interrupted. He was excited to

talk about it. He knew all about the Coors family. He knew all about the right-wing committees that Coors had put together to defeat Teddy Kennedy and other progressive Democrats. He knew all about the Coors political stuff. It was amazing how up to speed he was on it. I think he was excited that we were having the impact. I went back to give him an actual impact. He was basically just interested in bottom-line numbers, how were we doing. When I gave him that report, he was really pleased. He was very pleased that we were having that kind of an impact.

03-00:26:36

Rubens:

That you'd already put in place these pre-sanction—you already had done your work, going throughout the western region and talking.

03-00:26:46

Sickler:

Yeah, and the boycott was really having an effect. Immediately, we had blacks join in, we had Latino organizations join in. People went out of their way to welcome me in with open arms. I gave them material and told them what they could do to help us.

03-00:27:07

Rubens:

You had a budget, the AFL.—

03-00:27:10

Sickler:

What my total budget was for the entire boycott—it was like a ten-year boycott—from the AFL-CIO. Thirty-two thousand dollars.

03-00:27:20

Rubens:

Thirty-two thousand a year?

03-00:27:21

Sickler:

No.

03-00:27:22

Rubens:

Oh, come on.

03-00:27:23

Sickler:

Period.

03-00:27:24

Rubens:

I thought he was excited about the boycott.

03-00:27:27

Sickler:

That was my term budget. That's what the AFL-CIO gave me.

03-00:27:31

Rubens:

That didn't include your salary?

03-00:27:32

Sickler:

Oh, no. This was actually a gift, in retrospect, not being able to have a budget. Because what that money went for was the stipend to the brewery worker

members that I'd pulled out of the plant to help with the boycott. That's what I paid them.

03-00:27:52

Rubens: So you did get brewery workers out?

03-00:27:54

Sickler: Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah, sure. I went back. Because I wanted live brewery workers that could tell the story themselves.

03-00:28:01

Rubens: So you had the fifty that you had wanted?

03-00:28:03

Sickler: No, I didn't have enough money for fifty. I had maybe, at best, seventeen, eighteen.

03-00:28:11

Beagle: But that \$32,000 didn't get you very far.

03-00:28:14

Sickler: No. But then I went to people like Justin Ostrow, with the Machinists union, and told Justin the problem I had. He writes me out a check for fifteen grand. I talked to other unions. Steelworkers wrote me out a check for ten grand. Talked to other unions, and they wrote me out checks, so I picked up fifteen here, ten there, five there, three thousand there, whatever I could pick up. But the most important thing, the most cost-effective thing I learned, was how to use the AFL-CIO's structure. If you learn how to use the AFL-CIO's structure, you can save a ton of money and actually get more work done. The Central Labor Councils themselves, like having an army of volunteers. Central Labor Council gets onboard; they get the message out to all of the local unions. The locals get the word out to all of their membership, and it just saturates. Same thing with the NAACP structure. If you get the buy-in from the grand poobah at the top of the pyramid of all these organizations—the NAACP, La Raza, whoever it is—and they agree at the top end to filter that down through their structure, it spreads. That's what I did. I just went to the top cats in the organization, and it's amazing how well that worked.

03-00:29:39

Beagle: So you were the salesman. You were the salesman for the boycott. You were the head of the sales department.

03-00:29:45

Sickler: I was.

03-00:29:48

Beagle: Let me just ask a question. Let's say you go to the president of the NAACP. Did he say to you, "Okay, I'm going to introduce you to my regional person from New England. I want you to go talk to my person in Chicago." In other words, how far down the structure did you have to go?

03-00:30:05

Sickler:

I didn't work it that way. I didn't work it that way. What I did was I went to the local guys with NAACP, like Don Fields in Los Angeles, who was a great guy. I loved him. He loved the boycott. So I said, "Don, in order for this to work, I need your organization, from the top down, to buy this. I'm a white guy. I don't feel comfortable going to your top black guy, telling him to buy a boycott on behalf of a bunch of white guys. But here's what the bastards have done against blacks. They didn't hire them until they absolutely had to. You guys filed a lawsuit against them in '68, '69. That's their record. Plus, take a look at who they support. They support the Jesse Helms of the world. All your enemies, these bastards fund. So I need you to go up the ladder in your organization and get me buy-up," which he did. I said, "In return, here's what I offer you guys. I'm not asking you guys to keep the boycott going until you get what I want and pass up what you want. If you get out of your boycott what you want out of Coors, fine. Take it. Make the agreement. Tell them you won't boycott anymore. The only thing I ask you to do is not ask your members to drink Coors beer. Because there's no doubt in my mind, once you've asked them not to, they're not going to again. If you just agree not to boycott them anymore, that's good with me, because I don't think your people are going to drink their beer anyway. So you do that, because here's the truth. If I get what I want from my local, I'm going to sign the deal, whether you guys get what you want or you don't. That's the truth." He was impressed with that.

03-00:31:57

Beagle:

It's your honesty.

03-00:31:58

Sickler:

Yeah. He said, "I can live with that deal." And that's exactly what happened. Now, the guy that was really pissed off about me making that deal was Harry Bernstein from the *L.A. Times*, labor writer for the *L.A. Times*. He was bitching about the NAACP signed an agreement with Coors. I think they got—what did they get?—half a million dollars, \$500,000 deal that Coors gave them.

03-00:32:23

Rubens:

What's the money for?

03-00:32:26

Sickler:

It was a money deal to help finance NAACP projects, plus they agreed to give blacks distributorships and to promote blacks within the company. Great deal. I was happy as hell. Harry Bernstein meets with me and says, "Why aren't you outraged? The black people sold you out." I said, "No, they didn't. That's the deal I made with them." "How could you make such a deal? You just gave the stuff away for labor." I said, "No, I didn't." Because the truth is, once they got what they needed—look, every one of these deals that black organizations get, brown organizations get, are huge bites out of the elephant's ass. Okay? That's what I want. I want big bites out of the elephant's ass. There's no doubt

in my mind that blacks are not going to run out and start drinking Coors beer. Latinos aren't going to run out and start drinking Coors beer. But they just took big bites out of the elephant's ass, and that's what I want. I'm going to hold out until I get what I want from labor. There's no doubt in my mind I'll be the last son of a bitch they want to deal with. The very last.

03-00:33:37

Rubens:

You have a wonderful story about dealing with the gay community and with—

03-00:33:45

Sickler:

Howard Wallace.

03-00:33:45

Rubens:

Howard Wallace, yeah. How did that strategy evolve?

03-00:33:51

Sickler:

When I first went to San Francisco to set up the boycott, this guy named Allan Baird from the Teamsters union, who had a long history of boycotting Coors for Teamsters Local 80—a rich history. So I sat down with him and talked to him, and he said, “Let me tell you something. The guy you have to meet here is a person named Howard Wallace. He's both labor and he's gay movement. The gay movement is really strong in San Francisco. They're activist. They're political. They vote. They vote with their feet, they vote with their money, and it's really important to get their support.” I said, “I agree with that 100 percent.” So I sat down with Howard and met with him, and come to find out, he's from Denver, Colorado. We shared a lot of experiences together. And a great guy. Extremely, extremely smart. By the way, there would have been no Coors boycott—and Harvey Milk. You saw the movie *Harvey Milk* and the whole Coors piece within *Harvey Milk*? That was Howard Wallace. Howard Wallace brought Allan Baird and Harvey Milk together. There would not have been a boycott—and Allan Baird would be the first to agree with it, although he was given a prominent piece in that movie, Howard Wallace should have been made prominent in that movie. As far as I'm concerned, the only reason the gay movement had as much leverage against Coors as they did was because of Howard Wallace.

03-00:35:28

Rubens:

What was their leverage? They got Coors out of—

03-00:35:31

Sickler:

Their leverage was they shut down a distributor overnight in San Francisco with that boycott. Boom.

03-00:35:39

Rubens:

The beer is not going to the gay bars.

03-00:35:40

Sickler:

No. Gays stop drinking it.

03-00:35:42

Carole Sickler: Took it out of every gay bar.

03-00:35:44

Sickler:

And to show you how powerful it was, *60 Minutes* went around in a gay bar, asking different gays why they were boycotting Coors beer, and they found a gay person who was drunk, and he couldn't tell them why. He was trying to come up with reasons why. What that is, that's testament to how powerful the gay boycott was. It said, don't drink the beer, and people drank it without even knowing why they shouldn't drink it. Just didn't drink it. That's how powerful the boycott was. *60 Minutes* tried to make it look like these were stupid people who couldn't make up their own mind, instead of interviewing really articulate, smart, bright people out of the gay movement who were very influential with that boycott, including some vice presidents of banks in San Francisco who supported the boycott. They didn't interview them, although Howard had given them their names. He gave them a list of twenty-four people to interview in the gay community. These were bright, articulate activists in the community. They didn't interview one. The one person they showed on the program was the drunk guy in the bar who had no clue why he was boycotting Coors beer. That's the guy they chose to show.

03-00:37:00

Rubens:

Just remind me, Howard Wallace was affiliated with what union?

03-00:37:05

Sickler:

He was SEIU, but he worked for the IATSE. He worked in the theaters, and IATSE was a local, but he was also SEIU. He ultimately ended up as a field rep for the SEIU, working for Sal Rosselli.

03-00:37:23

Beagle:

Well, he started with Sal. I was going to ask you about Sal. Then he moved over to 790 and worked for Paul Varacalli and Josey. But I guess my question was, was Sal important in the San Francisco boycott?

03-00:37:36

Sickler:

Not at that point. He wasn't in leadership at that point.

03-00:37:43

Rubens:

I had another question, just parenthetically. Allan Baird and you are really tight. There's no cloud hanging over your name because you had stopped the Teamsters in Montana, and you had stopped them in Colorado?

03-00:38:01

Sickler:

Ultimately, there was, but on Coors, everybody hated Coors enough to forgive me. I was invited to speak at the convention of the Teamsters International, and she was with me. We were in a hotel room. And I got disinvited at the last minute.

03-00:38:19

Rubens:

When are we talking about?

- 03-00:38:20
Sickler: What year was that? Remember? They called me back, and because—
- 03-00:38:24
Rubens: This had to be in the eighties, I guess.
- 03-00:38:26
Sickler: Yeah, because they found out that I had busted Teamsters in a number of places.
- 03-00:38:33
Rubens: I was wondering if you had been—
- 03-00:38:35
Sickler: Well, I busted them when I was in L.A. As late as L.A., when I got out to L.A. They had raided a plant called ITT. Remember the ITT plant? They stole it from IBEW. We went through the target clearances at LAOCOC, and the machinists were given clearance to go back at the Teamsters to bring it back. Andy Anderson, who was the grand poobah of the Teamsters for the West Coast, called me, all pissed off, and said, “Hey, I hear you’re supporting a raid on my union. I thought you were the anti-raid guy in L.A.” I said, “Andy, this is not a raid. This is retrieval of stolen property.”
- 03-00:39:27
Rubens: Let’s stay with the boycott a little bit more. The boycott is hurting Coors, no question. Does Coors, in response to the boycott, up its ante? Start marketing more, branding more, and literally expanding their operations into—
- 03-00:39:46
Sickler: Great question. They did. Probably the most disheartening news I had during the boycott, especially when we were starting to peak in boycott effectiveness against the original beer itself, was the introduction by Peter Coors of the Silver Bullet, which was Coors Light. That really set me back. That probably added years to the boycott.
- 03-00:40:15
Rubens: Because?
- 03-00:40:16
Sickler: Because the sales took off like crazy.
- 03-00:40:20
Rubens: There weren’t too many light beers? Bud had a light.
- 03-00:40:23
Sickler: Millers had a light, Bud had a light. But the packaging of the beer, the sell of the beer, advertising of the beer, was second-to-none. It was called the Silver Bullet.
- 03-00:40:36
Rubens: They brought in some top-notch guys, then.

03-00:40:38

Sickler: This son, Peter. Peter Coors. He was brilliant. It was a smart move.

03-00:40:46

Rubens: This is how many years into the boycott? Seventy-seven, it starts.

03-00:40:53

Sickler: No, this wasn't long. Probably a couple years. Maybe '78, '79. It was actually about a year, about a year into the boycott. Because after six months, they finally caught on. When sales really started to drop by a significant number—it was like it all hit them at once, and they couldn't believe it. But they gave me a six-month lead, and that's all I was asking for, was a six-month lead, and I had them. Then when they came out with Coors Light, the Silver Bullet, that scared the hell out of me.

03-00:41:34

Rubens: So what did you do?

03-00:41:36

Sickler: Double down. Just double down. Just kept doing what we did. Just tried to intensify it.

03-00:41:43

Rubens: I think you told me at some point that you worked with, I guess, maybe, a lot of neighborhood groups. That was with LAOCOC. I've got that—

03-00:41:52

Sickler: No, no, no, that's true. A lot of community groups. The Farmworkers. The Farmworkers have wonderful contacts with community groups, so I tried to piggyback that.

03-00:42:01

Rubens: They had had that successful boycott of grapes.

03-00:42:03

Sickler: Yeah. Using the Farmworkers. I gave them material, they translated it into Spanish and got it out to their community groups. For a while, for like ninety days, Cesar gave me his staff in Los Angeles, so we used his staff and all their contacts to get the word out to the community. The other thing that I did, I think, that was unique in the boycott was not shot gunning. I told you before that I studied boycotts. The biggest problem with boycotts, in my study of them, is that they're shot gunning. A shotgun boycott is not effective at all.

03-00:42:49

Rubens: What does that mean, shotgun?

03-00:42:50

Sickler: It means you just put the word out that you want to boycott this product. That's not effective. What is effective is if you target a particular distributor. I targeted a particular distributor, a very popular distributor, Danny [Daniel] Villanueva who owned the Mexican TV station. Univision.

03-00:43:15

Rubens: Oh, wow. Big guy.

03-00:43:17

Sickler: Yeah, big guy. He had the Coors distributor in East L.A. Here's what was really important. I'm looking at Los Angeles. This is a state with thirty-three million people. We've got nine million people in L.A. County. Where do I go? I told staff, "We're not going to shotgun. We're going to pinpoint." So I'm looking at the sales, where the sales are, who's the distributor, what's the plus, the minuses. The plus was East L.A. was ideal for us, because they were poor to middle-income Latinos, highly unionized, highly concentrated, and there was a history of abuse of Latinos by Coors.

03-00:44:08

Beagle: In the plant or in the world?

03-00:44:10

Sickler: They refused to hire them, for one thing. Refused to promote them when they did hire them. The GI Forum, Corky Gonzales had a boycott against Coors forever. So the word was out there in the Latino community that Coors was crap. So I made friends. Tony Perez from the Steelworkers, Jimmy Rodriguez from Retail Clerks. Etc.

03-00:44:32

Carole Sickler: The car clubs.

03-00:44:36

Sickler: Oh, yeah, I made friends with the car clubs. Those guys got me in with the car clubs, the low riders. They bought the Coors boycott, lock stock and barrel. Those guys were fantastic.

03-00:44:46

Carole Sickler: They used to drink a lot of beer.

03-00:44:47

Sickler: Oh, drank a lot of beer. Tony, from the steelworkers, is driving me around the neighborhoods in East L.A., and there's no air conditioning in those houses, and it's like these old, big houses that the Jewish community used to live in and moved out of, but they're now turned into apartments. There's like four and five and six apartments in these big houses. They get hot in the summertime. But they've all got these huge porches. So we're driving down the street, and stacked up on these porches are four or five, six cases of Coors beer. Coors beer was that community's beer. It was their beer. I said, "Okay, I know what to do." I said, "We're going to start targeting community by community. We're going to go block by block. Show me where the liquor stores are, and the grocery stores, and the restaurants. Where's most of the beer sold? Show me." So he took me around and showed me. I said, "Okay, here's what we're going to do. We're going to picket every one of these stores." I let the Teamsters know. The Teamsters and I were really in constant contact about where we were picketing. The Teamsters would go back and tell

the Budweiser management, “Hey, the Coors boycotters are running picket lines in front of this liquor store, that liquor store, this grocery store, that grocery store. Why don’t you guys run a sale? Budweiser would come right in and stack their beer in big pyramids and run it on a sale while we’re running the boycott, picketing out front.” The liquor store guys would always bitch, “If I don’t sell it, my competitor down the street is going to sell it, so I’m out. I’m out. You cost me money.” I said, “No, no, no. We’re going to picket him, too. You can’t just take the beer out. You’ve got to put a sign in your window that says, ‘I don’t sell Coors beer.’”

03-00:46:44

Beagle: Who is picketing? Who is doing the actual picketing?

03-00:46:46

Sickler: Our people. Plus Farmworkers—

03-00:46:49

Rubens: No, he’s getting volunteers. He said that.

03-00:46:50

Sickler: Yeah, and volunteers. Farmworkers. Volunteers. Teamster members. Teamsters are sending me staff, too, to picket. We’ve got pretty good-sized pickets going on.

03-00:46:59

Carole Sickler: LAOCOC people.

03-00:47:01

Sickler: Yeah, we had LAOCOC people out there. We had a lot of different people out there. Garment workers. A lot of garment workers, Latino garment workers, showed up. Christina Vasquez’s people showed up. Fine. They got rid of the beer. They didn’t want the hassle. In the meantime, Budweiser is running these incredible sales.

03-00:47:20

Rubens: And that’s not a crossing of the picket line for Budweiser to be delivering and selling?

03-00:47:27

Sickler: No, we encouraged them; we wanted them to go in there.

03-00:47:33

Carole Sickler: You weren’t boycotting the store.

03-00:47:36

Sickler: Yeah, not boycotting the store. That’s illegal. I’m boycotting the product. So I told the guy, “The product disappears, I disappear. But I’m going to have people driving by your store. If they don’t see the sign, we’re back. Pickets. Okay? If there’s beer back in here, we’re back here.” I said, “The guy down the street, we’re going to picket him until he gets rid of it, too, okay?” They

were fine. So we did that, block by block by block by block by block, until Danny started selling candy, which was against Coors's rules, and soda, and a lot of other stuff, because he wasn't selling that much Coors beer.

03-00:48:19

Rubens:

Against Coors's rules they had control over the distributors?

03-00:48:23

Sickler:

Exclusively Coors beer, nothing else. You weren't allowed to do anything else. But it became such a hassle for Danny, he sold out. He got rid of the distributorship.

03-00:48:33

Beagle:

Did you ever talk to him? Did he ever approach you? Did you ever have any conversation?

03-00:48:37

Sickler:

No, never did. No. But we both know the truth.

03-00:48:41

Beagle:

Okay, so this is all very labor-intensive. Do you replicate this in Phoenix and Seattle and wherever?

03-00:48:50

Sickler:

Here's the thing. You can never win a boycott just by shot gunning the information. You've got to take a distributor out, and that tells the manufacturer, wow, wait a minute. If this continues, not only hurts my product, it scares distributors off. People are not really going to want to take on a distributorship, especially in a minority community or a high labor-intensive community. They're not going to want to do that. That strategy worked in San Francisco with the gays. It worked in East L.A. with the Latinos. It worked in the black community in Los Angeles. It started to work, and then Coors started really freaking out.

03-00:49:40

Rubens:

One of the things I understand is that Coors is freaking out and they hire a high-level Latino.

03-00:49:52

Sickler:

Joe Benitez, yes

03-00:49:53

Rubens:

From MALDEF?

03-00:49:54

Sickler:

No, LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens]. They gave him thirty dimes. Thirty pieces of silver.

03-00:50:00

Rubens:

So Coors is getting freaked out and trying to burnish their image, and then, second—

03-00:50:05
Sickler: All that did was discredit Joe Benitez. Not one single Latino started drinking beer because a sellout named Joe Benitez came out and pimped for Coors.

03-00:50:19
Rubens: If we could just take one little sidetrack about the distributors. They seem like very key people in the whole enterprise of beer.

03-00:50:28
Sickler: They were and they weren't. They had no voice.

03-00:50:32
Rubens: When you say a distributor, how wide a market are they responsible for? It must vary, but—

03-00:50:40
Sickler: Yeah, it varies, but I got the feeling they're structured almost like the Congress. Given so many numbers of people, that would be their distributive area.

03-00:50:50
Rubens: Does Coors have to approve them?

03-00:50:52
Sickler: Oh, of course. Absolutely.

03-00:50:54
Rubens: You're a distributor for Coors, and only Coors.

03-00:50:57
Sickler: Absolutely. Absolutely. It was a dictatorship.

03-00:51:01
Beagle: But you're not an employee of Coors.

03-00:51:03
Sickler: Pardon me?

03-00:51:04
Beagle: You're not an employee of Coors.

03-00:51:05
Sickler: No, but they sign a contract that they're bound by, that really limits their ability to do much of anything, other than take orders from Coors. In the heyday, that was a real prize. Because in the heyday, famous coaches got distributorships. Famous golfers got distributorships. It was really wealthy, famous people that normally got—because it added to their prestige as well, and then added to Coors's prestige to have this high-profile coach selling Coors beer. That was in the day when Coors was held as the golden elixir of beers and people were paying exorbitant amounts of money to get it in New York and Pennsylvania and all the East Coast. But once the boycott started

working, the distributors went crazy, and they started demanding Coors settle. There were a lot of distributors that really were upset with Coors.

03-00:52:13

Rubens: What's on the table, by the way, in terms of Coors settling? What are the demands that Coors—

03-00:52:22

Sickler: I wasn't at the table. Matter of fact, a friend of ours you may have known, Dennis Lundy, worked for the Seafarers union. I was about burned out in 1987—when was it? What year was it we went on the cruise?

03-00:52:46

Rubens: Is this when it's about to come to an end?

03-00:52:50

Sickler: Yeah. The key battle, after we had all these other battles, after we had all these other battles in the field with—and on balance, I knocked their sales down close to 50 percent in every other state.

03-00:53:05

Carole Sickler: Because they had expanded to so many ss.

03-00:53:06

Sickler: And they kept expanding. They were producing about thirteen million barrels of beer a year for eleven States in 1977 and because the boycott was so successful they were still only producing 13 million barrels of beer forty-eight states. New York and New Jersey were the only two states left, but that's over 12% of the beer market in the United States. The key battle for me was when Coors expanded into Michigan in 1985. Coors and I both new Michigan was the key battle ground. If I failed there they won the boycott. If I had beat them in Michigan we won. That was the decisive battle. My lucky break came because so many autoworkers were out of work. Autoworkers in 1985 were on their back. I talked to Owen Bieber, who then was the international president of the UAW and I asked for his help. He said, "I'll be more than happy to help." He put a lot his of staff to working the boycott. "I've got a bunch of staff hanging around with nothing to do. I'll put them to work on your boycott," he said, "but you're going to have to tell them what they need to do and the whole nine yards." So we had to meet with the Labor Council. I remember that it was in the winter and as I stepped out of the cab and stepped into a pot hole full of ice cold water that went up to my calf.

The autoworkers International, and local unions and their members did an amazing job in Michigan. Coors blitzed the state with so many TV ads. I mean they gave it every effort they had and they really tried to penetrate the market, and they failed. So after they failed in Michigan it was a decisive turning point in the boycott because the only states left for Coors to market in were New York and New Jersey, which represented 12% of the nation's beer market.

I was going back to New York to attend a meeting there. We had a huge conference in New York, and we even had students from Canada and a large group from Toronto and other places in Canada. I'm trying to remember the old black civil rights leader. His name is Bayard Rustin. He was there along with the top labor leaders from the New York state AFL-CIO and New York AFL-CIO Central Labor Council. There were elected leaders there as well. I was overwhelmed at all these powerful people and college students joined together to announce their support for the boycott. I was humbled to be there. But they talked about how important this boycott was, how they were not going to let them get a foot hold in New York and New Jersey with their racist beer. And there were pictures in the *New York Times* of students pouring the beer down the sewers.

03-00:55:07

Rubens:

There were a lot of student unions that voted to boycott Coors.

03-00:55:09

Sickler:

Colleges were there to support the boycott. By this time, the boycott had picked up so much momentum it became like riding a twenty-foot wave boycott. I just had to stay on top of it.

03-00:55:21

Rubens:

Let's stop this.

Audio File 4

04-00:00:00

Rubens:

We left off talking about battleground Michigan. We're almost at the end of the boycott. Before we get there, I want to revisit the role of the AFL-CIO, of the international. The \$32,000 budget over ten years is pretty shocking to me when it was such a successful boycott and such a long-endured. Then, I believe at some point you were taken off it full-time, early on. You were taken off. You're told you're only 20 percent time. What's that story?

04-00:00:52

Sickler:

I was asked several times by Alan Kistler that—actually, I was kind of asked and told at the same time that I was only to spend 20 percent of my time on the Coors boycott.

04-00:01:06

Beagle:

One day a week?

04-00:01:08

Sickler:

Basically. So I had to be ingenious in how I worked the Coors boycott and did LAOCOC at the same time. Plus, they had me on other AFL-CIO assignments. I had to service Central Labor Councils. I had to work different national legislative priorities for the AFL-CIO. I was expected to juggle all these balls in the air, and, theoretically, head up the boycott of Coors beer, which basically meant I didn't do anything on Coors, basically, other than just

20 percent of whatever I could do on the boycott. I knew what the picture was. I knew what the message was. It was Larry Gold trying to pull me out of the Coors boycott—

04-00:01:54

Rubens: Larry Gold is?

04-00:01:55

Sickler: He was the general counsel for the AFL-CIO. Attorney. I basically saw him as telling us how to lose the war in the United States for the labor movement, legally. He was like every other damn lawyer that can tell you how to lose legally, but can't bail you out once you win a fight, using the law. I wanted to beat Coors, and I knew we could beat Coors. Whatever the side effects that were, so what? That was minor damage to the AFL-CIO with a major boycott victory like the Coors boycott.

04-00:02:37

Rubens: Side effects were, for example, what?

04-00:02:40

Sickler: Side effects were whatever lawsuits that were filed, and there were lawsuits filed against me anyway. They were nothing. We blew them out of the water.

04-00:02:48

Rubens: What kind of lawsuits?

04-00:02:49

Sickler: They filed a lawsuit that we had illegally blocked them from using a public television station in San Francisco to promote public TV, but it was a Coors Day. They called it a Coors Day. Since when does public television let a particular company come in and run public television? So we ran a boycott against them, and simply because we ran that boycott, they filed a lawsuit against Howard Wallace and myself, personally. Now, to the AFL-CIO's credit, they defended me. Altshuler and Berzon defended me, and we blew them out of the water.

04-00:03:35

Rubens: Who are those names?

04-00:03:36

Sickler: Altshuler and Berzon, they're very well-known law firm in San Francisco. They blew them out of the water, because the bastards had no leg to stand on. Again, they're so stupid, they didn't know, by publicizing this and filing a lawsuit, you just inflamed everybody that supported the boycott.

04-00:03:58

Rubens: But Larry Gold didn't like this?

04-00:04:01

Sickler:

No, he was paranoid. After *60 Minutes* raped me on television, and pulled that lying slick job they pulled, Larry Gold took me for a walk around the Biltmore Hotel in downtown Los Angeles and told me, basically, “We wouldn’t defend Lane Kirkland against *60 Minutes*. We’re not going to defend you.” That’s what he told me.

04-00:04:26

Rubens:

Hold on one second. [Pause in audio] So Larry Gold is a little concerned about lawsuits. Isn’t Meany or Kistler or somebody else saying, “Back off, Larry”?

04-00:04:45

Sickler:

No. As far as I’m concerned, he kind of ran the AFL-CIO.

04-00:04:49

Carole Sickler:

By then, Meany was gone.

04-00:04:51

Sickler:

Meany was gone. I’ll tell you, I love Lane Kirkland, because after *60 Minutes* raped me, I knew a lot of people in the AFL-CIO that were very unhappy about that interview. I got calls. The night that it happened, we were on the second floor of the hotel in Aspen. Now, we were so sure that was going to be a great show, simply because of the material that we gave *60 Minutes* to use. What actually happened was they took all the material, documentation, that we gave them, and they took it back to Coors and showed it to Coors, and they used none of it. All the strikers that were interviewed and they had stayed out that whole time. Now, I’m talking from ’77 to ’82 they stayed out. They interviewed those families that suffered and sacrificed, and they didn’t air one of those interviews.

04-00:06:03

Rubens:

Let’s back up for one second just to unpack this. *60 Minutes*, the producers get interested in the Coors—

04-00:06:11

Sickler:

Alan Moranis was the producer.

04-00:06:14

Rubens:

And he’s done other investigative pieces?

04-00:06:18

Sickler:

Yeah, and Carole was with me when I turned over all my documents. The biggest mistake I made in my life was turning over my documents to them. To him.

04-00:06:27

Rubens:

What did they say to you? They come to you and say, “We want to do this?”

- 04-00:06:30
Sickler: They actually called Coors Nazis. He calls me on the phone and says, “We’re doing an investigation on the Coors boycott, and it looks like the Coors Company, we’re dealing with a bunch of Nazis there. Are you interested in doing a show or an interview with us regarding your boycott?” I said, “I’ll have to get back to you. I have to clear it with the AFL-CIO.” So I called the national, and they said yeah. I called—what’s the name of the director of media relations at that time?
- 04-00:07:01
Beagle: Rex Hardesty.
- 04-00:07:03
Sickler: No, it wasn’t Rex. It wasn’t Rex. It was another guy at that time.
- 04-00:07:06
Rubens: We can get it.
- 04-00:07:08
Sickler: Anyway, I called Alan. He said, “Yeah, I guess so.” No, was it Alan then?
- 04-00:07:14
Carole Sickler: Yeah, it was Alan.
- 04-00:07:15
Sickler: I guess so. Everybody was kind of wishy-washy about it, but said, “Yeah, okay, go ahead.” I kept trying to get some guidance from them about how to do it, and got nothing from anybody. So *60 Minutes* rolls around. They come out and they do this whole investigative story, or interview, with me. I turn over all the documents, and Carole is with me with the guy. We take the guy to Langer’s Deli, and he said, “Oh, this is the greatest deli I’ve tasted since New York.” Blah, blah, blah, blah.
- 04-00:07:52
Rubens: What kind of documents are you giving him?
- 04-00:07:57
Sickler: Affidavits from workers who took the lie detector test and all the questions that were asked them. That was one of the stories we were putting out there, that very few people believed was actually true.
- 04-00:08:09
Carole Sickler: The woman who had her kidneys ripped out.
- 04-00:08:12
Sickler: Yeah.
- 04-00:08:14
Rubens: A woman had her kidneys ripped out?

04-00:08:17

Carole Sickler: Tell them. They said, "If we have to hire women, we don't have to give them easy jobs." They gave them the hardest and dirtiest jobs.

04-00:08:33

Sickler: A guy named Jack Bramble, who worked for the personnel department, was totally against hiring women. Nineteen seventy-two, a law was passed in the state of Colorado that mandated women be hired. Jack Bramble says to me, "We may have to hire them. We don't have to keep them." I said, "Really? Let me tell you something. If you discriminate against them, I'm going to be the first one to come against you. I'm coming to get you." He said, "You're not going to have anything to say about it." I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "We're going to get rid of them before they get their probation period over. They won't be union members." I said, "I'm coming after you. If you do that, I'm coming after you. I'm just telling you." So they started hiring them. They put them on the clean-up crew at midnight. At midnight in the bottle department it meant you had an industrial mop, about this big around, with a mop head about that long, about that wide, that, soaking wet, weighed probably about forty pounds. Your job was to swing that back and forth on walk ramps, overhead walk ramps. I dare anybody to go sixty feet, swinging a forty-pound wet mop, without feeling like their kidneys are being ripped out. So these women were quitting by the handfuls. I contacted shop stewards to go talk to those women, to come out and talk to me. Only a couple did. They were all scared. A couple did, and I begged them to file charges against Coors. I said, "I can't represent you as a union member. I can't file a grievance, because you're not a member. But I can take you down with EEOC and file a lawsuit. We can file a lawsuit. I'll have a press conference, the whole nine yards." Only one of them said yes. The rest of them said no. Then I think she backed out. Anyway.

04-00:10:49

Rubens: This is the kind of documentation that you had that you were giving.

04-00:10:53

Sickler: Yeah. I had affidavits from them. The end of the story was I contacted this guy, Jack Bramble, with management, and told him, "If you continue this"—and by the way, we had a union member that was part of this whole cabal. We had a lead man out of the warehouse that was putting this whole process into effect. He was a member of ours. I was ready to file charges against him for doing it. Finally, management backed off and they stopped doing that with the women. But that was their attitude. That was their attitude. They were going to flush them out of the plant. I had my own membership. Actually, at that particular time in the warehouse, they started an impeachment procedure against me, because I was supporting women coming into the brewery.

04-00:11:51

Rubens: Say it again. Who's impeaching you?

04-00:11:55

Sickler: My own members. Well, the lead man that was part of management instigated the impeachment procedure against me. They were going to impeach me as business manager because I was bad for the integrity of the bargaining unit. We were infecting the bargaining unit with these women.

04-00:12:12

Carole Sickler: Men were afraid women were going to take their jobs.

04-00:12:28

Rubens: So Moranis comes out and he's meeting with you. You give him documentation. He says, "We're going to expose this fascist." He used the word—

04-00:12:36

Sickler: Yeah, fascist. He called them—like the Ku Klux Klan. Nazis.

04-00:12:42

Rubens: What goes wrong? Coors calls them—

04-00:12:45

Sickler: What goes wrong was this was set up from the beginning. Come to find out that one of the vice presidents of Coors was a good friend of—

04-00:12:57

Carole Sickler: Mike Wallace.

04-00:13:00

Rubens: Who was the talent, who would have done the interviewing?

04-00:13:01

Sickler: He had served in the military with Mike Wallace, and they were good buddies. He had called Mike Wallace early on to do a story about how they were wrongly being affected by this boycott. How their great integrity, their great name, was being muddied by this horrible boycott, and was headed up by this disgruntled employee. That's why they wanted me exclusively. I was the guy they targeted, because I was the face of the boycott.

04-00:13:34

Beagle: Is this *60 Minutes* show available? Do you have it?

04-00:13:38

Sickler: Probably. I don't have it.

04-00:13:42

Carole Sickler: They wouldn't give us the outtakes. They'd only give us what they aired.

04-00:13:46

Sickler: What they produced, yeah. I'm sure you can get it. It's got to be in a library somewhere.

04-00:13:51

Rubens: So you're sitting there now, and your mouth drops open. How could this be?

04-00:13:57

Sickler: Yeah. Oh, yeah. We thought it went so well. As a matter of fact, when I went into the bathroom after they were all finished, one of the camera guys, who was a member of IATSE, comes in and he slaps me on the shoulder and says, "Congratulations. It's very few guys that take on Mike Wallace and hold their own, and you did really good out there." He said, "As a union member, I'm proud of you." Then Howard Wallace is there, and so we go out and we celebrate that night. We said, "If they just go fifty-fifty, we win. If they just go"—

04-00:14:39

Rubens: One side or the other.

04-00:14:40

Sickler: We win. Our side wins.

04-00:14:42

Rubens: But they didn't go.

04-00:14:44

Sickler: No. They cut all the strikers out. Howard Wallace got all of these well-respected leaders in the gay movement interviewed for that *60 Minutes* piece. They all wanted to be on *60 Minutes*. And they didn't air one of them. Not a single one.

04-00:15:03

Rubens: What was the repercussion? You must have died, but was there—

04-00:15:08

Sickler: I thought the boycott was over. I thought that was the end of it. I would have committed suicide that night, except that we were only on the second floor, so I would have just broke my ankles. I was trying to get switched to a room on the fourth floor. [laughter]

04-00:15:27

Rubens: That show was influential. A lot of people watched that show, right?

04-00:15:30

Sickler: Yeah. Oh, it was really influential. But here was the good news. It was influential because a lot of people wrote me angry letters. "How could you fuck up such a great opportunity? Those dirty sons of bitches. If you can't do a better job, get me information, I'll do it." Ask Carole. We were so busy after that show, cranking out material to send to people who wanted material.

04-00:16:05

Carole Sickler: But a lot of people sent letters also saying, "They were so blatant, it really infuriated me."

- 04-00:16:10
Sickler: That's true. I'm probably too pessimistic about the feedback I got, because you read the worst stuff first, right?
- 04-00:16:17
Carole Sickler: There were a lot of good letters.
- 04-00:16:18
Sickler: There were really good letters, yeah.
- 04-00:16:22
Rubens: It's '82. You have another five years to go with the boycott. It might have been a low point for you—
- 04-00:16:28
Sickler: I'll tell you what, it turned out to be the biggest mistake Coors ever made.
- 04-00:16:33
Rubens: How come?
- 04-00:16:34
Sickler: Well, because the boycott kind of stalled. It's like the word got stale out there about the boycott. People kind of got—
- 04-00:16:44
Carole Sickler: Lazy.
- 04-00:16:45
Sickler: Numb with it. That show, boom. Nationwide. I couldn't believe how many people thought the boycott was already over. I got calls, telephone calls, letters, saying, "We thought the boycott was already over. We didn't know it was still going on. Get us information. Give us information." I wish we had social media then, because we'd have killed Coors in two weeks with social media during that thing.
- 04-00:17:15
Rubens: So you had another five years. In fact, let's get to how it gets over. You win Michigan.
- 04-00:17:28
Sickler: That was the boycott. Michigan was the boycott.
- 04-00:17:32
Rubens: What literally happens? There's a story, but the NEA, about the Teamsters. Are they putting pressure on Coors to settle?
- 04-00:17:49
Sickler: Yeah. They all were.

04-00:17:52

Rubens:

Why the NEA? National Education Association. Big, big association. Had you worked with them at all? They first had not supported the boycott, and then they did?

04-00:18:05

Sickler:

Right, right. Well, they did because they had women and African Americans as members, and Latinos. I think there was a lot of minority membership that pushed them to support the boycott. Not for the brewery worker reasons, but for all the other reasons. The Heritage Foundation, and the Committee for the Survival of a Free Congress, and all of their positions against women, and their position against gays, and their position against blacks, and supporting the Jesse Helms of the world. It was all those reasons. That was one of the best things that we did about the boycott, was that we were able to disseminate that much information about who they stood for. There were so many reasons to hate Coors that we became like a buffet.

04-00:18:58

Rubens:

What's your understanding of how the boycott—who decides to end it?

04-00:19:06

Sickler:

Coors decided to end it. They reached out to Donahue.

04-00:19:10

Rubens:

Why them? In fact, had the brewery workers gone into the—

04-00:19:20

Sickler:

I don't know if they reached out to Lane or they reached out to Tom first. I don't know who they reached out to first. I know Tom called me, secretary treasurer, and said he'd been contacted by Coors. We were on this cruise. Dennis Lundy from the Seafarers, we had drinks with him one night and he said, "God, Dave, you need a break." I hadn't had a vacation in years. Remember?

04-00:19:48

Carole Sickler:

Yeah.

04-00:19:48

Sickler:

Years and years and years of working the boycott. No vacation at all. We'd just work, work, work, work. He said, "I can book you a place on a cruise. You should take a cruise of the seven islands of Hawaii. Get out there." So we bought it. We're out there on the cruise, and it's storming that night, so the ship is going. Everybody is sick. I get a call from Tom Donahue on the goddamn ship.

04-00:20:21

Carole Sickler:

There were no cell phones then.

04-00:20:23

Sickler:

We didn't have cell phones. He tracked me down on a ship in the ocean. I don't know how the hell he reaches me. But he's telling me, as soon as we get to some port I've got to call him, because he's got a settlement offer from the Coors Company.

04-00:20:38

Rubens:

Oh, so Coors had contacted the AFL?

04-00:20:40

Sickler:

Yeah, Coors contacted the AFL-CIO. He wants to know what should we ask for. At the time, the best that we could ask for was neutrality. I couldn't ask them to recognize a bargaining unit, because in 1978, the year after the strike, Coors decertified the local. They had what they call an RD election under the NLRB.

04-00:21:08

Rubens:

What are those initials?

04-00:21:09

Sickler:

RD.

04-00:21:12

Beagle:

What does that stand for?

04-00:21:13

Sickler:

Representation decertification. Basically, what that says is only current workers have a voice in whether you belong to the union or you don't. So all the workers that elected to stay out, that went out on the strike and suffered in sacrifice, had no voice in this vote. That's what's really wrong with the labor law. That's why I did not want them to go out on strike, because this is exactly the mechanism that Coors used with eighteen other unions to get rid of them. They go out on strike for a year, then, boom, they decertify them, and that's what they did. So there was no union to recognize for bargaining. The best thing that we could ask for was neutrality for whichever AFL-CIO union wanted to come in and represent the brewery workers. We had a number that expressed interest. By the way, the Teamsters had just rejoined the AFL-CIO prior to the settlement.

04-00:22:20

Rubens:

This is 1987?

04-00:22:21

Sickler:

Yeah. Was it '86 or '87 that we had the convention in Florida with the AFL-CIO and the Teamsters joined?

04-00:22:31

Rubens:

We'll look it up.

04-00:22:32

Sickler:

They had Jackie Presser.

04-00:22:33

Rubens: You think it was '86?

04-00:22:34

Carole Sickler: I think it was '86.

04-00:22:35

Sickler: Jackie Presser there. All nine hundred pounds. So the deal was—

04-00:22:45

Carole Sickler: The Building Trades.

04-00:22:47

Sickler: Oh, yeah. This was key. Only major victory we got out of that settlement was Bob Georgine was at the bargaining table with Donahue and insisted that everything Coors built forward be union, and they signed off on that.

04-00:23:09

Beagle: I remember that.

04-00:23:11

Sickler: Yeah. That was a huge win, because they built Elkton, Virginia plant. That was all built union. That was all Building Trades. That was a big deal. But the best we could get out of that deal, because there was no union left to deal with, was a neutrality agreement, and the Teamsters lost. They ultimately won the arbitration to go in and organize the workers, and I knew they were going to lose.

04-00:23:42

Rubens: Lose? Oh, they lost in the election.

04-00:23:44

Sickler: Lost in election.

04-00:23:45

Rubens: Really?

04-00:23:46

Sickler: Yeah. Well, sure. You were dealing with scabs. Scabs that had been beat up and pilloried for ten years of the boycott. We caused their layoffs. We were trying to get rid of their jobs. My boycott was to shut them down. I wanted to shut Coors down. That was the AFL-CIO position, as far as the workers in the plant were concerned. And I did. I was so effective with that boycott that they had several layoffs.

04-00:24:16

Rubens: At that plant?

04-00:24:17

Sickler: At the plant.

- 04-00:24:18
Rubens: Even though they're expanding into other states?
- 04-00:24:21
Sickler: Yes. Even though they were expanding, there were periods where the boycott was so effective, we laid them off until they could establish distributors and get the sales back up in other ss. There were pockets where they had to lay off.
- 04-00:24:34
Rubens: This is a naïve question. Was Golden the only brewery?
- 04-00:24:39
Sickler: Yes, at that time. They built another one in Elkton, Virginia later. Their big problem was distribution.
- 04-00:24:50
Rubens: Got it. So you got them to—
- 04-00:24:54
Sickler: So their structure became my advantage, and I took advantage of it.
- 04-00:24:58
Rubens: And so that was the end. By the way, are you at a negotiating table? You're not part of that?
- 04-00:25:10
Sickler: No. Donahue is talking to me, and then he's going back to them, but I knew it was a foregone conclusion. I knew, no matter what I said, they were going to settle.
- 04-00:25:20
Rubens: And you were ready for it at that point?
- 04-00:25:22
Sickler: I wasn't ready for it, but there wasn't anything I could do for it. There wasn't anything I could do about it. It was what it was.
- 04-00:25:31
Beagle: Let me ask you a couple of questions about—well, one question about the boycott specifically. You described your relationship with the NAACP and the black community in Los Angeles, I think, which Bayard Rustin wasn't bound by that when you went to New York, I'd assume. And Howard, of course, in the gay community in San Francisco. Can you talk about other sort of ways in which you retailed the boycott to other communities?
- 04-00:26:03
Rubens: Well, he talked about the neighborhood by neighborhood. The Latino community was a good example. I think we did a good job on that, Danny.

- 04-00:26:11
Beagle: Did you go to NOW, National Organization of Women, for example?
- 04-00:26:13
Sickler: No, but we went to different women's organizations and sent them information. Believe it or not, we had a mailing list of 55,000 by the time we finished. That was a lot.
- 04-00:26:28
Rubens: I thought you did go to NOW.
- 04-00:26:32
Sickler: Probably, but I can't remember right now. There were so many people that I can't remember them all offhand. Probably, after this, all of these questions will—
- 04-00:26:44
Rubens: That's why it's good to have some time off.
- 04-00:26:47
Sickler: Because I have kind of an analog brain in a digital world.
- 04-00:26:54
Rubens: Couple of details. Very quickly, you move out to Los Angeles when the boycott starts. What governs that? I know that you're going to then be almost 80 percent time LAOCOC. Is that why? Were they already thinking about you being that, and that's why you moved to L.A.?
- 04-00:27:19
Sickler: Chuck and his regional director really wanted me to take over the organizing committee because of my background, strong background, in organizing activity. It made sense in terms of the boycott, because the lion's share of the beer, over 50 percent of their total production, was sent to California.
- 04-00:27:42
Rubens: Oh, really?
- 04-00:27:42
Sickler: Yeah.
- 04-00:27:43
Rubens: Oh, we didn't say that.
- 04-00:27:44
Sickler: The lion's share of that beer was sold in L.A. If I was going to put down roots anywhere to launch a boycott, this was the place to do it. If I was going to launch it, the Latino community was the place to launch it, because that's where, believe it or not, the bulk of the sale—ironically, the sales were, was in the Latino community. Blue-collar union community. It was so easy to get them to stop buying

- 04-00:28:14
Rubens: Well, sure. How peppered were they already—assaulted—with the UFW mentality of supporting—
- 04-00:28:25
Sickler: The retail clerks.
- 04-00:28:26
Rubens: No, I'm sorry. Farmworkers. Of supporting a boycott.
- 04-00:28:32
Sickler: Oh, yeah, it was.
- 04-00:28:32
Rubens: So they knew they were—
- 04-00:28:34
Sickler: And then the car club guys. There was Natividad. What's the guy's name? Nativo Lopez, who took over for—God, he was like a legend here.
- 04-00:28:53
Carole Sickler: Bert Corona.
- 04-00:28:53
Sickler: Bert Corona. Took over for Bert Corona. La Hermandad Mexicana Nacional, an immigrant labor organization, which became a powerful supporter of the boycott. So we took the boycott onto campuses. By the way, college campuses became critical, absolutely critical, to the support of the boycott. At the same time while I was targeting communities that, by high concentration, were drinking Coors beer, that were our people, I was targeting college campuses. The way we were successful on college campuses was not trying to convince them that I was right, but convincing them to hear a debate between me and Coors, and then make up their mind whether I was right about our charges against their racism. Of all things, they sent the dumbest son of a bitch they had on their staff out to debate me. That's how dumb they were. Big, stupid John—what the hell was his last name? I had to debate him, and his heart wasn't in it, and his brain sure wasn't in it.
- 04-00:30:00
Rubens: Who is Nativo Lopez?
- 04-00:30:02
Sickler: Nativo Lopez? He's now head of—what is it?
- 04-00:30:09
Carole Sickler: Bert Corona's old organization.
- 04-00:30:10
Sickler: Yeah, Natividad.

04-00:30:14

Rubens: Oh, I see. We can look this up, too. Then what was the student group you were saying?

04-00:30:21

Sickler: MECHA. That was the Mexican student organization on college campuses. They were powerful, especially in Los Angeles, Southern California. San Jose and a lot of places.

04-00:30:36

Rubens: Let me keep coming back to this. We're talking about that it made sense for you to be in L.A. because the AFL is going to appoint you to be part of LAOCOC. I'm still stuck on why they're allocating only 20 percent of your time to—

04-00:31:00

Sickler: In spite of that, they made me a regional director after that. That's crazy, huh?

04-00:31:09

Rubens: Things aren't always rational, are they?

04-00:31:12

Sickler: Because I violated that 20 percent, like every day. I used their own structure, their own organization, to beat the hell out of Coors. I can't talk enough about how important that role played in beating Coors, just the structure. If you just understand the structure of the labor movement, this is why the longshoremen are so wrong and so dumb about pulling out of the AFL-CIO. You can hate them all you want, but use them, use them to your advantage, because there are so many pieces and branches and arms and legs and tentacles that come out of the AFL-CIO that can help you. One doesn't even know the other one's helping you.

04-00:32:05

Rubens: Let's talk about what you were doing for LAOCOC.

04-00:32:10

Sickler: The most important thing I did for LAOCOC was to get them to focus on organizing immigrant workers. I started it in 1976, when I first came out here. I was only out here for a few weeks. We had a big workshop planned. I talked to Chuck, and I said, "Chuck, do you have a workshop for organizing immigrant workers here?" He said no, and I said, "Boy, you really need one. Why don't you get some of your organizers that organize immigrant workers?" That's when I met Helen Hernandez and Gene Perry.

04-00:32:46

Rubens: Let's just establish, who are these immigrants? They're coming mainly from?

04-00:32:50

Sickler: Undocumented Mexicans. Mexico and Latin America. Yeah. El Salvador.

04-00:32:55

Rubens: What's drawing them here? What are the jobs?

04-00:32:57

Sickler: More jobs. Just jobs. Jobs.

04-00:32:59

Rubens: Expanding of the L.A. economy is just booming.

04-00:33:01

Sickler: Sure, sure. The furniture industry. You name the industry. They came in here for jobs, because they could work for less than minimum wage and make more in one day than they could make in an entire week in Mexico. That's what they were coming here for. But unions went about organizing them all the wrong way. They would try to organize them like they would white workers. They'd go out and handbill. The biggest mistake on the planet, because all that did was notify the employer that the union was on the scene, so then the employer would say, "Okay, any of you son of bitches sign up with the union, you're deported. I'm getting rid of you." So right away, the workers rejected the union, wanted them to go away. If they did get involved, then the employer would fire them or get them deported. Call the INS and have the whole damn plant raided, and send them all out, and then just hire a new batch of undocumented workers in there. That cycle repeated itself over and over again. It got to the point where immigrant workers said, "Stay away from the unions, because they just bring la migra. Stay away. They're bad." Some of the unions—I'm not going to name them, and I'll probably invoke the fifteen-year rule here—they would go in and organize them, and then put the plant out of business. Strike him, and keep striking him until he was out of business.

04-00:34:35

Rubens: These were small plants, relatively?

04-00:34:36

Sickler: Small plants. These were small, little garment shops. In order to protect the ones they already had under contract. That was the deal they made. That was the deal they made. But the immigrant workers were victims of that, too. So you add that to the stupid way we were organizing immigrant workers. But at the same time, we had people that were organizing immigrant workers very smartly, like Helen Hernandez, who never went to the worksite. She contacted people where they lived.

04-00:35:06

Rubens: Who was Helen Hernandez?

04-00:35:08

Sickler: She was an organizer for the Furniture workers. She would go to where people lived and she would sit down with them and talk to them, and then she'd talk them into getting—and she included the wives and the families. Then she would have these gatherings of families together, talking about the advantage

of the union and keeping it quiet in the plant. Don't talk about the union in the plant. Do not do it. After work hours, we'd bring everybody over here, where we are. The employer doesn't know we're talking. Then, when we have 100 percent signed up, we go tell him. If he doesn't sign with us, we shut the whole plant down. When the employer got hit with that, they knew they were dead meat, and they signed contracts. She had fifteen campaigns, fifteen wins, fifteen contracts. That was proof to me what she was doing worked. I used her in a workshop, her model, and then Gene Perry. Big, fat white guy from Chicago. Carried a gun in a briefcase. Wore purple socks. Maroon pants.

04-00:36:18

Rubens: What was he?

04-00:36:20

Sickler: Baker and confectionary workers. Talked with a Chicago accent, you know. He had a Mexican interpreter for him, and they would go right into immigrant homes, and he'd sit there. While his buddy was talking to them in Spanish, he'd look around the house. When he left that house, just by not being too obvious with observation—he had such a quick mind—he knew exactly what those people needed. He knew if those kids needed shoes. He knew what kind of food they needed. He knew what they needed. The next day, there was a box of shoes that fit those kids. There was food there. Whatever they needed. He had a big box of stuff for them. Those were the kind of organizers we needed to share information with other unions.

04-00:37:15

Rubens: So you're really breathing new life into this organization. Is that right? I was thinking one of the things we could do is maybe back up a little, because Carole is with the LAOCOC since '62.

04-00:37:33

Sickler: She wasn't working there when I went there, though.

04-00:37:35

Carole Sickler: No, I was gone.

04-00:37:36

Rubens: You were there from?

04-00:37:37

Carole Sickler: I was at the Central Labor Council then. Well, when he came, I was not working. I was raising my son and staying home and going to school and doing other things. Then after my husband died, then I went back to work, and I went to the L.A. County Federation of Labor to work. But I had worked at LAOCOC from the day they opened the doors until—well, I don't remember what year.

04-00:38:07

Rubens: Hold on one second. Let's stop. [Pause in audio] So you're targeting the immigrant community because?

04-00:38:15

Sickler: Because that's the future workforce. That's the future workforce to organize. You either had the option of organizing these people or just abandoning that industry.

04-00:38:38

Beagle: That industry meaning?

04-00:38:33

Sickler: Furniture. Manufacturing. All the industries that we had high concentration in at the time. We were being replaced by immigrant workers.

04-00:38:43

Carole Sickler: Hotel and restaurant.

04-00:38:44

Sickler: Hotel and restaurant. That's a classic example. Scotty Allan headed that up. Anglo guy, obviously. White. Had a white staff, white officers. But a Latino immigrant, undocumented worker membership couldn't talk to them. Refused to translate the contracts into Spanish. Refused to have a translator in the meetings so the members could understand what was being said. Couldn't represent them. The members were not being represented at all. So there was this revolution. There was a smart young woman by the name of Maria Elena Durazo who was a member, and she came in and ran against Scotty Allan and beat his ass. That's just one classic example of the revolution that was going on in Los Angeles internally in the labor movement. Now she's the head of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. Miguel Contreras. At the time, there were white people pushing, and even Latino people, pushing me to replace Bill Robertson. Even Bill Robertson asked me to run to replace him. I always—

04-00:40:07

Rubens: Bill Robertson was?

04-00:40:08

Sickler: Was the head of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. Prior to Jim Wood taking over, prior to Miguel Contreras taking over. Asked me to run, to head up the L.A. County Federation of Labor. I felt it needed to be a Latino, because that was the majority of our workforce in Los Angeles. It needed to be a Latino. Miguel came along at exactly the right time, and had the right formula, and the right—

04-00:40:33

Rubens: He came out of the—

04-00:40:35

Sickler: He came out of hotel and restaurant. He was international.

04-00:40:37

Carole Sickler: Well, and the Farmworkers.

04-00:40:40

Sickler:

When Elena led the insurrection against hotel and restaurant Local 11, Miguel was ordered by the international to come in and throw the local into trusteeship, and basically freeze the situation there. He was the enemy as far as Maria Elena and the immigrants were concerned, and so there was a hostile reception to Miguel. But Miguel observed the terrain, smartly, wisely, and started working with Maria Elena, and then married her. They got married, and they got rid of Scotty Allan, and Maria Elena ran for office and became the head of hotel and restaurant Local 11, and started representing those workers, and then that local started growing again. She worked for hotel and restaurant, and that local at one time represented every big restaurant in the city of Los Angeles.

04-00:41:34

Carole Sickler:

My first job in the labor movement was working for hotel and restaurant. I was seventeen years old, right out of high school. At that time, all the locals were separate, all the crafts. The waiters had their own local, waitresses had a different local, cooks had a local, dishwashers had a local, bartenders. I worked for the Cooks local. At that time, every restaurant in L.A., every restaurant, every country club, every studio commissary, everything, was union. They had a fantastic health and welfare plan—

04-00:42:19

Rubens:

When are we talking about? What year is this?

04-00:42:21

Carole Sickler:

This was 1957. I worked there until '61. Actually, even after '61. I went from the local to the Joint Board, the Hotel and Restaurant Workers' Joint Board. Then from there, I went to LAOCOC.

04-00:42:51

Sickler:

That was a powerful union, and it represented—

04-00:42:53

Carole Sickler:

Every restaurant. Big, big, fancy restaurants in Beverly Hills, and little, tiny mom-and-pop shops.

04-00:43:01

Sickler:

Perino's. You name it.

04-00:43:03

Rubens:

How did that happen? How did they get so strong? You don't think of L.A. as a—

04-00:43:10

Carole Sickler:

If a restaurant opened in L.A., the Hotel and Restaurant union would go get the owner to sign a contract. If he refused to sign a contract, they'd put up a picket line—

04-00:43:23

Sickler: Teamsters wouldn't deliver.

04-00:43:23

Carole Sickler: —and the Teamsters would refuse to cross the picket line and deliver their—if they don't get milk and bread and everything every day—

04-00:43:23

Sickler: No meat, no milk.

04-00:43:33

Carole Sickler: —they're out of business.

04-00:43:35

Rubens: So all the fancy restaurants? Chasen's and—

04-00:43:38

Carole Sickler: Oh, yeah. Oh, Chasen's was very big union restaurant. Yeah.

04-00:43:43

Sickler: Name it, they were union.

04-00:43:43

Carole Sickler: Romanoff's. All those restaurants on Restauran Row.

04-00:43:46

Sickler: Perino's.

04-00:43:46

Carole Sickler: —what they called Restaurant Row at that time.

04-00:43:49

Sickler: La Cienega.

04-00:43:49

Carole Sickler: La Cienega. Yeah. They were all—

04-00:43:52

Sickler: Lawry's.

04-00:43:53

Carole Sickler: There was a fancy restaurant by the name of House of Murphy. Then all the business agents that worked for the cooks union, they all came out of those restaurants. They were either cooks or waiters or maître d's, whatever. They came right out of the industry.

04-00:44:16

Sickler: Bill Robertson, who headed the L.A. County Fed, was a bartender. Came out of the Bartenders Union.

Beagle:

Were these all white guys?

04-00:44:29

Sickler: Oh, yeah. Everybody was a white guy.

04-00:44:30

Carole Sickler: Well, no. There were a couple of Latinos. No, they had some Latino business agents.

04-00:44:45

Sickler: But most were white.

04-00:44:46

Carole Sickler: Mostly white, yeah. But the Waitresses Union, they were all women waitresses that ran that local, and the woman that was the head of that union was tough as nails. Her name was May Stoneman. She's like a historical figure. She didn't take anything off anybody. She would get the best contracts for her waitresses. All the business agents were women. Because I was so young and impressionable. I was seventeen years old. All these women were dressed to the nines. They were always in these beautiful suits, and some of them wore hats. They were business agents, and they would go out to the restaurants and represent the waitresses. It was a different world then. It was before check-off. The members had to come to the local to pay their dues, and so you got to know the members. I got to really care about these members, these cooks, working all day in a kitchen, hot kitchen. It's hard work. They would come up to the union hall. They'd play cards. They'd come up on their days off, or if they were out of work, we had the dispatcher's office right there. So you got to know them personally. After you got check-off, you didn't see the members so much anymore. You'd see the retirees would come up and play cards. But when you had that personal contact, I think, with the members at the local, I think the union had more—I don't know. More power, more of a relationship with their membership. After check-off, they were just a name on a card. The members were really loyal to the union. Those were the days when I started out.

04-00:46:56

Rubens: I think that's a perfect ending for today.

Interview 2: March 25, 2014

Audio File 5

05-00:00:02

Rubens: Hi, Dave.

05-00:00:03

Sickler: Good morning.

05-00:00:09

Rubens: I'd like to go back over just a few things that we didn't quite fill in yesterday. One was you wanted to talk about your brother, Dwight.

05-00:00:26

Sickler: Yes. My brother, Dwight. He's about five years younger than myself. When he got out of the Army, I think it was 1971 that he was able to get on at Coors. Of course, he followed in my footsteps as a shop steward for the warehouse. He worked in the warehouse department, and the warehouse department was kind of like no-man's land in terms of the brewery, in terms of the local union. We really didn't have much representation out there. He ran for shop steward, and was very likeable, and very dedicated, and very sincere, and studied hard, and became a really effective shop steward. Then, after I left and went to work for the AFL-CIO, my brother Dwight was elected to the executive board, and then was part of the negotiating team that ultimately led up to the strike of 1977. So I not only was able to stay up to speed on how negotiations were going from the officers of the local, but my own brother was at the scene as well, so I got his perspective on it, which I trusted immensely.

Then, of course, after the strike in April, I didn't immediately put Dwight to work in the field on the boycott, but then I got into a real problem in San Francisco. I had a guy I didn't trust. I felt there was some funky business going on with the fundraising he was doing for the boycott. I got a couple of calls from some of the locals up there wanting to know what this guy was doing with money that they'd contributed. So I went up and investigated it. I arrived unannounced and found him with a nice apartment in the Marina, with brochures on the table for sailboats. He had his girlfriend in this apartment with him. I discreetly terminated him, pulled him out. Then I found out that the boycott was kind of under a cloud in San Francisco, people wondering what the hell was going on with their contributions to the boycott.

So I needed somebody in there to clean it up right away and somebody that I trusted with my life, that could build some credibility back to it, and that was Dwight, and then another member by the name of Al Gauna, a great guy that I trusted. Those two went to work in San Francisco and quickly built credibility there. They worked close with the councils. Everything they did was out there in broad daylight. This was at a huge sacrifice for my brother. He was making \$200 a week. That's all he was making. He had a wife at home that wasn't

working. Then while he was working for the boycott for two years in San Francisco, his wife back home was pilfering money. When he got back, he found out that none of his bills had been paid. She had taken Kleenex and put it in the bells of the phone, so when bill collectors called, he couldn't hear the phone ring. Disengaged the doorbell. Got out the mail first and made sure that he didn't see any of the mail. Then, finally, it all came crashing down on him. So he not only had to work 24/7 on the boycott for a couple of years in San Francisco in the Bay Area up there, but then when he went back home, he found that everything he owned was at risk, and that whole world was crumbling out from underneath him. He had a tremendous burden to make that all right again. Then he ended up driving a truck for Robinson Brick and Tile and became a shop steward for the Teamsters union.

05-00:04:34

Rubens:

Back in Golden?

05-00:04:35

Sickler:

In Golden. Actually, Robinson Brick and Tile was out of Denver. He had to haul brick over the passes of Colorado. These were all really rough jobs that he did. Then when there was a company-sponsored decertification of the local, he fought that decertification and he won. Then they figured out a way to fire him, because he was that effective. I feel I owe a lot to my brother, Dwight, and the contributions that he made to the whole effort on the Coors boycott.

05-00:05:07

Rubens:

That's a good story. It raises an issue besides loyalty and trust and picking people who have good skills. There were charges by Coors that there was corruption in the union. In general, it's very easy to tar the labor movement with alleged corruption. The Teamsters had a little bit more of a reputation for that. But in terms of the boycott, people that you were working with, did you find much of—

05-00:05:47

Sickler:

No. No, absolutely not. As soon as I even heard the rumor that one of my boycotters might be involved in that, I pounced on it immediately and cut it off at the head. No, we were never charged with corruption ever. The local was never charged with corruption. Coors may want to float that threat or that imaginary aspersion on us, but there was absolutely never any truth to that at all. Everything we did was an open book. As you probably are aware, unions have to be more accountable to scrutiny than companies. There are very few places that unions can hide or play games with finances at all, just based on the Landrum-Griffin Act and Department of Labor, the high degree of scrutiny that's placed on unions. They have to fess up to everything. They have to show and document wherever they put money. Unfortunately, we have bad actors in the labor movement, but we didn't have bad actors in that Coors boycott, because they were culled and dropped out immediately. I fired a boycotter that we had on staff for pushing that rumor that Coors was

connected to the Ku Klux Klan, because I couldn't prove it, and I didn't want him out there making those kinds of accusations. So everything we said was true.

The thing they screamed the most about was asbestos. I had stickers made up that said "Coors beer filtered through asbestos." Which was true. We didn't know that until after we were on strike and the boycott started. A chemist out of the company lab called me and said, "Are you guys aware that that beer is filtered through asbestos?" I said, "What?" He said, "Sure. It's the adhesive that keeps fibers together. Coors beer is not pasteurized. It's filtered." Well, to keep the fibers together in the filter pads, they use asbestos. I didn't know whether it was harmful or not. I just knew they did it, and it was the truth. Coors went insane, just absolutely insane, with that accusation. When they filed a suit against me, and the Coors attorneys are doing discovery, they hold up a fluorescent label, about that long and about that wide that said, "Boycott Coors. Coors beer filtered through asbestos." The attorney says, "Are you aware of this sticker?" I said, "Yeah, I had them made." "You did?" I said, "Yeah, I had them made up." "Well, are you aware they were posted all over Coors cabinets, on the glass and everything else?" I said, "Yeah, that was the job of the boycotters, was to post those everywhere Coors beer was." I don't know why they thought I was going to run and hide from that when we made it very obvious. But it drove Coors absolutely insane.

05-00:08:51
Rubens:

I believe that one of the strategies of the boycott, your strategy, was to get legislation passed in different states that required pasteurization.

05-00:08:58
Sickler:

Yes, that's right. We did. And I think we did in Oregon, if my memory serves me right. I think we got that legislation passed in the state of Oregon. But just to have Coors on the defense and have to defend it was well worth the effort, because management is always throwing everything but the kitchen sink at us to keep us on the defense. One of the things I loved about the Coors boycott was that we were constantly throwing the kitchen sink at them and keeping them on the defense, and there wasn't a thing illegal about it.

05-00:09:33
Rubens:

Now, maybe this is a transition for me. You did get involved in certain political campaigns. I know that, just to back up, Coors had tremendous influence on the city council in Golden, influence in the state, and influence in the nation. I want to move up to the Reagan election, but just in terms of when you were shop steward and then business manager, were you involved in any political campaigns?

05-00:10:09
Sickler:

Oh, yeah, heavily involved. In 1971, about the time I transitioned from being a shop steward to business manager, I got involved in Pat Schroeder's

campaign with the first congressional district in Colorado. She was such a breath of fresh air, politically, for Colorado. Here's this progressive woman.

05-00:10:31

Rubens:

Where had she come from, and had she had a background in politics?

05-00:10:34

Sickler:

I apologize, because I can't remember what her background was. She was an amazing person, and people, nationally, loved her. She was just a great candidate. There was a lot of excitement by students and folks out of labor. We all worked really hard. Contrary to the public opinion about Colorado being this knee-jerk right-wing state, Denver is very liberal. Even when I was living there, it was a very liberal city. No, she didn't have part of Boulder. I thought she had part of Boulder; she didn't. But she had Denver as a liberal place. So labor and college students, especially then—the Vietnam War was kind of at its pitch. People were fever pitch against it. Then—

05-00:11:27

Carole Sickler:

Women.

05-00:11:30

Sickler:

Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah. She was really supported by women, women's organizations. It was a huge and exciting victory for us when we got Pat Schroeder elected. Of course, Coors poured all kinds of money into her opposition's campaign. But as soon as she was elected, Coors people called up and wanted a refrigerator installed in her office, to be stocked with Coors beer, and she blocked it. When she blocked it, she gave me a phone call to tell me this whole story. She said, "I thought you might enjoy this story."

05-00:12:10

Rubens:

Tell me just a couple of things that meant you were involved with the campaign. Number one, didn't you design a T-shirt?

05-00:12:17

Sickler:

Yeah, I did. It's funny. I think Carole thinks I'm a little wacky. Somewhat paranoid. I designed a black T-shirt with white letters, "Vote Pat Schroeder," and then down below it, I had like a check mark with a big whoosh to it, and then below that, "Just do it." Was the T-shirt. Then, wasn't too long after that, Nike shoes started showing up with this check mark, swoosh, with "Just do it" underneath it.

05-00:12:53

Rubens:

And Nike, at the time, was headquartered in—

05-00:12:56

Sickler:

Denver. Yeah, they were headquartered in Denver. I had those T-shirts everywhere.

- 05-00:13:01
Rubens: What did it mean to be involved in the campaign? Just describe a couple of things you did or you had your members do.
- 05-00:13:08
Sickler: Oh, you mean with Pat's campaign? Oh, yeah. My major role was not just getting my members activated, but working through the Denver Area Labor Federation, getting the other locals roused up about it and getting their members to show up and go out and do the precinct walks. Do all the shoe-leather stuff. There was a lot of excitement about Pat's first run for office. We really wanted to see her win, and so it was exciting when it happened.
- 05-00:13:39
Rubens: Once in office, did she remain a friend of—
- 05-00:13:41
Sickler: Always. Always was a friend. Pat's been true to her last breath. She's amazing.
- 05-00:13:49
Rubens: Let's talk just a little bit also about Coors meddling in state and national politics. I don't know, "meddling" is pejorative on my part, and they would say being good citizens, but we had mentioned earlier that they had created the Heritage Foundation. Really financed it. The Heritage Foundation was responsible for this huge report that laid out the groundwork for what Reagan's agenda would be.
- 05-00:14:26
Sickler: That's exactly right.
- 05-00:14:26
Rubens: They had really supported—I have the name of it, but I can't remember what it was at the moment.
- 05-00:14:32
Sickler: Yeah, they established the agenda for the Reagan administration.
- 05-00:14:41
Rubens: Couple of questions about that. They had tremendous influence in getting James Watt appointed secretary of the interior, and Anne Such—
- 05-00:14:53
Sickler: Anne Gorsuch, for the EPA.
- 05-00:14:56
Rubens: The EPA. Now, what had run their legal foundation? They had created—what was it called? The—
- 05-00:15:09
Beagle: Pacific Legal.

05-00:15:10

Rubens: No, no, theirs was called the Mountain Legal.

05-00:15:12

Sickler: Yeah. He primarily worked out of Wyoming, did a lot of his work out of Wyoming.

05-00:15:17

Rubens: James Watt did, yeah.

05-00:15:18

Sickler: James Watt did, yeah. I was stunned right after Reagan got elected that this was the big post that Coors wanted, was the secretary of the interior position, James Watt. Because I thought sure they were going to be all over Reagan to—and he did—appoint some real right-winger as the head of the Department of Labor, and then as chair of the NLRB. Reagan did pick Donald Dotson, who had publicly said he was against collective bargaining.

05-00:15:50

Rubens: Who was that?

05-00:15:51

Sickler: Donald Dotson. But on James Watt, that one shocked me, and I couldn't figure it out until, later, found out that Coors wanted to develop oil shale on the Western Slope, and this oil shale was on public land. So he needed somebody in a key position that would open up that land for oil shale development, and Coors was so certain that was going to come to fruition that they actually built a city called, I think, Parachute, Parachute, Colorado, over on the Western Slope, and they went in and actually built this little city. Built houses and built roads and sewers and schools. Just developed the whole infrastructure. Of course, this was when we had gasoline rationing, and the gas prices were going crazy, and everybody was wondering what the hell are we going to do to get more oil. Well, Coors had this brainstorm about using shale. Then the bottom fell out of that and they didn't need them. But they were also dumping a lot of toxic stuff. I don't know whether most of it was coming from the chemical plant, the porcelain plant, or whether it was coming from the brewery, or a combination of all these businesses that they owned, but they needed somebody statewide to run interference for them on the environmental stuff, to see to it that they didn't get fined and burned and all that stuff. That's where Anne Gorsuch came in. She was with the EPA, and she ran interference for Coors at the state level. That was the reason. Then it made sense, once I found out oil shale, toxic dumping. That's why that was all very important to the Coors family.

05-00:17:46

Rubens: Looking at that whole set of people you were talking about—first the labor secretary, and then interior and Anne—I read somewhere someone who said Reagan picked people for cabinet positions precisely because their history of opposition to those very agencies. He was trying to—

05-00:18:02

Sickler:

That's exactly right. This is one thing that the Republicans have done so much better than the Democrats. Instead of trying to pass laws that would outlaw these agencies that are popular with a lot of the public, they just defund them. So if Reagan gets elected, Republican gets elected, instead of just going out there, saying, "We have to destroy the Department of Education," you just don't fund it. Same thing. Of course, that's what Reagan did. He just starved to death those various agencies that were important to most of us but corporations didn't like.

05-00:18:39

Rubens:

Of course, you were working the boycott at this point, but even thinking about the Coors brewery workers, do you think they supported Reagan? Do you have any sense about how they—

05-00:18:49

Sickler:

Oh, the brewery workers? No way. No. One of the jobs of union leaders is to educate workers about who's important, politically, to your paycheck. That's why we're always opposed to blending in social issues, like abortion and guns and all that stuff, when you talk to workers one-on-one about why they should vote for candidates that support their bread-and-butter issues. Because it gets real fuzzy and crazy once you take your focus off bread-and-butter issues, like wages and union rights, and you start talking about abortion and gun control. Then you always lose, because you take your eye off the ball that's important to you, and that's the money ball. That's where employers really win. Imagine most of these corporations, like Coors, probably didn't give a damn about a lot of the social issues, but it takes people's eye away from money, and that's what they're primarily interested in.

05-00:19:54

Beagle:

So would you guess that 80 percent of your folks were Democrats? Ninety percent? Ninety-five?

05-00:20:01

Sickler:

I think they were so well-educated by the time I left the local, I would say it was a safe bet that we had 85 percent, at least. I'm trying to be—

05-00:20:12

Beagle:

Voting against Reagan?

05-00:20:14

Sickler:

Yes. I think they really understood, because they understood who Coors really was then. I compare what our members did against Reagan, by seeing the Coors/Reagan connection, as we did here in California when we fought Proposition 226, and Pete Wilson was the chair of the 226 campaign. He had just tried to take eight-hour day away from working people in California. The UFCW folks, in a lot of the areas of the state, are very conservative, and by a majority of UFCW locals, they vote Republican, and in some of those locals, actually have Republican business managers, presidents of the local, with a

long history. But once we talked to retail clerks and UFCW folks about Pete Wilson wanting to take the eight-hour day away from him, they were all against Pete Wilson. Then when 226 came along, which was not too long—it was like the following year—Pete Wilson was the poster boy for 226, paycheck protection. I made 111 meetings. Carole will tell you, I was never home. I was gone every night, Saturday and Sunday. That’s when I found out unions actually have meetings on Sunday morning, Teamsters do, because I attended those meetings. I didn’t have to get up into a long-winded dissertation about the evils of 226. All I had to say is, “Pete Wilson wants it.” Everybody got it.

05-00:21:52

Carole Sickler: And the fliers all had his face—

05-00:21:54

Sickler: We put his face on it. We put Pete Wilson’s face on it. We did the same thing with Coors. This is what they want, and do you trust your future with Coors’s political decisions?

05-00:22:06

Rubens: Let me ask you one more question, just hovering around 1980. George Meany dies in January. Reagan is not elected until November. You continue as national boycott director. What’s that transition like for you when it goes from Meany to Kirkland?

05-00:22:35

Sickler: I didn’t like Meany before I became a field rep and I was with the local union because of his position on the Vietnam War, primarily. I was really against the war, and I thought he was being stubborn and obstinate and tunnel-visioned and just didn’t get it about the Vietnam War. After I got to know him and work with him, and really got to know the labor movement better, the more I understood about the labor movement in the United States of America, the more I appreciated George Meany. Let me back up a little bit, because when he gave a retirement speech, and I think it was Milwaukee, and I was there—we had a big regional meeting, so I attended this meeting where President Meany was interviewed by the press. There was another meeting where I sat in where he had a private meeting with a reporter. I’m not exactly sure where exactly he said these words, but a reporter asked him, “What’s your greatest contribution to the labor movement as you retire?” He said, “Just keeping them together.” I thought, that’s it? That’s all you’ve got to say after all these years? President of the American labor movement? You know what? That was the most powerful statement any labor leader can ever make, is, “Keeping them together.” It’s the hardest thing to do in this labor movement. Because if you’ll notice, after Meany left, we didn’t keep them together. The movement fractured and split in a hundred pieces. Andy Stern took half of them initially, and then they all spun out there doing their own thing, still fighting each other. It was more chaotic than ever before. We’re just now in the process of trying

to bring the movement back together again. But, you know, Humpty Dumpty fell off the wall. We're now trying to put the pieces back together.

05-00:24:48

Rubens: So when Kirkland comes in, of course there's a little jockeying within the international about who's contending. Was it clear Kirkland was going to be the—

05-00:25:04

Beagle: Think so.

05-00:25:05

Sickler: Yeah. It was a pretty clean transition. At that time, the old man carried so much weight that whoever was his heir apparent was going to be his heir apparent.

05-00:25:16

Rubens: And that was Kirkland. Did that transition affect you or the boycott? Where was Kirkland on the boycott?

05-00:25:22

Sickler: He was great. He was fantastic. As a matter of fact, when the disaster with *60 Minutes* happened, which I was crestfallen about—she'll tell you, I was at my lowest. I was depressed for a long time. I got invited to go to San Francisco to speak before that huge gay pride meeting, and Jack Henning was wonderful, by the way. Jack really supported me. Jack said, "I want you to come in. I want you to speak up there."

05-00:25:57

Rubens: Jack Henning being the—

05-00:26:00

Sickler: Head of the California Federation of Labor, state federation of labor. Jack was wonderful. And Lane was there. So I got up and gave a speech to the crowd about the boycott, and I got a great reception from the crowd about it. This was following *60 Minutes*, not too long afterwards. Lane came up to me and hugged me, and he said, "Don't you ever let those bastards get you down." He said, "You're doing a great job."

05-00:26:34

Rubens: Nice story.

05-00:26:35

Sickler: And he hugged me.

05-00:26:38

Rubens: And of course, he's the one—we'll get to it—who appoints you regional director of the western region. You didn't get an increase in your budget for the boycott? [laughter]

05-00:26:48

Sickler: Did not get an increase in the budget.

05-00:26:53

Beagle: Can I just ask one question while we're talking about it? Here's my question. We had criticism of the AFL-CIO—that it was sort of a San Francisco labor movement, lefties, that kind of thing. That everything they did was kind of half-assed. Budgeting \$32,000, 32-5, for something like this seemed like giving with one hand—“Okay, go ahead and do it”—and taking back with the other. That, you know, “We think maybe it's a loser. We don't want to be too committed to it.” Can you talk about that just a little bit? Am I right that there was sort of a style of—

05-00:27:46

Sickler: Yeah, because there was. Larry Gold didn't want anything to do with the boycott from the get-go, from the beginning. Wanted nothing to do with it. He saw nothing but downside, so he constantly put in pressure. But there were other people in the organization that were thrilled about the boycott. They wanted to go after Coors. The Union Label Department. I think we talked briefly yesterday a little bit about using the structure of the AFL-CIO to really go after Coors. It's amazing. If a lot of the affiliates really understood how they could utilize the various departments of the AFL-CIO to execute their program—I'll just give you one example. I got a call from a guy that said—he actually was from one of the Australian locals that supported the Coors boycott, and said Joe Coors was coming to Australia, representing Ronald Reagan, to give a speech on something. He said, “I just thought you ought to know that.” So I called the International Affairs Department of the AFL-CIO and said, “Hey, how hard would it be to get the Australian labor movement to put up a big banner out at the airport, telling Joe Coors to go back home, because we don't like your labor policies?”

International Affairs Department loved it. They jumped on top of it and ran with it, and they called—I think the guy's name was Peter North, who was the head of the Australian labor movement at the time. They loved it. They jumped on it. They got a bunch of their members out at the airport. They had these huge banners that said “Joe Coors, go home.” Anything to do with boycott Coors beer. The International Affairs Department was helpful on a number of other occasions. Coors was going to go into a partnership with a brewery out of Brussels. International Affairs Department got the word out to the brewery workers in Brussels. The brewery workers in Brussels were going to strike the Brussels brewery if they merged with Coors. This had to shake Coors's tree, that labor, this little boycott out of Golden, Colorado, had fingers that stretched all the way to Brussels and Australia.

Then the Union Label Department. We had a friend that worked in the Union Label Department that came out of the L.A. County Fed and went to work back in Washington, D.C., and she loved the Coors boycott. So she invited me back, and when she would go in the field to meet with various councils—she

took me through a good part of Pennsylvania, for example, when Coors first moved into Pennsylvania. We went together to a couple of Central Labor Councils there and pushed the Coors boycott there. So it was all these departments. For example, the Public Affairs Department. Neal Sacharow. I don't know if you guys ever met Neal Sacharow. Brilliant guy. Did a lot of the advertising stuff for the AFL-CIO. Loved the Coors boycott. On his own time, he developed a piece, a hit piece, against Coors on the Silver Bullet and the whole thing, and was marketing it to the Central Labor Councils and the state feds to play to their rank and file. They didn't cost me a penny. All that stuff never cost me a dime. Australia never cost me a dime. Brussels didn't cost me a dime. The PR department didn't cost me a dime. The Public Employees Department was pushing the Coors boycott, to AFSCME and SEIU and all their members. There was the labor press. You'd be more than aware of the Labor Press. It was much bigger at the time of the Coors boycott than it is today. Every edition in most of the labor press was carrying a boycott Coors message. Maybe not a story, but a constant reminder that the boycott was on. So putting it out there. Didn't cost us a dime. If you had to go pay for all that stuff, you'd have to have a million-dollar budget to pay for it. That's the kind of stuff, just because of the AFL-CIO's structure, that I had at my fingertips.

05-00:32:21

Rubens:

Good. Let's stop for a minute. [Pause in audio] Now Carole Sickler has joined us and we're going to interview her in just a few minutes. But Dave, you said there was one more political story?

05-00:32:33

Sickler:

I forgot to mention there was another actual meeting requested by Joe Coors and myself. I had supported a guy who was running for Congress in the second congressional district by the name of Tim Wirth. He had come to me before he went to Coors and asked for support. He was a liberal Democrat.

05-00:32:57

Rubens:

When are we talking about?

05-00:32:58

Carole Sickler:

In Colorado.

05-00:32:59

Sickler:

In Colorado.

05-00:33:00

Rubens:

But roughly when? Around Schroeder?

05-00:33:04

Sickler:

It was after Schroeder's campaign of '71. This is like '73. Tim Wirth then ultimately went on to become a US senator. But when he first ran, he came out and met with me. We sat out there and talked for hours in the auditorium, and I was really impressed with him. So I got all of the shop stewards involved in his campaign, and I got all the other unions in Jefferson County

involved in his campaign, and I ran fundraisers for him myself. I ran fundraisers and really pitched a hard campaign for him. It was pretty public. So when we beat Coors, Coors's guy, Joe Coors invited me to come to the brewery to meet with him about joining together. His whole pitch was, "I was really impressed with the campaign you guys ran for Tim Wirth. Congratulations on that. But, you know," he said, "your members are really dependent upon the welfare of this brewery, and I would like to talk to you about getting together on legislation that's good for the brewery." I said, "Well, Joe, the first thing, before I start working with you, you got to do, you got to eliminate that list of ten people you want to defeat, like Pat Schroeder and Teddy Kennedy," and I went down the line of federal candidates that he wanted defeated. That was the end of the meeting. That was the end of the meeting.

05-00:34:39

Rubens:

Did you ever have another meeting with him?

05-00:34:40

Sickler:

Never. No. But I thought it was significant that he invited me to come in and talk about politics.

05-00:34:50

Rubens:

Absolutely. All right, so we're going to switch gears and talk to Carole. It's wonderful to have you join this interview.

05-00:35:10

Rubens:

You guys have been a team, really, since 1977 or so.

05-00:35:16

Sickler:

Actually, '79.

05-00:35:17

Rubens:

You were married in—

05-00:35:18

Carole Sickler:

Eighty.

05-00:35:19

Rubens:

By 1980. Carole, you really have quite a background in the labor movement in Los Angeles, even prior to meeting Dave, and then you'll go on. Let's just get your history a little bit.

05-00:35:36

Carole Sickler:

Well, I graduated from high school and I wanted to just work for the summer, but I didn't want to work as a waitress or some low-paying job. I wanted something better. I was lucky; I got a job working for one of the unions in L.A. At that time, hotel and restaurant all had separate locals. They had a waiters local, a bartenders local, a cooks local, even a dishwashers local. I went to work for the cooks local. I loved it. I got—

05-00:36:16

Rubens: What did you do, literally?

05-00:36:17

Carole Sickler: I was a secretary. General office. I took dues at the window. I got really attached to the members. In those days, they didn't have check-off, so the members came up to pay their dues. You got to know them personally. I got to where I would help them with their health and welfare problems. They were having a problem with their insurance or their doctor bills, and I would call the health and welfare office for them and try to take care of them that way. When summer ended and September came, I didn't want to leave. I wanted to stay. I was seventeen years old. So I convinced my parents that I would go to school at night. So I did for a while. I went to East L.A. Community College. I was really getting attached to the labor movement, because my grandfather was the president of the United Mine Workers in Pennsylvania, and I adored my grandfather. He died the year I graduated from high school, when I was seventeen, right before I went to work. I always felt somehow that he went to heaven and made this job possible for me, because I just really fell into it.

05-00:37:44

Rubens: Had you grown up, then, in a pro-union household?

05-00:37:47

Carole Sickler: Well, with my grandfather. My parents were pro-union, but my father was a businessman. When he came from Pennsylvania, he didn't want to work in the coal mines in Pennsylvania, so he moved me and my mother to California when I was six years old, and he went to work in the Furniture manufacturing business.

05-00:38:10

Rubens: This was when? You were born when?

05-00:38:12

Carole Sickler: I was born in Pennsylvania in December 1938. My grandfather was such a big influence when I was just a tiny little girl. I remember everything about World War II, about him taking me every night and sitting me on his lap and listening to the radio, and listening all about the war, but to Roosevelt's Fireside Chats. He was always telling me about the labor movement and how important it was to help people to make a better life.

05-00:38:57

Rubens: What was his name?

05-00:38:58

Carole Sickler: John Hosey. This was my mother's father, the Irish side of my family.

05-00:39:02

Rubens: How do you spell "Hosey"?

05-00:39:03

Carole Sickler: H-O-S-E-Y. This is the Irish side of my family. Also, my father's father, too, the Italian side, he came from Sicily to America and wound up working in the coal mines there, because he worked in the sulfur mines as a child in Sicily. Both sides of my family were very pro-union and in the coal mines of Pennsylvania. But my father didn't want to work in the coal mines, so he moved us to California. Later, my grandparents moved out, and all my aunts and uncles, the whole family, moved to California. When my grandfather died I was just graduating from high school, I was devastated. I lost him. But then when I found this job in the labor movement, it just seemed perfect. Then I started seeing what he was talking about, these cooks that worked all day in a restaurant in a hot kitchen, and what the employer, the restaurant owners, would try to get away with. Paying them as little as possible, not giving them protections and insurance, and the union providing all of that for them. I really felt like I was doing my grandfather's work. I really loved working there and I didn't want to go back to school, so I went nights. Then—

05-00:40:48

Rubens: What do you mean you went nights?

05-00:40:49

Carole Sickler: I went to East L.A. Community College night classes and started getting more interested in political science. So from the cooks union, I went to work for the hotel and restaurant workers joint board, and that involved the unions and the employers, because it was the joint board. Then I took a little time—well, not really. I got married. I don't know if you want personal information, but I got married to the boy next door. I was very young. I was twenty years old. I got pregnant, I had a baby, and then we got a divorce. So then I had to work. I went back to work for the union. That's when I went to the Joint Board. One year later. LAOCOC was just opening their doors in Los Angeles. The national AFL-CIO was just establishing this pilot organizing program. I was lucky to be hired.

05-00:42:07

Rubens: This is in 1962?

05-00:42:08

Carole Sickler: This was in '62, yes. My son was just a baby. That was a fantastic job. Then I got to know all of the unions, not just Hotel and Restaurant, but all of them, and I really loved that.

05-00:42:26

Rubens: What did you do there?

05-00:42:28

Carole Sickler: There, I started out as receptionist, and I wound up being the office manager. But on the side, I was always working in political campaigns just as a volunteer, even organizing campaigns just as a volunteer. All of my friends were from the labor movement. I married Chuck Hogan, who later became

regional director of the AFL-CIO. At that time, he worked for AFSCME. When we married, Chuck adopted my son Mark who was only two years old at the time. Chuck is the only father Mark had ever known. I quit for a little while when my son was about three years old. I wanted to stay home and take care of my son. So I quit working, but I still did everything as a volunteer. I still involved myself in political campaigns and organizing campaigns.

Then as the years went on, my husband became very ill with cancer. Before that happened is when Dave Sickler came to town with the Coors boycott. Everyone in the labor movement in Los Angeles loved Dave Sickler. Here comes this young, good-looking guy in blue jeans and a “Boycott Coors” T-shirt—what he wore all the time—and would make these fantastic speeches from the heart about his boycott, but about workers in general. He’s this big white cowboy, and he had empathy for immigrants, these immigrants in Los Angeles that no one at that time was doing anything for. In fact, a lot of the unions didn’t like it. They thought they were taking away union jobs and so forth, and he comes along and starts talking about organizing them. So everyone embraced him, and we became friends. Chuck adored him. Chuck wanted him to come and run the LAOCOC.

05-00:44:42

Rubens:

Chuck, by then, had become head of LAOCOC.

05-00:44:44

Carole Sickler:

Yeah, he was the head of LAOCOC. Then he became regional director, and he didn’t want to do both, and so the AFL-CIO said that he could hire someone to run the organizing committee. He started talking about this guy from Colorado—at the time, it was before Dave actually physically came, and before I met him—and how he wanted him to run this organizing committee. Then Dave came to town to study the organizing committee, and Chuck talked him into moving here and staying here. In the meantime, Chuck got very, very ill. He was in Loma Linda Medical Center. It was like sixty miles from where we lived, so stayed out there. In the meantime, I was working for the office and professional employees union. I was their job counselor and program coordinator. I coordinated their national convention that was held in L.A. I was doing all of that part-time. Then Chuck got sick. He wanted Dave at the hospital at night. I would stay there all day until I couldn’t keep my eyes open, and then I’d go to this little motel next to the hospital and sleep, and Dave would come in and spend the night with Chuck. When Chuck died, he was almost as devastated as I was, so we were kind of grieving, and he was helping me—my son was sixteen years old at the time—and he was helping me and my son get our lives back together and apply for the Social Security for children under eighteen, all of that. I knew then I needed to go to work full-time. I had to find a full-time job. He started telling me about this job at the Los Angeles County Federation of Labor. There was a woman there that was going to be retiring that ran all of the standing committees and coordinated all of the conferences and things like that. She was retiring, and

he talked me into going and applying for the job. Bill Robertson was the head of the Federation then. So I did, and I got the job.

I wound up staying there for twenty-two years until I retired. I became the program coordinator. I coordinated twenty standing committees. I was the director of the union art exhibit, which was a once-a-year program that the federation put on that was fantastic. It was my favorite thing. It was artwork of union members and their families. First, it was at the California Museum of Science and Industry. We had a big exhibit space there. The public didn't realize that people who work in grocery stores, etc., can do this fantastic art. The art was really very professional, a lot of it. We even had children's art, the children of union members. It was a wonderful thing. I loved that. That was one of my favorite projects. Another project was the student and teacher workshops, which Dave was very involved with. We would bring students from a particular high school. The high school would pick the students that could come, and we'd have them all day and teach them about the labor movement, because it wasn't being taught in the schools. In the morning we would have a session on labor history, which Dave would teach. We had labor and politics taught by John McDowell who headed the Labor Center at L.A. Trade Tech. Also we'd teach them about community services. We called it the "heart of the labor movement".

05-00:49:38

Rubens: One thing led to another.

05-00:49:39

Carole Sickler: Yeah.

05-00:49:41

Rubens: Dave, we should just say your first marriage had come to an end before you were out in L.A., so you had been single for a while. One thing led to another.

05-00:49:52

Sickler: That's right. Our friendship became love. We fell in love. I should also add that her son Mark actually became one of my biggest advocates. He wanted us together.

05-00:50:19

Carole Sickler: I would call him from work and say, "Dave is going to come home and have dinner with us tonight." And we'd get there, and he'd have the house all cleaned up. He'd have the fireplace going. He'd have our music on the stereo. We started realizing, I think we're being set up here.

05-00:50:37

Sickler: This is a set-up.

05-00:50:38

Carole Sickler: Then he'd say—he was in high school then—"Patty and I are going to go to the movies," and they would leave.

- 05-00:50:46
Sickler: What did he say the day we got married?
- 05-00:50:48
Carole Sickler: “She’s your problem now.” [laughter]
- 05-00:50:51
Sickler: He was worried about her.
- 05-00:50:53
Carole Sickler: Actually, at our wedding, I had him give me away. We got married in Santa Barbara, in a garden, and he walked me down the aisle and gave me away.
- 05-00:51:05
Rubens: So you guys were a powerhouse in the labor movement in Los Angeles.
- 05-00:51:09
Carole Sickler: Well, I wouldn’t say that.
- 05-00:51:17
Sickler: One thing she’s left out, she held a very powerful position there for a very long time. She was Miguel Contreras’s executive assistant.
- 05-00:51:27
Carole Sickler: That was later.
- 05-00:51:29
Sickler: Yeah, but that’s a powerful position. She was the gatekeeper for Miguel.
- 05-00:51:45
Rubens: What’s an example of that?
- 05-00:51:56
Carole Sickler: Sometimes, he would be in favor of supporting a certain person from the labor movement that I happened to know was not in his best interest, and someone I had known for a long time, that I would say, “Miguel, wait a minute. This is what this guy is about.”
- 05-00:52:18
Sickler: Because she’s had a long history, so she knew.
- 05-00:52:20
Rubens: That’s why I wanted to get a sense of what kind of—
- 05-00:52:23
Carole Sickler: Or sometimes he would pooh-pooh something that I thought was pretty important to the labor movement that seemed like a small thing, but it really needed the Federation of Labor’s support.
- 05-00:52:37
Rubens: Did he listen to you for the most part?

05-00:52:39
Sickler: He did. For the most part.

05-00:52:41
Carole Sickler: Yeah. He'd argue with me, but he'd always say, "You have history."

05-00:52:48
Beagle: Carole, didn't you become political director?

05-00:52:50
Carole Sickler: No. No, I was never political director. I worked in the political department for a while, yeah. When Fabian Nunez was the political director, I was his assistant.

05-00:53:03
Sickler: But you also took over for Damon Moore for a while.

05-00:53:06
Carole Sickler: Oh. Well, yeah. Damon Moore was the political director for a while before Fabian Nunez and he had some personal—

05-00:53:14
Sickler: Issues.

05-00:53:15
Carole Sickler: —issues and problems, and disappeared. Just left, and nobody knew where he was. It was in the middle of big campaigns that were going on. I think at the time it was city council. I don't remember exactly.

05-00:53:32
Sickler: Key races.

05-00:53:32
Carole Sickler: So things were kind of falling in my lap. Miguel called in—what's that political consulting firm?

05-00:53:53
Sickler: Oh, Parke.

05-00:53:53
Carole Sickler: Yeah, Parke Skelton.

05-00:53:56
Rubens: What is that?

05-00:53:58
Sickler: He's a consulting group that works with a lot of the unions and progressive candidates in Los Angeles.

05-00:54:02

Carole Sickler: So they really took over the campaigns, but they needed someone there physically, at the office, so that fell in my lap for a little while. But I was never political director, no.

05-00:54:15

Rubens: You mentioned when I first met you that—forgive me if I'm wrong—was there a certain ceiling on how far women could go? Women were coming into the movement and to—

05-00:54:29

Carole Sickler: Yeah, there weren't very many women leaders in the labor movement then. There are now, a lot more. Still not enough, really.

05-00:54:40

Rubens: We talked about Durazo yesterday.

05-00:54:42

Carole Sickler: Yeah, and Maria Elena Durazo, who is Miguel Contreras's widow, was the head of the L.A. County Federation of Labor. But there still aren't as many as there should be. When I was at the Federation of Labor when I first started out, and even toward the middle, there were really virtually hardly any. Elinor Glenn, who was getting up there in age then and had retired. There were a few others.

05-00:55:17

Sickler: Gwen Newton.

05-00:55:18

Carole Sickler: Yeah, but there had never been very many women.

05-00:55:20

Rubens: Who was that, Dave?

05-00:55:21

Carole Sickler: Gwen Newton was the head of the office and professional employees union.

05-00:55:26

Sickler: She was international vice president.

05-00:55:28

Carole Sickler: Yeah. But at the federation, there were no women department heads.

05-00:55:35

Rubens: The city council later on had quite a few women. I don't know, quite a few. Maxine Waters got—

05-00:55:43

Carole Sickler: Maxine Waters wasn't on the city council. She was in the State Assembly.

05-00:55:46

Rubens: Oh, she was the rep.

- 05-00:55:50
Carole Sickler: She was, I think, in the state assembly. I don't know where she was before she became a congresswoman.
- 05-00:55:55
Sickler: Yeah, she was state assembly.
- 05-00:55:58
Carole Sickler: There was a woman on the city council years earlier. Actually, when I first went to work in the labor movement, or shortly after. Rosalind Wyman. She was a firecracker. She was so great. I used to love to listen to her speak.
- 05-00:56:20
Sickler: She was amazing.
- 05-00:56:21
Carole Sickler: She was the only woman on the city council then, I believe.
- 05-00:56:24
Rubens: She and her husband were very big in the Democratic Party.
- 05-00:56:27
Sickler: She was a force unto herself.
- 05-00:56:30
Rubens: But so did you feel at some points there was a ceiling on you?
- 05-00:56:38
Carole Sickler: Not really. I was not ambitious in that way. I wanted to do things, I wanted to help members, but I never had the ambition to climb the ladder or to have a title.
- 05-00:56:52
Rubens: But overseeing twenty committees, that's a pretty—what's an example of just some of the committees? These were the committees of the County Fed?
- 05-00:56:59
Carole Sickler: Standing committees of the County Fed. We had an education committee. We had what they called at the time church and state or something, but it was really community services. We had cultural activities. That's what the art show came out of. We had employment and training. We had the health and welfare committee. We also had the Latin American which later became Immigraiton Committee.
- 05-00:57:31
Rubens: I get it. There were twenty. There were a lot.
- 05-00:57:33
Carole Sickler: There were a lot. There were a lot. All of them had meetings every month, activities, workshops and conferences, whatever. It was a lot of work.

- 05-00:57:45
Rubens: You're scheduling, you're keeping track.
- 05-00:57:46
Carole Sickler: Scheduling. Oh, yeah. Oh, yeah.
- 05-00:57:48
Rubens: There must have been the minutes to coordinate.
- 05-00:57:50
Carole Sickler: There were minutes. I hated minutes, but I did tons of minutes all the time, yeah. Then the student workshops came out of the education committee. So Dave and I worked together on things like the student workshops, the teacher workshops, and at the same time, I was a volunteer in the Coors boycott. Everyone loved the Coors boycott in L.A. Those little stickers that he talked about, "filtered through asbestos," we had those. We'd go into restaurants. We'd put them in the ladies' room. We'd put them in phone booths.
- 05-00:58:29
Sickler: Put them in menus. Down where it said where the beer listings were, right next to Coors, "filtered through asbestos."
- 05-00:58:38
Carole Sickler: Everyone in L.A. got really excited about the Coors boycott, and there's a million stories.
- 05-00:58:45
Sickler: A million stories.
- 05-00:58:45
Carole Sickler: I really think he should write a book about some of the funny stories that came out of the Coors boycott, because a lot of it happens in bars and restaurants and festivals and things like that.
- 05-00:58:58
Sickler: One of the funniest stories came out of, then, the Retail Clerks.
- 05-00:59:04
Rubens: Do we have time to tell the story?
- 05-00:59:06
Sickler: Yeah, sure.
- 05-00:59:07
Carole Sickler: Well, it's up to you.
- 05-00:59:08
Rubens: I'm at fifty-nine minutes here. We've got maybe two minutes.

05-00:59:12

Sickler: I was invited to speak at Mike Straeter's local out in Santa Monica. This was quite an honor, because Jimmy Carter had spoken there not too far removed when I was invited. So I went out.

05-00:59:25

Carole Sickler: Ted Kennedy had also spoken.

05-00:59:26

Sickler: Ted Kennedy had spoken there. They did a wonderful thing out there at that time. They had a huge kitchen and a great, big, huge auditorium, and the retirees would cook dinner for all the members. The members were invited to bring their families, so it was a huge turnout. Anyway, I got up and gave a hell, fire, and brimstone speech about the boycott. Then about two weeks later, I get a call from Mike Straeter, the head of the local. His exact word: "Sickler, you son of a bitch. You got one of my girls fired." I had a lump in my throat. I said, "What? What? What are you talking about? What happened?" Then he starts laughing, and he said, "It's okay. I got her hired back." But he said, "I had to share this story with you." He said, "I got a call from one of the shop stewards at one of the grocery stores, saying that our member refused to check out a customer that wanted to buy a six-pack of Coors." And he said, "She's a great member. She comes to our meetings, and she's a great worker. She's never been late, never been tardy." Said, "So I normally have a business agent that handles that store, but I wanted to go check it out personally." He said, "I went out there myself." He said, "Of course we got her back on, because she had a perfect record." He said, "But I took her aside after the meeting and I said, 'Why didn't you just give your little boycott spiel and then check the customer out?'" She said, "No. He pissed me off. He was the only one all week that refused to take the beer back."

05-01:01:04

Rubens: That's a good story. So Michael Straeter was head of which local?

05-01:01:10

Sickler: UFCW Local 1442. Santa Monica.

Audio File 6

06-00:00:01

Rubens: Carole, at some point, you go to work for COPE, the Committee on Public Education.

06-00:00:06

Carole Sickler: Political education.

06-00:00:07

Rubens: Political education. How did that come about?

06-00:00:11

Carole Sickler: Bill Robertson retired.

06-00:00:14

Rubens: As head of the County Fed.

06-00:00:14

Carole Sickler: As head of the County Federation of Labor. Jim Wood, who had been the political director, became the secretary treasurer of the Federation of Labor. He moved me into COPE. He had an assistant, who had been his secretary in the COPE office. He moved her in to be his assistant.

06-00:00:43

Rubens: Your position?

06-00:00:45

Carole Sickler: No, I didn't have that position yet. He eliminated all of the committees. He, for some reason, didn't think they were necessary, all of those committees. The committees consisted of representatives from all the different unions. He eliminated all of the committees. We had the union art show, I think, one year after he became secretary treasurer, and then he eliminated the art show. He moved me into the political office. He hired Miguel Contreras to be the political director, so I was assisting Miguel in the political office. Then Jim Wood, after—I think he was in office about two years—he became very ill. He was still young. He wasn't even fifty yet, I don't think. Anyway, he had lung cancer, and he passed away. That's when Miguel was elected.

06-00:01:57

Sickler: Well, they brought Bill back in.

06-00:01:59

Carole Sickler: They brought Bill back. There was a big political fight.

06-00:02:02

Sickler: It was ugly.

06-00:02:03

Carole Sickler: There were people that were adamantly opposed to Miguel taking over the Federation of Labor.

06-00:02:10

Rubens: Because?

06-00:02:11

Carole Sickler: A lot of them were racist, and they were making horrible comments, like, "We're not going to have a Mexican running the labor movement in Los Angeles."

06-00:02:20

Sickler: Blatant.

06-00:02:21

Carole Sickler: Blatant, really ugly stuff. Now, the staff of the Federation of Labor was supposed to stay out of it completely. We were not supposed to be involved, but it's hard. Being a human being, you have your opinions, and I was very much in favor of Miguel. There were other people on staff that were opposed to Miguel. The whole thing got very ugly. But finally, Miguel was elected and became the head of the Federation of Labor.

06-00:03:02

Rubens: And the head is called the secretary—

06-00:03:04

Carole Sickler: The executive secretary treasurer.

06-00:03:06

Rubens: The president is more of a—

06-00:03:07

Carole Sickler: No, the president is a figurehead. He's the head of another union. I know in some places, the president is the head, but in Los Angeles, it's the executive secretary treasurer. When Miguel became the secretary treasurer, after about a year, I think it was, he appointed me to be his assistant, and I moved in then to that position.

06-00:03:39

Rubens: One of the reasons you went to COPE was also your relationship to Dave, in a way, because Wood was suspicious of—

06-00:03:51

Carole Sickler: Yeah, I guess you could say that. Jim Wood, for some reason we never really could understand, was very paranoid about Dave and thought that Dave wanted to be the secretary treasurer of the Federation of Labor, which Dave never wanted.

06-00:04:11

Sickler: Never wanted.

06-00:04:11

Carole Sickler: Dave never wanted that. He was regional director for the three Western states and Guam for the national AFL-CIO.

06-00:04:21

Sickler: Why would I give up Guam?

06-00:04:26

Carole Sickler: But he was very popular with the affiliates in Los Angeles, and they were approximately the same age. They were both these tall guys, nice-looking. So Jim saw him as a threat and always thought that Dave was after his job. So for that reason, I was on his staff, and he was kind of taking it out on me. He didn't want me to be privy to anything that he thought would get back to Dave. It was not a good time. It was not a good time. He moved me into the

political office, and I really think his intention was to eventually move me out the door, and probably if he had stayed in office, I would have left, because I wasn't happy. I was not happy there. Unfortunately, I felt really bad when Jim got so sick, and he died. Miguel finally was elected, and then appointed me to be his assistant.

06-00:05:44

Rubens:

Let's just tell the story and we'll see what we'll do with it. While Miguel is executive, Fabian Nunez applies for the position. Political director.

06-00:06:00

Carole Sickler:

When Miguel became secretary treasurer, he hired Damon Moore out of SEIU to be the political director. Damon was a great guy, did a great job, but had some personal issues and wound up having to leave the job. There was no political director, and Miguel was trying to do both jobs, and it just was too difficult to run the Federation and be the political director, so he needed to hire a political director. Fabian Nunez applied.

06-00:06:47

Rubens:

So Fabian?

06-00:06:49

Carole Sickler:

Fabian applied for the job.

06-00:06:50

Rubens:

And he had been with utility workers?

06-00:06:52

Carole Sickler:

Yes.

06-00:06:52

Sickler:

Yeah, he was kind of contracting out. He wasn't a member of utility workers, but he had contracted with them, and he was doing work around the eight-hour day.

06-00:07:02

Carole Sickler:

Contreras is a little wary of hiring him.

06-00:07:07

Sickler:

Only because he was worried that he was going to get hit for hiring a Latino.

06-00:07:15

Carole Sickler:

There were people accusing him of only wanting Latinos.

06-00:07:18

Sickler:

He really did want balance on staff. He wanted African Americans. He was even talking about getting somebody in that was white. He wanted a balanced staff.

06-00:07:27

Carole Sickler:

Damon Moore was African American.

06-00:07:30

Sickler:

I argued with him, because Fabian was extremely talented. My work with him on the utility workers and the eight-hour day stuff, I was immensely impressed with him. How sharp he was and how energetic he was. So I pushed Miguel really hard to hire him. I said, "Look. Yeah, people are going to accuse you of that. As soon as you make the announcement with his last surname, you're going to get accused of favoring Latinos. That's going to happen. But at the end of the day, all people care about is having political victories. This kid can take you there, and you know it." And he did know it, so that's why he ended up going with Fabian. It was a smart decision.

06-00:08:09

Rubens:

So you were with him?

06-00:08:11

Carole Sickler:

When Fabian started I was his assistant, working in the COPE office. Then, after—I don't remember how long it was. I don't think it was even a year. Maybe a year. Miguel took me out of there. I remember Fabian being mad and saying, "You're taking her from me." First, Miguel sort of proposed it to me like it was up to me, and Fabian was like, "Are you going to desert me and go with him?" It was so funny. The more I thought about it, I thought, yeah, I think I am. So I went with Miguel. I went into what they called the executive office, and became Miguel's assistant.

06-00:09:02

Sickler:

Tough job.

06-00:09:03

Rubens:

I bet.

06-00:09:03

Sickler:

Because you have to deal with all the people that are pissed off. Right?

06-00:09:08

Carole Sickler:

Yeah.

06-00:09:09

Rubens:

Where was the office, literally?

06-00:09:11

Carole Sickler:

Located? In L.A., on—

06-00:09:14

Sickler:

Ninth and Lake.

06-00:09:15

Carole Sickler:

Ninth Street. That's another thing. After Jim passed away, some of his friends in city hall had the street renamed James Wood Boulevard. So it's no longer Ninth Street. It's James Wood Boulevard.

Bill Robertson lived many years after that. He lived into his nineties. After he passed away, his widow, who was a friend of ours, came to us and asked if Dave could do something to help get a street—well, I think she wanted a park, actually.

06-00:10:00

Sickler: Yeah, she wanted a park.

06-00:10:01

Carole Sickler: Named after Bill. But they named a street after him. It's down, I think, somewhere near Exposition Park, near the Raiders; Coliseum..

06-00:10:14

Sickler: It is.

06-00:10:18

Rubens: Let me transition, I think, now back to Dave. We talked quite a bit about LAOCOC, but I wanted to just stay with an assessment by both of you. You're with it, Carole, in the beginning, in '62. As you had pointed out, Dave, it was this really hot initiative. It was really cutting-edge. You join it in '76. That's fourteen years it's been going. How successful had it been over those years?

06-00:11:08

Carole Sickler: Extremely successful.

06-00:11:10

Sickler: Yeah, it's the most successful organizing committee of its kind.

06-00:11:14

Carole Sickler: It's still in existence.

06-00:11:16

Sickler: It's the most successful. It's the longest-surviving committee. When the so-called "new" AFL-CIO came in, after Sweeney was elected, and Mark Splain became regional director of this area, he wanted to kill the organizing committee. Of course, I was out of pocket. I wasn't the regional director anymore. They kind of put me on a shelf and didn't include me in anything although I was still on AFL-CIO payroll.

06-00:11:44

Rubens: We're going to get to that.

06-00:11:45

Sickler: But I was excluded. The affiliates wanted to keep this organizing committee, even though he wanted to kill it. They were in the process of destroying files and the whole nine yards about the committee. Valuable files, by the way. The unions came to me and said, "We want to keep it. Would you be willing to run it if we raised the money for it?" I said, "Yes, I would." First, I called Bob. I called Bob Balgenorth, my boss—this was after I went with the Building

Trades—and said, “The guys want to keep the organizing committee. Do you have a problem with me helping put it together, reestablish it, and get it up and get it running?” He said, “No. Go ahead.” So we had a big meeting, and the unions voted themselves to pay per capita, to put money in to keep it alive. Because it was the one place they could trust. They had no other place they could go where people would make a commitment to honor a target, and they could trust it. But they trusted that committee. They had lived with it since 1962. If the rest of the movement had behaved as well with each other as they did in that organizing committee, the labor movement would be way, way ahead.

06-00:13:11

Carole Sickler: So when that happened, then the organizing committee didn’t have an office anymore, or a staff, so—

06-00:13:24

Sickler: Miguel.

06-00:13:24

Carole Sickler: Miguel Contreras gave them an office at the Federation. So they had a little office there, and they had a secretary in there, but the people that ran it were all doing it on their own time. The man that’s the executive director of it right now is from the Teamsters, Manny Valenzuela. Before Manny was—

06-00:13:58

Sickler: Well, there was me.

06-00:14:00

Carole Sickler: After you and before Manny. The director.

06-00:14:09

Sickler: Marty. I’m sorry, Marty Keegan. Oh, yeah.

06-00:14:11

Carole Sickler: Marty Keegan from the graphic communications union became the executive director for a while after Dave. And now Manny. But it’s still very vibrant. They still have conferences.

06-00:14:28

Sickler: And workshops.

06-00:14:28

Carole Sickler: They still help each other with organizing campaigns.

06-00:14:31

Sickler: They have a website.

06-00:14:32

Carole Sickler: They have a luncheon to raise funds once a year. They have the Joe Hill Awards luncheon, which really Dave and I established. That’s another thing. After I retired from the Federation of Labor—

- 06-00:14:45
Rubens: What year is it? I can't quite do the math.
- 06-00:14:47
Carole Sickler: When I retired? It was 2001.
- 06-00:14:50
Rubens: Oh, late.
- 06-00:14:51
Carole Sickler: Two thousand one. Yeah. But after I retired and I thought I was going to have this nice, cushy life of being retired, Dave talked me into working for LAOCOC again.
- 06-00:15:05
Sickler: Coordinator.
- 06-00:15:06
Carole Sickler: As a coordinator, because they needed somebody that would put all their mailings out, set up all their meetings. So I started doing that, and I found that they were really low on funds. We talked about it and decided they needed to have a fundraiser, and so we established this Joe Hill Awards luncheon once a year, where they honor organizers. Not heads of unions, but just in-the-field organizers.
- 06-00:15:41
Sickler: It's the only organization that I know of, nationwide, that has a luncheon and just honors organizers.
- 06-00:15:48
Carole Sickler: It's really popular. It gets bigger every year. I did that for about eight years, until we moved up here.
- 06-00:15:58
Beagle: Who were the driving affiliates? Which of the affiliates really pushed to reestablish—
- 06-00:16:06
Sickler: The organizing committee? Carpenters, Seafarers, Teamsters, Graphic Communication, Machinists.
- 06-00:16:19
Carole Sickler: Printing trades.
- 06-00:16:20
Sickler: Yeah, the printing trades. Who were the other ones? There were some others.
- 06-00:16:27
Carole Sickler: I think IATSE was involved by then, right?
- 06-00:16:30
Sickler: Yeah, IATSE was involved. SEIU. A couple of the SEIU locals.

- 06-00:16:35
Beagle: Wasn't that a way of saying "screw you" to Mark Splain and John Sweeney?
- 06-00:16:39
Carole Sickler: Yeah. When they had that meeting, the day that Mark Splain came to town to kill the organizing committee, the day they had that meeting, they were hanging from the rafters.
- 06-00:16:53
Sickler: They were out in the hall.
- 06-00:16:54
Carole Sickler: Dave put the word out what they were coming from. They had the meeting in the board room at the L.A. Fed, and they were lined up in the hall. There was not enough room in the board room. There were so many people that showed up. That was the biggest meeting that I'd ever seen.
- 06-00:17:13
Sickler: Mark Splain was visibly shaken.
- 06-00:17:16
Carole Sickler: They couldn't believe it. That's when they all got up and spoke about how the organizing committee had been in existence since 1962, had helped them with this campaign, that campaign. They're not giving it up, and they don't care—if the AFL-CIO wants to walk away from it, they could, but we'd run it ourselves.
- 06-00:17:38
Sickler: We're going to run it ourselves. It's ours.
- 06-00:17:39
Carole Sickler: And that's what happened.
- 06-00:17:39
Rubens: When is this about, when they're killing it? He said when—
- 06-00:17:43
Sickler: This was right after Sweeney and company took over, but it was a year after that. It was probably '96, '97. Well, it had to be '97, because I was working for the Building Trades.
- 06-00:17:54
Rubens: I think we're a little ahead of the game here. We're ahead of the game, because we need to go back and pick up some more of what you did when you were there. Let's just say one more thing, and then maybe we'll end this session. I was asking you about what was the vitality or the state of the committee when you came.
- 06-00:18:26
Sickler: When I came?

06-00:18:27

Rubens:

When you first came. You were suggesting and then set it on a new direction to organize immigrant workers. In general, this was a happening, exciting entity?

06-00:18:44

Sickler:

What started to transform after I took over was the whole technological revolution. Computers started coming about. We were using Gestetner.

06-00:18:57

Carole Sickler:

Mimeograph machines.

06-00:18:59

Sickler:

We were using all these old, archaic tools of communication. Communications was still important. The fundamentals of the committee have never changed. Those remain the same. But we had new tools available to us, and so we wanted to start using new tools. One of my goals was to get a website up where an organizer in the field, who works out of the trunk of their car, finds out in the afternoon that—and he's got a meeting that night with the workers—that there's a particular consultant. He finds out the name of a consultant that the company is using.

06-00:19:37

Carole Sickler:

Management consultant.

06-00:19:38

Sickler:

Yeah, management consultant. So he needs information on who this management consultant is. With computers now, and with a website, we had been keeping hard files in the organizing committee since 1962, with backgrounds and the method of operation of all these management consultants, and they all have behaviors of pattern. In other words, they send out a series of letters against the union, but they get into habits. So they'll send the same sequence of letters in every campaign, wherever they go. What's a great advantage to an organizer is to meet with a group of unorganized workers, and you know you're going to have Freddy Lopez, the union-busting consultant, working for management. You know Freddy is going to send this kind of a letter about how bad strikes are, how much it costs you, all that kind of stuff, at a certain point of the campaign. If you can go into a meeting and say, "Look, expect this kind of a letter to come in the mail. This is a union-buster. This is what he does wherever he goes," and then that consultant sends that letter out to those workers, that organizer is just getting tremendous credibility with those workers. It makes him look like he knows what the hell he's doing. So that's a real leg up and an advantage for an organizer to know what to expect from a particular consultant. The committee provided that kind of information. We kept detailed notes. The challenge was to get all that information on the computer and make it easily accessible to an organizer from a laptop.

06-00:21:19
Rubens: This was the early eighties this is happening? That early?

06-00:21:23
Sickler: It wasn't in the early eighties.

06-00:21:24
Rubens: No, it had to be later.

06-00:21:25
Sickler: Yeah, it had to be later.

06-00:21:25
Carole Sickler: When you first took over, it wasn't—

06-00:21:27
Sickler: Oh, no, it wasn't like that. No, no, no.

06-00:21:29
Rubens: By the way, how many organizers did you have about?

06-00:21:36
Sickler: We had a staff, a full-time staff—we had five, six.

06-00:21:45
Rubens: Where were you based? Where was the office?

06-00:21:54
Rubens: Is that downtown?

06-00:21:55
Sickler: Downtown, yeah.

06-00:21:59
Rubens: Maybe this is an aside, but anti-labor consultants, union-busting organizations, was that on the rise?

06-00:22:07
Sickler: Oh, yeah. That was one of the fastest-growing industries in the United States. After Reagan got elected and busted PATCO, the industry shot through the roof. Then everybody started hiring union busters, because after PATCO was busted, you had all these consultant firms sending out letters to employers, "You, too, can be union-free." That's what we were faced with. A part of the challenge for us during those early years after Reagan was elected was educating our organizers on what to expect from these union busters, and then collecting data on them. Even before we got computers, we were compiling records. LAOCOC had the most complete file system on union busters and management consultants of any organization in the United States. When the national AFL-CIO was mandated by convention action to put together a dossier on all union busters nationwide, the first place they came to was L.A., and then we turned over our files, and that gave them a big, fast leg up,

because they had a lot more staff than we had, and that staff went putting together what was called the “RUB sheet”. RUB sheet meaning report on union busters. This became like a bible in the field to organizers. The national AFL-CIO would be sending out these regular reports on union-buster activity and profiling different union busters around the country. But we were proud that we were able to provide them with that kind of material. All this stuff that Ruben Diaz did for years. After every organizing campaign, Ruben Diaz would send out—

06-00:23:54

Carole Sickler: Ruben Diaz was one of his staff.

06-00:23:56

Sickler: Yeah. His job was to collect all this data on that campaign and what that union buster did during that campaign. We got his entire MO. Well, what we started doing with that information was tracking it. Did he do the same thing in this campaign that he did in the last one? That’s when we found out these guys all have a fingerprint. It was very useful to us, because if we got a call from somebody in the field saying, “Hey, Dave, we got a guy named Timothy Gaylord out here. He’s from so-and-so law firm. You got anything on him?” Say, “Hold on a second.” Go through the hardcopy file. “Yeah, he just had a campaign, and this is what he did, and it looks like he uses that same pattern.” “Thank you very much.” So the guy could take that information into a meeting with his in-plant committee and say, “Look, this is the information we’ve been able to pick up on this guy, and this is what you can start to expect.”

06-00:24:56

Rubens: So consolidating data. Really making sure you had data was one of your—

06-00:25:03

Sickler: Being able to put information out to organizers in real-time need was one of the big services that we provided.

06-00:25:12

Rubens: I think maybe one of the next topics regarding you being with LAOCOC is—I don’t know if I have my dates right. There’s the big ’86 Immigration Reform Act that’s passed.

06-00:25:29

Sickler: Yes. That was a big deal.

06-00:25:31

Rubens: But you must have been anticipating that and doing some organizing leading up to that.

06-00:25:36

Sickler: We weren’t anticipating IRCA, but we knew the need to work with immigrants. Carole had an immigration committee—

06-00:25:46

Carole Sickler: That's when Bill Robertson was there and we established an immigration committee. Which was comprised of representatives from all the different unions that had immigrant workers in their membership or were looking to organize immigrant workers.

06-00:26:07

Sickler: As soon as IRCA was passed—

06-00:26:08

Rubens: And IRCA is Immigration Reform—

06-00:26:11

Sickler: Immigration Reform Control Act. As soon as IRCA was passed, bingo. That told me that the gates were open, and we needed to take full advantage of this. If we were smart about it and we handled it right, we could make major headway with the immigrant community. This was huge stuff. I don't think Reagan or the Republicans really understood what they were handing us.

06-00:26:42

Rubens: Had you been involved at all in the passage of it?

06-00:26:46

Sickler: Oh, no. Not in the passage of it at all. No. I got very involved in the "regs" after it was passed.

06-00:26:53

Rubens: Regulations?

06-00:26:54

Sickler: Yeah. Because there was a huge issue of family unity. They were saying some people could stay if they had documents, and other people in the same family had to go. Family unity became a huge issue, and I was involved with that.

06-00:27:07

Rubens: What does that mean, literally, involved? Where are you?

06-00:27:11

Sickler: What the rules for amnesty said was, if you had been here such-and-such a certain time, ten years, and you could document that you were here and working and stayed out of trouble for ten years, that meant you had to show a paper trail. You paid a utility bill. You paid rent. You had a job. Your nose was clean. You didn't get in any trouble. Then we would help. Well, let me back up a little bit. As soon as IRCA was passed, I appealed to the national AFL-CIO for QDE status. The INS could not process all the people that were eligible for amnesty. They physically were unable to do it. So they were giving QDE status.

06-00:28:11

Rubens: Dave, just to be clear, while you're getting involved with the regulations, you've now become regional director for the AFL-CIO for the western region.

We'll talk about how you get to that, but here you are. This is sort of some of the continuation of the work that you had been doing on immigration reform.

06-00:28:45

Sickler:

Yeah. All of a sudden, there's 1.9 million new immigrants to be processed that are eligible, they assume are eligible for amnesty and naturalization. We know, in Los Angeles in the labor movement, that a huge chunk of those people are our members. We don't know exactly who they are and we don't know for sure, but we have a pretty accurate idea that large numbers of our members, paying dues, working in our industry, are undocumented and are eligible to be processed for naturalization. We also know that the shysters are going to come out of the woodwork and start scalping people for money, and probably people will lose money and never get naturalized and never become citizens. So it was important for us to play, upfront and early, a key leadership role in that process. I asked the national AFL-CIO if I could apply for QDE status, and the mothership would be the L.A. County Federation of Labor, and Bill Robertson agreed to house it.

06-00:29:57

Rubens:

QDE means?

06-00:29:59

Sickler:

Qualified Designated Entity is what the INS termed it. They couldn't do the job, so they were looking for CBOs like the Catholic Charities. That was the big one in Los Angeles. They did a lot of legwork in putting the structure together, and initially we copied their structure. It was a failed structure and it imploded just as they were getting started. We shut down our operation and retooled it and opened it back up again. Mike Quevedo with Laborers Local 300 was kind enough to let us have—the whole bottom of his building was vacant. He had a tenant that had moved out. We got the Carpenters apprenticeship group to come in and build bookshelves and places where paralegals could help put papers together for immigrant workers. All told, we ran about 20,000 folks through the process. We actually helped about 10,000.

06-00:31:06

Rubens:

When you say "we"?

06-00:31:08

Sickler:

I had to hire about 127 people. I had to hire attorneys, immigration attorneys. We had to hire paralegals, and then we had to hire teachers to teach English, because part of the immigration process was that these folks had to start the process of learning English to get through the pipeline of amnesty.

06-00:31:28

Rubens:

So "we" is the AFL-CIO?

06-00:31:34

Sickler:

AFL-CIO, the affiliates that had members. In that process, I had to go around and raise money, because it takes a lot of money to hire all the staff and keep

them going. Hotel and restaurant, for example, gave me \$100,000, because they had so many members that needed to be processed.

06-00:31:53

Rubens: I interrupted you. There were something like 20,000—

06-00:32:00

Sickler: Twenty thousand people through the process. About half of those people were eligible.

06-00:32:04

Rubens: That's what I thought you said.

06-00:32:06

Sickler: Were eligible for amnesty. It was difficult in the beginning, because we actually had crooks that we had to get rid of. We had to identify them and fire them, and then we had poor leadership as executive directors. I went through three directors before I finally found one that could do it and do a good job.

06-00:32:30

Rubens: Who was that?

06-00:32:31

Sickler: Teresa Sanchez-Gordon. She's now a judge, district judge.

06-00:32:36

Carole Sickler: I think she's federal judge now, isn't she?

06-00:32:38

Sickler: Oh, yeah, she is a federal judge now.

06-00:32:40

Rubens: You called her director of—what was her—

06-00:32:43

Sickler: She was the executive director of the immigration project. Formal name for it was Labor's Immigrant Assistance Project. But what came out of that project was my goal, was how to translate this into organizing. Out of Labor's Immigrant Assistance Project, QDE status, the process for naturalization, was the development of the California Workers Association. Immigrant Workers. CIWA. California Immigrant Workers Association. It did some amazing things while it was alive.

06-00:33:20

Carole Sickler: That was an associate membership.

06-00:33:22

Sickler: Yeah, associate membership program. The AFL-CIO, if you remember, Danny, had put together a couple of experimental associate membership programs, one being in Cincinnati, Ohio, the other one with the immigrant project in Los Angeles. The goal was to have kind of a holding pen of all

these workers and communication with them, but also providing some benefit for being an associate member. One of the huge benefits that we were able to negotiate for the immigrant workers was membership in the Price Club. If you'll remember, that was the precursor to Costco. Sol Price was a liberal guy. Lived in Los Angeles. Mike Calabrese and I went and met with old Sol Price, and he's got like four jugs of Gallo wine on his kitchen counter. What a character he was. We told him we wanted to get these immigrant workers members so they could have access to baby diapers in bulk. Because ironically, as poorly paid as these people were, they lived in areas where they were scalped on horrible food, stuff you'd throw out. They were paying maximum price for. They had to buy diapers by small package, and they were overcharged for those. So one of the greatest benefits that we were able to get these immigrant workers was access to Price Club membership. So we got that in, but then the other thing that turned out to be a big deal for them was flight discounts back to Mexico and that kind of stuff.

06-00:35:17

Rubens: You would go to airlines and—

06-00:35:18

Sickler: Yeah. I didn't go. We had, then, Joe Lyle, who was working union privileges, was helping to put some of those packages together. I did sit down with SEIU, and SEIU had a great membership benefit discount program for their members that they had developed when they were an association and not a legitimate union. They'd kept that program for the members. That was Local 660. I was able to dovetail that program over for the immigrant workers program. But what was fascinating, what was really amazing to come out of the CIWA program, what those young mothers and fathers that were workers, immigrant workers, wanted more than anything was a voice on the school board. They went through all this hell to get here so their kids could have a better shot at a better life, and that meant getting a good education. Their kids were being shoved into corners and practically out the door in terms of getting any kind of decent education, so they were really upset about that. That's one thing CIWA was able to do. CIWA started establishing connections with the school board and started representing those immigrant workers.

06-00:36:44

Carole Sickler: Get bilingual teachers.

06-00:36:49

Rubens: Let me just make sure about one thing about you. When you say you're getting involved with the regulations, what does that literally mean?

06-00:37:00

Sickler: There were hearings. There were hearings held about the "regs". One thing Ross Perot was always right about, the devil was in the details. So they passed this massive IRCA law, and a lot of the "regs" hadn't been drafted. So you got the right-wingers out there, and you've got all the nuts out there, trying to set

draconian regulations on immigration. Part of it was only those who passed through the loop could stay. That meant kids or parents or brothers or sisters had to go back. Peter Shey—I don't know if you recognize that name at all. He's a notable immigrant attorney. Brilliant man. Worked with a lot of us. And Jeff Stansbury, who came out of UAW but was out here and very much involved in helping with the "regs".

06-00:38:02

Carole Sickler: Mike Calabrese.

06-00:38:03

Sickler:

Yeah, Mike Calabrese, big time, and then Christina Vasquez were part of it. Were all working on the "regs" and seeing to it that the family unification piece was a big part of it. What the byproduct of all of this was, was that after dozens and dozens and dozens of years and generations of the AFL-CIO having a horrible reputation with immigrant advocacy groups, CHIRLA [Coalition for Human Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles] and CARECEN, [Central American Resource Center] and La Raza—and all those groups hated the AFL-CIO, because we did horrible things in terms of immigration and immigrants. As a matter of fact, the AFL-CIO, when we started the program, their big piece about the Immigration and Reform Control Act that they liked was the sanctions on employers. Well, immigrant advocates hated that, because it drove the crooks deeper underground. I hated it, too, because as an organizer, it made organizing more difficult, not easier. Because, for example, you take a dirty garment shop. Instead of the guy having a shop actually there, once sanctions were in place, he made these immigrants work out of their own homes. Then they had to get on buses with trash sacks full of partially-sewed clothes, and they'd go someplace else, and that would be passed off. It was all an underground operation. It was impossible to organize those folks

06-00:40:14

Rubens:

I think we should take a break now. If you don't mind. We'll pick up with some of the other. I want to just finish up with LAOCOC, because you're going to get involved with UCLA, and the Pat Brown Institute is going to do a study, I think. This is not exactly out of left field, but there was a piece of the story about Jim Wood that I just wanted to get on tape. Because I don't know that people will really know this. Jim Wood had come out of an organization.

06-00:40:53

Carole Sickler: Frontlash.

06-00:40:53

Sickler: Oh, Frontlash, yeah.

06-00:40:54

Carole Sickler: Was a conservative student organization.

06-00:40:58

Rubens: When was this organized about?

- 06-00:41:12
Sickler: Danny Curtin was a part of it. Probably the late seventies, early eighties.
- 06-00:41:14
Carole Sickler: Seventies. Yeah, because it was around before Chuck got sick.
- 06-00:41:20
Rubens: What was the impetus for it?
- 06-00:41:22
Sickler: It was young people recruited, a lot of times off college campuses, and they were recruited by the likes of Don Slaiman, David Jessup, some other people, who were very conservative. They were like commie hunters. They were looking for—
- 06-00:41:38
Rubens: Are these labor people?
- 06-00:41:40
Sickler: Yeah, yeah, these were—
- 06-00:41:42
Carole Sickler: Don Slaiman worked for the national AFL-CIO.
- 06-00:41:46
Sickler: He was the deputy director of the Department of Organization and Field Services.
- 06-00:41:50
Beagle: It was the anti-SDS.
- 06-00:41:54
Carole Sickler: Yeah, that's what it was. That's what it was. Anti-SDS.
- 06-00:42:00
Sickler: Oh, yeah, right.
- 06-00:42:01
Carole Sickler: They formed to counter that.
- 06-00:42:08
Sickler: And Don Slaiman had boasted at one time, "There will be a day when only Frontlash people will be full-time field staff."
- 06-00:42:21
Carole Sickler: Running the labor movement.
- 06-00:42:24
Sickler: Because I was used as a poster boy of what not to be like.
- 06-00:42:28
Carole Sickler: Don Slaiman was this older guy, but he became like the guru of these young Frontlash people.

06-00:42:36
Sickler: Because he was a commie hunter.

06-00:42:37
Carole Sickler: Danny Curtin, Jim Wood, Linda Paquette. They all called him Donnie, and it was like he was their guru.

06-00:42:47
Beagle: Formed in 1968.

06-00:42:50
Sickler: Was that when they started? Wow.

06-00:42:52
Carole Sickler: I knew it was a long time.

06-00:42:54
Rubens: Where did Slaiman come out of? Where was he—

06-00:42:58
Carole Sickler: D.C.? Before that?

06-00:43:00
Sickler: No, I think he originally came out of New York. He was a longtime friend of Meany's. They played gin rummy together all the time.

06-00:43:09
Rubens: So there was this group.

06-00:43:11
Beagle: Penn Kemble was the founder, and they were Young People's Socialist League, which was—

06-00:43:18
Carole Sickler: That's what it was. They called themselves Social Democrats. We didn't know what that meant until we found out that meant right-wing Democrats.

06-00:43:28
Sickler: I didn't run into them until the eighties.

06-00:43:37
Rubens: So basically what we're saying is that it was an anti-war.

06-00:43:44
Beagle: It was a pro-Vietnam. Anti-SDS, anti-everything. I mean, they were awful.

06-00:43:50
Carole Sickler: They were just right of everything. Right-wing.

06-00:43:54
Rubens: But they're labor people? This group you were talking about, all of these people have connections one way or the other to the—

06-00:44:00

Carole Sickler: Yeah. I don't know, Don Slaiman must have gotten them from campuses or something and put them in the labor movement. Jim Wood and Danny Curtin and Linda Paquette, a few others. But they were all of our age group. So when Dave came along, they thought, oh, he'll be another candidate for Frontlash, but Dave opposed it. Hated it. Opposed it totally. That's another reason Jim Wood didn't like you. Don Slaiman labeled him a Communist.

06-00:44:37

Sickler: And a Socialist, yeah.

06-00:44:39

Carole Sickler: Socialist, Communist. Yeah.

06-00:44:42

Rubens: Did it have roots or supporters at the international level?

06-00:44:48

Sickler: Oh, sure. Absolutely. They were housed in the AFL-CIO.

06-00:44:51

Beagle: It was the AFL-CIO at its worst.

06-00:44:55

Sickler: When the AFL-CIO is working hand-in-glove with the CIA, and the joke in the field was, a lot of people never called us the AFL-CIO; they called us the AFL-CIA. Because we were in bed with a lot of what they were doing in Nicaragua.

06-00:45:13

Carole Sickler: They had the International Affairs Department.

06-00:45:16

Sickler: It was an ugly period for the labor movement.

06-00:45:21

Rubens: Al Shanker is one of the examples of the old neo-liberal conservatives. I thought that was an important—people might not know that history. Let's take a break. [Pause in audio]

06-00:45:44

Rubens: Who is Al Gruhn?

06-00:45:47

Sickler: He was the president of the California State Fed. Jack Henning was the executive secretary, but Al was the president.

06-00:46:03

Carole Sickler: After Chuck passed away, the national AFL-CIO appointed Jim Baker as regional director. Was it a temporary thing or was he—he was the regional director.

06-00:46:18

Rubens: Then you come in after him.

06-00:46:19

Sickler: A long time.

06-00:46:20

Carole Sickler: Then they sent him to France.

06-00:46:23

Sickler: Well, no. He went back. Yes, he went to France, and then he came back as Kirkland's executive assistant.

06-00:46:35

Carole Sickler: Oh, okay. Then they appointed Dave as regional director.

Audio File 7

07-00:00:01

Rubens: Dave. Regarding two major campaigns that LAOCOC—

07-00:00:21

Sickler: That coincided with immigration reform, IRCA, Labor's Immigrant Assistance Project under the umbrella of the County Fed. Out of that was born the California Immigrant Workers Association, which was an associate membership/organizing arm. That worked with LAOCOC. Two major campaigns came out of that operation that involved huge numbers of immigrant workers. Immigrant workers, by the way, who you normally would think were poor workers from Mexico, but instead were a lot of college-educated immigrants from Guatemala, from El Salvador, from Ecuador, and from Mexico. These were people with college degrees, but were working in sweatshops, making steel wheels for the big three automakers. About 2,000 of them at American Racing Equipment. These folks basically organized themselves. What they really needed help on was expertise and how to protect themselves from the INS, and how to get themselves lined up for amnesty and all of that. We helped organize 2,000 of those immigrant workers at American Racing. The Machinists union was the one that ultimately won that, and then negotiated a contract. Sadly, some eight, nine years later, the company folded its doors and all those workers were out of work.

07-00:02:05

Rubens: What is, literally, your job in this organizing campaign? What are you doing?

07-00:02:10

Sickler: What am I doing? I'm kind of overseeing the whole project. For example, LAOCOC was coordinating the rank and file. They're the ones that actually decided who is going to get financial assistance. Part of the genius of that campaign was—don't let me get them mixed up. American Racing was where we were actually doing immigration expertise on the job. We were helping people get legalized. We were helping people with their immigration

problems. The drywall campaign was an industry-wide campaign. It started in San Diego, swept its way up through Orange County, Los Angeles, all the way up to Fresno and Ventura. In that campaign, there were several unions that wanted to organize those drywallers. Our job was to keep their heads above water, help them organize so that they themselves could pick whichever union they wanted to go with. They ultimately picked the Carpenters. I was out raising money, actually on a national basis, to help fund these striking drywallers. Part of the strength was we had a pro bono team of lawyers helping keep them out of jail. We had paralegals from CIWA and LIAP helping them with their immigration status. The bottom line was we were able to show where the union was providing more strength and their support than the government could do to hurt them. In other words, whenever one of our strikers was put in jail, and put in the deportation tank, we kept them from being deported, and then we put enough money up for bail to get the leader back on the street. While they were in jail, their wives and families were taking their places on the picket line. The picket line just spread like a wildfire. This whole thing, from start to finish, went a total of about six months. We organized over five, six thousand drywallers, basically representing the industry. We had approximately 50 to 60 percent of the entire industry organized drywall contractors by the time we got through.

07-00:04:33

Rubens:

Who are the employers? Are they big? Are they small?

07-00:04:35

Sickler:

The employers were a number of drywall contractors. Drywall contractors, one of the levers that we had over their head was, once the attorneys for the Carpenters union started digging and getting documentation, they found \$2 million in fines for failure to pay fair wages and overtime. So part of the settlement was we dropped the charges for the overtime violations, and they settled a contract and signed a good contract for increasing wages and all that other stuff.

07-00:05:16

Rubens:

What is the relationship, in terms of this organizing campaign, between the Carpenters and LAOCOC?

07-00:05:28

Sickler:

They were members of LAOCOC, the Carpenters were. This was back before they pulled out of the AFL-CIO. The Carpenters were very important members of LAOCOC. They were some of its original founders. For example, international vice president Armando Vergara was on our advisory board as well. The Painters were involved, the Laborers were involved. They all wanted these drywallers. They all claimed jurisdiction for the drywallers. So I had to pull them all into a same meeting and say, "Look, guys, LAOCOC is not picking one of you over the other. Our job is to keep their head above water, keep body and soul together. Whoever they pick—I don't care if they pick the actors guild. I don't care if they pick the office workers. Whoever

they pick, that's their choice. Our job is to keep their head above water. So the best thing you can do is give us some donations of money so that we can help them keep body and soul together." We were able to raise enough money that we kept them together.

07-00:06:35

Rubens:

Then the actual signing of the contract, of the negotiation with the contractors, that's up to the—

07-00:06:43

Sickler:

The workers chose the Carpenters, because, frankly, the Carpenters had opened their doors to them in Orange County months ahead of time, when they just first started. They had an affinity for the Carpenters. As an organizing committee, as long as there was the dispute between one or more unions, then we couldn't pick one over the other. We just kept them together so the workers themselves could choose.

07-00:07:07

Beagle:

Dave, did you have a hard time getting—I'm thinking with the Laborers in particular—getting them to say, "Okay, we're going to back off"?

07-00:07:14

Sickler:

Getting who to back off?

07-00:07:15

Beagle:

The other unions that they didn't want. Laborers or whoever.

07-00:07:18

Sickler:

No. They didn't back off. They were all trying to lure the workers themselves, but after a while, they gave up. The painters found out that the majority of the workers wanted the Carpenters. The Carpenters kind of doubled down on their support for the workers, and they gave the lion's share of the money. I think Doug McCarron, by the time we got through, probably poured well over a million and a half dollars into that campaign. I told him, I said, "For the money you paid, we could have probably organized twice as many workers." He was paying for everything. He was paying their bail money, he was paying rent money, he was paying gas money. Buying groceries. He spent money hand over fist for about six months, but he organized the industry. By the way, it was the thing that launched him into the presidency of the international. Because the timing was perfect. Sig Lucassen, who was the president of the Carpenters Union then was retiring. The convention was coming up, and all of this kind of comes together at the same time. He organized all these drywall workers. Well, he got credit for organizing. I can tell you who organized them, was LAOCOC, CIWA, and LIAP. That's who organized, but he ended up paying for it.

07-00:08:43

Rubens:

What's that last one?

07-00:08:44

Sickler: LIAP. Labor's Immigrant Assistance Project. We had those lawyers out there and paralegals out there helping them.

07-00:08:56

Rubens: By the way, the complexion of the drywall workers had changed dramatically. It had become an immigrant, Hispanic workforce.

07-00:09:10

Sickler: Yes. It went from an almost all -white workforce, from about 1979. Ten years later, all the whites were gone. Totally Latino.

07-00:09:20

Rubens: Where did they go?

07-00:09:22

Sickler: Other work. The contractors refused to sign agreements with the Carpenters. The Carpenters had most of the drywallers in Southern California. But they started hiring Latino immigrants. Then they got too greedy. Then they started cheating the workers. They were working them sixty hours for peanuts. I saw one check for thirty-four dollars for a kid that had worked sixty hours.

07-00:09:51

Rubens: Tell me, then, about American Racing.

07-00:09:53

Sickler: American Racing Equipment was an important campaign. It was, again, about 2,000 employees. Almost 99.9 percent of them Latino, but a lot of them were South American workers with college degrees. Had been managers in their former countries. Smart people. They basically organized themselves. What they needed the most from us, what they reached out to LAOCOC about, was immigration assistance. We bought not just organizers from LAOCOC—Joel Ochoa. I don't know if you ever met Joel Ochoa or not. He was on our staff, and a crackerjack organizer. I assigned Joel to that campaign, and then we brought the paralegals in to help them. They basically had their own structure. They had their leadership. They had a campaign all laid out. It was very well-thought-out and put together. It was a matter of just, when the timing was right, merging them in with the Machinists union. Actually, we had to take some of those workers out of the bargaining unit and let them be officers of their own union. I think they picked one of them to be an international rep with the international, which was smart. So they had their own person with the international, they had their own staff as the top leadership of the local. It was a great deal. They got a good contract for them. But the sad part was, ten years later, they were gone. Just, poof. Laid off. The bastards closed the plant down.

07-00:11:39

Rubens: I'm just wondering, in '86, right in the cusp of the passage of IRCA, you are appointed regional director. I'm just wondering, should we move to that?

- 07-00:11:58
Sickler: I was appointed in May of 1986. IRCA wasn't signed until November of '86.
- 07-00:12:12
Rubens: Does your job as regional director overlap at all? Are you plugging into stuff that's going on at LAOCOC?
- 07-00:12:20
Sickler: Absolutely. I had California, Nevada, and Hawaii, and Guam.
- 07-00:12:30
Rubens: Who appoints you and why?
- 07-00:12:34
Sickler: Ultimately, it's Kirkland that signs off, but it's basically the decision of the leadership and the Department of Organization and Field Services.
- 07-00:12:43
Rubens: Was Kistler gone by then?
- 07-00:12:45
Sickler: Yeah, Kistler was gone.
- 07-00:12:51
Rubens: Why did they want you for that job?
- 07-00:12:55
Sickler: I think because I was doing some cutting-edge things. I think they wanted to use some of the stuff I was doing as a model for not only other regions, but other states to follow. The stuff with immigrants. We were doing some cutting-edge stuff. Plus, we were doing some great stuff with the Central Labor Councils. I started the only program in the United States where we would pull all the Central Labor Councils together every year for a conference. A two, three-day conference where they would share stuff with each other and get to know each other. The stronger councils helping the smaller councils.
- 07-00:13:34
Rubens: This was state by state?
- 07-00:13:37
Sickler: No just California. We pulled all the Central Labor Councils in the state of California together every year so we could start sharing stuff with each other. The bigger councils doing bigger things could kind of help the smaller councils who were part-time.
- 07-00:13:51
Rubens: And you're doing this as regional director?
- 07-00:13:53
Sickler: Yes. I put that together, the program.

07-00:13:54

Rubens: Did you try and do it in the other western states?

07-00:13:57

Sickler: No, I just had California and Hawaii, and we only had, like, one council in Hawaii, and we only had two councils in Nevada. But it was really useful in California.

07-00:14:12

Rubens: I can imagine, because it's so big.

07-00:14:18

Sickler: The goal was to help the weaker councils get stronger, and so we would rob from Peter to pay Paul the smaller councils. It was good. I think the stronger councils liked helping the smaller councils, too.

07-00:14:37

Rubens: Any campaigns that you want to talk about particularly in Hawaii or Nevada?

07-00:14:45

Sickler: Nevada was interesting. I spent a lot of time helping culinary over there, because they were down on their heel. About the time I became a regional director, that local was at risk of just being blown completely out of the water over there, because the industry had just decided to take them on. They'd had weak leadership for years in that local union.

07-00:15:15

Rubens: We're talking about—

07-00:15:16

Sickler: The culinary.

07-00:15:18

Beagle: Northern California?

07-00:15:20

Sickler: Yes, that's here.

07-00:15:21

Rubens: And the base mainly being Las Vegas or throughout—

07-00:15:24

Sickler: Yes, Las Vegas was—that's the largest local in Las Vegas. You had John Wilhelm, who was working with the hotel and restaurant workers then. I think he was director. I forget his exact position. He was assigned to come in. Very smart, great organizer. Hired some really smart people, like D. Taylor, who's now international president, by the way, and then called me up to see what I could do to help.

One of the things I did to help was I would come over and talk to their shop stewards and give them kind of a pep talk and a little bit of labor history. Most

of them were Latino. All of that local is Latinos. But to give you an idea of how large that local is, and what a great job they did in building it—if you don't have a good shop steward structure within a local, you don't have a strong local union. I don't care what they say. Because shop stewards provide two kinds of service. They can either sell a leadership in the value of the local union, or they can kill it. The other value that they serve is that they take back information from the rank and file to the leadership. What's going on, what are people concerned about, what are they pissed off about, what do they need. So shop stewards are extremely important in a union. Hotel and restaurant really understood that.

The first meeting I went to was in the morning, so it was a night shift coming off from all the hotels. There were 370 shop stewards in the room. Three hundred and seventy people in a labor meeting is a lot. That's a big membership meeting. If you go to a meeting with 370 union members, that's a big meeting. These were just shop stewards. The night meeting was over 700. Seven hundred shop stewards. I had never seen anything like it. These were shop stewards. These were dyed-in-the-wool, rank-and-file, true believers. You could feel the energy in the room. Watching that local grow was really something, being able to play a part in it. I was flattered, because they came to me when they had a fight against the Frontier. The Frontier Hotel strike. I don't know if you guys remember this. This became a big deal. John came to me and asked for help and ideas. He wanted to know how we could get help from Los Angeles over to Vegas. I said, "Only one way. And you're probably not going to like it." He said, "What do you mean?" I said, "I think you guys should have a march across the desert towards Los Angeles. You've got to march across the desert. I'll see if I can get Lane to call them every night wherever they station. We'll have the president of the AFL-CIO call them and encourage them and thank them for their struggle." They did. Some of them were sorry they ever did it, but they did. Wilhelm got a bunch of those strikers and they crossed the desert to Los Angeles. Every day, wherever they stopped, I did a blast fax to all the unions in Los Angeles about this struggle, about this march across the desert to Los Angeles to ask for help. By the time they got to Los Angeles—and we had the meeting out at the Musicians hall—it was fever pitch. People in Los Angeles were really excited about this. We had actors. Ed Asner was there. A bunch of movie actors wanted to be there for this thing. We raised a ton of money for them.

07-00:19:27

Carole Sickler: The hall was packed.

07-00:19:28

Sickler: Yeah. It was unbelievable. They're marching down the streets; they're getting all this coverage, TV coverage, radio coverage. Lane is talking. Lane is getting off on it. He's calling them every night, talking to them. Then, later, we win the strike. Remember? And there's a settlement. We have a big blow-

out party in Las Vegas. People from Los Angeles. They had to shut the town down; there were so many people in from Los Angeles. Caravans.

07-00:20:02

Carole Sickler: The big march down Las Vegas Boulevard.

07-00:20:04

Sickler: March down the street, the boulevard.

07-00:20:07

Carole Sickler: Yes. That was before—

07-00:20:10

Sickler: Oh, that was before the settlement. Yeah, that's right. We had Willie Nelson there. Jesse Jackson was there.

07-00:20:17

Rubens: In Las Vegas?

07-00:20:19

Sickler: Las Vegas, yeah, over that Frontier strike.

07-00:20:21

Beagle: Who organized the L.A. piece of that? The greeting end. The crowd.

07-00:20:28

Sickler: I did. Yes, I did. That was a lot of fun.

07-00:20:35

Carole Sickler: The settlement was because a new guy bought the hotel.

07-00:20:39

Sickler: Yeah, a new guy came in. The old, crazy woman that owned the hotel, she was just willing to go broke rather than settle with the union. So a guy came in. I forget who it was that bought the hotel. But he recognized hotel and restaurant, and signed an agreement. So when they finally had the signing and the victory, had a huge victory party Richard Trumka.

07-00:21:06

Carole Sickler: It was outside. It was huge.

07-00:21:08

Sickler: Yeah, it was huge. They built a bonfire that was scary. Illegal as hell, but it was pretty cool.

07-00:21:17

Rubens: When is this about? When is this? We can look that up.

07-00:21:22

Sickler: It was in the nineties. I think, if I remember right, it was around the time we were organizing the drywallers, American Racing.

07-00:21:34

Rubens: What about Hawaii? Anything—

07-00:21:37

Sickler: Hawaii was really cool. But this goes back to the Coors boycott. When Coors expanded the beer into Hawaii, I went over there and met with the unions, and of course the longshore. They were the key. The longshore refused to unload it from the boats for six months. Six months. It was really great, because the Hawaii AFL-CIO hated the national AFL-CIO. They had banned Ed Collins from ever coming over. .

07-00:22:22

Rubens: Who was Collins?

07-00:22:25

Sickler: He was actually filling in for Jim Baker. When Baker got picked and sent to Paris, we were kind of left without a regional director, but Collins was working the San Francisco office, so he was picking up some of these kind of duties that a regional director would pick up. He would go attend the state conventions and that kind of stuff. Evidently, he went over there and pissed off a bunch of the Hawaii unions that were not happy with the AFL-CIO to start with. AFL-CIO was kind of banned, so there was a decision to close down the sub regional office that we had over there. We had a rep that retired. So the AFL-CIO was also pissed at the Hawaii State Fed, and they weren't going to put another rep over in Hawaii, so it was that kind of thing. It was important to me, because I needed their support on the Coors boycott. It was weird, because, as luck would have it, I went over as the head of the Coors boycott, not so much as the AFL-CIO rep that I was. This was like '83, somewhere around there. Eighty-three. Their conventions—I don't know, Danny, if you've ever been to an AFL-CIO State Fed convention in Hawaii. Did you ever go?

07-00:23:52

Beagle: Yes.

07-00:23:54

Sickler: Well, you know what conventions are like. Labor conventions go for days, ad nauseam. You have this speaker and that speaker and this speaker and that speaker and this speaker and that speaker. I get invited to be a speaker one year at the State Fed convention, so I go. I left the room about 8:00, 8:30. I'm back, what, about 12:00 noon?

07-00:24:18

Carole Sickler: Before that even, yeah.

07-00:24:19

Sickler: Yeah. And the convention was over. Carole said, "What happened?" I said, "Well, there were only two speakers. There was the governor and myself." I

said, “It’s the damnedest convention I ever saw. They came out, started the meeting right at nine o’clock. There were a bunch of really brief reports. Then there were nominations of officers. Then there was election of officers. Then the governor spoke, and then I spoke, and then they broke for lunch and the convention was over.”

07-00:24:54

Rubens: They were off to play golf and surf.

07-00:24:57

Sickler: They go to this dinner at the hotel, and the dinner—not dinner, lunch. They go to lunch. Lunch would go to 3:30. They’re having a great time. This went on for several years. When I became regional director, I got close to the guys, unlike the national officers. I got pretty close to the guys. They would have a dinner for me when I’d fly in at night. They’d take me out to dinner. The last convention I was at, the same thing. Board meeting at 8:30, over at 9:00. Convention starts at 9:00, done by noon. I speak. Election of officers. Fifteen committee reports. I pulled the president of the State Fed aside and I said—Gary Rodriguez was his name. He was a Portuguese guy. I said, “Gary, I never will understand this. What if you have a problem? What if somebody decides at the last minute that they’re going to run, and so you’ve got a contest? You’ve got to really hold an election, and it drags out the convention.” “Oh, no, brother. If we’ve got a problem, we don’t have a convention.”

07-00:26:20

Rubens: Settle it. Settle it elsewhere.

07-00:26:24

Sickler: That made so much sense to me.

07-00:26:26

Rubens: Let’s make sure we know what we’re all laughing about. That it’s settled elsewhere. It’s not going to be settled at the convention.

07-00:26:32

Sickler: Oh, no, they took care of that business elsewhere. “Oh, no, if we have a problem, we don’t have a convention.”

07-00:26:40

Rubens: That’s why you can’t learn about unions from meetings. Or businesses. I mean, from minutes. From minutes. That’s not going to tell you where the thing takes place.

07-00:26:50

Sickler: That’s what Bill Gilbert used to call the bullshit and flowers, were the minutes.

07-00:26:55

Carole Sickler: Makes the flowers grow.

07-00:26:56

Sickler: Makes the flowers grow, yeah.

07-00:26:57

Carole Sickler: Bullshit makes the flowers grow.

07-00:27:00

Rubens: Guam. What's going on in Guam?

07-00:27:03

Sickler: Guam. I got called over there because there was a major problem with the teachers over there, the teachers union. There was a move to cut teachers' salaries and the whole nine yards. Just my coming over there stopped it. Just coming over. I guess they get so damn few visitors over there, during that period of time anyway, that they were shocked that I flew in from the mainland to meet with—and the governor requested a meeting with me before I sat down with some of the legislature and our teacher leadership. My being on that island was such a huge thing. They had special meetings called of all the unions so I could meet with them. I was invited to their houses for barbeque. The whole nine yards. It was amazing. I could see what was going on on the island while I was there. It was major construction, and none of it was union. It was all Japanese. The Japanese were buying up Guam like unbelievable. I mean, they were doing like Rodeo Drive. They had the Gucci stores. You name all the high-end—were coming in there, and high-rises. Operating engineers were out there. There were cranes all over the place, and not one of them was an operating engineer crane. None of them were union. All this growth and it was all Japanese growth. You could see who's coming in.

07-00:28:43

Rubens: And the workers, who are they?

07-00:28:46

Sickler: Most of the workers with the construction were non-union.

07-00:28:52

Rubens: No, but were they indigenous or were they immigrants, too?

07-00:28:54

Sickler: Most were indigenous. Except there were a lot of Japanese workers there, especially the skilled jobs that were going on. You could tell those were Japanese workers. But the teachers and the telephone workers. The telephone workers union was pretty big there. Those were Guam workers.

07-00:29:14

Rubens: Did you have some successes?

07-00:29:16

Sickler:

No, there wasn't that much going on. It really was sleepy there. When I got back, I called the operating engineers and said, "Man, you guys need to— Local 3. You need to get over there."

07-00:29:29

Rubens:

So to be regional director, does that mean that you're really requested to come in? It's not like you have to go and check in with them regularly.

07-00:29:42

Sickler:

No. No, you don't have to go check in with them regularly. You mean with Washington or you mean with the unions here?

07-00:29:50

Rubens:

With the state feds you were representing.

07-00:29:53

Sickler:

You want to stay close to them. They don't necessarily need you, but you need to keep an eye on what's going on, because there are certain national issues that are important for the state feds to carry. That's also true with the local Central Labor Councils. The big role of a regional director is to take national issues and get them carried out at the grassroots level. It doesn't make any difference, whatever our national issues are, if they're not being worked at the ground level. Well, a lot of central labor councils are really tied up and overburdened with local issues, not national issues. So they have a tendency to put national issues on the shelf. "I don't have time to deal with national legislation or this national campaign." Most of the time we'll get involved in national campaigns, because they can piggyback with a local campaign. But local Central Labor Councils, their big issues are the city council races, and the board of supervisors' races, and state senate and state assembly races. That's their bread and butter, so that's what they're going to focus on. Most of the time, they've got their hands full just with those. So the role of the regional director is to try to help them piggyback it. Show them how they can piggyback those issues, and it's not a big burden to them. But you have to remind them. You just have to be there to say, "Look, we need you to do this. Invite me in to talk about this national campaign." Either a national campaign or a national piece of legislation that's important to the labor movement.

07-00:31:37

Rubens:

Give me an example of a couple. Are there some you can think of over that period that you worked on?

07-00:31:43

Sickler:

Yeah. Minimum wage increases, for example. It's like Leon Panetta right here. When I think of Leon Panetta, I think of the time Carole and I drove up here. I kept bugging him to return my phone calls way before the holiday, but Fourth of July holiday, I finally got somebody that had his home phone number and I called him at home.

07-00:32:04

Carole Sickler: He lives in Carmel Valley.

07-00:32:06

Sickler: He lived in Carmel Valley. We were living in L.A., but we came up here. I forget where we were even—

07-00:32:12

Carole Sickler: You called from L.A., I think.

07-00:32:15

Sickler: No, we didn't call from L.A... We were up here. We called from a hotel up here. I called him. He was not happy, but he committed to me that he was going to be—it was number five or something. I think it was HR 5 or something on minimum wage, and I needed his commitment. Washington is bugging me, "Do you have a commitment?" Of course, NAFTA, that was a huge deal. NAFTA was a huge deal. Jim Baker told me that if all the other states had done the job that we did in California on NAFTA, we would have won. We would have defeated NAFTA.

07-00:32:56

Rubens: Let's talk a little bit about that. NAFTA was the North American Free Trade Agreement.

07-00:33:01

Sickler: This was 1992. Boy, there was so much stuff going on in 1992. NAFTA was a big deal. Peter Olney and I worked close on NAFTA on that deal, and worked close with the Teamsters.

07-00:33:13

Rubens: He was chairing a committee in Los Angeles to stop NAFTA.

07-00:33:16

Sickler: Yeah. As regional director, we were holding protest rallies, and we were just beating the drums on NAFTA. We got a lot of support, a lot of support, from people in California with NAFTA.

07-00:33:36

Rubens: Because the issue was—let's just spell it out for people who may be interested.

07-00:33:40

Sickler: The issue was the so-called Free Trade Bill meant the exodus of a lot of good-quality jobs for people in America. We knew, once NAFTA was signed, there would be this great mass exodus across the border. Ross Perot called it the great sucking sound you hear will be jobs going south, and that's exactly what happened. The maquiladora plants and all of that. The big argument was, well, it will stem immigration. We just won't have this massive flood of immigrant workers coming across the borders. Well, that was bullshit. We ended up with masses of people coming across the borders, because those jobs paid shit once

they got to Mexico. It was all bullshit. We all knew it. We knew, sadly, what else was going to happen was that investment in new technology was going to be invested in those plants in Mexico and other places that they went, with the so-called Free Trade Bill, and we'd be left holding the bag. That's exactly what happened.

07-00:34:42

Rubens:

So what you're doing, literally, is bringing the word to—

07-00:34:52

Sickler:

Getting our council and our affiliates onboard, and then having public protests, public demonstrations, public meetings about—

07-00:34:59

Carole Sickler:

You were taking people to Mexico, too.

07-00:35:00

Sickler:

Oh, yes. I took Gephardt. Well, I didn't take Gephardt. One of our staff guys, Victor Munoz—Victor Munoz took Dick Gephardt. Then I had meetings with Gephardt and Sandy [Sander] Levin, a congressman from Michigan who came out from Washington, D.C. to go down. Then I took a tour—

07-00:35:22

Carole Sickler:

You took Nancy Pelosi.

07-00:35:23

Sickler:

Yeah, I took Nancy Pelosi and Jane Harman.

07-00:35:29

Rubens:

What do you mean you took them?

07-00:35:32

Sickler:

We took a tour down. We took shuttle buses down into the maquiladora plants and showed them the kind of living conditions. This is where you see these big, shiny factories, and then off to the side would be these little cardboard shanties, made out of cardboard. They were made out of the pallets and the cardboard that housed the machinery that was in the plant. That became those people's homes. You could see the drainage ditches they'd cut for the sewage to drain. We showed them areas where batteries were thrown, like in a pond, and you could smell it way—it would burn your eyes way before you even got up to where you could see it, and it was like this orange and purple and green kind of crap that just burned your nostrils when you got close to it. This is where kids were playing around. Those were the conditions that these workers were living in. These are the so-called maquiladora plants. This was what there was going to be more of with NAFTA.

07-00:36:42

Rubens:

That was a lost campaign in the end.

07-00:36:46

Sickler: Oh, yes. We lost it, because Clinton screwed us. Clinton bought off a lot of congressmen in California.

07-00:36:58

Beagle: How did the California congressional delegation vote on that?

07-00:37:01

Sickler: We got screwed by [Xavier] Becerra. And the worst one of all was Esteban Torres, who was at one time a labor hero. He was a UAW rep out of East L.A. He became a congressman. Then Clinton made him head of so-called NAFTA Bank. I don't know if you remember the famous NAFTA Bank. So he bought him off. We were at a party one night with Esteban, and I took him in the other room and I said, "Where are you, man? You're not leveling with us. You're one of us. Where are you on this thing? We're hearing rumors that you're going to dice us." He just kept trying. "No." He kept trying to slip away from me but he screwed us. And this was a friend. This was a friend.

07-00:38:00

Beagle: When Baker says to you, "If everybody had done the same job, we would have beat this thing," what did you—

07-00:38:16

Sickler: Most all of our politicians, our Democrats, voted the right way, in spite of the pressure that was put on them by Clinton.

07-00:38:23

Carole Sickler: Jane Harman was great. Jane voted against NAFTA.

07-00:38:29

Sickler: Yeah. And the education that we did, the public education that we did with the public and the turnout of the labor movement, and just squeezing the votes. I'll give you a great example. Dianne Feinstein. Dianne Feinstein and I are sitting next to each other on the podium at the State Fed convention. She's scheduled to speak before I do. My speech was going to be about NAFTA. This was 1992. I have a copy of a check in my hand that Victor Munoz had gotten for me from a maquiladora worker. Thirty-four dollars and twenty-some cents for sixty hours of work in a maquiladora plant. She looks at it. She sat next to me and she says, "What is that?" So I tell her, "It's a check from a maquiladora worker." She says, "Really?" She says, "Can I use that?" She's a senator. We're counting on her vote. "Sure." I was going to use it, but what the hell? It's a US senator. We need her vote. She got up and gave a hell, fire, and brim speech against NAFTA, and held the check up and said, "This is what's wrong with NAFTA. This is what's wrong with NAFTA." The crowd went crazy. Standing ovation. I was one happy camper. I called Kistler after we got done with the convention meeting, when I could make a call, and told him the good news about Dianne Feinstein's great speech. They said, "Wow, that's really great, because we haven't been able to get a commitment out of her." I said, "Well, she did it here." "Oh, that's great news." So then a few

weeks go by, and I get a call from one of the staff guys. It wasn't Alan. This was one of the other guys in the office. "Hey, Dave, we thought you said Dianne Feinstein was with us against NAFTA." I said, "Yeah, she gave this big speech. I told Alan." Said, "Yeah, well, she won't commit to us." I said, "What?" They said, "Yeah, you better get back here and come back here and have a meeting with her, and make her live up to her commitment." I said, "Okay. I'll see if I can bring some other people that were in the room with me that heard it, too." I was all lined up to take some people back to meet with her, and then I get a call. I'm in Sacramento for something else later on, and I'm walking through the airport to get ready to catch a plane to come home, and I get paged. When you first get paged, you think there's something wrong with your wife, something's happening, something's happening with your mother, your brother, whatever. I go racing to this white page telephone. At first, I couldn't believe what I was hearing. It turns out it's this woman telling me that Dianne Feinstein had voted against NAFTA and wanted a \$2,000 contribution.

07-00:41:48

Beagle: So did she get it?

07-00:41:49

Sickler: She learned some new words.

07-00:41:54

Rubens: How much are you going to international headquarters? Are regional directors meeting as a group back in—

07-00:42:04

Sickler: Yeah, they would have regular regional director meetings.

07-00:42:08

Rubens: You'd go back and—

07-00:42:08

Sickler: Yes. We'd go back for those.

07-00:42:16

Rubens: What was the other question I was going to ask? Maybe we should just say quickly about Peter Olney. He had run this committee to stop NAFTA. I think that came out of SEIU? He had been working for—

07-00:42:34

Sickler: He had worked with so many local unions, and the dates kind of run together. I forget who he was working with when.

07-00:42:41

Rubens: Ninety-one, he was with the director of building services, I think.

07-00:42:46

Sickler: Yeah, he was involved with that for some time. He helped them a lot over there.

07-00:42:51

Rubens: Then '92, '93, he chaired a committee—maybe it was of a bunch of unions—to stop NAFTA.

07-00:42:59

Sickler: Yeah, he did a great job. Peter was a lot of fun to work with on that whole anti-NAFTA campaign. We were pretty much up to speed, and we had great cooperation from the Teamsters. They devoted an eighteen-wheeler, just traveling up and down the state. They had converted the entire trailer into kind of an educational—for lack of a better term—bookstore about the evils of NAFTA. So you could actually climb up into this trailer truck and then kind of take a tour. It even had videos that played that showed some of the nastiness of what was going on in Mexico with maquiladora plants and all that. It was a great thing.

07-00:43:45

Rubens: Tell me about Janitors for Justice.

07-00:43:48

Sickler: Oh, Justice for Janitors? Yeah, that was a great campaign. That was before I was regional director. That was another one of those industries where the companies completely changed the people who had been unionized. It was highly unionized, but most of those workers were African American. They pushed them out and then hired immigrant Latinos to do that work, at one-fourth the cost. SEIU ran a brilliant campaign called Justice for Janitors, and ultimately won that entire industry in Los Angeles.

07-00:44:33

Rubens: It was thousands of workers, wasn't it?

07-00:44:35

Sickler: Yes, thousands of workers. They won the whole industry back.

07-00:44:39

Beagle: Lisa, that's where Jono was—

07-00:44:40

Sickler: Jono Shaffer.

07-00:44:41

Rubens: Jono had been my student when I taught for a brief while at a high school in San Francisco. He was charming and smart. He graduated college and went to work right away.

07-00:44:53

Sickler: Worked his tail off. Did a great job.

07-00:44:57
Carole Sickler: You were already regional director.

07-00:44:59
Rubens: I think that was in 1990. But he had been organizing for years and years.

07-00:45:14
Carole Sickler: Didn't they have another janitor uprising, downtown L.A.?

07-00:45:20
Sickler: Yeah, they did. They did a few years later.

07-00:45:34
Rubens: So these janitors worked for companies that were then contracting with large offices and businesses?

07-00:45:35
Sickler: Yes.

07-00:45:36
Rubens: These weren't individual janitors?

07-00:45:40
Sickler: Right.

07-00:45:42
Rubens: That's a lot of people, 4,000 people.

07-00:45:44
Sickler: That was a huge amount of people. While I was working for Antonio, I sat down with Mike Garcia. They had a campaign for security guards. While I was working for the mayor, we were able to help with the pressure on one of the major owners of the buildings downtown. Started a big campaign. We brought in thousands and thousands of security guards. That local has really grown big. Security guards, before Antonio took over as mayor and I went to city hall with—there weren't any unionized security guards in L.A. Now almost all of them are organized.

07-00:46:30
Rubens: I think what I'd like to do in just a few minutes—we have about ten minutes on this tape. When we move on, I'd like to get to you becoming southern regional director for the state building and construction trades. We had flashed forward a little bit about the ending of LAOCOC, but we didn't really talk about Kirkland. You didn't really assess Kirkland in the same way you'd assessed Meany. Then, in '95, Sweeney is going to come in. Perhaps say a little something about what you want to say about Kirkland, and then the succession.

07-00:47:18
Sickler: I think the biggest mistake Lane made—and I totally disagreed with his decision, and I got into a major battle with my director, the director of

organizing and field services. Lane had made the decision that we were not going to engage in retail organizing anymore.

07-00:47:45

Rubens: “We” meaning?

07-00:47:47

Sickler: The AFL-CIO’s staff. Their Department of Organizing and Field Services was no longer going to be involved in helping affiliates organize workers. It was this horrible decision, in my opinion. It was crazy.

07-00:48:02

Rubens: Because the retail clerks weren’t—

07-00:48:06

Beagle: That’s not what he means. Retail organizing—

07-00:48:08

Sickler: Retail organizing, meaning we’re not going to go out and help them, on the ground level, do organizing. Staff is not going to help them. His reasoning was, they’re organizing their industries and their jurisdictions and units; that’s up to them to do. It’s not the business of the AFL-CIO. The business of the AFL-CIO is political.

07-00:48:37

Carole Sickler: By “them,” you mean various unions.

07-00:48:42

Sickler: Yes. It was the various unions’ business to go organize their own jurisdictions, and the AFL-CIO’s job was just political, and we would handle the political stuff. Well, I knew what a disaster that would be in Los Angeles. So I protested right away in front of everybody. I said, “I’m just letting everybody know this right now: I’m going to be organizing. I’m going to be organizing in Los Angeles. If you have a problem with that, maybe we need to go sit down with Lane and straighten it out now, because maybe you’ve got to get somebody else to be the director. Because if I’m out there in Los Angeles, I’m going to be organizing. That’s our lifeblood there. That’s how we keep the movement together.” Joe Shantz was my national director, and I could tell it bothered him. I don’t think he ever ran it up the flagpole with Lane. He basically said, “You go ahead and do what you do, and I just won’t see it. I won’t know about it.”

07-00:49:45

Rubens: National director of the—

07-00:49:48

Sickler: Department of Organizing and Field Services, which I was a regional director of that department. That’s kind of where we were. When that edict came out, it really pissed off a lot of unions.

07-00:50:05

Rubens: What time is this about? What year, I'm sorry.

07-00:50:15

Sickler: It had to be prior to the next convention. So it was in the nineties. It had to be that period between '93 and '95.

07-00:50:26

Rubens: Okay, after NAFTA.

07-00:50:28

Sickler: Because at the '95 convention, I knew something was really up in February of '95, because I had heard a report on the radio. Carole and I were driving back from a council meeting in San Diego, and I heard it on the news that Gerald McEntee, who was the international president of AFSCME, and a couple of others, were upset with Lane Kirkland and were threatening to run someone against him. I called Jim Baker, who is now back in the United States as Lane Kirkland's chief executive assistant, and he didn't even know anything about it. He was stunned to hear it. I said, "It's on the radio, Jim. Turn the radio on. It's on." That's in February. By the fall, it's a full-blown war against Lane Kirkland. That really pissed people off. They were really angry at Joe Shantz, all the other unions. So Joe Shantz had become one of the targets they wanted to take out. They wanted to take Joe Shantz out. Ironically, most of the unions, the internationals, wanted me to stay as regional director because of the organizing I was doing in Los Angeles, and the help that I had given their unions, specifically CIWA. A lot of the unions loved CIWA. They had put pressure on Sweeney, but Sweeney wanted to give California, which was the big plum, to Mark Splain, because Splain was one of his guys.

07-00:52:16

Rubens: Let me just get clear here, because I don't know the exact sequence of politics. Shantz is Kirkland's person, who had—

07-00:52:25

Sickler: Shantz was the director of organizing and field services.

07-00:52:30

Rubens: So there's this uprising against the position that he's taking, which obviously Kirkland is supporting.

07-00:52:36

Sickler: Sure. Kirkland asked for it.

07-00:52:38

Rubens: So there's this discussion of who's going to run against Kirkland. Is Sweeney now going to use this as a stepping stone? Had he been waiting in the wings?

07-00:52:55

Sickler: I think Sweeney was recruited by people like Andy Stern, who was the head of SEIU, and—

07-00:53:02

Rubens: Sweeney, by the way, was—

07-00:53:04

Sickler: He was SEIU. Sweeney was the president of the SEIU. Andy Stern was the director of organizing for SEIU when Sweeney moved over to run against Kirkland—not Kirkland, Donahue. Kirkland decides to retire early. That way, he can hand the mantle over to the secretary treasurer, Tom Donahue. So then Tom becomes interim president to fill out Kirkland's term, and then he becomes, obviously, the heir apparent that Sweeney is going to run against for the next new term for president of the AFL-CIO. So it got quite ugly, and I got caught up in it.

Tom called me when the Clinton administration, agreed to attend Owen Marron's big Labor Day picnic in Oakland. Owen was head of the Alameda County Central Labor Council. I could have killed the Clinton administration for doing that. Tom calls me on the phone and says, "Dave, I need you to get up to Oakland. The Labor Day picnic is coming up. I'm hearing all kinds of rumors that the guy that's the head of the council there is in a meltdown. I need for you to get up there and cover my ass and make sure I'm protected when I get in there." I said, "Okay." I get this call at night, and so I've got to catch a plane that night and fly in. I call Owen on the phone, and he sounds very upset. I said, "Don't do anything until I get up there. I'm flying in. I'll meet you at the hotel, the Hilton Hotel by the airport."

He's there in the lobby, when I come through the doors. This is like 12:30 a.m. He wants to take me back to his office. So we go back to his office, and he's really upset. He's going to disinvite the President of the United States, because the President of the United States' staff is telling him that he can't have his full executive board up on the podium. We're going round and round and round, and I'm saying, "No, you're not going to disinvite the President of the United States." Owen finally agrees to a limited number of people on the podium/.

Because of the Donahue/Sweeney issue, SEIU was pushing Owen to let Sweeney introduce Clinton at the picnic. Obviously I'm not going to let that happen. I'm regional director of the AFL-CIO. Tom Donahue is the president of the AFL-CIO. If it were John Sweeney, I'd do the same for John Sweeney. I would not let Donahue introduce Clinton. I told Owen, I said, "This is an AFL-CIO Central Labor Council. You're going to have Donahue, who's the president of your organization, introduce the President of the United States. That's the way this is going to go." He said, "Yeah, but I'm going to lose my biggest affiliates." I said, "No, you're not. You're going to tell them you got your orders from me." That was kind of an out for Owen. I don't think he

knew he had that out. Owen told SEIU he had no choice. Sickler was the bastard in this. Of course, SEIU still wasn't happy with Owen, but, boy, were they pissed at me.

A representative for Sweeney wrote a memo, that Owen got a hold of, to Sweeney, saying, "The first person's head to roll once you take over is Sickler's." They were really pissed that I blocked them from being able to have Sweeney pull that little one-upmanship on Donahue.

07-00:58:20

Rubens: So Sweeney is elected?

07-00:58:22

Sickler: Sweeney gets elected. That's right.

07-00:58:23

Rubens: Is it overwhelming?

07-00:58:25

Sickler: Yes, it was by a pretty good-sized margin that he got elected by. People were really angry. They were really upset, because we were hemorrhaging members. We weren't doing a cohesive action to organize. It was hit and miss. We were doing a good job in L.A., in other parts of California, Nevada, but the rest of the country was just stagnant. Nothing was happening. The labor movement was kind of dormant when it came to organizing.

07-00:58:058

Rubens: Let's stop for a minute to change the tape.

Audio File 8

08-00:00:00

Rubens: So Sweeney comes in. Is there immediate fallout for you?

08-00:00:07

Sickler: No. No, nothing really changes for about a year. I continue to operate as a regional director from '96 to about '97. Then in '97, everything changes. They bring Mark Splain in. I didn't know this was happening, but Walter Johnson with the San Francisco Labor Council, Shelley Kessler from the San Mateo Central Labor Council, I think Owen was part of that group—there were several others—unbeknownst to me, took a trip back to Washington, D.C. to protest to Sweeney about removing me as the regional director. They had liked the state meetings that I had put together with the councils, and I was helping the various councils with whatever problems they had. So they liked it, and they liked the work that we had done on NAFTA and other stuff. They had come down to study the immigration project in Los Angeles. A lot of them wanted to duplicate it in their areas. They felt that I had some stuff moving that they liked and they didn't want to see end, but I didn't know. I

had no idea until, actually, years after—years after—they did it, that they had gone back to protest—

08-00:01:36

Rubens: What are they protesting? Why do they want you out?

08-00:01:41

Sickler: No, they didn't want Sweeney to replace me with this guy Mark Splain.

08-00:01:48

Rubens: I misunderstood. I was thinking, this sounds so weird.

08-00:01:52

Sickler: There were a number of international presidents, because some of the staff in L.A. were pissed off about Mark Splain coming in. I was working with them on a lot of projects, like immigration stuff. They were calling their international presidents, protesting. Some of the international vice presidents that I worked with were upset, and they were protesting to Sweeney about replacing me. While all this stuff is going on, I'm not even aware of it. People aren't telling me that they're going to call and protest. I just figured things were going to take their natural course. Anyway, I get pulled off of everything. I'm uninvited to any and every meeting.

08-00:02:40

Rubens: Splain is the one who's orchestrating this?

08-00:02:42

Sickler: Yeah, Splain is. But what happens then, evidently Sweeney is really feeling the heat. We get back—I think it was at a conference. . New York, I think, is where it was. I'm pretty much fed up. I'm already fed up with what I see them doing. They were really mistreating my staff. They wanted to push my staff out. Instead of really trying to buy them out with a decent offer, they were just harassing them, giving them crappy jobs to do. I'll give you one example. They're having an organizing conference in Los Angeles at the convention center. I'm not even invited to attend it. Now, I'm not bragging, but I kind of was Mr. Organizing for a while in Los Angeles, with LAOCOC and my role. So they have a meeting regarding organizing on my turf and I'm not even invited to attend it.

08-00:03:43

Rubens: "They" meaning?

08-00:03:44

Sickler: Meaning Mark Splain, Richard Bensinger, the national AFL-CIO, Marilyn Sneiderman, that whole crowd. But then the ultimate insult is they tell my staff that their job is to sell T-shirts, but they have to take a class. They have to learn how to do it properly. They put my staff through training on how to sell T-shirts at this conference.

08-00:04:13

Rubens: This is the regional office staff?

08-00:04:17

Sickler: Yes, my staff.

08-00:04:18

Carole Sickler: Can I just say something about all of this? The terrible thing for me is that, working at the Federation of Labor as Miguel's assistant, the national AFL-CIO sends this woman in who was coordinating for them at the convention center, but she doesn't know anything in L.A. Miguel assigns me to work with her, so I have to help put this whole conference together in L.A. while they're insulting my husband. Not inviting him, making his staff sell T-shirts, all of this. But I had to be going to the convention center, meeting with the people from the convention center, telling them we need rooms for workshops. It was so upsetting in the way they were treating him when he was the number one organizer in L.A., and they didn't even want him to attend. They were having people in L.A. teaching these workshops that had never even been involved. They were just nobody. They had never even been involved in organizing.

08-00:05:39

Rubens: Let me just get clear on something.

08-00:05:40

Carole Sickler: It was terrible.

08-00:05:42

Rubens: It's under Kirkland that this move against focusing on organizing is taken. Yet when Sweeney comes in, he's the one who cuts LAOCOC. Why didn't Kirkland start chipping away at it or cut it?

08-00:06:06

Sickler: I think Kirkland liked me, and I think he liked what I was doing out here, and he left me alone. I'll give you another example of my relationship with—

08-00:06:14

Carole Sickler: And LAOCOC was started by Meany.

08-00:06:18

Sickler: It was started by Meany, but the other thing is, I had a good personal relationship with Lane. I think it got deeper after I was attacked by *60 Minutes*. I do. No words were said between us, but I think after that, there was kind of this common sharing of scars. He'd been cut up by *60 Minutes*, too.

08-00:06:40

Carole Sickler: By the press, period.

08-00:06:42

Sickler: For example, I'm giving him a ride back to the airport after a regional conference in Los Angeles, and he's asking me how things are in L.A., and I'm saying, "You know, by the way, Lane, we have a national AFL-CIO

organization for Latinos, African Americans, women. We really need one for Asians. There is a huge Asian population here in Los Angeles. We have lots of Asian union members, and they are hungry.” There were a huge number of Asians active in the labor movement. He said, “Sounds like a great idea to me.” He said, “Start moving with it.” I said, “Well, good. I got some folks I want to bring back to D.C. for you to meet with.” He said, “Let’s do it.” So I took Kent Wong back to meet with Lane, and the next thing I know, we’re off and running. We develop APALA [Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance] That’s how APALA got started, because we had a local Asian committee already established in L.A.

08-00:07:49

Rubens: And APALA is? The initials are?

08-00:07:51

Sickler: Asian Pacific American Labor Alliance. APALA.

08-00:08:02

Rubens: Kent Wong had come out of?

+

08-00:08:04

Sickler: Kent Wong came out of SEIU 660. He had been their general counsel and for fifteen years or more, director of UCLA Labor Center.

08-00:08:18

Rubens: So APALA is a pretty big initiative on your part. We didn’t talk about it. Just talk a little bit about the—

08-00:08:26

Sickler: I was called—I’m still called one of the godfathers of APALA.

08-00:08:29

Rubens: Just talk a little bit about the structure of it.

08-00:08:32

Sickler: It’s structured pretty much like LCLAA, [Labor Council for Latin-American Advancement] like APRI [A. Phillip Randolph Institute] like the other adjunct organizations of the AFL-CIO are structured. And like those organizations, it really basically depends on the density of the population of those organizations, how much activity is going on. Lots and lots of Asian activity going on here, lots and lots of Asian activity going on in New York, obviously, and Chicago, and those kinds of cities where there’s large concentration of Asian workers and Asian leadership in the labor movement. A lot of activity.

08-00:09:08

Beagle: What about Hawaii?

- 08-00:09:10
Sickler: Yeah, Hawaii is very much involved. Guy Fujimura was one of the first guys we had involved in it. Matter of fact, he was president of APALA for a while. I don't think he is anymore, but there for a while. By the way, you know how I found out that Mark Splain was going to be the guy to replace me? Guy Fujimura called me and told me.
- 08-00:09:34
Carole Sickler: How did he know?
- 08-00:09:38
Sickler: He had been back there in D.C. He was in a meeting where it was announced. He was the first guy to tell me about it.
- 08-00:09:50
Rubens: Was Sweeney going to revive organizing or—
- 08-00:09:52
Sickler: Was what?
- 08-00:09:53
Rubens: Where did Sweeney fall on that axis of emphasis of organizing versus not emphasizing it? Did he want to—
- 08-00:10:01
Sickler: He ran on organizing. He ran—
- 08-00:10:03
Rubens: Because he was the opposition to—
- 08-00:10:04
Sickler: Oh, yeah. Oh, sure. That was the big crime, they say, Lane committed, was he was anti-organizing and didn't do enough. I disagreed with his decision, and I wish he hadn't. But he didn't know much about organizing. It wasn't his first love. International politics was his first love. He loved the whole intrigue about international politics.
- 08-00:10:35
Rubens: You think there's something—
- 08-00:10:37
Carole Sickler: When Sweeney took over, they got rid of all the other regional directors.
- 08-00:10:45
Sickler: Well, not all of—
- 08-00:10:46
Carole Sickler: When they didn't get rid of you, kept you on staff but put you on a shelf, but they gave you a special title. Remember?
- 08-00:10:55
Sickler: Yeah, they called me like—

08-00:10:56

Carole Sickler: Like a special assistant to the president.

08-00:10:59

Sickler: Called me national representative or something. National presidential assistant or something like that. This goofy title. But they basically put me on a shelf. They were just kind of saying, "Go play golf, or stay away, whatever you want to do, but just don't bother us."

08-00:11:18

Carole Sickler: They kept you on until you were eligible to collect your pension.

08-00:11:24

Sickler: That was one of the things we negotiated. I told them I wanted my pension. I had a couple of years to collect to get pension credit, so I stayed on until—what was it? Two thousand, I guess. No, no. Ninety-seven, I went to the Building Trades.

08-00:11:40

Rubens: Ninety-seven, you go to—

08-00:11:42

Sickler: The Building Trades.

08-00:11:46

Rubens: Even though Sweeney is—

08-00:11:50

Beagle: "Mr. Organizer."

08-00:11:51

Rubens: "Mr. Organizer" pulls the plug on LAOCOC?

08-00:11:55

Sickler: LAOCOC, yeah. I know what happened. Splain wanted to come in here. Splain has tunnel vision. . He didn't understand how to come in here and use and established structure to his benefit. He just wanted to wipe it off the face of the earth and start something else in his image. He was worried that he would come here, and whatever was done using the LAOCOC apparatus, that credit would go to somebody else other than him.

08-00:12:41

Carole Sickler: To you.

08-00:12:42

Sickler: Yeah, probably. That, by the way, was what their concern was with L.A. MAP. I kept warning Peter all the way through this thing, "Mark Splain and Richard Bensinger are going to kill L.A.MAP. And they're going to kill it because, if it's successful, you get the credit, and I may get some credit. But they won't get the credit if it's successful, because they didn't build it. You built it."

08-00:13:07

Rubens: We haven't said what L.A. MAP is.

08-00:13:09

Sickler: Los Angeles Manufacturing Action Project.

08-00:13:11

Beagle: Their model was the organizing institute, right?

08-00:13:14

Sickler: Yeah. Bensinger.

Peter and I spent a lot of time developing L.A. MAP. We did it through the Community Scholars program, the study at UCLA. They did the research, in-depth research on it. It was a brilliant program. It would have worked.

08-00:13:34

Carole Sickler: Tell her what it was.

08-00:13:36

Sickler: What we were doing was targeting the Alameda corridor, from downtown Los Angeles to the port. There were 300,000 manufacturing jobs in that corridor. Three hundred thousand, all unorganized. They weren't going anywhere. They're necessary jobs that feed that corridor. All the transportation and warehousing and all that stuff between Los Angeles and the port. So we thought longshore should be involved in it, machinists should be involved in it, steelworkers should be involved in it, Teamsters should be involved in it. So we start putting it together. Well, you would think it's getting ready to be delivered to the Sweeney administration on a platter. They should take it and run with it. But Bensinger, who was in charge of organizing, and Splain, who's going to come on head of California, they don't want anything to do with it. Now, this is not said by either one of them. I'm just telling you what my interpretation is of what they did and why they did it. My interpretation is, if it had succeeded, then Peter Olney and Dave Sickler would have got the credit for L.A. MAP. If it failed on their watch, they would have got the blame. That's why they wanted nothing to do with it. It was in their best interest to kill it. Which was insane, because it was poised to pick up 300,000 workers in Los Angeles.

08-00:15:16

Rubens: Was it ever revitalized? These guys could have called it something else and claim it was their vision.

08-00:15:25

Sickler: He goes up to Watsonville, and the Farmworkers want to put a big thing together in the strawberry fields in Watsonville. He goes to Watsonville. Of course, I'm left out in the dirt. They get up there, and I get a call from Victor Munoz saying, "Dave, this is really hard." I said, "What are you talking about, Victor?" He said, "The way they got us organizing." I said, "What's happening?" He said, "We go out in the fields, but the workers won't have

anything to do with us. They won't even talk to us." I said, "Wait a minute. Are you telling me you guys are going out in the field during the daytime, talking to workers out there?" "Yeah." I said, "Are you crazy? What the hell are you thinking? Who told you to do this?" "Well, Mark and those guys sent us out here." I said, "Victor, get your ass out of those fields. You're scaring the shit out of those people. Do you understand, the people that control their jobs are the foremen in those fields that are watching them? They owe their jobs to that guy. He brought them up from Mexico or from wherever, south of the border. They're there because of that foreman. His job is to watch them. If there's any threat of union, throats get cut." He said, "They want us to go in at night and knock on doors and talk to the workers where they live." He said, "Every time we knock on the doors, we can hear them tell the kids to come tell us to go away. So they tell us to go away." I said, "Well, hell yes they tell you to go away. You guys come in blaring horns and trumpets, telling them you're from the union. You jeopardize their jobs. They went through all this shit to come up here for a job, and then you guys are going to threaten it? What kind of stupid program are you running up there?" This was insane. And then they wonder why they couldn't organize the strawberry workers.

08-00:17:53

Beagle:

That was a fiasco. I remember it was a huge deal, and it just turned to nothing.

08-00:18:02

Sickler:

I have a good friend that was staff for [Assembly member Richard] Polanco and he headed up the Chicano caucus for the state assembly. The guy's name was Saeed Ali. He was Richard Alarcon's right-hand man. Saeed and I became close friends during the immigration project. He was a big fan of that, so we were close on that project. He contacted me and he said, "Dave, I want to talk to you about an idea I have to organize those strawberry workers up in Watsonville. I want to get your opinion, what you think of it." So I sat down with Saeed, and Saeed said, "You know, I've worked with those people a lot for a lot of years, helping them get water, because the big growers, they suck all the water out of the area." He said, "I've fought for those small growers." He said, "By the way, most of those are ex-Farmworkers. There's a lot of them, and they have little fields, and they make a living. They don't make a great living, but they're making a living and they're getting along, but they want to be union." He said, "So my idea is, look, see if we can get the Farmworkers to negotiate a deal with them where they're not paying as much as they would demand from a Driscoll or the big berry farmers. But we'd get the thunderbird on the boxes." He said, "I will even take time. I will do this myself. I will go to every school district in America and ask them to buy strawberries with that thunderbird on them." He said, "I think I could sell it." And I think he could, too.

08-00:19:55

Rubens:

Great idea.

08-00:19:59

Sickler:

I put together a meeting with Artie Rodriguez, and of course he brings Mark Splain with him to the meeting, and the idea goes nowhere. They don't buy it. Nothing. Not a single doubt in my mind that that couldn't have worked. That would have worked! They had to come in and sign a contract that would have been less than whatever they were trying to get out of the big berry farmers, but they would have got a foothold in that valley up there, and then they could have gone after the big guys. We would have had them institutionalized up there. They would have sold more berries than they could grow, to those school districts. I thought that was a brilliant plan of Saeed's.

08-00:20:52

Rubens:

It's a kind of bitter end for you with the AFL.

08-00:21:01

Sickler:

You know what? I'm bitter about some things, but in the total, I was the luckiest guy in the world to ever have that job. Believe me, I was the luckiest guy on the planet to have that work. I would take a triple dose of the crap I had to eat at the very end to do it all over again. It was fantastic. It was a fantastic ride.

08-00:21:30

Carole Sickler:

Because you loved it.

08-00:21:32

Rubens:

How did you get to the State Building and Construction Trades Council? How does that come about?

08-00:21:39

Sickler:

Once people found out I was cut loose from the AFL-CIO, I started getting a lot of job offers. The Machinists asked me to come onboard with them. I was looking at one offer that was kind of attractive. Different unions were offering me different things. IATSE was asking me if I would be interested in coming on board to represent the International. Bob and I were friends. We had been social friends for a lot of years. Before Carole and I actually got married, I knew Bob. Then Carole and Bob and I socialized.

08-00:22:30

Rubens:

Bob [Robert] Balgenorth is head of the Building Trades.

08-00:22:34

Sickler:

When I became regional director, and then he became the state head of the Building Trades, we would get together about once a month for a lunch, to share information and talk and all that kind of stuff. I had been asked by Art Pulaski to help him put together an affiliation campaign fund. I was giving a report to the State Fed executive board about this campaign to increase affiliation to the State Fed, and Bob was on that board. So then, as the meeting broke up, he came up and he says, "Can we have lunch?" I said, "Yeah, sure. I'm open for lunch." We went, and he asked me what was going on, because he was all curious about the AFL-CIO, me ending up away from the AFL-

CIO, and what was happening and all that stuff. I told him, I said, "I've probably got to give my word by Monday about going to work for IATSE." He said, "Don't do that." I said, "Why?" He said, "Come to work for me instead." I said, "You're crazy." He said, "No, I'm dead serious." I said, "Bob, you can't afford me." He says, "What do you mean I can't afford you?" I said, "You can't afford me." I said, "You're a friend. Why don't you get somebody half my age, pay them about half what you've got to pay me?" He says, "Because I don't have thirty years to wait for them to know what you know." That's what he said. I said, "No, come on." "No," he said, "I'm serious. Just think about it. Do me a favor and just think about it over the weekend, then call me and let me know Sunday or Monday." I came home and I told Carole. I said, "You're not going to believe what that crazy Bob wants me to do." She says, "I think you better think about that."

08-00:24:39

Carole Sickler: I thought it was a great offer.

08-00:24:43

Sickler: I was worried about ruining a good, close friendship. Bob and I had been very close.

08-00:24:49

Carole Sickler: He took classes from you.

08-00:24:51

Sickler: I taught him. He took classes from me. Oh, one funny thing. While we're at lunch and he's saying, "What do you mean I can't afford you? How much would you have to have?" So I told him, and he swallowed really hard. He goes, "Well, that is a little more than I thought I was going to have to pay." He said, "But I'll pay it. I'll pay it. I'm telling you, I'll pay it. I'll match it."

08-00:25:15

Rubens: Did he say what the job would be? Did you have a sense of—

08-00:25:17

Sickler: Yeah, yeah. Because I asked him, I said, "What do you want me to do?" He said, "You do for me what you did for the AFL-CIO and I'll be the happiest man on the planet." He said, "Just do for me what you did for the AFL-CIO. That's all I ask." I said, "I can do that." So I called him back and I said, "I'm still not ready to commit, Bob. I think we need to have a further discussion." I said, "How about you fly down to Burbank Airport and I'll meet you at the Hilton at the airport? We'll talk some more." So he flew down. We talked some more, and I said, "Okay, you've got a deal. Let's give it a whirl."

08-00:26:39

Rubens: Maybe we'll stop there. We'll stop there, and then next time we pick up, we'll pick up with what you did for him. You were there for almost eight years.

- 08-00:26:47
Sickler: Yes. Yeah, I loved it. You know why? It was nice to work for grown-ups for a change.
- 08-00:26:54
Rubens: How big a union?
- 08-00:26:57
Sickler: The State Building and Trades Council runs between about 380 to 400,000 sometimes, depending on the season and work and who's laid off.
- 08-00:27:10
Beagle: Oh. Just one thing. Were you there when the Carpenters disaffiliated from it?
- 08-00:27:15
Sickler: Oh, sure. Yeah.
- 08-00:27:16
Beagle: So we can talk about that piece.
- 08-00:27:17
Sickler: Yeah. I tried to get the Carpenters to come back in, because McCarron liked me, obviously, for what I'd helped him with.
- 08-00:27:24
Carole Sickler: McCarron offered you a job.
- 08-00:27:26
Sickler: Oh, yeah, McCarron tried to hire me as his state organizing director. He wanted me to come to work for him.
- 08-00:27:32
Carole Sickler: That would have been a disaster.
- 08-00:27:33
Sickler: At the time, when he offered me the job, it was when Saddam Hussein had just invaded Kuwait. Saddam Hussein was being pilloried through the press Armando says, "Doug wants to hire you as his California director of organizing. Wanted me to talk to you about whether"—I said, "No. Tell Doug going to work for him right now would be like going to work for Saddam Hussein."
- 08-00:28:13
Beagle: He's a Republican himself, I think.
- 08-00:28:16
Sickler: You know what? The first year Bush was in office, they had Bush at their Labor Day picnic. They invited Bush to their Labor Day picnic.
- 08-00:28:28
Beagle: He's a strange character.

08-00:28:30
Rubens: Who is this we're talking about?

08-00:28:34
Sickler: Doug McCarron?

The Carpenters Union. My dad would be flipping in his grave about how they turned out. He walked a lot of picket lines.

08-00:28:44
Carole Sickler: He busted OPEIU.

08-00:28:46
Beagle: He did?

08-00:28:47
Sickler: Oh, yeah, Doug McCarron did.

08-00:28:48
Carole Sickler: All the secretaries and clericals that worked for the Carpenters, he treated them like crap, and they wound up going out on a strike.

08-00:28:59
Beagle: Carpenters in Washington or Carpenters all over the country?

08-00:29:01
Carole Sickler: Well, this was in L.A. I don't know what happened in Washington, but in L.A-

08-00:29:35
Rubens: You're there eight years. I think we'll pick it up next time. I think we'll pick it up next time. We got that. We got—I always say his name wrong. Villaraigosa. You told me that it's a tough thing going to the Department of Water. That was just a little—

08-00:29:58
Sickler: Fifteen floors of snakes.

08-00:30:00
Rubens: Fifteen floors of snakes, I love it. Then you go back to the Building Trades. Let me ask one naïve thing. Why is it called the Trades Council?

08-00:30:13
Sickler: The Building Trades?

08-00:30:14
Rubens: Yeah.

08-00:30:16
Sickler: Because each individual craft is called a trade. So when you say it's Trades Council—

08-00:30:23

Rubens: Means all of them.

08-00:30:24

Sickler: All of them in one council, one group.

08-00:30:27

Rubens: How many?

08-00:30:32

Sickler: There are actually about fifteen national skilled trades. There are offshoots of some, like the Carpenters have millwrights and woodworkers and that kind of thing. So do the Painters. The Painters aren't just the painters. They also—drywall and plastering work, and the carpet layers do tile work and that kind of stuff. But there are basically fifteen craft unions, or what they call trade unions, that make up most of the construction work.

08-00:31:05

Rubens: The council, yeah.

08-00:31:06

Sickler: Yeah. That's the big rub in the building trades, by the way. The big fight with guys like Doug McCarron and the Laborers international president -I can see his face.

08-00:31:23

Carole Sickler: Sullivan?

08-00:21:26

Sickler: Yes, Terry O'Sullivan. Those guys think that there should only be three or four big international unions that represent every trade. The sad thing is, the Carpenters are bastardizing a lot of the skills. They're adapting their membership to mimic more of a production crew than a skilled craft crew. They, for example, will run a number of their members through a brief sheet metal course, a brief electrical course, a brief bricklayer course. So that when they take a crew of workers to a developer and say, "Okay, I've got crews of six guys. They can come in and do all your wiring. They can do all your sheet metal work. They can do all your plumbing. They can do all your carpentry work. They can do all of that." Then they charge the developer a little less money. So the incentive is for the developer to hire these crews, these production crews, that can come in and do this work. You say, gee, that's kind of smart. You're kind of meeting the demand of the employer that's out there. Well, the problem is, yeah, you may be customizing a square peg for a square hole, but you're not teaching those people all of the requirements of that particular craft. They're going to be little Johnny-one-notes out there. They're going to be able to do just a certain limited amount of things in that particular craft. They're not going to have a full spectrum of knowledge and be a fully-skilled worker that can go off on their own and, in that craft, make a living, and satisfy the needs of all of the requirements of that particular craft. Because it takes four to five years, given the craft, to learn all there is to know about

that craft. That's combined on-the-job training and classroom training. It gets more technical and it gets more difficult as technology increases, and so the requirement to use more and more computers and have better computer skills increases, and learning more ways to deal with new kinds of materials that are coming out on the market that are used in construction now. It's awful, I think, what he's doing to his membership. He is—

08-00:40:03

Rubens: "He" meaning?

08-00:34:04

Sickler: McCarron and the Carpenters. They're bastardizing the craft.

08-00:34:08

Beagle: That's interesting. Because if you ask them, if you ask the Carpenters—I think—they will say exactly the same thing about the Laborers. But they're—

08-00:34:20

Sickler: Well, that's true. The Laborers are doing exactly the same thing. Laborers are training their guys to do carpentry, to do some operating engineer work. They're out there. They're teaching these laborers to do counts on cement trucks, measure yardage of concrete to handle heavy equipment. That's all operating engineer work.

08-00:34:52

Carole Sickler: This is what Meany meant about keeping them together.

08-00:34:55

Sickler: Keeping them together, that's right.

Interview 3: July 14, 2014

Audio File 9

09-00:00:00

Rubens:

Dave, hello. It's nice to see you for our fifth sit down together, but we're labeling this interview #3. It's the 14th of July, 2014. I really want to get to talking about your role with the Building Trades. We had ended our last interview just starting to talk about why Balgenorth—not why, but that Balgenorth wanted you. He wanted you to do just what you had done with the AFL-CIO, and we didn't explain that. To rev up to get to that, what I want to ask you about are those last months—I don't know how long it was—with the AFL-CIO. We did discuss Mark Splain. Well, we discussed the changes in the national leadership. We talked about Mark Splain coming in and you being made, rather than the western regional director that you were made the special assistant to the president. What did you actually do then?

09-00:01:03

Sickler:

The actual election, where there was a change of leadership, was in 1995, when John Sweeney defeated Tom Donahue for presidency of the AFL-CIO. Had Tom Donahue been elected, not much in the way of staffing would have changed. There probably would have been organizational changes and policy changes, that kind of thing, priorities, but there wouldn't have been the wholesale dramatic personnel changes that were made. Those personnel changes really didn't happen until about 1996, about a year later. The election was held in the fall in New York City in '95. Then, by the time the transition took place in 1996 and they started this election process of firing regional directors and AFL-CIO staff, and then replacing them with their hand-picked people, that process took place during 1996. During 1996, I was called in. I called it bloody Friday. On a Friday, they were calling a lot of the regional directors in, and they started them off in meetings, one by one, early in the morning. I was the last one they called in, in the evening. What had happened prior to that, and I didn't know this at the time, but Walter Johnson, who was the head of the San Francisco Central Labor Council, a number of the Central Labor Councils were really upset, because they had heard Mark Splain was going to take over and I was going to be removed as a regional director. By the way, several international presidents were, too, including the Carpenters, the Laborers, the Machinists. A number of international unions went to Sweeney and lobbied on my behalf, that I not be removed as regional director.

Come Friday, I'm the last one to call in. The one just before me was a guy by the name of Steve Bieringer, who was the AFL-CIO regional director in Colorado. I believe he had Colorado, Wyoming, Arizona, Utah, I think New Mexico. He was called in and summarily fired. So then I was called in after him, last one of the day. Bob Welch, who was the ax-man for Sweeney in charge of doing all this stuff, informed me that I was being removed as regional director; however, they wanted to keep me on staff, and they wanted

to make me a state director for the state of Colorado. Of which I said, “No thanks. That’s insane. I haven’t been to Colorado in twenty-five years. So everybody I worked with there is either dead or retired, and we have two new officers.” At that time, Art Pulaski and Tom Rankin were brand-new officers of the California State Fed. While they were known quantities in Northern California, they were virtually unknown in the rest of the state, from the central coast all the way down to Southern California. I’d had a number of meetings with Art, and because I had worked very close with Jack Henning, Art wanted me to help him kind of transition into the job. You know, what his obligations were in relationship to the AFL-CIO, help with other Central Labor Councils, help with affiliates.

So he had a number of questions about how the State Fed had operated over the years, especially in its relationship with the AFL-CIO. I would meet with Art on a regular basis, and I was very honest with him about some of the pitfalls to look out for and that kind of thing. I knew how much he didn’t know, and so it was ridiculous for the national AFL-CIO to take me away from helping him with that. I would have helped him for free, even if I wasn’t working for the AFL-CIO, because it was that important to do. But the idea of transferring me back, he said, “Well, you’re from Colorado, so I just thought you’d love to live and work in Colorado.” I said, “I’m from Colorado, but it was twenty-five years ago. It’s ridiculous. I don’t know the players there now. I know the players in California. California is one of your most important states. It’s got most of your membership condensed in one state, so it’s very important to get these guys up to speed.” He was very flummoxed. He thought he was giving me a great benefit and he was sparing me the axe, and I think he thought I was supposed to be very grateful and humble myself before his greatness. But I just got up and I said, “You guys do what you have to do, but I’m not going to Colorado.” So they didn’t know what the hell to do.

Later, we were at an AFL-CIO event in Pennsylvania. I think it was Pittsburgh. Anyway, John Sweeney saw me at the reception and came over to me and said, “Dave, I want you to fly back to Washington next week to sit down with me.” By this time, I was so pissed off at the national AFL-CIO for the way they were treating staff. They were brutal to my old staff. They were brutal to good staff throughout the country. They just fired them and made them feel like dirt. There was one situation in Los Angeles where they were putting on a dog and pony show for the affiliates on organizing, and they forced seasoned organizers on my staff to go through training on how to sell T-shirts. Of course, I was carved out of all of that stuff. When they took over, I was basically put on a shelf.

09-00:07:46

Rubens:

You’re being paid, but they’re not giving you an assignment?

09-00:07:49

Sickler:

Yeah, not giving me assignments. They just kind of want me to go away and stay away. This has all transpired before I see Sweeney in Pennsylvania. We'd had arrangements as soon as that conference or convention was over. We were going to see our kids in Florida. At that time, I had a five-year-old grandson named Adam. The thing I was looking the most forward to after going through all these months of hell with this transition and watching all this stuff transpire, I really looked forward to spending time with my grandson. Sweeney comes up to me and says, "I'd like to see you in my office next week." Before we could even go any farther, I said, "No, John. Next week, I'm going to be in Florida. I'm going to be in a sandbox with my five-year-old grandson." He wasn't pleased with that response, so he kind of wheeled on his heel and left, and of course I went on to Florida and had a hell of a good time with my five-year-old grandson. That's kind of the way things were. Then I was told, well, I'm going to be a special assistant to the international president, but I was included in nothing. I wasn't asked to do anything. I was just put on a shelf. I started putting the word out that I was not happy with the AFL-CIO, so a lot of offers started coming in. I was approached by the international vice president to IATSE. He wanted me to fill a position in Los Angeles as the West Coast Representative. I was approached by—

09-00:09:29

Rubens:

They wanted you because of how well you knew the area, your skills, the success of having brought people—

09-00:09:36

Sickler:

Yeah, and they were just getting their local unions involved in politics. I had worked with them, and I had worked with the international in getting their locals involved in politics. They wanted me to be there to kind of get them more involved in politics. I was offered a position with the Carpenters as the state organizing director for the Carpenters international. I was offered a position as California's organizing director for the Laborers International Union. The Machinists offered me a position. I had a number of these positions. I was really interested in the one from IATSE.

09-00:10:13

Rubens:

You wanted to stay an organizer? You wanted to stay in Los Angeles, basically? I was wondering if there was anything else you were thinking about that you wanted to do.

09-00:10:22

Sickler:

I wanted work that would be interesting and challenging, but keep me in Los Angeles, too, because I loved the labor movement in L.A. It was by far one of the greatest labor movements anywhere in the United States. I had a habit of meeting with Bob Balgenorth every month. We were close personal friends, and so we would try to meet once a month. When I was director of the AFL-CIO and he was the head of the State Building Trades Council, we'd try to get together once a month for a lunch. It just so happened I was actually helping

Art, and we had an executive board meeting of the State Fed in—I think it was Sacramento. I was helping Art with affiliation, and so Art wanted—

09-00:11:08

Rubens:

What does that mean? Just explain for our—

09-00:11:11

Sickler:

We had a number of our unions that were not affiliated with the California State AFL-CIO. Were not paying per capita, weren't participating. Especially Firefighters. Most of that was because they actually hadn't been invited in. They go through several cycles of leadership, and the leadership doesn't even know that the state Fed is there and that the state Fed can help them in their particular pieces of legislation or their particular goals. I put together a campaign for Art to reach out to these firefighter locals especially and invite them to come in. We started bringing them in. I tried to do that with Jack Henning, but Jack Henning really didn't care. He felt that if they didn't want to belong, he didn't want them. That was his attitude. But Art really wanted to put it together, so we were putting together almost kind of like a United Way campaign. I even had a thermometer with how much affiliation we had and what our goals were to reach affiliates. I gave a report to that board meeting, and then when it was all over with, as we were starting to leave, Bob came up to me and said, "You got time to eat lunch?" and I said sure. We go to lunch. He knew I was really unhappy with the Sweeney administration and what was going on. He wanted a report from me, and I said, "As a matter of fact, I've made the decision to leave. I'm quitting. I've already informed the AFL-CIO that I'm going."

09-00:12:42

Rubens:

You had not yet informed IATSE that you were going to take that?

09-00:12:44

Sickler:

No. That was coming up. This was a Friday. This was coming up on Monday. I told him, I said, "I'm thinking of calling the IATSE and letting them know I'm interested in the job." He said, "Don't do that." I said, "Why?" He said, "Come to work for me." I started laughing at him. It actually pissed him off. I started laughing. I said, "You're crazy." He said, "What do you mean I'm crazy?" I said, "Because you can't afford me." He said, "Well, what makes you think I can't afford you?" I said, "Because I know you can't afford me. I know you." He said, "How much do you have to have?" So I told him. He got a big lump in his throat, and he said, "Well, I wasn't expecting to have to pay that much," but he said, "I will." I said, "You're crazy." So I started laughing at him some more. I said, "Come on, Bob. Hire somebody half my age, pay them half of what you'd have to pay me, and then you can train them the way you want them trained. Make a little puppet out of them." I was teasing him, and he said, "I'm serious. Stop making fun of me. I'm dead serious." I was still kind of joking about it. I come home that night from Sacramento and I told Carole. I said, "You're not going to believe what this crazy Balgenorth

wants me to do.” Then she got real serious. She said, “You better think about that.”

The main reason I didn’t want to think about it was because we were very good personal friends, and I didn’t want that destroyed. I did think about it, and we talked about it a lot. I still wasn’t totally convinced. I called him and I said, “Look, I’m not totally convinced. I need to talk to you some more about this. If I’m going to come to work for you, I need to know exactly what you want, and I’ve got to be able to know I can deliver. If not, then it’s not only going to be a bad deal for both of us; it will ruin a damn good friendship, and I don’t want that to happen.” He said, “I’ll meet you tomorrow morning in Burbank.” He flew down to Burbank and we had breakfast at—it was the old Hilton Hotel and restaurant for them, but I think it’s Park Grill or something now—or Daily Grill. Daily Grill. We had breakfast there. I said, “Okay, let’s cut to the chase. What is it you want from me with the Building Trades?” He said, “I just want you to do for me what you did for the AFL-CIO. That’s all.”

09-00:15:16

Rubens: What did that mean?

09-00:15:18

Sickler: That meant educating the membership and keeping the affiliates happy, organizing, educating. Especially educating. Political stuff is the number one issue with all these councils, whether it’s the state council, like the California State Fed, or the Building Trades. Education is the number one thing, because you want your members voting the right way, you want them registering to vote, you want to turn them out to vote. They won’t do that unless they’re well-educated. That means the affiliates, the councils, down to the local union, down to the job site. People are registered to vote, and they know how to vote, and they do vote.

09-00:16:00

Rubens: We’ll get to some specific campaigns, then, once you take the job, but you understood that. You understood when he said—

09-00:16:06

Sickler: Yes. Right after that, 226 happened. Proposition 226, which was a so-called paycheck protection.

09-00:16:18

Beagle: Just one question. Was he interested in your experience with immigration issues?

09-00:16:26

Sickler: No, not so much. I was able to get him converted on immigration issues, but the Building Trades were probably the worst group of unions when it comes to immigration. Back when I started in ’87, the immigration project—see, Reagan had signed IRCA in ’86, and ’87, I kicked off the immigration project.

The Building Trades were the worst. I was publicly criticized in the paper by the head of the Building Trades—remember the guy's name?

09-00:17:04

Beagle: Jerry Cremins.

09-00:17:05

Sickler: No, it wasn't Jerry. Jerry was the head of the state, but the local guy was a guy, I think, named Bud Mathis, head of the local Building Trades in Los Angeles, who attacked me for putting this immigration project together. They just wanted them all deported. They weren't smart enough to look at the membership and see the membership was just getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. More and more of our Building Trades affiliates were having undocumented immigrants in their membership.

09-00:17:36

Rubens: But that wasn't discussed in the first days of negotiation and coming on?

09-00:17:42

Sickler: No. No, that part wasn't discussed with Bob, but Bob was fine with it. Bob actually supported it.

09-00:18:15

Rubens: Balgenorth is not saying anything about that. We're just right there at the cusp.

09-00:18:18

Beagle: He's not saying, "Dave, just keep it to yourself?"

09-00:18:22

Sickler: No, he didn't. Never.

09-00:18:26

Carole Sickler: I just wanted to say, he wanted you to take care of Southern California so he didn't have to be bothered with it.

09-00:18:32

Sickler: He wanted me to be his eyes and ears in Southern California.

09-00:18:36

Rubens: I want to take one step back further, because you're going to take this job. The dates we're saying, this was '97, basically?

09-00:18:45

Sickler: Nineteen ninety-seven.

09-00:18:46

Rubens: By the time this happens.

09-00:18:48

Sickler: I think it's end of August, early September.

09-00:18:52

Rubens:

I want to just back up for one other point about the Carpenters. They offer you a job. They're interested in you. You had worked with them before. There had been the drywall strike. What did you do with that drywall strike, which must have made them interested in you, but then you weren't so interested in them?

09-00:19:24

Sickler:

I'd heard that the drywallers—and nobody represented them at that time. They were striking on their own in Southern California. Let me back up a little bit before that and just preface this all by saying my main reason for being so interested in the drywall strike is that I had been looking, literally for years, decades, for a campaign where we could actually take over an entire industry. The drywall workers had been represented by the Carpenters year before. They lost them around the end of the 1970s, because the contractors started bringing in undocumented workers and working them for a dime on the dollar. So they pushed out all of the unionized white drywall workers and slowly, completely converted the entire drywall workforce to undocumented immigrant workers.

09-00:20:29

Rubens:

Over a ten-year period?

09-00:20:31

Sickler:

Yes. It happened pretty rapidly, because the way it would work is that these workers would work really hard, and then the contractor would say, "Are there more people like you back home? Can you bring them up? We'll hire them." These folks, although most of them were from the same villages in Mexico, they were working all over the place. Southern California, from Fresno all the way down to San Diego. They were working for different contractors, but they knew each other. They were related to each other. They had come from the same villages. When the strike started, it wasn't just a couple of contractors. It spread region-wide, and they literally would get in their cars, drive up to the work sites, and call them off the job. If they didn't come voluntarily, they physically would take guys off the job, and they'd throw them in cars and drive away. The police and the contractors were arresting the strike leaders and throwing them in jail, and then putting them in the deportation tanks, getting ready to go back, and—

09-00:21:39

Rubens:

They were basically doing this on their own? They hadn't been seeded by—

09-00:21:43

Sickler:

They had gotten support from the Carpenters in Orange County. They were actually using the Carpenters' hall as kind of their strike headquarters. The Carpenters were helping them as much as they could, but the Carpenters were very limited in what they could do. First of all, most of the carpenters didn't speak the language. They had limited resources. They had absolutely no knowledge about immigration law. They were kind of stagnated there. I got a call from one of the strike leaders. In broken English, told me he wanted to

meet with me. That he'd heard about CIWA, the California Immigrant Workers Association. Wanted to know if I could give them some help. I took my top staff down to Orange County and sat down with the top strike leaders there to find out exactly what the situation was, how we could help. Once I found out that they were throwing the strike leaders into jail and had them there, and they were posting bond on them, like \$10,000 and \$100,000 and higher, I started getting our immigration attorneys involved, and then contacted some other attorneys, civil attorneys, that went to work in helping them. Long story short, we got them bailed out. The Southern California Regional Carpenters Council started paying the bail-out, the bails on these. We were taking the strike leaders right out of jail and putting them back on the street in leadership positions. The immigration attorneys were keeping them out of the deportation tanks by informing the authorities what the rights of these immigrants were. By the way, the wives of these immigrant strike leaders were taking their place on the picket lines.

Once it was known that the union was helping them more than anybody else, the word spread like wildfire. We can strike and the union can protect us. They're stronger than the cops and they're stronger than the contractors. This strike just went like wildfire. The abuse of these drywall workers was so severe that once we started getting their story across to the press, the press picked up their cause and ran with it. The public relations directors of these contractors said, "You better settle soon, because you're getting killed in the media," and they were. A conservative press, like the *Orange County Register*, was running positive articles, because we had documented proof about how these workers were getting cheated out of their pay. They were working, some of them, sixty hours a week, and checks for like thirty-four bucks or something like that for an entire week of work. We were able to document two million dollars in violations, overtime pay violations, to these workers. Push comes to shove, by the time we get all of this stuff laid out, the contractors knew that if they didn't settle with the Carpenters, they were facing huge, hefty fines, plus the workers were organizing.

The position I was in, I couldn't pick the Carpenters over any other union. There were a number of unions that wanted these strikers. The painters wanted them, because they had drywall workers. The Laborers wanted them, because they had some drywall workers. I had a meeting of those three unions, and I told them, "I can't pick either one of you. What I suggest you do is all three of you help as much as you can these workers, and then it's up to those workers to make that choice. They're going to look around and see who they want to pick. So my advice is, get your face out there and get some money and some support out there for them, and keep their head above water. My job is keeping their head above water so they succeed, so they're in a position to pick one of you. But I'm not going to anoint any one of you." I told that to Doug McCarron, and I told it to the painters, and I told it to the Laborers. So everybody knew where they stood on it. But it was the Carpenters that ponied up. They're the ones that put the money in it and put

staff into it. In the end, it was the drywallers that chose the Carpenters to go with.

09-00:26:22

Beagle: Had an election?

09-00:26:24

Sickler: I believe they had an election. I wasn't a part of it. They chose the Carpenters. They got a contract for, I would say, probably 45, 50 percent of the entire industry, which is significant.

09-00:26:41

Rubens: Very significant. Did that cover what you thought—

09-00:26:45

Beagle: What made these, I assume, previously, more or less, lily-white organizations so interested in these Mexican drywall workers? They would have some political strength within that union.

09-00:27:01

Sickler: Yeah, and because it was a significant industry. If the drywall industry could be taken over by non-union, undocumented workers, so could a lot of the other building trade industries could have been as well. It was very important to get them organized.

09-00:27:20

Beagle: So that trumped—I'm going to call it racism, or anti-immigrant sentiment, on their part?

09-00:27:27

Sickler: It depended on the union that you talked to. Some of the old white leadership still held those beliefs. But over the decades, over the years, a lot of the Latinos who'd come up from Mexico themselves, some of them may have come through legally or were second generation of undocumented immigrants, but were citizens, American citizens, but they were very sensitive to undocumented. They became in leadership positions in their local unions. So they were very supportive of me. A lot of the Laborers locals, a lot of the—even within the Plumbers, there's sprinkler-fitters. Most of those folks are undocumented. When you talk to the business managers of those locals, they're Latino, and they were very supportive of our program.

09-00:28:20

Rubens: I just wanted to finish up. You had mentioned that, in a previous interview, you just really couldn't go into work for the Carpenters. So though you had had this success and seen dramatic changes—

09-00:28:33

Sickler: At that time, Doug had gone to war with almost all of the building trade unions. He was raiding them. Going to work for him would have been like going to work for Saddam Hussein.

09-00:28:47

Rubens: Then you mentioned having Reagan at their Labor Day picnic, or it was something that was just shocking that they would have—no, no, Bush.

09-00:28:54

Sickler: George Bush. Doug had George Bush at their Labor Day picnic.

09-00:28:58

Rubens: Just spoke to his politics.

09-00:29:02

Sickler: But I have a good personal relationship with Doug. I was explaining to Danny before, I could put a phone call into him right now and he'd return it. He did one time when he was in Europe. He called me right back. We wanted to get Marsha Berzon from Altshuler Berzon law firm in San Francisco. Wanted to get her appointed a federal judge. Everybody was scrambling around about how to reach Doug McCarron, because he had a very special relationship with Dianne Feinstein, and especially her husband. They served on the same boards and had been longtime friends. So I said—

09-00:29:38

Rubens: Her husband, meaning?

09-00:29:40

Sickler: Dianne Feinstein's husband.

09-00:29:40

Rubens: Oh, Richard Blum.

09-00:29:43

Sickler: So I said, "Look, I know Doug. I'm willing to make a phone call if you want." He said, "Yeah, go ahead." I put a call in. I had Doug's cell phone, so I called him on his cell phone, and I got a call right back, and he was in Europe, and explained to me he was in Europe, so I explained to him what we wanted. He said, "Sure. I'd be more than happy to help any way I could." I know he did.

09-00:30:10

Rubens: Let's get in gear. The way I thought we might talk about working for the State Building Trades is, what was your assessment of them when you started out? Danny had asked the question about weren't they—

09-00:30:26

Sickler: My assessment of Bob Balgenorth was extremely high. I thought he was a talented, smart visionary leader. In terms of the State Building Trades Council, very high on Bob. I had good relationships with a lot of the Building Trades guys, especially in Los Angeles. I'd worked with them. They had seen my work politically. I was on a very cordial basis with them, even though some of them, I politically was much farther left than they were. But I had good relationships. I don't know of too many of them that I had a bad relationship with, other than Dick Slawson, when he was running the L.A.

Building Trades Council. Matter of fact, just a little side note about his and my relationship. On the first day I was on the job, I was taking a plane over to Las Vegas to study a Building Trades organizing project there in Las Vegas. It was unique, because it was put together by all of the international building trade unions, and it was to organize all of the building trades construction work they couldn't in Las Vegas. I was interested to go in and study it and look at the components and how it was working and all of that, and then bring back to Los Angeles whatever was working and see if we couldn't replicate whatever new was going on there that I didn't know about.

I was excited about going over there. Just as I'm getting ready to get on the plane, I get a call from Dick Slawson, and he says, "I need to talk to you. This is really important." I said, "Dick, I'm getting on a plane. Can I call you as soon as I land?" We fly into Vegas. I get the rental car. On my way over to the Building Trades headquarters, I call him on my cell phone. He starts right away. He could have knocked me over with a feather. He says, "I have a problem with your title." I said, "You have a problem with my title?" I wanted to say, "Are you having trouble spelling it or what's the problem?" I started laughing. I said, "Uh, okay. What's the problem?" He said, "It looks like I work for you." I said, "It does?" I said, "I thought it was Southern Regional Director of the State Building Trades Council. Isn't that the title you're looking at?" "Yeah, well, it looks like I work for you." I said, "Richard, that's crazy. Why would that look like—?" He said, "People are going to misinterpret." Then I started laughing. I thought this was just ridiculous. I said, "Richard, people get our titles confused all the time. There were people who thought I worked for Jack Henning. There were people who thought Jack Henning was below me. There were people who actually thought I worked for Bill Robertson at the L.A. County Fed. There were people who thought Bill worked for me. People don't know about our structure. People are always going to be confused about that." I said, "Look, if you're smart, why don't you use me? Use me. Use me like a rented mule. My job is to help make you stronger, instead of being confused by titles." He said, "I still don't like it. The media is going to confuse you with me, and they're going to be calling you about my issues." I said, "I don't know how to break this to you, Richard. They always have, and they always will. When I was an AFL-CIO rep, I would get calls from the media about issues that were building trades. I'd refer them to you. When I was regional director of the AFL-CIO, they called me all the time about issues in the building trades, because I was a regional director of all the AFL-CIO unions. When it was a specific issue about the building trades, I either referred them to you or I referred them to Bob Balgenorth." I said, "So come on. That's always going to be the case." "Well, I don't like it."

09-00:35:30

Rubens:

I want to talk about the structure of the State Building Trades. But let me first ask if yours was a new position? In fact, was that—

09-00:35:41

Sickler: Yes, it was a brand-new position.

09-00:35:44

Rubens: Now what about the structure?

09-00:35:0047

Sickler: You want the entire structure from the national down?

09-00:35:48

Rubens: Yes.

09-00:35:50

Sickler: The National Building Trades Council is very unique within the American AFL-CIO labor movement. There's no other body like the Building Trades for specific industries. The Building Trades Department has its own constitution and is in charge of all of the state feds and local Building Trades labor councils. The national Building Trades holds those charters. In other words, if there is a problem with—let's say the L.A. Building Trades Council is screwing up and there's something wrong with the books, the national Building Trades can put that into trusteeship. They control it. Under the state AFL-CIO, the central labor councils are not subservient to the s. They're subservient to the national, but they have a working relationship. The State Building Trades just works basically on state and national issues. The local building trades are responsible for issues within their jurisdiction, within their county or counties. Some building trade councils have more than one county. May have three or four, especially as you go up north. They're kind of responsible for politics, local politics and county politics, and the state, of course, is in charge of state issues.

09-00:37:17

Rubens: Theoretically, we can understand that he thought another layer of administration was coming in, because there was now a regional director.

09-00:37:28

Sickler: Yes, but he wouldn't have to answer to me.

09-00:37:29

Rubens: I understand that. That I understand completely. What I was going to ask, then, if there was a difference—I know in the state of California, I think, wasn't there about fifteen affiliates that made up the—

09-00:37:43

Sickler: Yes, although—

09-00:37:44

Rubens: Was that the same at the national level?

09-00:37:46

Sickler: Yeah, the same at the national level, although, in reality, there were only at one—I think even now—thirteen. Because the Carpenters pulled out,

Operating Engineers pulled out, and for a while, the Laborers had pulled out. We were down to about twelve or thirteen.

09-00:38:06

Beagle: A lot of per capita. That's a lot of money.

09-00:38:08

Sickler: Big per capita unions were out, yeah. It hit the State Building Trades hard; it hit the national Building Trades hard.

09-00:38:18

Rubens: But it was the same national as well as state and then local, obviously. Who were the biggest players, and were they different at the national scene than in the state scene?

09-00:38:29

Sickler: If you look at the Laborers, just in terms of sheer numbers, they have probably more members. If you look at unions that dominate their industry, the Operating Engineers dominate their industry. In many areas of the country, the Ironworkers dominate the industry, like Los Angeles and San Francisco. It's hard to find a building going up anywhere without union ironworkers on it, and bridges, that kind of stuff. Highway construction is about 95 percent organized. Building trades. That's Operating Engineers. Laborers, Carpenters. I think that's the major construction unions.

09-00:39:09

Rubens: But did that mean the heads of those trades were necessarily the most powerful within the council, or were some more laid back and just let it alone, and others were aspiring for—

09-00:39:23

Sickler: If they were active, those were powerful unions per capita and they have a lot of political juice, because you'll see a lot of these guys not only participate through the councils politically; they participate on their own. We have two lobbyists in Sacramento at the State Building Trades Council. But every big construction union has its own lobbyist. We have a number of them that use the same consulting firms. We had a guy that worked for us by the name of Scott Wetch. He was the lobbyist for the State Building Trades Council. He left and went to work for another lobbying firm, and then that guy retired, and so now he runs it, and he represents at least five or six big statewide building trade unions. Lobbies for them on a daily basis. But even those unions will have their own lobbyists, or people they send up to Sacramento to lobby.

09-00:40:27

Rubens: What about the culture of working for the building trades, compared to what it was with the AF L-CIO?

09-00:40:36

Sickler: In a lot of ways, I think the building trades are more active and bring more to the fight than a lot of the other unions, a lot of the other bigger unions, like

SEIU, for example. I can tell you times when we've had political campaigns. When the building trades would outnumber SEIU and the other unions with turning people out to walk precincts and phone bank, would outnumber them ten to one. Because they would not only bring their own members, they would bring their apprentices. They would take over the whole room and make phone calls. I found them to be more disciplined. These guys would show up. When you look at it, building trades guys have to go through four or five years of apprenticeship training. They really have to be dedicated to become a journey person at a craft. That takes a lot of self-discipline. There's more daily contact between a union member and the union hall than in almost any other kind of industry, because building trades people don't work for the same employer over and over again. They may work for one contractor for three months and then they're on to another contractor. The most stability they have in their life, in terms of their employment, is their union. That's where they get their job through the hiring hall. Their benefits are monitored by the union. That's where they get their healthcare, that's where they get their pension. All of that is monitored. All their hours, their travel cards, their out-of-work cards. All that stuff is monitored by the union. With most of the building trade guys, it's a very close relationship with the local union. When the business manager puts out a letter, it's taken really serious by a construction worker.

09-00:42:36

Rubens:

You had made perhaps an offhand comment when we were previously talking about the transition for you, that despite what had happened in the last two years, year and a half, at the AFL-CIO, you still thought it was just one of the greatest jobs you had.

09-00:42:53

Sickler:

It was.

09-00:42:54

Rubens:

But when you went to work for the trades, it was like working with grown-ups. I didn't know what you meant by that.

09-00:43:03

Sickler:

It was like going to work for adults, especially the last months, year and some months that I spent with the Sweeney administration. Some of the stuff that I saw was just—

09-00:43:19

Rubens:

It just seemed childish and—

09-00:43:20

Sickler:

Childish and bizarre.

09-00:43:21

Rubens:

I get it. You talked just a little bit about what the functions of each level were of the trades, but how do you start talking about what was going on in the

industry in general? Particularly where you were now going to lay down your trade.

09-00:43:44

Sickler:

There was an all-out attempt to destroy the building trade unions by the associated building contractors. We referred to them as the ABC. This is an anti-union organization that non-union construction, developers and contractors pay into. They have full-time staff. That staff's job is just to destroy building trades, and that is to block project labor agreements and prevailing wage and to block any kind of union construction at all. They fight you on several levels, and they're everywhere. They're at the national level, they're at the state level heavily, and they're at the local level. If there's a school district that's getting ready to build a new school, you'll find the ABC there. They usually get there before we do, and they start hammering on school board members not to go union. They'll put together all kinds of propaganda, slick DVDs, printed material, talking about the horrors of getting sucked in by a union and how horrible it will be and how much there will be a cost overrun if they go with the union. This was part of my job, by the way, when Bob hired me, was to educate the councils, the central labor councils and the affiliates, about how important it was to stay on top of that. If you had school districts in your counties, watch them like a hawk, because if there's money being allocated for a new school, you need to get there early and you need to get there often, because if you don't, the ABC will be there, and they'll start talking about how awful the union is. By the time you find out there's actually going to be a vote on it, it may be too late, because these people have already been indoctrinated by the ABC and have already been turned off. Our folks need to know that almost all of these school board people know zero about building trades, about construction, and about building trade unions.

09-00:45:57

Rubens:

May have already been prejudiced because of dealing with teachers unions.

09-00:46:01

Sickler:

Very likely. But also because most of them take these positions because they're interested in school and curriculum and making sure that the school is run properly for their kids. The last thing they think of when they run for these positions is, oh, good, I get to vote on construction. But it's a huge issue. Matter of fact, when Gray Davis had appointed me to sit on the State Allocation Board, he whispered in my ear, "I want \$300 million a month sent out there for schools." We had gone sixteen years without building schools in this state. The one thing he never used in his campaign when they recalled him was the great job he did at building schools statewide. I was on the front row of that, so I know how much money and how important it was to him that we get that out there. But because I was allocating that kind of money out there, I knew first where the money was going, so I would call our building trade councils and say, "Look, you've got dollars coming your way. We just

allocated that money. Get to those school boards and talk to those school board members.”

09-00:47:22

Rubens: When did you get on that board?

09-00:47:27

Sickler: Right after Gray got elected, he appointed me.

09-00:47:34

Rubens: He announces it at a general meeting of your—

09-00:47:39

Sickler: It was a legislative reception; he announced it there.

09-00:47:45

Rubens: I had the quote, which I can't find.

09-00:47:48

Sickler: I loved that board. I felt really good about being on that board, because we were pushing a lot of money into areas that needed new schools. That was great.

09-00:48:00

Rubens: Was that any of Balgenorth's doing?

09-00:48:10

Sickler: Oh, sure, yeah. Bob was busy doing all that stuff. Not just that position, but hundreds of other positions in state government where we needed our people to be placed.

09-00:48:24

Rubens: We'll get to some more of that. This is coming off of this general question about what kind of changes are taking place in the industry in general. Is there consolidation of these construction companies? Are they getting bigger, or is it—how do you characterize them?

09-00:48:41

Sickler: There are big ones, but there are general contractors then. I haven't seen that much change. I think what has changed a lot, and one of the reasons we wanted the Academy, is change is mandated by Prop 32, which was the environmental bill, reducing the carbon footprint. So there's a lot more solar being built. We wanted to be on the front end of that. There's changes in material that's being used. The UA [United Association], the plumber's union, one of the leaders right out there, cutting-edge stuff, working close with industry on how to redesign entire buildings, skyscrapers, to make them environmentally-friendly. Recycling water, and planting grass and stuff on roofs, and making buildings a lot more energy-efficient.

09-00:49:52

Rubens: What about prisons? That was one of the biggest growth industries for a while.

09-00:49:58

Sickler: I think that's one of the things California really has to feel ashamed about. We've privatized prisons in this state. It's a privatized, profit-making business. In order for the prison industry to make money, they have to have a lot more product, which means prisoners. They're very interested in getting these people elected that want to put people in jail, in prisons.

09-00:50:26

Rubens: But building these things had to have been a tremendous amount of work for your people.

09-00:50:30

Sickler: It goes back to what Samuel Gompers said. We'd rather build schools than jails. That's the way we feel. I don't know of anybody that's happy building a prison. We'd rather build schools.

09-00:50:44

Rubens: There were a lot of prisons going in.

09-00:50:46

Sickler: Yes, it was a growth industry in this state for a long time. But you've got to shame on three strikes. That loaded up prisons. Ridiculous. Putting kids in prison for smoking marijuana.

09-00:51:03

Rubens: The whole social-political issue is a big deal, but I'm wondering how that growth industry affected your council.

09-00:51:13

Sickler: I don't know that we got that much work out of it, to tell you the truth. I don't know that many guys that were actually working on prisons.

09-00:51:21

Rubens: Maybe more in Northern California, too.

09-00:51:23

Sickler: I'm hopeful that they didn't even go out looking for it, in my opinion.

09-00:51:29

Rubens: You're talking about some of the changes that are going on in the industry, and then it seems to me one of the biggest changes was the workforce that you had—

09-00:51:37

Beagle: Can I ask a question about some of the processes of the work? How did you learn that stuff? Did you have to learn about construction technology, about how projects were built, about just how things worked?

09-00:51:54

Sickler:

Yes and no. I grew up in a construction household. My first exposure to work was construction work. As a matter of fact, I had to help my dad on weekends.

09-00:52:07

Rubens:

Yeah, you told us great stories about—

09-00:52:11

Sickler:

In my ear, I still—“Get your shoes on. You’re going with me.” That meant you were going to go work construction all day. I was around him in construction. That was my early indoctrination. There’s a lot to learn about industrial construction, and one of the best ways to learn about it was through the health and safety project that we put together. We had grants to put on safety programs. We had full-time staff, and that’s all they did.

09-00:52:46

Rubens:

Now you’re talking about once you were with the State Building Trades?

09-00:52:50

Sickler:

The State Building Trades. Yeah, with the State Building Trades Council. You learned a lot about construction by just dealing with the safety hazards in construction. Material and scaffolding and all that kind of stuff. It’s very basic. Falls caused most of the death and injury to construction workers. You’ve got to sit down with different unions, and they’ll talk to you about their work, what it’s like.

09-00:53:24

Beagle:

Did people object to you coming to work with the Building Trades because you weren’t really a construction guy, or was that not an issue?

09-00:53:32

Sickler:

I guess it wasn’t an issue. Part of it was that I was so well-known. I came out here in ’76, and so I didn’t go to work for the Building Trades until ’97. I had worked side by side with almost everybody around the table, for years, sometimes decades..

09-00:54:54

Rubens:

How much were you dealing with inter-jurisdictional disputes? What did that look like?

09-00:55:11

Sickler:

We don’t deal with it. We do not deal with it. All that stuff has to be dealt with at the top level. The international presidents have to work that stuff out. They would not tolerate working it out at the local level, nor should they.

09-00:55:54

Rubens:

We can fill it in.

09-00:55:56

Sickler: God, I've got a mental block. Close friends with me. He played a key role in the immigration project. He let me have the entire bottom floor of his union hall, Laborers—

09-00:56:10

Carole Sickler: Mike Quevedo.

09-00:56:12

Sickler: Mike Quevedo, who is the business manager of the Laborers District Council for Southern California. A terrific human being, and totally agreed with our project. The funding that I was supposed to get from the feds got hung up at the state level. I was approved for \$3 million in what INS called QDE funding, which was funding for CBOs, community-based organizations that were going to do this processing work for amnesty for undocumented workers.

09-00:56:48

Rubens: What is QDE?

09-00:56:50

Sickler: QDE, Qualified Designated Entity, is what the INS called them. I'd asked the AFL-CIO to let me apply for that. They did. We put it under the umbrella of the L.A. County Federation of Labor, structure-wise, and then I was able to get a grant of \$3 million. That money was sent to the governor and then the state had to allocate it down the pipeline to the QDEs. Because we had Pete Wilson, who was a very hostile Republican governor, he sat on the money and wouldn't release it. In the meantime, the clock is ticking on getting these people through the pipeline. So I went ahead and ramped up. I got space. Armando brought the carpenter apprentices in and completely redid the bottom part down there where we were going to process people. I hired a bunch of teachers. At one point, I had 113 teachers teaching ESL classes. I had no money to pay people. I was pushing the panic button. I was in Sacramento and they were going to strike me, but I'd done a very smart thing. In opposition to what my boss wanted me to do, I went to OPEIU and I negotiated a contract with OPEIU for my staff, so my staff was unionized. My boss was saying, "You're going to regret the day you did that. You're going to regret it. That's going to come back to haunt you. It's going to be like these damn staff unions." They saved my ass. Folks want to strike me, because they hadn't had a paycheck going on three weeks. So I called Gwen Newton, who's international vice president of OPEIU, and I said, "Gwen, I've got a problem. I've got a problem with your members, my staff. They want to strike." She says, "Yeah, you son of a bitch. Now I know why you wanted them unionized." I said, "Come on, I need your help." She went over and kept them from striking. Through Jack Henning and Willie Brown, we were able to loosen up the valve, and then they sent somebody down to work with us.

09-00:59:06

Rubens: That's an interesting story.

09-00:59:07

Sickler: Yeah, true story.

09-00:59:08

Beagle: How did they loosen up the valve? How did that work?

09-00:59:11

Sickler: Willie Brown worked his magic. That's the finest politician that ever lived, was Willie Brown. He made Bill Clinton look like a rookie. More than once did I go to Willie Brown and he worked his magic and made it happen.

09-00:59:29

Rubens: We've reached the end of this tape. Maybe we ought to stop and take a break and pick that up. Because you must have some examples of that, and we might just say a few of those.

09-00:59:39

Sickler: I have one other example that I think is good.

09-00:59:45

Rubens: Let me just change the tape.

Audio File 10

10-00:00:01

Rubens: You mentioned the money that had come down through the—

10-00:00:04

Sickler: Yeah, the INS allocated a certain amount of money to each CBO that was designated. The biggest CBO that we worked with, that we actually copied their model, was the Catholic Charities of Southern California, but it was a faulty program, and it imploded on them. We had to stop what we were doing, we saw what happened to them, and we had to retool. We redesigned our process, our intake process and the whole process. We had to reconfigure it.

10-00:00:42

Beagle: What was wrong?

10-00:00:44

Sickler: It was too many people at one time, and it just choked up the system, and it just wasn't working, so we had to pare it down and kind of string it out and allow more time for each person going through the system. It was just too much. It just choked the system down. It just got out of hand, and people got frustrated and angry at the Catholic Church, and they were just leaving, kind of in droves. Which was dangerous, because every shyster on the planet was putting out a shingle that they would help these people process for citizenship. In many cases, they would charge them \$5,000. to \$15,000 a head. We were charging \$75. But they would take their paperwork, and these immigrants had to produce a paper trail of ten years of living in the United States before they could be even considered for amnesty and citizenship. That was a tough call

for a lot of our staff, because immigrants spend a lot of time destroying a paper trail. They don't want any linkage to them. Trying to fabricate that stuff, put it back together, was challenging for a lot of our paralegal staff. It just took more time than anybody thought it would, especially the Catholic Church. When that thing imploded and we saw what happened to them, it was happening to us on a much smaller scale.

10-00:02:14

Rubens: When you say "us," you mean CIWA?

10-00:02:19

Sickler: Prior to CIWA, it was called LIAP, Labor's Immigrant Assistance Project. That was just dedicated to processing people for amnesty and citizenship. That was comprised of paralegals, of course office help, teachers, that kind of stuff.

10-00:02:41

Rubens: When we took a break, you had mentioned how Willie Brown was just a genius, just a political genius, and he had helped get this money loosened. I realized, boy, while we talked about when you were regional director, we didn't talk about if you had any specific relationship with Willie.

10-00:03:00

Sickler: My relationship with Willie was usually through Jack Henning, because Jack had this amazing relationship with Willie. Whenever I got a problem where I need Willie's help or anything with the state, I'd call on Jack. I have to say, Jack was wonderful. He would respond immediately. He'd set up a meeting between Willie and Jack and myself, and then I would tell what the problem was, and then Willie would seem to know instantly the solution. What to do.

10-00:03:34

Rubens: Can you give an example of—

10-00:03:37

Sickler: After he corrected the problem that I had with Pete Wilson and releasing the funding to process these folks, the chancellor of the UC system wanted to destroy, eliminate, the labor center at Berkeley and the labor center in Los Angeles. Especially the one in Berkeley was in trouble in those days, because the labor center really didn't have much of a relationship with the labor movement. Of course, this was Jack's baby. Jack Henning established those labor centers. He did. He was outraged when I told him they were going after the Berkeley Labor Center to kill. It's primarily Berkeley, but they also were eyeballing L.A. L.A. had a terrific labor center.

10-00:05:27

Rubens: Terrific, yeah. Very different than Cal.

10-00:05:30

Sickler: Even prior to Kent Wong, there was a lot of labor support for it. Anyway, Jack put together an emergency meeting with Willie. I was in Berkeley, then I drove all the way over to Sacramento for a meeting. Jack met me over there

the next day and told Willie, and Willie put together a meeting with the chancellor. The chancellor wouldn't show up, but he sent some of his people. Willie goes in the meeting, and Willie was pissed off because the chancellor wasn't there. Willie didn't mince any words. He said, "Gentlemen, just let me put it this way. If there's not going to be any money for the labor centers, I'm going to have a hard time justifying any money for your universities. Okay? Take that word back to your chancellor." Magically, the money appeared.

10-00:06:28

Rubens:

Then they did some reorganization. Something about they were linked, the two were linked. I don't recall. We could fill that in if we needed to. He just cut through things, didn't he?

10-00:06:41

Sickler:

He did. He did. He cut through things. We used him, even after that, for some other things. I forget what. He was an amazing guy.

10-00:06:51

Rubens:

All right, so back to working with the State Building Trades. There were a couple of things I wanted to follow up with before we move on. The jurisdictional disputes being the bane of the building trades, you had said that most of it was handled at the national level, and nor should it be handled at the local level. Why do you say that?

10-00:07:19

Sickler:

If you're talking about written agreements on jurisdiction, it will probably never happen at the local level, and it shouldn't, because you obligate the rest of that trade and craft, nationwide, to that kind of an agreement. It sets a precedent. It's a problem. It has to be worked out between the international presidents, because if it's not, you can't—first of all, we don't have any legal authority to call these unions in and set them down and tell them they're working outside their jurisdiction, because almost every one of them is going to point to someplace in their union, in their craft, where they have historical presence in that work of some kind or another. It's really convoluted. It gets as crazy as a laborer driving a forklift on a construction site that normally is covered under an operating engineer's contract, and they'll shut the whole site down to get that labor off the forklift. It gets that insane. It's stupid.

10-00:08:30

Beagle:

Let me just posit something to you. Your job is actually political. Right? You want the Laborers and Carpenters, for example, to work together—

10-00:08:42

Sickler:

Side by side.

10-00:08:42

Rubens:

—particular campaign without belly-aching about who's doing whose work. But in that, let's say in that same congressional district, there's a school going up where the carpenter business agent is all over the laborer about something

or other. Were you able to transcend that? Were these unions able to transcend that, just get past them? That's jurisdiction, this is politics— different issues.

10-00:09:06

Sickler:

Quick answer is yes. They wouldn't talk to each other when we brought them in the same room for a political campaign. I'd bring them in and ask them to bring all their members and their apprentices in. We'd get them in the same room. The Carpenters would be on the far right side. The sheet metal workers and the IBEW would be over on the left side, glaring at each other, but they'd be in the same room.

10-00:09:30

Rubens:

Doing the same thing, making the same phone calls or whatever.

10-00:09:32

Sickler:

That's right. When we said, "Okay, go get them, guys," and we gave them their walk sheets and their precincts and all that stuff, they're out the door and they're gone, and they work. They work hard. They may hate each other and they don't want to be in the same room, but they were. I've got to say, for the most part, the building trade councils do a good job, because they have to balance those relationships every day.

10-00:09:55

Beagle:

At the county level.

10-00:09:56

Sickler:

Yeah, at the county level. They have to deal with it every day. There are politics at the county level every single day that affect all of them. You don't want to elect an enemy of project labor agreements. The Carpenters don't like project labor agreements, because it deals with jurisdiction, so they'll opt out more often than not. But the other trades love project labor agreements, because once they get an agreement on the work—and that's the first thing that's agreed to, is the scope of work, what they call a scope of work—then the crafts sit down and hammer out who's going to get what kind of work. You do that on the front end of the job. That's why everybody likes project agreements, because you can eliminate a lot of this jurisdictional crap with project labor agreements. You have the fight before the project starts.

10-00:10:53

Beagle:

Just so you understand, a project labor agreement is saying there will be no jurisdictional beefs on this—

10-00:11:01

Rubens:

I understand that. Is that agreement being worked out at the national level? Are national reps coming out—

10-00:11:06

Sickler:

That's done at the local level. Some of it's done at the state level, if it's a state project. For example, we had Cogent Power power plants, being built statewide after the deregulation of energy in the state. We knew that if we

didn't jump on top of that, that all of that stuff would be non-union, because Duke Energy and Enron were coming in. We knew that was all going to be non-union. Bob, working with some of the affiliates, and they asked him to chair it, put together a program called CURE, Coalition of Unions for Reliable Energy, it was called. Their job was to organize all of those power plants, and they did. About 99 percent of them were organized. That's where we sat down, and then everybody hammered out what work was going to be done and who was going to do it, and then we negotiated those project labor agreements with the big utilities.

10-00:12:14

Rubens:

That's where I was trying to get at. This is effectively working out jurisdictional disputes at a local level.

10-00:12:21

Sickler:

Project labor agreements. But if you don't have a project labor agreement, then—

10-00:12:26

Rubens:

I understand that. Where does that structure of project labor agreements come from? Is that regulation?

10-00:12:35

Sickler:

No. It was born out of the Depression. It actually got born with Hoover Dam. That was such a big national project, and it was out of the Depression. Roosevelt wanted no labor disputes on that project. He sat everybody down and said, "We're going to have a project labor agreement. We want everybody to agree that, for the life of this project, there be no disruption in the building of it." That was one of the very first.

10-00:13:16

Beagle:

In exchange for that, it's going to be 100 percent union?

10-00:13:20

Sickler:

A hundred percent union and a guarantee of no strikes. Couldn't strike for any reason. Once you sign that agreement, you can't strike. You've got to go all the way through. It was a value to everybody. It was a value to the federal government, it was a value to the contractors, it was a value to the workers. Everybody profited from it. That was a positive experience, and then it went on from there. The more especially government uses project labor agreements, the more they like them. Because, believe it or not, they satisfy the budget better than not having a project labor agreement, because the union signs off and agrees to the amount of wages that are going to be paid, and benefits and the rest of it, and the contractor signs off on what the cost is going to be. That's nailed down before you.

10-00:14:14

Rubens:

The whole thing is rationalized.

- 10-00:14:18
Sickler: There's a very limited number of what they call change orders that have to be done on a project labor agreement. That stuff is pretty well thought-through. If there needs to be some cushion built into it to allow for possible changes, they do that on the front end of the project instead of the back end of the project.
- 10-00:14:37
Beagle: Did you ever work with an attorney named Sandra Benson?
- 10-00:14:41
Sickler: No, I haven't.
- 10-00:14:47
Beagle: Wasn't she instrumental in project labor agreements? Wasn't she important in negotiating a lot of that stuff?
- 10-00:14:56
Sickler: She's out of the north. I didn't work with her at all.
- 10-00:15:32
Rubens: Let's talk a little bit about changes in the workforce. We've talked quite a bit about immigrants, but what about women? Weren't women coming into the—
- 10-00:15:41
Sickler: Yeah. Here's the interesting thing. This is where Bob was visionary again. Bob wanted to recruit women into the building trades, so he hired someone you know very well, Debra Chaplin. Matter of fact, when she left *We Do The Work*, I told Bob. He was talking about what he needed in terms of a grant writer. He wanted to get somebody to help put together a women's project, and I said, "Debra Chaplin is available. You should talk to her."
- 10-00:16:17
Rubens: When are we talking about? Is it right when you're starting?
- 10-00:16:21
Sickler: No. Actually, you were there when I had the conversation with Bob that morning for breakfast.
- 10-00:16:25
Carole Sickler: It was a little while.
- 10-00:16:27
Sickler: Yeah, it's been a while. Whenever it was Debra left *We Do The Work*, or California—
- 10-00:16:33
Beagle: I want to say early nineties.
- 10-00:16:36
Sickler: No, it was after that. Because I didn't even go to work for the Building Trades until '97. But I don't think it was too long after that.

10-00:16:45

Rubens: 2000 maybe.

10-00:16:46

Sickler: Probably early 2000. Anyway, Bob wanted to establish this women's department for the Building Trades, and did, and it's quite successful. It's so successful, the national Building Trades wanted a part of it, and so they've teamed up. They've joined with the California Women's Department of the Building Trades, and they have a yearly conference just for women. It started out just women in California. Then it expanded. Once it joined up with the national, it became women nationwide. Now we've got women coming from other countries.

10-00:17:29

Carole Sickler: It's huge. They get a huge—

10-00:17:32

Sickler: Seven, eight hundred women at these conferences now, with great stories. Then Bob produced great videos about women coming into the building trades, testimonials, and set up training for women. How to report sexual abuse on the job, what their rights were on the job. Education for men. The journeyman and the apprentice on how to take care of women and not violate their rights, because if you do, you're not going to get protection from the union. You're going to be prosecuted by the union as well. It's been wonderful.

10-00:18:16

Rubens: Were there certain trades where women were coming in more easily and being accepted more easily?

10-00:18:21

Sickler: Kind of across the board. Ironically, some of the trades are the hardest trades to work in, like cement masons. I was amazed at how many women went through cement mason training, pouring concrete and finishing concrete.

10-00:18:40

Carole Sickler: IBEW.

10-00:18:41

Sickler: IBEW, yeah. I had hired a young girl, Jan Whetsone, who had been injured on the job as a journey person electrician. We had gotten a grant for \$300,000 from Jack O'Connell, from the superintendent of education then.

10-00:19:02

Carole Sickler: Jack O'Connell.

10-00:19:03

Sickler: Jack O'Connell. Just to reach out to inner-city school kids, mainly targeting black kids, trying to keep them out of gangs, because the percentage of black kids that were not even graduating was like 80 percent not graduating. These

were kids that saw no future for themselves in school whatsoever. We thought if we could reach these black kids and tell them, “Look, you don’t have to go on to college to have a decent life and a career. You can go into construction. But if you’re going to go into construction, you have to have some math. If you’re going to be an electrician, you have to have a little algebra. If you’re going to be a carpenter, you’ve got to have some geometry. These are things it’s important to know now so you can get qualified and get into an apprenticeship program and make a good living.” This gal, Jan Whetsone, she came out of the hood. She was a hood girl, South L.A. She knew exactly how to approach these kids in the schools. She would go in. She was an African American woman.

10-00:20:12

Carole Sickler: Very, very young. She was in her early twenties.

10-00:20:14

Sickler: Yeah, she was in her early twenties. She was young. She knew the language. She and I cut through the bullshit and all that stuff. She tells one story about how she rescued this one little fifteen-year-old kid that wanted to be a gang-banger. He was just ready to get fully immersed into the gang and drop out of school. She took him and some other kids out to visit with the electrical lineman on the job. So she pulls up, and here’s these big four-wheel-drive pickup trucks with, she calls it, bling all over them. They’ve got the spotlights and all this stuff. Some of these guys are African American guys, but they’re linemen. They climb the poles. That’s pretty macho stuff. This kid is watching them work, and then the guys climb down and talk to the kids. There’s this black lineman talking to this fifteen-year-old kid about, yeah, he’s got a truck and he’s got this and he’s got that, and he goes here and he goes there. The kid gets back in the van—

10-00:21:25

Carole Sickler: He told him how much he made a year.

10-00:21:27

Sickler: Yeah, he told the kid how much money he makes a year. So Jan is driving the kid back after they’re all done, and the kid is kind of sulking by the window, looking out the window, and she’s thinking, you’re probably turned off on all this stuff. So she says, “What are you thinking?” He says, “I’m thinking I’m a chump.” He says, “I want to be a lineman.”

10-00:21:55

Rubens: Is this one of your initiatives? How does this—

10-00:21:58

Sickler: No, this was Bob’s initiative. This was something Bob wanted to do. I think Debra applied for the grant and got this \$300,000 grant to reach out to these kids.

10-00:22:07

Rubens: I never thought about school districts giving grants to unions. .

10-00:22:12

Sickler: It wasn't the district. It was the superintendent's office.

0-00:22:17

Rubens: But he can do that?

10-00:22:19

Sickler: Evidently. I didn't know he could, but I guess he had that kind of money discretion to do, because we got enough money to do it in the South, and we had enough money to do it in the North. We picked up an African American woman out of the ironworkers who was a terrific woman. Her son was a professional baseball player, pretty famous. I forgot his name. Anyway, I went up and spent two whole days training them on how to talk and give speeches and that kind of stuff, and get people involved in discussions and all that stuff. They went out and just did a fantastic job, because they could represent the trade and they could relate—

10-00:23:02

Rubens: The goal is to bring them, then, into the trades apprentice program?

10-00:23:06

Sickler: Yeah, and to get them to stay in school and pick up some skills that they could use. These kids had never thought twice about having to have math skills to make it. All the things a kid learns in school, probably some of the most important is picking up some math skills, because it's needed in a lot of different things, but especially in the trades. You need to know that stuff.

10-00:23:35

Rubens: There's that great civil rights organizer, Bob Moses.

10-00:23:38

Sickler: Oh, sure.

10-00:23:39

Rubens: He created and runs the Algebra Project, specifically to enhance students' skills.

10-00:23:43

Sickler: That's right. He's right. He's on the money.

10-00:23:49

Rubens: What an interesting program. Is it still going on?

10-00:23:51

Sickler: No, no. We blew through the \$300,000, and then unfortunately it was over. We couldn't get refunded.

10-00:23:57

Rubens: Debra's stuff is still going on.

10-00:23:58

Sickler: Oh, yeah. Oh my God, yeah. That's huge. That's bigger than ever.

10-00:24:27

Beagle: In terms of encouraging the Building Trades affiliates to bring women in, there was a good relationship there, I'm assuming?

10-00:24:35

Sickler: Yes. And blacks. When I went to work, one of the reasons Antonio wanted me to come to work for him was to increase the number of African Americans in the apprenticeship program. Because one of the places where he really caught a lot of hell when he was running for mayor was why aren't there any African Americans doing construction work on city projects in African American communities? Why is it we drive down the street and just see Latinos and white guys? You're not hiring any African Americans. We went from an average of, I think, 6 percent African Americans, on average, in the Building Trades apprenticeship programs in Los Angeles area, to one point where we had 18 percent. We made that big a jump in a couple of years. Of course, the recession hit us in the ass about that time, and then it scrambled. But we'd made a significant jump.

10-00:25:44

Beagle: How did you do that?

10-00:25:47

Sickler: Hard fingernail work. We reached right out into the community, went right deep into the community. Had meeting after meeting with the ministers, the religious community. Had meeting after meeting with the Building Trades. Some of the Building Trades got really pissed at me. We had done, previous to my going to work for Antonio through Larry Frank and myself and Peter Olney, I was the chair of the UCLA Labor Advisory Committee, and Peter was working as assistant state director of the institute. Larry was staff director for the UCLA Labor Center. When we put that institute together—remember when we got that six million bucks to put the institute together for the state? We had enough money to do a study about how our apprenticeship programs were constituted in the state of California.

10-00:26:44

Beagle: You're no longer working for Balgenorth. You're now at water and power?

10-00:26:54

Sickler: No, Starting in September of 2005 I was working for Antonio.

I was working for the Building Trades when we started the studies on how apprenticeship programs—what the ethnic breakdown was in all of our apprenticeship programs. But we had to do it apples versus apples, not apples, and oranges, so we studied the school district statewide. We found it ran the

gamut from 13 percent African Americans in sheet metal, way down to the ironworkers were one of the lowest. The net average was 6 percent. The population of African Americans in Los Angeles was around 11 percent. We were significantly low in terms of what the population was. Dick Slawson would say to you, "We don't discriminate. Blacks are free to come in and join us any day of the week." I countered, "Yeah, but you've got to put a 'Welcome' sign on the front door, and you've got to kind of build a little road so they can get here without having to hire a helicopter to come in." We had a significant disagreement. Anyway, when the study came back, I was interested. I called the Sheet Metal workers and I said, "How is it you guys come in at 13 percent African American apprentices?" It was Roy Ringwood. Roy says, "Simple. I made an African American my apprenticeship coordinator. That's one of his jobs, bring in more African Americans." He hired some African American coordinators under him. That makes sense. So I knew it was possible, that we could do that. We could bump it up.

Here's the interesting thing, and I don't know whether we want to put this in print or not. I used a hammer. The guys really wanted project labor agreements. They had gotten only one project labor agreement under [mayor James] Hahn the whole time Hahn was in there. The Building Trades backed him when he first ran, and then they backed him again when he ran against Antonio [Villaraigosa]. All they ever got out of him was one project labor agreement, and that wasn't done by the so-called labor person on the Board of Public Works.

10-00:30:54

Carole Sickler: A particular ethnic group.

10-00:30:55

Sickler: Yes, any particular ethnic group. But if I bring African Americans in to the building trades, and they sign an agreement through a project labor agreement that they're going to target so many different zip codes to pull in, that's not you doing it. That's an agreement between the Building Trades and the contractor.

When I went to Larry Frank and I said, "I'm going to push for project labor agreements," Larry said, "You're crazy, because none of the staff here wants a project labor agreement. They want to do no favors for Slawson. "You want blacks in the building trades? Then there's going to be a project labor agreement. That's the only way it's going to happen. I'm not even going to try. I'll just fold up my tent right now, because it's not going to be possible." So I pulled all the Building Trades guys together. We had a big breakfast meeting. I said, "Look, I'm just going to put this very bluntly. You want project labor agreements, you're going to have to bring up your percentage of African Americans in the apprenticeship." "We do it already! We've got this!" I said, "Okay, here's the facts." I had Amy Dennissen, a sociologist at Cal State Northridge, who did the research for us, come in, and she broke down

the research. Did the whole Power Point presentation. The guys just sat there with their mouths open, and then some of them left the meeting pretty pissed off at me and Amy and Kent Wong and UCLA. Fast forward, we got project labor agreements. We have more project labor agreements in the city of Los Angeles than any other place in the nation right now. Matter of fact, I made a motion when I was commissioner of public works that established an automatic trigger for a project labor agreement once it reached a certain amount, and it passed. City council passed it, everybody passed it. It's the only one of its kind that I know in the nation.

10-00:33:19

Beagle:

Because the project labor agreement was a vehicle for affirmative action in a way that couldn't happen—

10-00:33:25

Sickler:

That's exactly right. I had this great friend. None of this would have happened if it hadn't been for this magnificent African American director of contract administration, who was a genius at putting graphics together that showed instantly the value of the project labor agreement. Not just in bringing African Americans in apprenticeship, but how much money it saved the city. Project labor agreements saved the city millions of dollars.

10-00:34:02

Carole Sickler:

That was John Reamer. He was also a minister.

10-00:34:07

Sickler:

He was a minister, too. An amazing, amazing guy. Once the city council saw the win-win factor with project labor agreements, that they weren't just doing a favor to unions and building trades, so the Republicans would get beat up in their council districts by right-wingers, but they could show they were actually bringing the bacon home and saving taxpayers money with these project labor agreements. It was a win-win deal.

10-00:34:36

Rubens:

What's the process by which you get it to the city council? You conceive this, you—

10-00:34:42

Sickler:

We pass it on our board, and then it has to go to the council, city council. It goes to a particular city council person who has a committee that looks at it. They talk about it. They bring it in, and then they incubate it for a while, and they talk about it. A lot of the stuff had to do with timing, what was the right timing. Then once it became known to be successful, once John was able to present all this stuff on graphics and then back it up with documentation, then the city council people that wanted to own it came out of the woodwork. Everybody wanted to own it. Everybody wanted to be the mommy and daddy of this thing. That became the big feud. We had a lot of problems trying to untangle staff and city council people from each other, get them out of each other's hair so we could move this thing forward. Jan Perry, our city council

person when we lived in L.A., wanted ownership of it, and then the other black councilman, who was the biggest jerk on the planet, Bernard Parks, he wanted ownership of it, and somebody else wanted ownership of it. I was long gone by the time the damn thing went through the city council and finally got signed off on, but I got invited back for the victory lap.

10-00:36:06

Rubens:

For the signing of it. That's great. That is a great story. I want to go just a couple of directions. Maybe this is a step backwards. There was the county Building Trades that was supporting Hahn versus Antonio.

10-00:36:27

Sickler:

So did the L.A. County Fed, too, though.

10-00:36:30

Rubens:

They had that kind of autonomy?

10-00:36:31

Carole Sickler:

That was the second election.

10-00:36:33

Rubens:

But they had that kind of autonomy to support who they wanted politically, even if the state or the national—

10-00:36:38

Sickler:

Yeah, that's right.

10-00:36:39

Rubens:

So in certain areas, they're autonomous, and other areas they're not.

10-00:36:42

Sickler:

That's like I explained to you earlier, the structure. They have their own charter, they have their own council, their own officers.

10-00:36:51

Carole Sickler:

Sometimes they go against the endorsement, which isn't right. Because when Antonio ran the first time, the L.A. County Fed endorsed Antonio, and I guess the State Fed, too, but the Building Trades didn't. Which is not right—

10-00:37:09

Sickler:

Slawson hated Miguel.

10-00:37:14

Rubens:

So they're not going to have their hands slapped by the state, and I don't know what the national is going to do if they're—

10-00:37:21

Sickler:

They've got their own jurisdiction. They have their own body, their own constitution. The only body that could have legally slapped their hands would have been the National Building Trades Council.

- 10-00:37:39
Rubens: What about UCLA? That project sounded fascinating, that study.
- 10-00:37:45
Sickler: The Construction Academy?
- 10-00:37:46
Rubens: When did you first get associated with the UCLA labor center there?
- 10-00:37:55
Sickler: Oh, way, way back.
- 10-00:37:57
Rubens: I know you had met Peter Olney. Did it go before that?
- 10-00:38:02
Sickler: Oh, yeah. I was a member of the UCLA Advisory Board for years. I was probably the chair for at least fifteen years or longer. Maybe twenty. Twenty years, I was chair.
- 10-00:38:17
Rubens: Let's take a step back and just make sure we talk about that. How did you get on the board in the first place?
- 10-00:38:33
Sickler: I had always loved labor centers at universities.
- 10-00:38:37
Rubens: Sure, you talked about Denver.
- 10-00:38:38
Sickler: Yeah, I was trained in Boulder at the university there. I sought out the UCLA Labor Center and I was thrilled to death. Plus, we had a woman that worked for the Los Angeles Orange County Organizing Committee. She left LAOCOC and went to work as a staff person at the UCLA Labor Center. Her name was Gloria Busman. She had a great deal of respect and affection for the organizing committee. Then when I came in, she and I worked together, especially after I became coordinator of the organizing committee. We worked together to put on conferences regarding organizing and other labor issues. I had this very close contact with the labor center from 1977 on.
- 10-00:39:29
Rubens: No kidding. Then you become chair of the advisory board.
- 10-00:39:32
Sickler: I became chair a few years after that. It was a good twenty-some years I was chair of the advisory committee.
- 10-00:39:41
Rubens: What did that mean? What were you literally doing?

10-00:39:44

Sickler: We had quarterly meetings. We'd get reports from the director and the staff about the programs they were running, and then we would talk about programs we felt we needed in the movement.

10-00:39:56

Carole Sickler: The advisory committee was made up of people from all the various—

10-00:40:00

Sickler: The various affiliated local unions. Slawson was on that committee, and we had L.A. Fed people that were on the committee that attended. I would sit down with Kent and some of his staff before the quarterly board meetings—

10-00:40:18

Carole Sickler: I was on it.

10-00:40:20

Sickler: Yes, that's right. I would talk about things that I felt we needed to be looking at, like targeting the bargaining table instead of the ballot box. One of my frustrations with our unions was that when they would go out and organize, they would be targeting the ballot box, just winning the election, without getting the members prepared for the long haul to the bargaining table. Because the most frustrating part for non-union workers is that they think once they vote for the union, that's it, and the next day you get a contract with more wages and you've got benefits and everything else is great. They don't know how hard it is to slog through that first contract. We were having a number of organizing drives that won, and then because the employer drug their heels and fought and drug out the collective bargaining process, they'd go over a year, the members would get so upset that they would file a decertification and just get rid of the union. All that work, all that money, all that effort flew out the window, and we left a bunch of workers with a bad taste in their mouth. I wanted—

10-00:41:35

Rubens: Because they blamed the union for not—

10-00:41:36

Sickler: Of course. Sure.

10-00:41:37

Rubens: Whereas it was the employer that was—

10-00:41:39

Sickler: And I don't blame them, because the union didn't prepare them for what they were going to experience. Instead of educating these workers about what the process was going to take and what they had to go through, they'd just come in and paint this rosy picture of the union, and "Vote for us and we'll take care of your problems." Then, of course, once they voted them in and nothing happened, people really got upset. We wanted a conference to go show these folks the process to go through on how to educate unorganized workers about

this process, and to do their homework so that they could start applying leverage early in the process to get a contract, not just win the damn election. We did a bunch of stuff like that. Immigration. I did a lot of immigration conferences early on, starting in the seventies, about the importance of organizing immigrant workers. In those days, we would bring in priests from the Catholic Church who dealt with immigrants every day, and they'd help educate our organizers on what these people faced and what they needed. I knew the most successful organizers of immigrant workers, and I would build the conference around them so they could actually teach other unions on how they were successful. For example, we had one woman from the Furniture workers who had fifteen organizing wins, election wins, and fifteen contracts in a row.

10-00:43:15

Rubens: You had mentioned her.

10-00:43:16

Sickler: Helen Hernandez. We wanted to show other organizers that it's possible to do this, but you have to follow the same kind of approach and thoughtfulness that they used when they were organizing. All that was done under the umbrella of the organizing committee, in conjunction with the UCLA Labor Center.

10-00:43:39

Rubens: Interesting. The Legacy Project. Does that come along later?

10-00:43:46

Sickler: Which one is that?

10-00:43:56

Rubens: I got a note from a student at UCLA who said he heard I was interviewing you, and he's interested in the Labor Center and wanted to know what the Legacy Project was. I couldn't find anything on it.

10-00:44:06

Sickler: I can check on it with Kent. I can call him and see what it is.

10-00:44:10

Carole Sickler: Wasn't anything you were involved with.

10-00:44:15

Rubens: But, boy. Fifteen years chair.

10-00:44:19

Sickler: At least. Maybe twenty.

10-00:44:20

Rubens: Took you through while you're still with the State Building Trades?

10-00:44:25

Sickler: Yeah.

10-00:44:26

Carole Sickler: The only time you left is when you went to work for the mayor.

10-00:44:30

Sickler: Yes. I had to give it up when I went to work for the mayor.

10-00:44:35

Rubens: Is this something that the AFL likes? They're not feeling it's—

10-00:44:39

Sickler: The AFL-CIO was fine with it. They had no problem with it. We brought Maria Elena Durazo in to replace me as the chair.

10-00:44:49

Rubens: I see. I think we might talk to her, too, because you did work closely with her.

10-00:44:58

Sickler: Oh, sure. I did.

10-00:45:04

Rubens: We have fifteen minutes on this tape. Are there specific legislative efforts that you get engaged with when you're with the State Building Trades? A lot of what the state is doing is legislation and regulation.

10-00:45:22

Sickler: Legislation and a lot of initiatives, and then campaigns. We've got a candidate in some area, some state senator or state assemblyman race that's critical to us, I would get involved and help with that. A lot of the work that I did, believe it or not, was initiatives, propositions on the ballot.

10-00:45:48

Carole Sickler: Two-two-six was—

10-00:45:49

Sickler: Two-two-six was the biggest. That victory against 226 stopped—so-called paycheck protection. Basically what it did was it handcuffed the hands of unions to be able to participate politically. In other words, before you could spend a penny politically, you would have to get written permission from every single union member to spend that portion of dues, which was all bull crap. Union dues weren't spent on politics. We have to keep those funds separate, because the federal government demands we do that. Dues money in a separate account. Political fund is all voluntary contributions from our union members, and so that's what we use. But the law said, before any money from the union could be spent, whether it was earmarked for political uses or not, you had to get the written authorization of every single union member to spend that money. Even if you were able to get authorization from every single union member, the process of getting that signature almost takes you out of the game. By the time you get done with it, it's over with. The red tape just hamstringed you. That's why they wanted to pass that, and there was big national money put into that campaign, and they thought they really had a shot

at winning it, because the polls showed that not only overwhelming majority of workers and union members supported it; 72 percent of union members that were polled when they were asked about this initiative said they supported it and were going to vote yes on it. A lot of our unions threw up their hands and just were going to cave in. They didn't want to fight it. Carpenters were one of them. They were not going to fight it. I got into a big argument with Bill Luddy. "You guys are crazy if you think you're going to fight that and win it." I said, "No, we're going to win it."

10-00:48:01

Carole Sickler: And even Miguel.

10-00:48:02

Sickler: Even Miguel. I had a meeting with Miguel Contreras, and he says, "We're going to lose this." He said, "Every consultant I talk to tell me we're dead in the water on this. We're throwing good money after bad to take it on." I said, "Bullshit, Miguel. We can win this."

10-00:48:20

Rubens: Why were you so convinced?

10-00:48:21

Sickler: I knew, because Pete Wilson was the poster boy for both. He was the poster boy for paycheck protection, and he had just been the poster boy for taking away the eight-hour day. I had just finished a war with him over the eight-hour day. We won that fight, but he was the poster boy for taking—and everybody in the labor movement was aware of the eight-hour-day fight. His face was prominent there. His face was also prominent on the paycheck protection plan. I can't tell you how many meetings I went into, and one of the first things out of my mouth was, "Pete Wilson tried to take your eight-hour day away from you. Now he says he wants to protect your paycheck. You believe him?" "No! No! Fuck no!"

10-00:49:09

Carole Sickler: It's just a matter of educating membership. Not the leadership, but the membership.

10-00:49:17

Sickler: I never had a single union member, not one, and she will tell you, I was gone night and day, every single day, seven days a week.

10-00:49:26

Carole Sickler: I was setting up the meetings.

10-00:49:30

Sickler: I did 111 meetings.

10-00:49:31

Rubens: This was when you were—

10-00:49:33

Sickler: At the Fed.

10-00:49:33

Carole Sickler: I was at the L.A. County Fed.

10-00:49:38

Beagle: You're still at AFL-CIO?

10-00:49:39

Sickler: No, I was with the Building Trades. Regional Director for the Building Trades. I was meeting Sundays.

10-00:49:45

Carole Sickler: But I was working in COPE at the L.A. Fed at that time.

10-00:49:49

Sickler: She's right, she set up a lot of the meetings. We had request after request after request to come out and talk about this issue. I debated the authors on TV, debated them on the radio. I did like 111 meetings, not counting radio debates and TV debates.

10-00:50:08

Rubens: Did you bring in any media consultants, or you could do it? You knew you could do it?

10-00:50:14

Sickler: Yeah, I'd spent a lot of time working these quarters. *60 Minutes* was my best teacher.

10-00:50:21

Beagle: So you worked pretty closely with the State Fed on 226?

10-00:50:24

Sickler: I got really frustrated with Art, because I had a program that was already up and running and working in L.A., and they hadn't even launched. I called Art and said, "You're going to have to get off the dime, Art. Look, I've got a program running here. I don't want to be contrary or run into a collision in the intersection with the State Fed." He says, "Will you come on up and talk to us about it? Because we've got some concerns." So I come up and I sat down with him and said, "What's the concern? What's holding you guys up?" Art says, "I'm just not comfortable with the message." I had been to some of their focus groups, and I called Bob after one of them in Fresno. I said, "I'm not wasting one more minute with these goddamn focus groups. It's bullshit. They're confusing these people, and then they're surprised that they don't get the answer that they're looking for at the end of these focus groups. They spend thirty-five minutes telling these people why they should support it, and then they spend the last twenty-five minutes telling them maybe they shouldn't support it. Well, they've already made the commitment in the first twenty-five minutes, and you're asking them to reverse a commitment they've

already made.” I said, “I can see it on their faces.” I said, “This is all bullshit. Don’t listen to any of these goddamn focus groups.”

I told Art, I said, “Listen, Art, I can’t believe the workers are that different in Southern California than they are in Northern California. I’m having 100 percent success in Southern California with our members. They’re on it. They get it. They’re against it. As a matter of fact, they’re pissed. They’re very angry about this.” He still didn’t know. You know Art. He’s cerebral sometimes. He just wrestles with decisions. I said, “You guys are going to have to get moving, because this thing is winnable, but you’re just letting too much time slide by.” Anyway, I came back down south and just picked up where we left out, and just kept steamrolling. Then by the time the election came around, we not only blew their socks off; we carried Gray Davis. The election was in the primary for 226, and Gray won that primary hands-down.

10-00:52:52

Carole Sickler: That was the greatest election night I’ve ever been through. So many people thought we were going to lose. When those votes came in, we were at the Biltmore Hotel. Oh my God. We won so big. And it was won in Southern California, without a doubt.

10-00:53:12

Sickler: Just the sheer numbers.

10-00:53:13

Rubens: We were with Art that night. Art and Bob.

10-00:53:16

Sickler: L.A. County won by 63 percent. Sixty-three percent of Los Angeles voted against that thing. Just the sheer numbers was enough to tip it over.

10-00:55:57

Rubens: I don’t get what Art means. I don’t understand the message.

10-00:56:00

Sickler: He’s not comfortable with the message, our message. He hadn’t come up with a message for labor that he thought would resonate out there. I said, “The message is very simple. The same guy that tried to take your eight-hour day away from you wants to protect your paycheck. You believe him?”

10-00:0056:20

Rubens: Paycheck protection, it was just a—

10-00:56:22

Sickler: People got it.

10-00:56:23

Rubens: —switch.

10-00:56:24

Sickler: People got that. He didn't have to get a whole lot more complicated than that.

10-00:56:31

Beagle: When you were working for the Building Trades, the fact that you were a non-Sweeney guy, you were the anti-Sweeney guy or whatever, did that affect your ability to work with AFL-CIO? Unions, councils—

10-00:56:45

Sickler: No. Not at all. Especially in California, because they liked me a lot more than they liked anybody the AFL-CIO sent out here. They had to get rid of Splain and they had to get rid of Pat—whatever her name was. Pat Lee. They had to get rid of both of them, because nobody would work with them. Those two people were run off. That wasn't me that did it. I didn't even campaign for it to happen. Mark Splain was anti-Central Labor Council. I had a run-in with him when he worked with the organizing department. Bensinger called me and said, "Can you give office space to Mark Splain?" Worked for Bensinger then. This was up north in my regional office in San Francisco. I said, "Sure." I said, "But you know what, Richard, if you guys are going to be poking around in Central Labor Council territory, I'm going to ask you—you got to sit down with those councils and talk to them before you go poking around in their counties. They get really upset about that, and they should. They can be a big help." "The councils ought to be doing more about organizing and they're not." I said, "I don't care, Richard. I'm not going to have that argument with you. I'm just telling you. This is my region. I want whoever is out here "punking" around in my councils to sit down with the councils and let them know what you're doing here. I'll give you all the help I can. I'll give Mark Splain help." I gave him office space. He crashed my copy machine. Didn't even have the decency to tell me he crashed my copy machine. Then went out and arrogantly started organizing in counties, and never once had a conversation with the Central Labor Council.

10-00:58:35

Rubens: You did talk about that. I remember that. Now, believe it or not, it's fifty-eight minutes. The camera is starting to blink. I think we'll take a break and get some lunch. We'll check into the hotel. Then, what I'd love you to be thinking about, because some of these stories are just fantastic about what you're doing—

10-00:59:03

Sickler: The 226 campaign that was a fun one.

10-00:59:08

Beagle: Maybe we should spend a little more time with it?

10-00:59:11

Sickler: No, I think we pretty well covered it.

10-00:59:13

Beagle: Where is Mark Splain right this minute?

10-00:59:17
Sickler: I think he's retired.

10-00:59:19
Rubens: Two-two-six is '98. When do you go to work for Antonio?

10-00:59:30
Sickler: Two thousand five.

10-00:59:32
Rubens: I see. This is what I have confused. When you're at the Department of Water, that's working for him. Is that what you mean?

10-00:59:42
Sickler: Yes, I was working for the city, but he asked me to go over to the Department of Water and Power. They were having a real horrible fight between IBEW Local 18 and the general manager of the Department of Water and Power.

10-00:59:59
Rubens: You'll explain that. But what I didn't understand is if you had had some kind of tenure with him as a consultant or advisor or something. You go straight from this—

10-01:00:08
Sickler: I was his senior labor advisor, Antonio's. He hired me to be his senior labor advisor.

10-01:00:15
Rubens: While you're still at the state trades?

10-01:00:18
Sickler: I wore two hats. I was a senior labor advisor, but I was also a commissioner of public works. Those were the two hats I wore.

10-01:00:24
Beagle: And you were regional director.

10-01:00:26
Sickler: No. No, I wasn't with the Building Trades at all then. I had to leave the Building Trades.

10-01:00:32
Rubens: I get that now. I don't know if we'll get to this the end of today or not. We'll see. Oh my God, it's fascinating. Just fascinating. I don't know that people know these kinds of things about the building trades going into the schools. I don't think these kinds of things are—

10-01:00:54
Sickler: They don't. Our guys, all the time, they don't blow their own horn. I get mad at them all the time, because they don't even want credit for it. They work for hospitals, they do children. They go in and build stuff for children's hospitals.

Audio File 11

11-00:00:01

Sickler:

One of the campaigns we worked on that I thought was important didn't get any press. Both the governor's office and the legislature robbed money that was supposed to be provided by Prop 42 to build roads for the state, repair and build roads. I don't have to tell you guys how bad the roads are in the state of California. Both the governor and the legislature kept stealing that money that was earmarked. Part of our campaign on Prop 42 was working with both Republicans and Democrats who cared about roads in their district. That was kind of unique, in that I had to sit down with Republicans, Republican legislators, and talk about joining together to save that money, earmark it, and put it back in for road construction.

11-00:01:07

Beagle:

They certainly knew that you had enough Republican members.

11-00:01:12

Sickler:

Yeah, they were aware. It was just kind of bizarre sitting in a room with a looming picture of Ronald Reagan over the head of the guy I'm talking to. You have this gag reflex that you have to choke down all the time.

11-00:01:34

Rubens:

I have to look that up. I don't know the date of Prop 42.

11-00:01:36

Beagle:

When is Prop 42?

11-00:01:39

Rubens:

It had been passed quite a while before we worked this campaign. The money had been earmarked, and I'm trying to think. It was before I went to work for Antonio.

11-00:01:54

Carole Sickler:

I remember voting for it, but I don't remember.

11-00:01:56

Rubens:

We'll look it up. We'll look it up. I wanted to make sure it was when you were—

11-00:02:00

Sickler:

It was around 2002, 2003. We finally got fed up, because they just kept stealing more money and more money. Gray was doing it as well as the legislature was. We finally had had enough and started putting together a joint Democrat/Republican campaign to call a halt to it.

11-00:02:25

Beagle:

Where was Willie Brown on it?

11-00:02:28

Carole Sickler:

He was gone.

11-00:02:30

Sickler: He was long gone. I think he was mayor of San Francisco at that time.

11-00:02:46

Rubens: But it came through, so it shook it loose.

11-00:02:50

Sickler: I don't think we ever got it funded to where it amounted to much. It was interesting in that, for a change, we laid down our guns against each other and started working with some of the Republicans on this joint issue. There were [Jim] Brulte out in Rancho Cucamonga, Tony Strickland up in Thousand Oaks. These were two Republicans that we would sit down with and talk to, because they were as concerned for their districts as we were. They were concerned about other interests than we were.

11-00:03:26

Beagle: Brulte is a very interesting guy.

11-00:03:29

Sickler: He'll work across the aisle. Strickland, too, but you can't trust him. You wouldn't leave your checkbook and go to the bathroom and come back and find it.

11-00:03:42

Beagle: But Brulte. I remember him speaking at a union convention, at a Local 1000 convention. They wanted him because he was a Republican with a little bit broader—

11-00:03:51

Sickler: Yeah, he did. He was a practical guy. We had a business manager of the insulators, headquartered out of Azusa, a very smart, bright guy, who was a Republican. Jim Watkins. Jim happened to be very close to Brulte. He'd call Brulte up and set up meetings and the whole nine years. Brulte was fine with working with unions.

11-00:04:23

Rubens: Dave, do you feel you've mentioned the most significant or interesting campaigns?

11-00:04:37

Sickler: Yes, I think the big ones.

11-00:04:39

Beagle: There's the issue of prevailing wage.

11-00:04:44

Rubens: Now in the residential sector there's a real loss of union jobs. I'm wondering what relationship that might be to prevailing wage.

11-00:05:07

Sickler:

It's really sad. To put it into context, after I got out of high school, the first job I had out of high school was working as a laborer in residential housing outside of Denver for an outfit called Perl Mack. They were the largest residential builder in the state of Colorado at the time. Totally unionized. I belonged to Laborer's Local 727. My dad was a union carpenter. Every worker on those job sites was all union, residential. It was even more highly organized in the state of California. We probably had, at one point here in the state, 90 percent of everything that was built was built union.

1-00:05:52

Rubens:

In Colorado?

11-00:05:53

Sickler:

In California. In Colorado, I would say probably 70 percent.

11-00:05:58

Rubens:

Oh, I see. Higher in California. Okay.

11-00:05:59

Sickler:

Yes, it was higher in California. The building trades kind of walked away from residential housing, and that was a huge mistake.

11-00:06:12

Rubens:

Starting about when?

11-00:06:14

Sickler:

Starting in the seventies. Sixties, late sixties, seventies. Seventies especially is when we took a huge hit, and we kind of walked away from it, because our members really didn't like to work residential if they could get industrial and commercial, because they got better pay. Residential was kind of hit and miss, and it paid lower. In some cases, it was harder work for less pay. They preferred the big industrial jobs. That's what they did in California. They just let it go. They didn't fight to keep it, because a lot of the members actually didn't want to work it. At that time, when this was happening, California was like in a huge boom growth period. There was more than enough work to put the members to work doing commercial and industrial work. Of course, we all know construction is boom and bust. So then when commercial and industrial goes bust, you have more members than you've got work, and then all of a sudden you look around and residential is cooking, but our members can't get that work now.

11-00:07:24

Rubens:

That was just a lost cause. Is that—

11-00:07:27

Sickler:

It wasn't a lost cause, but the building trades didn't go after it.

11-00:07:31

Rubens: That's what I'm saying. From then on, whether you were with the AFL or when you were with the trades, it was not a—

11-00:07:38

Sickler: Until the drywall campaign.

11-00:07:42

Beagle: So by the time you got to the Building Trades, that was over. Is that still going on, the loss of residential work, or was it a done deal that you weren't—

11-00:07:54

Sickler: Most of it was done. Most of it was over. But when I came to work for the Building Trades, one of the things, one of my missions, was to get us back into residential housing.

11-00:08:05

Rubens: That's what I'm asking.

11-00:08:07

Sickler: Yeah. That was one of my goals, was to get us back into it. I thought I'd found a crack in the door with affordable housing. I had an old friend, Jan Breidenbach, who used to work for SEIU, and then went on to head up Southern California Affordable Housing Project. SCAHP, it's called. She called me one day and said, "Dave, I need your help. My board is really becoming anti-union. You know me," she said. "That's where I'm from. I'm trying to convince them that prevailing wage is a good thing, but I need help, because I don't know the arguments." I said, "Sure." She said, "I have one or two people that I really trust. I'd like to have breakfast with you and them, and you could kind of school of us on how to make this argument." She brought those two folks and we met, had breakfast and we got things started. Then, out of those discussions, we decided it would be great to put kind of a summit meeting together, or shoot for a summit meeting, with a lot of stuff that had to be done in between. That is bringing the actual trades in to meet the actual contractors that do affordable housing.

11-00:09:37

Beagle: Contractors or developers?

11-00:09:39

Sickler: They were contractors. Contractors and developers. We had, actually, both. The contractors, believe it or not, were more important than the developers to get this across. Well, let me back up. It was more important to get the board members. We had to sell them on this idea. A lot of work went into it. This was when UCLA was cooking, full steam ahead. So I sat down with Larry Frank and we started hammering out a strategy to put this stuff together. If we could get a foothold in affordable housing, in order to get a foothold in affordable housing, our affiliates would have to establish a residential rate. We had one many, many moons ago, but it went by the wayside when we lost residential housing. The residential rate is a lower rate than the commercial

rate, and a lower rate than the industrial rate. I figured we could sell unionization, project labor agreements, if we had a lower rate to offer the affordable housing folks. Part of my sales package to our unions was, “Look, we’ve got members, let’s face it, that can’t—even though they’re making building trade wages, they can’t afford housing in L.A. Getting affordable housing for our own members is important for us to be involved in.” Most of them bought it. They did. But it’s a real hike to internally pass—well, you’ve been through this stuff—to pass a bylaws change, or get a motion passed through your membership, lowering rates for certain work. It’s political football in some cases. Guys don’t want to touch it.

The plumbers, the UA, they had done it. Laborers didn’t want to go with it. They figured their rates were already too low as it was, even with commercial and residential, so they didn’t want to go with it. But they made motions. Sergio Rascon from the big Local 300 had played the game back and forth. I don’t know where he had eventually gone. What happened was, when I got picked up by Antonio—I was doing this when I was regional director for the Building Trades. Then when I got picked up by Antonio, I kind of had to drop it. I couldn’t work it. Then Larry got picked up by Antonio, too, so the two key pushers and players in this thing on the labor side was Larry and myself, and we both had to drop it because we got more than two platefuls handed to us when we took over. When we dropped out, that’s when it all fell apart.

11-00:12:43

Rubens:

That was an interesting story.

11-00:12:44

Sickler:

But before it all fell apart, in the process, we ended up having a statewide meeting. Darrell Steinberg, before he got elected state senator and got elected Senate pro tem, he facilitated a meeting between us and the affordable housing folks, statewide. So out of this little project in Los Angeles grew this whole thing statewide that happened, where we agreed to work with each other on legislation that was of mutual concern. We tried to establish kind of a statewide rapport with the affordable housing folks, that we weren’t the enemy. I think one of the things that we accomplished, even though we didn’t meet my goal of actually getting—we did pick up one project labor agreement out of the whole deal, before it was all said and done, and I had to go to the mayor. We did establish a relationship where everybody laid down their guns and knives and we started talking to each other, so the whole exercise was worth it if for no other reason than that. We have supported each other on mutual legislative goals. And they’ve learned a lesson that prevailing wage is not the enemy. The two big issues in the Building Trades: project labor agreements and prevailing wage. Those are the two biggies. Then preserving apprenticeship programs. Keeping the quality and the credibility of apprenticeship programs. The apprenticeship program for the Building Trades is really the heart and lungs, because nobody can match us for quality work,

skilled service, like the apprenticeship programs can. They're college. It's college on the job.

11-00:14:48

Rubens: It's a real nice infrastructure that's already in place that ABC can't match.

11-00:14:53

Sickler: They can't match it. No contractor, no developer on his own, can match the program. We spent \$200 million a year training people a year in the building trades. Two hundred million alone in the state of California. That's not taxpayer money, by the way. That's money that contractors, union contractors, and union members put into training. Two hundred million a year. It's 800—well, it's probably closer to 900 million now, nationwide.

11-00:15:25

Beagle: It's interesting. I was telling you that the Carpenters have cranked this conversation up again. One of the things they're selling is not only is this housing for your folks, but it's jobs for your kids. It's entry into those apprenticeship programs for the kids who live there. We now have a relationship. We can begin the pre-apprenticeship process, and we'll help you do it. The hidden part of it, the part that nobody is really talking about, and the political juice we have to help you get funding. But nobody is kind of quite there yet. Because we're going around the same bush that you went around now.

11-00:16:08

Sickler: Yeah. It's a slow process, but it's worth doing. Then there are key players you find out. There's a guy named Charles Ramsey who is an attorney and is a board member of the Richmond school district. Black, African American guy.

11-00:16:24

Rubens: A Berkeley guy.

11-00:16:25

Sickler: .No out of Richmond, CA an African American guy. Total religious minister on behalf of project labor agreements. Believes in it. The reason he believes in it so strongly is not just because it provides good working-class jobs, but opportunity for black kids. He wants it there so black kids have a place to go to other than college.

11-00:16:48

Rubens: He's quite a figure in the Bay Area.

11-00:16:50

Sickler: He's so articulate. He's amazing.

11-00:16:53

Beagle: There's also a local hire piece to these things.

11-00:16:55

Sickler:

Oh, yes, there is. That's the other elixir that's ingrained in project labor agreements, is the local hire piece. One thing we've been able to point out when we get into these debates with the ABC is that a lot of the contractors that are hired come from Arizona, come from Utah, where they pay bottom-scale, feeder-bottom wages. All you have to do is go around to some of these work sites and take pictures of the license plates. They're all from out of s. How much money are they going to plow back into the economy? How many local kids are not getting a job opportunity because some kid is being exploited from Arizona? That kid needs a job. He's got to drive all the way from Arizona to work a job that pays crap, but your kid locally is getting beat out of a good job. You've got a union contractor come in here, pay your kid good wages, the money stays locally, it gets plowed back into the economy. It's a win-win for everybody. Plus, you're getting quality, skilled work.

11-00:18:00

Rubens:

Do you think we said enough about prevailing wage? Was there any other—

11-00:18:04

Sickler:

I think the scary thing about prevailing wage is that it's constantly under threat, and it's under threat because, now more than ever, local economies and local councils, local government, is under tremendous stress economically. Tax dollars are just shrinking up like crazy. It's a real popular sell to come in and say, "Look, if you don't go union construction, you can save yourself a million dollars on this project." Think about what a million dollars can do for your budget. If you're already in the hole, why do you want to pay these fat-cat union guys this exorbitant amount of money? People who don't know any different—again, have to always emphasize—these people take these positions politically, not because they care about construction. That's kind of the last thought they'll ever have. Once they get into office, then they find out, all of a sudden, construction is part of the deal. I have to okay these construction projects. They don't know beans about construction. Whoever gets to them first and educates them, they're probably going to have them. Usually, the ABC beats us to the punch. They've got more staff, and that's all they do. We do everything else, plus that, and this is all they do. So they're constantly out there trying to educate school boards about the evils of unionization and how much money they can save if they go non-union. That's a constant battle.

11-00:19:38

Rubens:

Were you going to ask something more about—

11-00:19:39

Beagle:

Yeah. In your tenure, while you were at the Building Trades, did you work on this, and under what circumstances?

11-00:19:45

Sickler:

Oh, worked on it all the time. One of the reasons we did, we filed a lawsuit against Vista, California. The real battle comes down to, hidden underneath

this argument about general law cities and charter cities, you know what the great big incentive is, the great big apple of enticement to go charter city? If so they won't have to go union.

11-00:20:10

Beagle: So they won't have to be subject to the Little Davis-Bacon laws.

11-00:20:13

Sickler: They don't have to follow Davis-Bacon. They don't have to follow prevailing wage at all.

11-00:20:17

Beagle: If they're a charter city. So a whole bunch of cities have had this.

11-00:20:21

Sickler: Yeah, and that's the number one enticement. When dollars got tight in all these local governments, the ABC went around and said, "If you were a charter city, you wouldn't have to worry about this. You could just vote it out."

11-00:20:36

Rubens: So vis-a-vis Vista? What is it that you did?

11-00:20:38

Sickler: Vista became a charter city for the sole purpose of going non-union on all of its construction projects. We argue that, even though they go charter city, prevailing wage, Little Davis-Bacon was a state law. They still had to adhere to the state law. We lost, and then we appealed the loss, but one of the dissenting judges in the loss said he agreed with us that there is a state law. So that kind of gave us encouragement to go ahead and file the appeal and take it to the Supreme Court. State Supreme Court ruled against us, so we lost that. A lot of city councils were holding the cards close to their chest, waiting for that Supreme Court decision. Then, after the Supreme Court decision, a bunch of them jumped on the bandwagon and started going charter city. In the meantime, those that had already gone charter city, the verdict was starting to come in on what the aftermath was of going non-union construction. Oceanside, California. We had a huge public battle with Oceanside, California. Several years after they went charter city, the information started coming back that they were hemorrhaging hundreds of thousands of dollars with this derelict non-union construction company that screwed them royally, just left them high and dry. Shoddy work. They had to bring in a union construction outfit to do the work right and get it fixed over. That became the poster-boy for charter city non-union construction.

We got some more of those kinds of examples coming in. Other examples of charter cities is like Bell, California. The famous case where Rizzo, the mayor, was making a million dollars a year in salary, and the police chief was making like \$800,000. This is a tiny little crap city with almost 95 percent immigrant workers, and they were screwing them royally. They had a quota

for the police department in Bell, to tow immigrant workers' trucks and cars, and then charging them exorbitant fees to get their cars and trucks back. Bell Police Department finally ponied up and confessed to doing that kind of stuff. This was a charter city. The point is, is that, if you become a charter city, you can kind of work in the dark, and you're not accountable to anybody. But if you have an immigrant population that's afraid, they don't want to be too vocal and too obvious, you can probably get away with murder. We spread the word about the evils of charter cities and just letting politicians work at their own will.

11-00:23:48

Beagle:

On a typical day, how did prevailing—I'm looking for the kind of day-to-day work you did. You open the door, sit down—

11-00:23:57

Sickler:

What I would do is get our Central Labor Council guys, Building Trades Council guys, to set up meetings with mayors and city council people, one-on-one meetings, and then go in and sit down with them, one-on-one, and talk about this. We developed a video that you could take a laptop, and you could sit with a guy and show him a six-minute video. In that six-minute video, you'd have Antonio Villaraigosa go in detail about the different projects in his city that were done by project labor agreement, the money that was saved, the local hire that was brought in. Then you'd have a brief clip of an African American guy or a Latino guy or a woman talking about job opportunities she wouldn't have got if it hadn't been for this project labor agreement. That kind of stuff. Then we would actually have contractors and developers step up and say, "Yeah, we endorse the project labor agreement, because it saved money. We've been doing it for years. We intend to continue to do it for years."

Probably the most convincing guy, the big shock to me, was Bob Foster, the mayor of Long Beach, who was the ex-CEO of Southern California Edison. I knew him when he was at Southern California Edison, and I had no idea the guy was a progressive guy. I think he's a Republican, but I'm not sure, but he's a very progressive guy. He called me when I was working for the mayor and he said, "I understand you're kind of a local hire job training guy." I said, "I'm not an expert. I'm doing some stuff for the mayor." He said, "Yeah, that's what I hear." He started asking me a bunch of questions about it, and I said, "We're using project labor agreements here." He said, "That's what I hear. Okay." He said, "So you guys like them?" I said, "Yeah, we love them." "Okay." The next thing I know, Debra is able to go down to Long Beach, and she gets the guy on film, and he does a better job than Antonio. By God, I believe in project labor agreements. We're always going to use project labor agreements if I have anything to say about it. I wish I had one to show you guys.

11-00:26:13

Rubens:

We're going to have to make a list of some of this stuff that we should see if we can pull out or make available. I think, so that I can move along to get you

to when you worked for the mayor, maybe this question is awkward. I know you're friends. How do you characterize, in the end, looking back, Balgenorth's leadership? Where were his real strengths?

11-00:26:39

Sickler:

His real strength was a lot of guts. Extremely strong, gutsy visionary guy. What I liked about him was, other than the fact—putting our friendship aside, he'd ask you to do a job, and then would not look over your shoulder. I hate it when somebody questions every move I make to get a job done, because sometimes I'm unorthodox in the way I work. But I want to work at my own speed, I want to work—and if I want to do 190-degree change in the middle of something, I'm going to do it, and I don't want to be second-guessed by it. I don't want to have to explain every move I make. I told that to Bob early on. "You want me to do what I did for the AFL-CIO? Then stay 3,000 miles away from me like they did." Three time zones. Don't question me. But that's the way he works. He hires smart people, like he hires Debra. He doesn't question Debra. She brings in a product, or she comes in, and he may have questions about it, or he may even disagree and they argue, but when she walks out the door to go do something, he doesn't second-guess her. She does it. It's very seldom he ever second-guesses you.

11-00:28:01

Rubens:

What I want to get in is that you had first met him when he was with IBEW.

11-00:28:08

Sickler:

Right, business manager of IBEW Local 441.

11-00:28:12

Rubens:

He was their business and financial secretary.

11-00:28:17

Sickler:

Yeah, he's business manager and secretary treasurer.

11-00:28:19

Rubens:

He was adept at budgets, and he's really sharp financially.

11-00:28:25

Sickler:

Oh, yes. Very much so.

11-00:28:27

Rubens:

You had met him then, because you were doing all that—

11-00:28:30

Sickler:

Coors boycott stuff. He was active in the Central Labor Council of Orange County, and I was working close with them. Of course, we had a lot of Coors stuff going on in Orange County, so I was down there a lot. He would show up. We'd get to talking, and we just kind of hit it off. I thought he was a very smart, aggressive guy.

11-00:28:56

Rubens:

In fact, you had said he attended one of the classes you taught, or a couple of classes.

11-00:29:01

Sickler:

He took a class I taught on boycotts. How to establish and run a boycott. He was interested in running some boycotts in Orange County, so he attended the class.

11-00:29:17

Rubens:

How did it come to an end? How did you make the decision that you would go with Villaraigosa?

11-00:29:28

Sickler:

I called Bob and told him. I didn't commit to Antonio. As a matter of fact, Carole and I had just got out of Cedars-Sinai. She was going to have knee replacement surgery. We had to donate some of her own blood. She had to go out and have some blood drawn in case of transfusion. We stopped at Tony Roma's. Remember, Carole? Tony Roma's Ribs. We were just getting ready to order, and my cell phone rings, and it's Antonio. He's calling me on his cell phone. I had his cell phone number. I pick up the phone. I had no clue why he was calling. Then when he dropped that on me, "I want you to come to work and be my public work commissioner and my senior labor advisor," I thought, what the hell? I remember going to the bathroom, and I'm thinking, why the hell did he have to offer me this? I was pretty happy where I was, doing what I was doing. So I came out and talked to Carole about it, and then we talked about it and talked about it and talked about it, and then made up my mind to go ahead and give it a shot.

11-00:30:49

Rubens:

You must have known him. He had gone into the assembly in '94, I think.

11-00:30:54

Sickler:

Oh, sure. He wanted me to run his campaign for mayor.

11-00:31:00

Rubens:

So he was in the assembly, and he's majority leader.

11-00:31:03

Sickler:

When he decided to run for mayor, he asked me to come to work for him full-time, run his campaign for mayor.

11-00:31:10

Beagle:

You must have been engaged with him a lot.

11-00:31:13

Carole Sickler:

Yeah, because I was at the L.A. Fed. That was the first campaign.

11-00:31:19

Sickler: She also shadowed his daughter. His daughter worked at the County Fed. Carole was like a second mother to his daughter. She was a little piece of work.

11-00:31:28

Carole Sickler: His daughter was a little problem child.

11-00:31:32

Rubens: But he had asked you to run the campaign?

11-00:31:34

Sickler: He wanted me to come to work for him full-time, join his campaign for mayor. I said, "No, I can't do that." I said, "I'll tell you what." This was when he was speaker. I said, "I'll tell you what. Let's sit down with Bob Balgenorth and we'll talk about what I can do part-time to help you. I'm willing to do that, and it won't cost you anything." We met in the speaker's office, Bob, myself, and Antonio. Then I didn't hear anything more. He never called. He never did call me, until after he made—no, I take that back. He did call. He called me a couple of times for some advice with labor, and he was really upset, because guys that had supported him in the first run, when he first ran, had turned their back on him. Marvin Kropke from IBEW. Those guys. I had personally brought Marvin in. Antonio had an advisory council, and I was on that council. Maria Elena and myself and a couple of other labor guys were on that advisory council.

11-00:32:49

Rubens: From the first campaign?

11-00:32:50

Sickler: First campaign. I encouraged Antonio to let Marvin Kropke come in, because Marvin brought a lot of money, marbles, and chalk with him. So I got Marvin in on the council, and Marvin spent a ton of money in the first campaign. A million T-shirts and bodies and money, you name it. Then when he lost, Marvin was really upset, because he felt like he was outside the loop with Hahn. Then when Hahn was running for reelection, he's going to stay with Hahn. He didn't want to go through another loss.

11-00:33:29

Rubens: Which he did.

11-00:33:30

Sickler: Which he did. Which is his mistake. Antonio was more hurt than he was mad. He was just kind of hurt, because he comes out of labor. It was like a brother turning on him.

11-00:33:44

Beagle: Can you talk a little bit about Antonio, his background, how you guys met him? What that relationship is about for both of you.

11-00:33:53

Sickler:

I met him the first time when he was an AFGE member, American Federation of Government Employees. He was working for the immigration service on Veterans and Wilshire, downtown L.A., the big Federal Building there. I had a boycott, I had a Coors boycott out there, and I'm trying to remember exactly what it was about. He came up and identified himself, and I was really impressed with him. I'm talking to him for a while, and I thought, man, this kid is really sharp. Really smart. Then I got to know him more after he went to work. He left there and then went to work for UTLA, as a rep for United Teachers of Los Angeles. That's when I really worked with him the most and became really impressed with him. He got involved with LCLAA, Labor Council For Latin American Advancement, and he was just kind of always around. But his name wasn't Villaraigosa. His name wasn't even Antonio. His name was Tony Villar.

11-00:34:58

Carole Sickler:

Well, it was Antonio, but he grew up as "Tony."

11-00:35:03

Sickler:

Everybody called him Tony Villar.

11-00:35:08

Carole Sickler:

He married a woman named Raigosa. They put their names together.

11-00:35:16

Sickler:

This is a true story. My secretary—because this was when I'm regional director of the AFL-CIO—my secretary comes up and she hands me a slip. It's a name I can't pronounce, other than "Antonio." She says, "He says he's a good friend of yours." I said, "He's a liar. I don't know who this is. I can't even pronounce this name. If that was a good friend of mine, I could pronounce the name." She said, "He insists he's a good friend of yours." I said, "No, he's not." I said, "I'm not calling him back." I hand her back the slip. He keeps calling. Clarice keeps coming back, saying, "He keeps insisting he wants to talk to you, that you're a friend of his." I said, "I don't know who this guy is. He's nuts." Clarice says, "He doesn't sound nuts. He sounds really nice." I said, "Right." I'm over at the Fed one day, and there was a LCLAA meeting there and he comes up to me. Tony comes up to me and he starts chewing my ass about not returning his calls. I'm saying, "You didn't call me." "Yeah, I called you. I called you and you won't return my calls. What's wrong with you?" The more this is going on, then somebody else walks by and says, "Hey, Antonio." Then, *bing*.

11-00:36:43

Rubens:

So this was a political strategy on his part?

11-00:36:46

Sickler:

I guess. I don't know when he made this name switch, but he didn't fill me in on it. I wasn't called in for the ceremony when the name change was made.

Finally, it dawns on me that this is not Tony Villar anymore, it's Antonio Villaraigosa. I wanted to say—

11-00:37:03

Carole Sickler: His wife's name was, I guess, Aigosa, and then with the "R" at the end of his name— They put them together. Villaraigosa!

11-00:37:13

Rubens: You must have encountered him when he was in the legislature.

11-00:37:16

Sickler: Oh, no, way before then.

11-00:37:17

Rubens: I know that, but I'm now moving along.

11-00:37:19

Sickler: Oh, okay. Yeah. Then, of course, I knew him when we campaigned for him when he ran for assembly. Then, of course, when he made speaker, I saw him a lot, and then when he decided he wanted to run for mayor when his term was up, he came to me. Wanted help. I got involved with him even before that, before he became speaker. There was a big feud between him and a close friend, Gil Cedillo. These are both L.A. boys that went to the same school. These were close friends. Both of these were good friends of mine. I was actually closer to Gil than I was Antonio.

11-00:37:57

Rubens: Gil came out of?

11-00:37:59

Sickler: Gil was business manager of SEIU 660, and then when Prop 84 hit, the anti-immigrant—

11-00:38:09

Carole Sickler: 187.

11-00:38:10

Sickler: Prop 187. I kind of helped lead the charge against 187. A lot of the unions were kind of scared and hanging back on it. Especially SEIU. SEIU was dead set against doing anything against 187. As a matter of fact, they went all the way to the top. They tried to get me fired by going to Kirkland. To Kirkland's credit, he hung with me. It was Gil Cedillo and myself that really led the charge to start with. We got the rest of labor behind us and led the charge. I called Lane Kirkland and asked Lane. We were putting together a huge rally. Ultimately 135,000 people turned out at that rally. I got Jack Henning to fly in from San Francisco.

11-00:39:06

Rubens: I think we talked about this. Somebody was very upset about the order in which they spoke.

- 11-00:39:16
Carole Sickler: It was the march. We marched from East L.A. all the way from East L.A. to downtown.
- 11-00:39:23
Rubens: You'd been close with him. What was the feud? Were they running—
- 11-00:39:27
Sickler: They both wanted to be speaker. It was hard, because I didn't want to be enemies with either one of them, so I wasn't taking any sides, either with Gil or Antonio. Antonio ended up getting the nod.
- 11-00:39:44
Carole Sickler: They wound up not ever speaking to each other.
- 11-00:39:47
Sickler: Yeah, they ended up at war with each other.
- 11-00:39:48
Carole Sickler: They grew up like brothers —through college.
- 11-00:39:50
Sickler: It got really ugly. It got really, really ugly. I've been lucky. I've been able to stay friends with both of them through that mess. We were at one event at the Biltmore where each one was taking me aside, telling me, "I want to be speaker. You need to support me." Then Gil would take me out in the alley. I thought he was taking me out there to get mugged.
- 11-00:40:15
Rubens: How do you tell Bob? How do you make the decision, all right, I'm going to go with him?
- 11-00:40:20
Sickler: I called him. I didn't call him and just tell him. I said, "What do you think?" That's the way I usually talk to Bob. "I got this opportunity; what do you think about it?" He said, "Well, do you want to do it?" Bob never gave me any hassle at all about anything I ever wanted to do. He totally encouraged me to do it.
- 11-00:40:41
Rubens: What was most attractive about it for you?
- 11-00:40:47
Sickler: Trying something new. It was doing something new. And—
- 11-00:40:50
Rubens: It was literally being inside a political administration.
- 11-00:40:54
Sickler: And working for a mayor that knew about labor.

11-00:40:57

Carole Sickler: And you thought it would help, ultimately, the unions.

11-00:41:01

Sickler: The unions, but also, I knew there was a great opportunity here, because Antonio was so estranged from labor, and that was his home base. The unions were estranged from Antonio. They didn't know how to talk to each other. They didn't trust each other. The unions were actually—SEIU—Julie Butcher's Local 347 was getting prepared for a strike against the city. They were training their stewards. They were so convinced Antonio was going to take it out on them and get even with them that they were preparing for a strike. Antonio came up with this brilliant thing about mutual gains bargaining, win-win bargaining. He brought them in to help get a contract settled at the transportation department. We'd always had a history, almost every time a contract came up there, we ended up on strike, because we had this creep by the name of Zev Yaroslavsky who hated labor. He would cause a strike because he sat on that board.

11-00:42:14

Carole Sickler: He was on the L.A. County Board of Supervisors.

11-00:42:17

Sickler: How many contracts came up that he caused a strike?

11-00:42:19

Carole Sickler: It was totally unnecessary, but he was that kind of guy.

11-00:42:24

Carole Sickler: He was on the MTA board.

11-00:42:26

Sickler: MTA, yeah. Antonio, once he became mayor, was chair of MTA. He just ran right over the top of Zev Yaroslavsky and brought in an expert on mutual bargaining, and they negotiated a contract without a strike. It was a contract both sides were very happy with. Antonio brings me in and he says, "This is what I want to do with all the unions in the city. Do you think you can sell it to them?" I said, "Let's give it a shot." I said, "This is the best news I've had, because I have something now that I can tangibly tell them." Then I had credibility with the unions.

11-00:43:06

Rubens: Obviously. That's why he wanted you.

1-00:43:09

Sickler: There were some hard-asses there, like Julie Butcher and Cheryl Parisi. Parisi, AFSCME, and Julie Butcher, SEIU. They both had huge chunks of the workforce there in the city. We had operating engineers, we had the Teamsters, we had the Building Trades. We had all those guys. I started with the easiest ones first. I got the Building Trades to sign off, and then I got the operating engineers to sign off. Then I sat down with Julie Butcher, and Julie

Butcher said, "I'm not having anything to do with any mutual bargaining." I said, "Come on, Julie. What do you got to lose?" "No. I'm not conceding anything. It's some kind of trap he set." I said, "Okay. Let's do this. We're going to have a meeting of management and some of the labor guys, myself." I said, "Why don't you go with me, sit next to me? All right. If, at the end of the day, you don't want to do it, I'll be the first one to escort you out and say, 'Do it your way.' I'll be the first one to go along with you. Do it your way." So we showed up, and the gal that moderated the meeting comes out of United Food and Commercial Workers out of Washington state. It's her company. Management is there. This gal starts it off and we go through the whole exercise. At the end of the day, Julie is still there, and she doesn't say anything. She just packs up her stuff and she leaves.

The next morning, we have to meet in a different place. We meet for two days. The next morning, just so happens I get on the elevator at the same time Julie gets on, and we're alone. She says, "So is this when I apologize to you?" I said, "What do you think?" She said, "To tell you the truth, Dave, I had butterflies in my stomach when I left. I couldn't even speak." I said, "Yeah, I noticed. You didn't say goodbye." She said, "I couldn't even speak." She said, "For the first time, I'm really hopeful." She said, "The first time in my experience with this city I'm hopeful." I said, "We're serious. We don't want to strike. We want the best contract we can get for you." I said, "You know me. I'm going to screw you on a contract? You know better than that. I'm not going to have anything to do with anything that screws any of the unions. This is a win-win deal." We got them the best contract they'd had in ten years. Ten years. Of course, then, afterwards, when everything went to hell, the recession hit and all the cities imploded, there had to be contract concession bargaining. I was long gone by then. I was gone when the concession bargaining started. That contract we negotiated, if the bottom hadn't fallen out of the economy it would have lifted city workers up and had made up for losses they had suffered years prior.

11-00:46:18

Rubens:

So you were now—

11-00:46:26

Sickler:

I was actually representing the mayor at the bargaining table. I was negotiating. I was negotiating.

11-00:46:32

Rubens:

Is that because you're a commissioner?

11-00:46:34

Sickler:

No. This was my hat as the labor advisor. Not just an advisor. I was actually a negotiator. I was representing management.

11-00:46:46

Rubens:

You're being paid by the city?

11-00:46:48

Sickler: Yes.

11-00:46:50

Rubens: At the same time, you're commissioner of public works?

11-00:46:54

Sickler: Yeah. I had a plateful. I was so burned out by the time I left the city, between the negotiations, the twelve city unions, and then the one that was the killer was the bargaining in the harbor with the clerks. Just on top of everything else I was going through—by that time, I had moved over to Department of Water and Power. That was a nightmare. A hundred and twenty-one grievances, unfair labor practice charges, arbitration cases backed up since the year 2001. This is 2007. I mean, warfare. So I'm dealing with that war, then I'm dealing with the negotiations with the city unions, and then, boom, we get nailed with the harbor.

11-00:47:53

Rubens: Let's explain it. I don't know this.

11-00:46:56

Sickler: The clerks, longshore clerks—

11-00:47:57

Beagle: Can I just interrupt? Mutual bargaining, what's that?

11-00:48:01

Sickler: Mutual gains bargaining is a philosophy where I don't make you lose so I gain. We want bargaining where you gain, I gain. You get what you've got to have and I get what I've got to have.

11-00:48:15

Beagle: How does that work concretely, for the city? The city is sitting there with its union.

11-00:48:21

Sickler: Sitting there, and the city says, "Okay, here's the budget." By the way, the key to the integrity of mutual gains bargaining is getting mutual agreement on what the size of the budget is. The problem we had always had in the past in the city was the city would lie to the unions about the size of the budget. They would say its X number of dollars when it really wasn't. They would say, "This is all we have." But then, two months after bargaining, all of a sudden, a billion dollars shows up somewhere, magically. More than they said they had. There was always this distrust about the budget, but we were blessed with a woman by the name of Karen Sisson, who was the head of the budget. She came out of a religious organization.

11-00:49:11

Carole Sickler: She used to be a nun.

11-00:49:12

Sickler:

She had total credibility with the bargaining committee. She just was so bluntly honest. People were sometimes shocked by what she said at the table. She was able to garner trust on the budget, and she demanded staff be transparent. She was showing them the books. We had everything out on the table. That was a big step forward in getting the trust. Then once we got an agreement on what the figures were, then it became a matter of jockeying those numbers around so everybody was okay with it. It's funny how much you have in common when you agree on the money. How much is there. Then it became a matter of trade-offs between benefits, and what the city was looking for at that time was some help in cutting down healthcare costs, and also cost in—I mean, stupid costs. We had a grievance procedure that was so archaic and so stupid, it just ground up a lot of time and wasted money. We streamlined the grievance procedure to everybody's benefit. Everybody was happy with it.

11-00:50:31

Rubens:

Pension is a big issue at that point, or not that—

11-00:50:32

Sickler:

No, pensions weren't. Healthcare costs was a big issue, because we weren't going after concessions on the pension. As a matter of fact, we dumped a little extra money into the pension for them. Cutting down the healthcare costs, worker comp costs that was a major big issue for us. They wanted X number of dollars in the three years. What we did was we actually ended up giving them a little more than what they wanted, but we did it in steps with a five-year agreement. Instead of a three-year agreement, we went to a five-year agreement, and then we built steps in it. They actually came out well above at the end of the fifth year in terms of payments. These were trade-offs. We were asking for stuff, and it was stuff that they could give, like streamlining the grievance procedure. They even wanted that.

11-00:51:32

Rubens:

Being commissioner of public works, what did that require of you? That had to be approved by the city council.

11-00:51:38

Sickler:

It was a lot. One of the big things—oh, you mean the position?

11-00:51:42

Rubens:

Yeah.

11-00:51:44

Sickler:

Antonio can appoint a ham sandwich, but it's got to be approved by the city council. I had one built-in enemy in the council, which was Bernard Parks, the ex-police chief. For some reason, he held me personally responsible for not getting the COPE endorsement from the County Fed. I don't know why. He thought I was symbolic of the reason he didn't get the endorsement. He didn't vote against it, but he talked against me. He challenged me.

- 11-00:52:19
Carole Sickler: He was the only one at that meeting to do that.
- 11-00:52:22
Sickler: Here's the irony. Hilda Solis had flown in from DC, unbeknownst to me, to attend the hearing before the city council.
- 11-00:52:32
Rubens: Isn't she now a county supervisor in Los Angeles? And she was Secretary of Labor under President Obama. But then she was a congresswoman, and she just showed up?
- 11-00:52:36
Beagle: And she was a friend?
- 11-00:52:37
Sickler: She was.
- 11-00:52:37
Carole Sickler: Good friend, yeah.
- 11-00:52:39
Sickler: She asked to speak on my behalf before the city council. I was blown away.
- 11-00:52:42
Carole Sickler: After that, they all kind of got real quiet.
- 11-00:52:45
Sickler: Council got real quiet.
- 11-00:52:46
Carole Sickler: They all voted. When they voted, he voted, yes.
- 11-00:52:51
Sickler: It was the first time a congressional representative—this was when she was in congress—it was the first time a congressperson had ever shown up to speak on behalf an appointment to a city council.
- 11-00:53:02
Rubens: Of a city council. I see, I see.
- 11-00:53:04
Sickler: Appointment from a mayor to a city council.
- 11-00:53:08
Rubens: I remember you mentioning Pelosi, I think, advocated back at the AFL when they were letting you go. At some point, you mentioned her being part of some contingent.
- 11-00:53:23
Sickler: No, it wasn't Pelosi.

11-00:53:25

Rubens: No? We have to check this out.

11-00:53:27

Carole Sickler: I think that was during NAFTA.

11-00:53:29

Rubens: During NAFTA, yeah. You're right. I'm sorry, I interrupted you.

11-00:53:37

Carole Sickler: Bernard Parks, that day, he even tried to make an issue out of the fact that I worked for the County Fed and you were going to be—I don't know, like there was a conflict that his wife worked for labor. Everybody else on the city council knew both of us.

11-00:53:57

Sickler: You could see the eyeballs rolling. Eyeballs rolling.

11-00:54:02

Rubens: So that took a bunch of time, being a commissioner. How many were there?

11-00:54:07

Sickler: Was. How many were there? About five of us, I think. There were five of us. I was vice president of the board. Then we were supposed to rotate. I was supposed to be the president the following year, but I didn't want it. I had too much on my plate already. Being president of the board required you to be out almost every night and weekend. You had to show up at openings of dog centers. Every time the Girl Scouts had a cookie table someplace, you had to be there to bless it. That's the last thing I wanted to do, because being his labor advisor, that was full-time by itself. Because here's the problem. Both he and I come out of labor, so every time somebody had a problem in L.A.—not just L.A. city, L.A. County—every time they had a problem, they would either call him or they'd call me. If they called him, he would call me and say, "Dave, Cheryl Parisi has got a problem with Red Cross. Looks like they're going on strike. Will you go out and see what you can do to help them?" You've got to stop doing what you're doing, you got to check into it, get all the facts down, figure out who the players are, and come up with some kind of strategy.

11-00:55:30

Carole Sickler: She was asking your responsibilities on the board—

11-00:55:35

Sickler: I was in charge of contract administration. That's a huge piece. All the construction the city that was done, I was over all that. The first day I took over, the very first day I took over as public works commissioner, the mayor landed on my desk the little Santa Monica/big Santa Monica merger, and it was a nightmare. It was a year behind in construction. All the residents—and these were wealthy residents that live out there, Bel Air and Santa Monica,

that whole area out there. They'd taken all their neighborhood councils and formed them into one, one gigantic organization just aimed—

11-00:56:18

Carole Sickler: Because the Hahn administration had screwed it up.

11-00:56:22

Sickler: Yeah, that was part of it, but the weather also played a key role. It was a perfect storm. It sounded simple on paper. You take little Santa Monica and tear it apart, and then merge them together into one slick, sleek road. Well, it wasn't that simple. First of all, they got set back five weeks by unbelievable, horrible weather. We had—how many?—three months straight solid rain, every single day. For every day you have rain, it sets you back five days. If the ground is wet, you can't work. That set us back five months, just with the wet weather that we had. Then once they dug down, they found a bunch of old pipes that had been laid somewhere around 1906, they figured, that wasn't on anybody's blueprints. They had to tear all that old pipe stuff out, figure out where it went and what it was doing. Then once they were down in there, they decided, since they'd gone down that deep and they had dug that much stuff out, they might as well put in new streamline water pipes. Then it took on another life of its own.

11-00:57:35

Rubens: How long did this run? This went between—you said did I know little Santa Monica, and I know—

11-00:57:40

Sickler: It ran from Wilshire down to—

11-00:57:44

Rubens: Beverly?

11-00:57:45

Sickler: Way past Beverly Glen.

11-00:57:46

Rubens: No, I was going to say Beverly Drive. Oh, you're going west. Wilshire to—

11-00:57:0053

Sickler: Yeah, it goes west. I'm trying to remember exactly where the cut-off part was. Anyway, when I took over, they were suing. The same week I was there, that I had taken over, we get a threat of a lawsuit filed by all these joint neighborhood councils. I went out. They were holding monthly meetings with these groups, and it was a stand-off. The staff would go out and you could just see them kind of cringe, because all of these neighborhood council people would yell and scream at them, and it was like our staff didn't know what to do. They were trying to tell them why they're doing what they're doing, but it's like we were just kind of stuck. Nobody came up with any kind of idea of how to deal with these people. I attended several open houses that they had around the project, sat down with some of the businesspeople that were pissed

off. Then I got a call from the editor of the newspaper. They put out a little newspaper for that area out there. The guy says, “Just getting ready to write a scathing editorial about you guys.” I said, “Okay. So why are you calling me, then?” He said, “I just want you to know, I’m going to write this article. We’re going to have a meeting”—I think it was in a couple of days—“of all the players at the”—this was at Westfield Shopping Center where they were meeting. He said, “You might want to attend it.” I said, “Thanks for the invitation. I’ll be there with bells on.”

I called up all of my directors of the different departments that had anything to do with the project. Contract administration, engineering, street lighting, street services. I called them all up. I said, “I need you guys”—some of them couldn’t, because they were already committed, but most of them did. They canceled everything else and went with me out there. We took on all the major forces in that area out there. They went around the room at the shopping center auditorium, and they’re all saying, “You know, if you think the residents can burn you with a lawsuit, you have no idea what we can do to you. We have a few more dollars than they have to burn. We’re going to sue the city.” I listened to them all vent, and then I said, “Okay, here’s what I propose. We’re doing everything we can. We’ve been working on this project in pieces all along the boulevard. What we’re going to do different is we’re going to concentrate right here in front of this shopping center as much as we can. We’re going to have a meeting after this meeting is over with to see what we possibly can do.” They had an opening date of December 12th, I think it was, and that’s the year they make all their business. That’s when they make all their money in that shopping center. We had been working at different segments of the boulevard. I said, “We’re going to see what we can to get this place ready, the street, everything open and ready for you guys to open and do business when you reopen.” They had shut down, along with our schedule, kind of remodeled the whole shopping center. Then we were supposed to have the streets and everything done by the time they reopened. We were nowhere near ready to reopen.

I said, “Okay, but let’s do this. Let’s have a meeting once a week with your representative. I don’t want to meet with this whole committee, but you guys come up with five or six people that represent all of you, and I’ll bring our people in. We’ll meet with you once a week, and we’ll go over what we’re doing. You can take a look at exactly what our obstacles are and where we are and progress.” We left that meeting. They were doubtful—

11-01:01:59

Carole Sickler: Promised it would be ready to open.

11-01:02:02

Sickler: I told them, I said, “I will do everything in my power to get it done.” When we left that meeting, I took all of our guys back to city hall and we met up in my office, and I said, “Okay, let’s go around. What’s it going to take? What’s it

going to take to get this done?” Guy from street lighting says, “Well, it depends on how many poles I can get my hand”—

Audio File 12

12-00:00:01

Rubens:

Dave, when the tape ran out, you have gotten back from this meeting and were polling, basically, your key people. Your lighting man said he could come up with the poles.

12-00:00:27

Sickler:

Had to hear from the street guys how much they could get done, striping, all of that, how much striping they could get done, what dates we were looking at. It looked like, if everything went, and weather was good, we could have it all done with two weeks to spare. Two weeks to spare. And that’s exactly what our guys did. Once we combined all their efforts on that just one stretch in front of the shopping mall, it worked like magic, and everything kind of fell into place. That’s when I had the greatest respect for public workers and public entities. Everybody likes to make fun about how inefficient public workers are. Man, these guys worked like synchronized swimmers. There’s no way you could, as quick as we pulled people together, pull together a street crew, a striping crew, lighting crew, and have them work in that kind of harmonious nature the way they did. It was really something to watch. They worked almost around the clock. Nobody tripped over anybody else. Everybody got their work done. It would have been impossible to replicate that in the private sector without spending years trying to train everybody how to work together that well. But these guys work together that well all the time. Street lighting works with street service. All of these guys work together close, every single day.

12-00:02:08

Rubens:

The opening celebration, one of your greatest critics—

12-00:02:11

Sickler:

One of the biggest opponents that we had, the loudest critic that we had, to his credit, got up, came up, and thanked us publicly, and complimented us publicly.

12-00:02:24

Beagle:

Do I have it right that what you did, your contribution to this, was saying, instead of doing paving three blocks away over here and lighting seven blocks north, we’re going to bring everybody together, focus right now on your needs, because you need to be open for Christmas?

12-00:02:41

Sickler:

That’s right.

12-00:02:42

Beagle:

It was just sort of reconfiguring what you were already doing.

12-00:02:47

Sickler:

The reason these guys do that, the reason they break it up the way they do it, is because they don't have to trip over each other. They don't have to worry about tripping over each other. They can kind of take their time and do it the way they want to do it. They don't have to trip over each other. They don't have to get out of each other's way. But when they have to, nobody does it better than they do. Nobody does it better than they do. That was amazing to watch.

12-00:03:10

Beagle:

The reason they had to is the public outcry was so great.

12-00:03:12

Sickler:

They had to. They had to.

12-00:03:14

Rubens:

Well, your decision, your leadership, let's—

12-00:03:16

Sickler:

I'm a commissioner. I told them they had to.

12-00:03:18

Rubens:

—pull this together.

12-00:03:19

Sickler:

I told them they had to.

12-00:03:21

Rubens:

The Department of Public Works in Los Angeles has to be one of the biggest—

12-00:03:25

Sickler:

It is. It's the biggest, and it's the only agency that has full-time commissioners.

12-00:03:32

Rubens:

Full-time?

12-00:03:33

Sickler:

Yes. No other commissioners in the city are full-time.

12-00:03:36

Rubens:

So you're senior labor advisor and commissioner?

12-00:03:40

Sickler:

Yes, senior labor advisor and commissioner. Senior labor advisor was supposed to be my part-time job.

12-00:03:50

Beagle:

How many unions did you have on this Santa Monica project working?

12-00:03:54

Sickler:

Oh, wow. A lot of the building trades road crews, a lot of the SEIU members, engineers and architects were there. We had IBEW members working. A lot of these are contractors that contract with the city. The actual staff, engineers and architects, SEIU, AFSCME members.

12-00:04:25

Rubens:

Antonio must have been pretty happy.

12-00:04:26

Sickler:

Operating engineers. Yeah, yeah.

12-00:04:28

Rubens:

I bet he was.

12-00:04:30

Sickler:

They were. Like I say, when I came in, there was a great deal of trepidation and fear on the part of the unions about how Antonio was going to react to them, because they hadn't supported him, and he won in spite of it. So there was a lot of nervous stuff. I think we dispelled that pretty quick once we got into negotiations.

12-00:04:55

Rubens:

Any other stories you want to tell about being a commissioner? Did you get a parking place?

12-00:05:02

Sickler:

Oh, sure.

12-00:05:03

Beagle:

Did you get tickets at Dodger Stadium?

12-00:05:05

Sickler:

No, no. Contrary to popular belief, we didn't get those kind of perks. As a matter of fact, it was illegal—whenever I'd go to lunch with anybody out of the labor movement, I had to pay for my own lunch.

12-00:05:20

Beagle:

Too bad.

12-00:05:21

Sickler:

Yeah, it was a rip-off.

12-00:05:22

Beagle:

Whatever. Jimmy Herman, when he was on the port commission, had parking passes at the airport. That was great.

12-00:05:30

Sickler:

Yeah, that is great.

12-00:05:30

Carole Sickler:

Miguel Contreras did, too, and he was on the airport commission.

- 12-00:05:34
Sickler: Yeah, that is great. Here's a little-known secret. I could drive anywhere in the city of Los Angeles and park, as long as I didn't park in a fire lane.
- 12-00:05:43
Rubens: Because you were commissioner?
- 12-00:05:44
Sickler: Because I was commissioner, I would not get a ticket. All the cops had to do is look at that plate, and I could park anywhere I wanted to park.
- 12-00:05:52
Carole Sickler: But one of the other things that was your responsibility was the filming. Okaying street closures for filming.
- 12-00:05:59
Sickler: Oh, that was a pain in the ass. I was over filming—
- 12-00:06:02
Carole Sickler: They do a lot of filming in downtown L.A.
- 12-00:06:05
Sickler: I was responsible for street closures for filming in Los Angeles, downtown Los Angeles. That was a real pain in the ass, because before there were a lot of people that started moving downtown Los Angeles, it wasn't a hassle. Basically, we were the only people that lived downtown for a long time. But then they started building lofts and apartments, and they were starting—
- 12-00:06:28
Rubens: Became fashionable.
- 12-00:06:29
Sickler: Yeah, it became fashionable. People started flooding in. It used to be a lot of these movies that were made were filmed at night, downtown Los Angeles, with spotlights and helicopters. We were used to getting helicopters outside our window at two o'clock in the morning, because a lot of the car commercials that you see on TV were filmed right next to our condo, because underneath us was the Second Street Tunnel, which is a beautiful tunnel. It's that tunnel that looks like its telescoped. White telescoped tunnel. You see a lot of movies where there's a lot of chase scenes and shooting scenes in that tunnel.
- 12-00:07:10
Carole Sickler: *Terminator.*
- 12-00:07:11
Sickler: Yeah, sometimes every single night there were films being there, and helicopters filming, and explosions and all kinds of crap. When this started happening after people started moving downtown and businesses started moving downtown, and businesses were having the streets blocked with filming trucks and film crews, and nobody could get to their businesses, they

started raising holy hell. What used to be kind of a routine closure of streets for filming, you're required to put out a notice to the public that you're going to shut down streets. Then total hell started being raised. The film crews really started getting pissed off. There were rumbles, "Screw L.A. We're going to move out of Los Angeles."

12-00:08:02

Rubens:

That's a nice chunk of change the city gets.

12-00:08:05

Sickler:

A lot of union jobs, too. A lot of union jobs. The mayor wanted us to start brokering peace between the residents and the film crews. To be honest with you, it was strange. We would charge petty crap. We would charge the film companies fees to come in to city hall and film. It's an irritation. We shouldn't have been doing that. We shouldn't have charged them to do it. On the other hand, film crews would come in and just trash city hall. I came back from the meeting one day, and there's a cable this big, through the window, over my desk. I had no clue. They'd taken over my office, and there's these cables running through my office. There they are, they're filming Donald Sutherland.

12-00:09:03

Carole Sickler:

Behind Dave's desk.

12-00:09:04

Sickler:

Yeah. Go figure. But once we started communicating with each other, we started dropping the fees that we were charging, and then we started getting these guys to play nice with the residents and the businesses downtown. Then things started to work its way up. But it was rocky for a while.

12-00:09:25

Rubens:

Who's carving out what your purview is as commissioner? Had that been established?

12-00:09:29

Sickler:

It was set before I got there. I inherited. Because the piece that I got was the so-called labor piece. That's gone, because Garcetti didn't put a labor guy in the slot that I used to have. Julie Gutman took my position when I left. Then when she left, I was able to get Steve Nutter. Steve comes out of—

12-00:09:58

Beagle:

He's a labor guy, isn't he?

12-00:09:59

Sickler:

Labor guy, yeah. He's an attorney. He was also the director of the Ladies Garment Workers District Council.

12-00:10:08

Rubens:

He came in as commissioner?

12-00:10:10

Sickler: Yeah, he came in after Julie left. Julie left, and then Steve came in, and now Steve is out, because Garcetti—

12-00:10:19

Rubens: Took it away.

12-00:10:19

Sickler: Took it away from him, yeah. It's too bad, because it was a great place for labor, especially as labor advisor. When you had that position as labor advisor, you had tremendous sway over contract negotiation. Plus, you sat on the Employee Relations Committee, which is about the most powerful committee in city hall. They set the salary for every worker in the city hall that works for the city.

12-00:10:48

Beagle: Overall, what were your relationships with SEIU like?

12-00:10:53

Sickler: I thought they were great. I don't know if you know Annelle Grajeda

12-00:11:00

Beagle: No.

12-00:11:02

Sickler: She was the vice president of the SEIU international. She was friends with Carole long before I met her. We've maintained a friendship with her. She's come up and stayed with us several days at a time. I think it's good.

12-00:11:57

Rubens: So sitting on that committee, the Employee Relations, is that what set you up to go to the Department of Water and Power?

12-00:12:11

Sickler: No.

12-00:12:11

Rubens: Because I thought that was the title of your—

12-00:12:16

Sickler: I sat in there. I staffed the mayor for those meetings. When something would come up—for example, we had a battle over a contract. Bernard Parks was holding out for some piece of stupid antique language in the AFSCME contract that the membership thought was insulting. They didn't want to agree to it. Basically, it was language that said, "We don't trust you, and if we don't trust you, then we'll be able to pull this trigger of this language and nullify the contract." So AFSCME didn't want to sign it. This was Bernard Parks. The mayor was getting ready to agree with Bernard Parks, and I was sitting off to the side and behind him. I went up and I whispered in his ear, "This is bullshit. Bernie is jerking our chain. This is bullshit. Don't go along with it." He jerked like I shot him with a taser. But then he went exactly the way I told

him to go, and he shot Bernie down and agreed to keep it out of the contract. It was that kind of stuff. The kind of role you played.

12-00:13:49

Rubens: Ever since Coors, you had been someone who could just really read a contract and understand it and know it, but these must have been really complex detail—

12-00:13:59

Sickler: They weren't. It was just a matter of distrust on both sides. Bernard hated unions, and so it was kind of his way of turning the blade. It didn't benefit the city one iota to have that language. It was no benefit to us at all, but it was a major irritant with the unions. Why have it? It just pissed people off.

12-00:14:29

Rubens: Are you going before the city council for any reasons?

12-00:14:32

Sickler: Sometimes. Yeah, I had to testify before the city council on a number of things, like local hire issues.

12-00:14:40

Rubens: Did you have staff by the way?

12-00:14:42

Sickler: Oh, sure, I had staff. I only had one part-time person. But I also had staff of the departments. If I needed something done, then the directors would give me staff, assign staff to take care of it and do it.

12-00:15:01

Rubens: Were you ready to get out, or does Antonio now, say, "I want you to move somewhere else"?

12-00:15:07

Sickler: What happened was he had a deputy director, and this problem that Department of Water and Power just kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger. I was actually friends with the union that was involved, and he was a pain in the ass. Name was Brian D'Arcy, head of IBEW and a real kingpin. Probably the most powerful union in the city. Because DWP was so dysfunctional, and they would go through a general manager every couple of years, and so what happens with staff, and there was like 10,000 employees there, what happens when you have that kind of turnover at the top, you get a reorganizational chart every six months. Nobody pays attention to it. They all sign off on it, and then they just go about doing what they do anyway to survive. The only people that really know how to run the damn place are the workers. You've got to go down about three, four levels of management, and then you get to the people that do the work, and they don't give a shit about anybody's organizational chart. They do what they have to do. They don't pay attention to anybody's organizational chart. The only people that really know what's going on is the union. Brian D'Arcy knows more about what makes the

Department of Water and Power tick does than any general manager or anybody else in management. Management in one little place of that department might know how to manage their place, or how it works, but they don't know anything about the rest of the place.

12-00:17:03

Rubens: What's this person's name?

12-00:17:05

Sickler: Brian D'Arcy, from IBEW, Local 18.

12-00:17:19

Rubens: And that's really the most powerful union in the city?

12-00:17:24

Sickler: Yeah. The general manager was so pissed off at Brian that he wouldn't resolve any grievances. Wouldn't even meet. Refused to even meet. So there's like 121 backed-up grievances. There are unfair labor practice charges filed, and arbitration cases. I go over there in 2007, I think, and the grievances are backed up until 2001. It was insane. It was so polarized. This is God's truth. It was like God was looking over my shoulder when I went over there, because I'm trying to figure out how the hell do I get this straightened out. Because you meet with Brian, and "Blah, blah, blah, I hate them, and blah, blah, blah, they won't, blah, blah, blah." Then you meet with management. "I'm not dealing with blah, blah, blah." So the general manager has a heart attack. He goes on vacation four days after I get there. He goes down to Costa Rica and has a heart attack. Major, massive heart attack. He's out of commission. They put another flunky in his place, but that's to my benefit, because, now, he knows the mandate from the mayor's office is to resolve these grievances and arbitration cases, and he wants them out of his hair, because he's hoping that general manager dies and he gets to take over.

12-00:19:01

Beagle: He'll look good if he—

12-00:19:02

Sickler: He would look great, plus he'd have all that crap out of his hair. So he takes over and we start settling contracts—I mean, grievances—like crazy.

12-00:19:14

Rubens: But you were next in line under him.

12-00:19:17

Sickler: Yeah. I was actually what they called an assistant general manager. I was assistant general manager. But over employee relations.

12-00:19:27

Rubens: I don't think we have established why you were willing to do it. Antonio tells you, "Do this"—

- 12-00:19:34
Sickler: I was asked by Marcus Allen, who was the deputy director under Antonio, who knew more about what was going on over there than Antonio did. He says to me, "Dave, with your skill set, you're probably the only guy here that we can send over there to untangle that mess. Are you willing to go?" Again, it was a challenge. I thought, why not?
- 12-00:20:05
Rubens: What does that mean in terms of your position as labor advisor?
- 12-00:20:10
Sickler: I had to keep it, because at the same time, I was still negotiating with the city unions. I was still working with them.
- 12-00:20:16
Rubens: And commissioner?
- 12-00:20:18
Sickler: Not only as commissioner, but now as I move over to Department of Water and Power, I'm still dealing with that, plus I had to take on the issue in the harbor when the clerks were going to go out on strike.
- 12-00:20:39
Carole Sickler: I was just going to say that when you left to go to DWP, Julie replaced you on—
- 12-00:20:46
Sickler: Yeah, she did. But she was new. She was green. So not only did I have to continue to work with the city unions, I had to kind of help her, break her in. Walk her through all this stuff.
- 12-00:20:59
Beagle: It just occurred to me. Speaking of heart attacks in Costa Rica, as you're going through all of this, this is pretty stressful.
- 12-00:21:07
Sickler: Very stressful. My heart—
- 12-00:21:09
Beagle: How's your health?
- 12-00:21:09
Sickler: My heart kicked out eleven times. Eleven times. I went into A-fib eleven times.
- 12-00:21:19
Beagle: During this period of time you're working with Antonio?
- 12-00:21:24
Rubens: No. At DWP.

- 12-00:21:28
Sickler: It went on, too, while I was in negotiations at city hall.
- 12-00:21:32
Rubens: Now, you had been a runner. You were a fit person. The level of stress took its toll.
- 12-00:21:41
Sickler: I went to my cardiologist, and he said, "Look, you've got to change occupations. You cannot survive at this level of stress. There's just no way your heart can take it." I told him, I said, "Man, there's times when I'm so happy, like when I cemented a contract deal or I kept a strike from going." He said, "Your heart doesn't know whether you like it or don't. It just knows it's stressful."
- 12-00:22:13
Rubens: So did you take some time off?
- 12-00:22:14
Sickler: No.
- 12-00:22:15
Rubens: You're there two years at DWP?
- 12-00:22:18
Sickler: No, I was there a little over a year.
- 12-00:22:20
Rubens: Only a year, okay.
- 12-00:22:21
Sickler: Little over a year. That's when I decided to leave. In 2008, that's when I decided to get out.
- 12-00:22:29
Beagle: Because of your health?
- 12-00:22:30
Sickler: Yeah, because of my heart. I was burned out. I was so tired, because she would tell you, I left at six in the morning, and I wouldn't get home until eight, nine o'clock at night. I'd have grievances that would start at six in the morning.
- 12-00:22:48
Carole Sickler:: Department of Water and Power is right across the street from where we lived, so it wasn't like he was spending hours on the freeway or anything.
- 12-00:22:54
Sickler: No, I would just walk across the street and I was there.
- 12-00:22:58
Beagle: So you were taking a chance.

12-00:23:02

Rubens: By even staying as long as you did.

12-00:23:07

Sickler: I couldn't take it anymore.

12-00:23:07

Carole Sickler: I started really pressuring him, then, too, because I'd wake up at two o'clock in the morning. He wouldn't be in bed. I'd go downstairs. He'd be down there. His heart had gone out, which means he went into A-fib. He had taken his pill, waiting for it to kick back in. It was scary, because when that happens, he could have a stroke, the doctor said. It was happening so much.

12-00:23:37

Sickler: Yeah, it was happening a lot.

12-00:23:38

Carole Sickler: That I thought, this is ridiculous. The pay was really, really good, but not worth his health.

12-00:23:44

Rubens: I was assuming each time you took these positions, you had to get a little more.

12-00:23:48

Sickler: They were paying me 200 grand a year at Department of Water and Power.

12-00:23:53

Carole Sickler: So that was good.

12-00:23:54

Sickler: But it wasn't worth the money.

12-00:24:03

Rubens: I ask this question as we start wrapping up a period in your life. When you look back at it, what do you think about Antonio? How do you characterize his leadership?

12-00:24:15

Sickler: Antonio? I thought he did a great job. He got reelected, because he was the best choice. There was no question. Antonio was a really smart, gutsy guy, and he was principled. I remember—

12-00:25:18

Rubens: He had a long history of having been in the public sphere.

12-00:25:24

Sickler: One of the biggest disappointments he had was in Mike Garcia, with SEIU, the janitors. Antonio had done a lot for the janitors union, every stage of his career, when he was in the assembly, when he was speaker. Then, right after I went to work for him, Mike Garcia called and wanted a meeting, and he was

going to go after security guards. So I invited Larry Frank to go out. Larry Frank and I went out, and we sat down with—

12-00:26:00

Rubens: He was the deputy mayor at that point?

12-00:26:01

Sickler: He was deputy mayor, yeah. He and I were working really close on labor stuff. We get in the car, and Larry says, “There’s no way Antonio is going to help him.” I said, “Oh, yes, he will.” He said, “What makes you think so?” He said, “Mike screwed him during the campaign.” I said, “He’s going to do it because it’s the right thing to do for security guards. You watch.” You know what? We get back to city hall and we meet with Antonio, and Antonio said, “Hell yes, I’ll help any way I can.” He happened to be personal friends with one of the major owners of some of the major buildings downtown Los Angeles. The reason Mike called us was because he knew Antonio had relationships with this guy. I think his name was Murray. Older guy. Kind of a liberal old guy. He hated Mike Garcia, because Mike Garcia had called him a bigot, and this guy was kind of a liberal. He wasn’t so much pro-union, but he considered himself a liberal and he hated racism. To be called a racist was about the worst thing you could do to this guy. The last person he wanted to deal with was Mike Garcia. What was worked out was Garcia, Mike Garcia, agreed to make it an independent local that he would have nothing to do with. Other people would handle it. Antonio was able to get this guy to agree, and they negotiated an agreement, and we had kumbaya at the city hall office where contracts were signed with this guy. Then that kind of broke the back of the resistance of security guards, so a lot more security guards got organized. I think most of them, downtown Los Angeles, are now unionized, the security guards. That was Antonio that did that.

12-00:28:02

Beagle: What was the disappointment? You’re saying Antonio’s biggest disappointment—

12-00:28:07

Sickler: His biggest disappointment was that Mike turned on him and didn’t support him when he ran for election. Second time. See, they all thought he wouldn’t win. I knew he could win, because everybody kept misreading what the bulk the people in Los Angeles wanted. Under Hahn, everybody was Balkanized. Nobody felt like they were Los Angelinos. They just kind of felt like they had to kind of hang in their own little neighborhood. Antonio came with this message that we belong together. Let’s all work together. We’re all in this thing together. Let’s work together. People wanted to hear that.

12-00:28:54

Rubens: He must have had those skills from being speaker of the assembly. He knew how to really work the constituencies.

- 12-00:29:01
Sickler: He was really good at that.
- 12-00:28:03
Carole Sickler: Plus he got tremendous Latino vote.
- 2-00:29:06
Rubens: Yeah. Well, that was important.
- 12-00:29:08
Sickler: But he got a lot of Jewish votes. He crossed all sectors.
- 12-00:29:16
Rubens: Oh, yeah. He was very popular in the Jewish community.
- 12-00:29:18
Sickler: And he worked hard. He worked his butt off. He's engaging. It's really hard not to like him.
- 12-00:29:25
Carole Sickler: Oh, yeah. It is.
- 12-00:29:27
Rubens: So you finally said, "Antonio, my health is more important." You'd solved these grievances. It looked like—
- 12-00:29:34
Sickler: I went over and sat down with him. He was like Bob. He was so good. He was like, "Whatever you need. Whatever you want. I'm with you." I never had a problem with Antonio, never had a problem with Bob, ever.
- 12-00:29:48
Rubens: By the way, this might seem so out of left field, but Tom Bradley was mayor for twenty years. I guess you come four years after he's mayor.
- 12-00:30:01
Sickler: Yeah. He was wonderful.
- 12-00:30:02
Rubens: What was your opinion of him?
- 12-00:30:04
Sickler: I loved him.
- 12-00:30:04
Rubens: Just because he lost the Jewish vote at some point. He was a real, it seems to me—I can't think of the word—centralizer, harmonizer.
- 12-00:30:13
Sickler: He was, yeah.
- 12-00:30:13
Carole Sickler: He was great.

- 12-00:30:15
Sickler: He was another unifier. He wanted to bring people together, and people responded to that.
- 12-00:30:23
Rubens: Did you work with him, literally? Were there times ever that—
- 12-00:30:26
Sickler: No, I didn't work that close with Bradley. I was with him a lot, and there were times when I called on him to help me with the Coors boycott that he came through. He was terrific. As a matter of fact, unbeknownst to me, he presented me with an award after we settled the Coors boycott at the Catholic Labor Day breakfast. One of my proudest—
- 12-00:30:52
Carole Sickler: It's beautiful. Where is it?
- 12-00:30:54
Sickler: It's still down in the box in the garage.
- 12-00:30:57
Rubens: The city honors you for—
- 12-00:31:00
Sickler: The boycott, the Coors boycott.
- 12-00:31:02
Carole Sickler: It was a city seal. It was really—
- 12-00:31:04
Sickler: It's a city seal. It's on a beautiful walnut plaque.
- 12-00:31:09
Rubens: In terms of his posture vis-a-vis labor, he was—
- 12-00:31:14
Sickler: He and Bill Robertson were amazing. Interesting anecdote. I'm going to tell the story about Jim Wood and Bill Robertson. We can decide not to have it printed or published. Mayor Bradley was in some serious trouble. There was accusation of financial misappropriations with Imperial Bank. He was really catching a lot of hell. Everybody was beating the hell out of the mayor on it. Bill Robertson called me up and said, "Dave, can you come over? I want to talk about helping the mayor out. What do you think?" I said, "I'll be right over. I agree with you 100 percent." So I went over to Bill's office, and we're talking about—he says, "Here's what I'm thinking. I'd like to put together a little fundraiser in my backyard, my house in Hollywood." He said, "What do you think?" I said, "Hell yes, I'm in. Let me know what you want me to do. I'll make calls and we'll get out whoever you want us to get out." We're talking about the logistics of putting this thing together, and in walks Jim Wood. I don't know if you remember Jim Wood.

12-00:32:28

Rubens: He was?

12-00:32:29

Sickler: Jim Wood was Bill Robertson's political director at the L.A. County Federation of Labor at the time. Jim—He never knocked. He would just walk in the door. He walks in the door, and Bill and I are in the middle of this conversation, and he overhears it, and he said, "You're not talking about doing something for Bradley, are you?" Bill looked up and said, "Yeah, we are." He said, "You don't want to do that. He's toxic."

12-00:33:01

Carole Sickler: This was after years of what Bradley had done for labor and for Jim Wood and—

12-00:33:07

Sickler: He bent over backwards for labor, and given Wood appointments.

12-00:33:09

Carole Sickler: Because he was in trouble, he was just going to—

12-00:33:12

Rubens: Cut him loose.

12-00:33:13

Carole Sickler: Dump him.

12-00:33:15

Sickler: So Bill says, "Get out of here. Get out of here. Just get the fuck out of here." Wood is dragging his tail out the door, and he looks over at me and he says, "Can you believe that fucking guy?" I said, "Yeah, Bill, I can believe him."

12-00:33:31

Carole Sickler: That was Jim Wood in a nutshell.

12-00:33:33

Sickler: Yeah, that was him in a nutshell. Long story short, fast forward several years, Bill is getting ready to retire. He calls me up and wants to have lunch at the Windsor. I meet him over at the Windsor and we're having lunch, and I'm absolutely blown out of my socks. He says, "I don't want that son of a bitch Jim Wood to take over for me."

12-00:34:03

Carole Sickler: He was the heir apparent.

12-00:34:05

Sickler: He said, "Will you take over for me?" I said, "God, Bill, I can't. I'm not the right guy for the job. I can't. I wouldn't be happy there." I was tickled to death where I was as regional director. I said, "I'm sorry, I can't do it." He didn't want Jim Wood in there.

- 12-00:34:31
Carole Sickler: Really, Bill had groomed Jim Wood.
- 12-00:34:33
Sickler: Oh, yeah. He did.
- 12-00:34:36
Carole Sickler: He treated him like a son. Took him under his wing. But then Jim did a horrible thing.
- 12-00:34:45
Sickler: Yeah, he did.
- 12-00:34:46
Carole Sickler: Jim became the chair of CRA. That's when he—
- 12-00:34:51
Sickler: Community Redevelopment Agency.
- 12-00:34:55
Carole Sickler: That was thanks to Mayor Bradley. *L.A. Magazine* wanted to do this story, the new upcoming—what did they call it?—shining stars or something.
- 12-00:35:11
Sickler: Winners and losers.
- 12-00:35:12
Carole Sickler: Of L.A. They called it “Power Players and Power Failures.” They listed Bill as a power failure, and Jim, they had this big picture of him behind his desk. He had had *L.A. Magazine* come up to his office, take his picture, had all this stuff. Bill didn't even know any of this was going on until the magazine came out.
- 12-00:35:33
Sickler: When the magazine came out. Wood knew this was bad for Bill.
- 12-00:35:37
Beagle: Wood knew that he was listed as a power failure? That's terrible.
- 12-00:35:41
Carole Sickler: The day that magazine came out, it felt like there was an earthquake in that building. Bill was the type, he never raised his voice. He was very soft-spoken. He was screaming. He called Jim into his office, and he was furious. That was the last straw with Bill. It just really personally hurt him so bad. In every area, they had lawyers, they had doctors, I guess, businesspeople. Then for labor, they had Jim Wood.
- 12-00:37:59
Beagle: Did you ever think—you're a public works guy. You're almost the mayor of L.A. You're a big guy in L.A. I don't mean to blow smoke at you. Did you

ever think, I'm a fucking brewery worker from Golden, Colorado, just out of high school? Did you think about that?

12-00:38:22

Sickler: I've got an admission to make to you. When I was a brewery worker, I thought, can you believe I'm a fucking brewery worker?

12-00:38:31

Beagle: "I work for Coors."

12-00:38:32

Sickler: I work for Coors, man. It was good money, man. If you worked at Coors, this is no lie, you could buy anything in town on credit. That was money in the bank if you worked at Coors.

12-00:38:48

Carole Sickler: But you used to say stuff like that all the time. When you were regional director with the city, all that, you would always say, "I can't believe they pay me to do this."

12-00:38:59

Sickler: I know, it's true, but then after I went to the Department of Water and Power I said: "They're not paying me enough for this shit. Two hundred thousand dollars a year is not enough for this."

12-00:39:11

Beagle: Were you dealing with all those grievances one by one? Was that your job?

12-00:39:17

Sickler: Part of my job. No, that wasn't all my job. My job also was to handle all the grievances that were coming in, the new grievances.

12-00:39:24

Beagle: No, I understand that. But did you actually have hands on—

12-00:39:29

Sickler: The way it should work, they should be settled at the entry level.

12-00:39:33

Beagle: Okay, but they weren't.

12-00:39:34

Sickler: But it was so dysfunctional there, the pettiest grievances made it to me. In order to weed through all these grievances, I would have to meet at six o'clock in the morning, because the shifts are twenty-four-hour shifts there. It's a utility—

12-00:39:49

Beagle: And you're facing each individual grievance? Or a lot of them, anyway.

12-00:39:53

Sickler: Yeah, a lot of them.

12-00:39:54

Beagle: Some of them are just twenty minutes of overtime.

12-00:39:57

Sickler:

Twenty minutes of overtime, and then I had management below me that was just such bullshit managers. It was a game. It was a keep-score game. If the union won a grievance, then they had to win the next one. It didn't matter whether they were right or wrong. I had a case that was so ridiculous. When I got there, they had a pretty good system. They had to develop a grievance book. If they were going to refuse a grievance, they had to have documentation from start to finish on it. I had one where a guy was being fired for insubordination. Early in the book, it said brought him in, he apologized and said he was sorry, and then, towards the end of the book, "I recommend discharge because there's no remorse on his part." We're in this meeting, and once a month I'd go through all of these managers and I'd go through their books. I opened this book. I'm asking the guy, "I'm confused here. Early in this grievance procedure, you admit that the guy expressed remorse, and then towards the end of the grievance procedure, you're saying he didn't express remorse. What is it? Which one is it?" I think he forgot that early in the book he said the guy had expressed remorse. So I caught him with his pants down, and he was furious. He was absolutely furious. "You're trying to trip me up." I said, "I'm not tripping you up. I'm just reading your own documentation here. Which one is it? Because I'm not going to authorize termination of this guy based on this report. You're not even clear on it."

12-00:41:43

Carole Sickler: The lady that was sick, that was—

12-00:41:47

Sickler:

Oh, yeah, that's another one. Oh my God. Let's get through the stuff you need to know first.

12-00:41:55

Rubens:

What I wanted to move to, because I promised we wouldn't go a full hour this time, you finally quit. You met with Antonio and you said—

12-00:42:04

Sickler:

Last time I had met with my doctor, he said, "I'm just telling you, you've got to get out. If you need me to write anything, you need for anybody to call me, whatever it is," he said, "I'll be more than happy." He said, "I'm worried about your heart if you stay there."

12-00:42:18

Rubens:

I don't want to take up going back to the state Building Trades. Is there a time? Is there some lapse in time before you—

12-00:42:27

Sickler:

Before I go back to the State Building Trades? Yeah, because I leave, and when I leave, I'm actually going to retire, but Kent Wong wants me to start this construction academy, suggests the construction academy.

12-00:42:39

Rubens: That's when that happens. Okay.

12-00:42:43

Sickler: It sounds interesting, and Kent said, "Take your time. Do whenever you want to do it, in your leisure. You want to work an hour, work an hour. You want to work whatever you want to work. Do it."

12-00:42:51

Rubens: We'll take that up. Then the other question was, at what point do you go on the—I didn't know that you were a commissioner for the L.A. City Community Redevelopment Agency.

12-00:43:01

Sickler: Oh, Community Redevelopment Agency. I went there—

12-00:43:09

Carole Sickler: You were with the Building Trades.

12-00:43:11

Rubens: So it's your second time?

12-00:43:13

Sickler: Yeah. Right after I went back with the Building Trades, Antonio asked me if I would sit on—here's what happened. John Perez, Speaker John Perez, was insistent that I take his place on CRA. He said, "Antonio wants it, too." I said, "Why? What's up?" He said, "Here's why. Because if I leave, it's going to be bullshit for the mayor, because it's going to be a lose-lose. Whoever he picks is going to be a problem with the Latinos. They're going to demand a Latino replace John Perez, unless you replace me. If you replace me, the Latinos won't say anything."

12-00:44:06

Rubens: Because they know your history.

12-00:44:07

Sickler: Is that what he said?

12-00:44:08

Carole Sickler: Yes. I was there.

12-00:44:10

Rubens: He said, "The Latinos won't say anything if you replace me. But if you don't, then whoever Antonio picks, he's going to have problems with the other ones." So he said—

12-00:44:19

Beagle: Because there were a lot of other Latino candidates?

12-00:44:21

Sickler: Other Latino candidates were jumping that they wanted that position at CRA. I told him no several times, until he took me out to lunch—

12-00:44:31

Carole Sickler: I thought it was a good thing for you to do.

12-00:44:35

Sickler: No, it was, it was. I was just burned out. I was really tired. I was very tired. I just didn't want more crap I had to deal with. But I took it, and then I was glad I took it.

12-00:44:47

Rubens: So we should talk about that. We'll talk about that tomorrow, about the—

12-00:44:50

Sickler: Because that was also important.

12-00:44:52

Rubens: We'll talk about that, we'll talk about that. Then we'll talk about media. I want to talk about media in general. A little bit on California. We Do The Work.

12-00:45:06

Sickler: You could interview Danny on that one. He knows more about that than I do.

12-00:45:10

Rubens: You were being recruited. But then there's this Speaker's Commission for Labor Education. That's interesting. Then I want to ask your opinion also about—how do we phrase this?—about the polling, about the political consultants that were—

12-00:45:28

Beagle: Oh, yeah. During your career—

12-00:45:30

Rubens: Well, I don't know we want to do this now.

12-00:45:32

Beagle: No, I'm just saying it. I'm just posing the question. I was just saying to him at lunch—

12-00:45:35

Sickler: You're going to give me a little primer.

12-00:45:38

Beagle: During your lifetime in the labor movement a group of labor-oriented political consultants arose to work on political and other campaigns. When you were talking about focus groups I was thinking about the growth of that whole way of doing labor's political business—focus groups, intensive polling, message development and so on. I just wonder about your take on that as you get into

doing politics for the Building Trades, particularly. What your relationship to that world was.

12-00:46:18

Rubens: It was your comment that said the focus groups when they were trying to come up with—

12-00:46:23

Sickler: I'm not impressed with them. Bob spent so much money in San Diego, fighting Prop A. Sent me down there to work it full-time.

12-00:46:36

Rubens: Prop A was?

12-00:46:37

Sickler: Prop A was banning project labor agreements for the city of San Diego. Couple of years ago.

12-00:46:45

Carole Sickler: We were living here.

12-00:46:46

Sickler: Right after we moved up here. He made a commitment on this campaign and sent me down there full-time. It was a loser from the start, for a whole number of reasons. He blamed a lot of the Building Trades for not being that signed off on it, but I don't care if they had given all their money and all their time and all their talent and every one of their members had voted against it; it would have still passed. It would have still passed. The stupid focus groups. We sat in one focus group after another. Bob had them all over the place, and I sat in on them. They were skilled people that ran them, but you could tell. You could tell—

12-00:47:31

Rubens: You knew. You could read it.

12-00:47:32

Sickler: Yeah. You could tell people were going to vote based on how it struck them, and unless you have a face you can paint on it that says it's evil, and you can vote against evil based on that initiative, if it sounds good, they'll vote for it. They'll vote for it. Prop A sounded good, because San Diego was a conservative area. It's very conservative. Those people vote. The conservative people vote. They voted overwhelmingly. No matter how much money Bob had spent, we would have lost. He poured so much money into management consultants, and he was so mad at those consultants. "I wasted all that money on them." I wasn't going to argue with Bob. Because when you live in Sacramento, you become a part of that culture up there, and they believe this bullshit, because they eat lunch with them and breakfast with them and dinner with them, and they talk at cocktail parties with them, and they believe this bullshit. They're not out in the field. If you work out in the field, and then you attend one of these focus groups, whew.

12-00:48:47
Carole Sickler: But some of the consultants you like, like Park Skelton.

12-00:48:0056
Sickler: Yeah, but that's old-school consultant. He's a guy that would craft mailers.

12-00:49:01
Rubens: Who is this?

12-00:49:02
Sickler: Park Skelton, in Southern California. He was a whiz, a master. These people are important, but these aren't the people telling you what your message has got to be, and your TV, and you've got to run ads, and you've got to do this, and you've got to do that, the focus groups. Park is a genius at putting mailers together that grabs your attention.

12-00:49:29
Beagle: So he'll come in and sit down with you and say, "What's the message, Dave?"

12-00:49:33
Sickler: Yeah, "What do you want to accomplish here?" Then he knows how to put sequences of mailers together so they fit together. They take you where you want to go with them. He's genius.

12-00:49:43
Carole Sickler: Who was that other one that you couldn't stand? Some of the things I saw him do were—

12-00:50:27
Sickler: Richie Ross. This is why I think Antonio lost the first election.

12-00:50:29
Carole Sickler: Yeah, I do, too.

12-00:50:31
Sickler: He sent out everybody in South L.A. a bullet-shell replica in an envelope.

12-00:50:39
Carole Sickler: With a letter. This is when there were gang shootings.

12-00:50:45
Sickler: There were gang shootings in South L.A. all the time. The blacks in South L.A. vote. You can say whatever you want, but if Maxine Waters says vote, they all go to the polls, especially the old ones.

12-00:51:01
Carole Sickler: Teachers got that letter.

12-00:51:03
Sickler: Not just teachers.

12-00:51:07

Carole Sickler: I forget what the symbolism was or why he did that—

12-00:51:10

Beagle: But it was bad taste.

12-00:51:12

Carole Sickler: But the first thing when they opened the envelope—

12-00:51:14

Sickler: The gun shell falls out.

12-00:51:15

Carole Sickler: It looks like a bullet. I don't know guns and shells and stuff, but I—

12-00:51:19

Sickler: In South L.A., the last thing you want somebody to do is open an envelope and have a bullet shell fall out.

12-00:51:24

Carole Sickler: Mothers and teachers. We got so many calls from teachers.

12-00:51:30

Sickler: Oh, they were so pissed off.

Interview 4: July 15, 2014

Audio File 13

[Dave talks about the Coors boycott in Los Angeles before the tape begins]

13-00:00:00

Sickler:

—from liquor store to liquor store to restaurant to grocery store in the Latino community in East L.A. and we were sweeping the beer out, block by block, and the distributor drivers were helping us. They were helping us picket. Then they would go back and tell the Budweiser distributor, “Hey, they just got Coors out of the liquor store. Why don’t you guys run a sale on beer over there?” So the distributor would start running sales everywhere we took the Coors beer out. You walk in those stores, and it would be piled up like a big Christmas tree. Major sales. Instead of buying Coors, Latinos were buying Budweiser, and so Budweiser’s sales were going through the roof. When we took Manny Valenzuela out of East L.A. and knocked him out of that distributorship, the Budweiser distributorship was going crazy.

13-00:01:10

Rubens:

Just tell the story. Who is he, Manny Valenzuela?

13-00:01:13

Sickler:

Manny Valenzuela is the western director of organizing for the Teamsters International Union. We go back with him a long, long ways. When he was a young organizer just starting out in Los Angeles, he would come over to our offices, and he would ask for advice and help on particular campaigns that he had. It was a little dicey at that time, because there was so much hatred of the Teamsters by a lot of the unions that worked with LAOCOC, but this kid was wanted to organize the right way and so we wanted to take advantage of a Teamster who was a good organizer, and teach him and train him right how to organize the right way. Because the Teamsters weren’t training their guys to organize the right way. They were teaching them how to raid, how to steal other union’s locals. So we nurtured him and nurtured him and nurtured him, and eventually, when the Teamsters came back in, Manny became their number one delegate to the Los Angeles Orange County Organizing Committee. Then, whenever we would get a conflict between the Teamster local organizing and one of our other affiliates organizing, we would sit down with Manny Valenzuela and have the discussion with him. Manny then would intervene on our behalf and pull them out. Nine times out of ten, he was able to get the other Teamster local to back off that campaign. He gained a lot of respect and credibility.

13-00:02:44

Rubens:

So he had both the training, and then he had the skill, and just took it?

13-00:02:47

Sickler:

Yeah.

13-00:02:49

Rubens: Where is he now?

13-00:02:51

Sickler: He's the Western Regional Director for organizing for the Teamsters. He's got the western states. He claims I ruined his life. [laughter]

13-00:02:59

Carole Sickler: He's also LAOCOC executive director.

13-00:03:04

Rubens: Currently?

13-00:03:05

Sickler: Yeah, he's the executive director of the whole operation.

13-00:03:06

Carole Sickler: Tell them the story about the police in Las Vegas.

13-00:03:11

Sickler: Oh. Yeah, thanks for reminding me. To show you what kind of organizer this guy is—I mean it comes out of every cell in his body. He's driving back from Las Vegas, and as he goes through Barstow, he's speeding. A Barstow cop pulls him over. By the time Manny gets done talking to the guy, he's got the guy starting a union campaign with the police department. So he not only talked himself out of a ticket, he's got this guy organizing police union for the Teamsters, because the Teamsters represent police. That's how sharp the guy is. It's that good.

13-00:03:52

Rubens: That's great. Since we're just talking about random things, I have a list of leftovers which I think, after you've read the transcript, and we both take a look at it, there may be a few things that need to be elaborated, and fit them into a more linear narrative. Also, for instance, we talked last night, off-tape, about some of the differences between Northern California and Southern California. I'm wondering, while that's on my mind and your mind, and earlier today, you were talking about history, if you would make some of those observations on tape at some point. You had successes in each region.

13-00:04:35

Sickler: Very much so.

13-00:04:38

Rubens: Northern California, a little bit, was living on its laurels, on its past.

13-00:04:43

Sickler: I think one of the great frustrations for me was—and disappointments—was that we had such a positive response to our immigration project in Los Angeles. There's a huge population of immigrants, but there's also a huge population of immigrants up north. I felt, and others, and the AFL-CIO felt, that a program like we had in Los Angeles would be needed in Northern

California. So we tried very hard to get it through there, but we didn't get any response. Executive board of the San Francisco Labor Council was non-responsive.

13-00:05:20

Rubens: Walter Johnson was for it, but couldn't push it through?

13-00:05:22

Sickler: Yes. He was for it, but he couldn't get the affiliates jazzed up about it. Part of it, maybe, is my fault. I'll tell you how impressive I was when I gave a speech to the executive board about it. Two of the board members were asleep.

13-00:05:40

Rubens: Was Jeff Greendorfer, Walter's assistant?

13-00:05:43

Sickler: Yeah, he was Walter's assistant.

13-00:05:45

Rubens: And he wasn't for it.

13-00:05:46

Sickler: I couldn't get any support out of him. He mouthed support, but I couldn't generate any support out of him. I couldn't get any response out of the executive board. Of course, here is the problem: the makeup of the executive board in Northern California was all older white people. Executive board of Los Angeles was more reflective of our membership. We had a lot of Latinos on the board. We had younger people. We had women. They were energetic about the project, but not in Northern California. It was really disappointing.

13-00:06:18

Beagle: What about immigration projects in Arizona, Texas border states?

13-00:06:26

Sickler: We had the only project of its kind in the United States.

13-00:06:29

Beagle: Was there any effort to do something like that in Arizona, Texas—

13-00:06:33

Rubens: Are you saying above them exporting it? I don't want to hear about it just now.

3-00:06:36

Sickler: No, I had my hands full in California. Of course, I was the regional director here, so I had no jurisdiction in those other areas. Frankly, I think the AFL-CIO was a little nervous letting me do it here. They were sticking their neck out by letting me run with it, and I'm not sure they wanted to spread that risk around. I think they wanted to see how things were working out. They worked out, in my opinion, terrific. One of the aspects that the AFL-CIO wanted out of this was an associate membership program. They went along with the

legalization part of it and all of that, but I think their big desire was to see a burgeoning group of associate members. That was extremely difficult to pull off, because what happens is, when you get new immigrants that come in to Los Angeles, they'll gravitate downtown and they'll take whatever jobs are available, no matter how dirty, no matter how bad they are. But the longer they stay here and the more skills they acquire, the more they seek out other jobs, and they kind of scatter. They don't stay in one area where you can stay in contact with them all the time. We may be filling the sack with 200 at a time, but there were 200 leaving at a time after a certain point in time. I think the AFL-CIO, measuring the associate membership program, weren't happy with the results, because we couldn't call that a major success. What was a success, and what I really put a lot of work into, was the organizing arm of the immigration project. That was a tremendous success. We organized 2,000 wheel workers at American Racing Equipment.

13-00:08:22

Rubens:

That we talked about.

13-00:08:24

Sickler:

Targeting that huge a group of immigrant workers, it was extremely powerful and helpful to have skilled people who understood immigration law, who were bilingual, who understood all the different cultures that are within Mexico and Guatemala and Honduras and El Salvador, all the differences, and could talk with these folks and get credibility, and get them to understand that the American labor movement was a friend and not an enemy. Because in Los Angeles at one point, you had a lot of unions that would go in and organize immigrant workers, and then if you had a strike, the employer would call INS and have the strikers deported, the union would call and have the scabs deported. But the message was the same: don't trust the union. You may have to deal with an employer you don't like, but if you call the union in, you've got another problem. So we had to break that image of the American labor movement, and that's why sometimes we had to be very visible and very vocal and out there in our support, so we could gain credibility. And we did. I hated it when they pulled the funding in 1994, and I understand it was expensive. They were putting a quarter million dollars in it a year. For the AFL-CIO, that was a lot of money.

13-00:09:49

Rubens:

It's almost a stepping stone to, then, '96 being that turnaround in the state legislature.

13-00:09:58

Sickler:

That was the payoff. That was the whole goal, was to not only build supporters for labor for organizing, but to build supporters for labor's political program. It was critical for us to be able to overturn what was going on in Sacramento. We threw out some Republicans that had been in office seventy-five years, and we replaced them with good, pro-labor Democrats. That's when things started to change for labor. So while the rest of the country was

losing and hemorrhaging members, we were growing. There was one year where we gained 500,000 members. That was a direct result of the investment that we made in the immigrant community. When people look at Los Angeles and say, “That’s a vibrant labor movement there,” it’s a movement that the immigrants built.

13-00:10:51

Rubens:

Similarly, when you take a look at the legislature and the way that all of these people we’ve been talking about started going into the assembly, like Antonio, and then coming—

13-00:11:01

Sickler:

You can go down the list and tick them off. The reason we were so successful in the assembly and we got Antonio in there and we got Gil Cedillo in there, and Fabian Nunez and John Perez, and you go down the list to name others that I’m forgetting—

13-00:11:15

Beagle:

They’re all union people.

13-00:11:16

Sickler:

They’re all union people. So all of the sudden, the assault on labor stopped, and then we started getting pro-labor legislation passed. So there’s no coincidence that you’re getting pro-labor legislation passed, and you’re also having organizing victories. Because once we started getting some friends up there, we were also able to bring in 120,000 home care workers, and we had been spinning our wheels all those years trying to find out who the hell the employer is so we could get collective bargaining going for them. Once we got our folks up there, we were able to do that. The state is a hell of a lot healthier for it.

13-00:11:56

Rubens:

Let’s do one more story we didn’t include about when you were working for Antonio, that he’s about to go to China. Mayors are always on good will trips to try to bring in business. There was a potential strike that would have prevented—

13-00:12:18

Sickler:

In this case, it was the port pilots. They were a great bunch of guys. We had moved the ball forward a lot. We only had really one remaining issue. I’d put everything else to bed. But they’d had an outstanding complaint about a lot of their work being done by management. It was a festering sore that hadn’t been dealt with. In past negotiations, they had been promised that it would be dealt with, and it wasn’t. They were a little distrustful. This is when I called on my friend Peter Olney, and we kind of worked it together.

13-00:13:00

Rubens:

Peter Olney, at that point, was—

13-00:13:02

Sickler:

He was director of organizing for the longshore. I called Peter and told him the dilemma that we had. The dilemma was that the mayor was getting ready to leave that afternoon for China, and the last thing he wanted was a port strike when he went over to China to talk about trade. The whole big purpose of his trip was to talk to the Chinese about trade and getting more business in port of Los Angeles. He wanted to make sure there was not going to be a port strike. He and I kind of orchestrated this little dance. He made sure that I had a room right next to his office, across the hall from his office. He could just walk out of his office and cross the hall and come in. It worked perfect. We put to bed everything but that issue. They wanted solid confirmation that that labor complaint was going to be dealt with. I went over and told the mayor, I said, "Timing is perfect. You can come on in." He comes in and he sits down. He's so relaxed, and he's so comfortable with these guys. You could just see them melt right away. Made the promise, and they just melted right there, and we had a deal. It was probably done within a minute, a minute and a half. It was done. He gets up, and he left, and he's comfortable, and our port pilots were happy as clams. We got them a good contract.

13-00:14:31

Rubens:

So is the conclusion that Peter had already worked his group, you had worked your group, but nevertheless, Antonio had this—charisma?

13-00:14:43

Sickler:

Very much. He is a charismatic guy. Charismatic. I could tell the port pilot guys wanted to like him. They did like him. They just wanted assurance from the man himself that that was going to be dealt with.

13-00:14:57

Rubens:

Then the other little leftover, just to bring us up to the chronology of you leaving DWP, what we didn't say is that when you came into DWP, besides the enormous load you had and the mess it was, there was resentment there, I believe.

13-00:15:14

Sickler:

Oh, yeah, there was.

13-00:15:15

Rubens:

What was that about?

13-00:15:18

Sickler:

Well, two things. One, they resented the fact that I was coming from the outside. They resented that. They resented it even more because I was labor. They resented it even more because they knew I was a friend of Brian D'Arcy, the head of their arch enemy local union that they had to deal with. Most of those people that were in management that worked under me, they were all vying for that position. They wanted that position. The danger is not just having people who resent you that work for you, but these are people that know where all the trap doors are. So it's not so much what they do to you;

it's what they don't tell you. If you're standing on a trap door and somebody is getting ready to pull the rope, they don't warn you. *Pssh*. You drop.

13-00:16:12

Rubens: Trap door is—what would be an example of that?

13-00:16:14

Sickler: I'll give you an example. I had one of the management people come in to me while I was on the phone and ask to talk to me just briefly. "I just need a second." I said, "I'll be right with you." I said, "Yes?" She said, "I just need your signature on this. It's just a standard memo that we're sending out." I had a serious conversation going on on the phone, so I just scribbled my name on it. Then I get a call from Brian D'Arcy saying, "What the hell are you doing sending this notice out?" I even forget what the hell it was about, to tell you the truth. It was so long ago. But it was a complete reversal of what our policy had been, but it was one of these draconian damn policy changes that my staff wanted to make that involved the union. He's telling me what it was, and I said, "I didn't sign anything like that." He said, "Well, it's got your signature on it." Then I thought, oh no. So I checked it. I got a copy of it and I checked it, and I thought, oh my God, what a screw-up. So I had to send out another memo canceling it. It's embarrassing as hell. But lesson learned. This woman set me up, and I fell for it.

13-00:17:25

Rubens: Picked the moment.

13-00:17:26

Sickler: Yeah, picked the moment to do it. There are a lot of little incidents like that, where—you know. [Pause in recording]

13-00:17:42

Rubens: How did your involvement come about with the construction academy?

13-00:17:46

Sickler: I had called Kent and asked him to come over for breakfast. I met him in the restaurant at DWP. They have a great cafeteria down in the basement of DWP. I asked him to come over for breakfast. I was telling him I was leaving. I was having health problems; I was wiped out, burned out. I said, "I'm going to leave, and I just wanted to let you know." He says, "Oh, great." He says, "We can start a construction academy." I said, "Oh, Kent, no, man." I said, "You don't understand. I just want to sit and play with a feather in the middle of the floor. I don't want to do anything else. I'm really tired." He said, "No, no, no. You can just spend an hour on it, or fifteen minutes on it, whatever you want, but we need to start this construction academy." He said, "It's been a dream of mine for a long time, and you're the perfect guy to do it." I said, "Well, I'll think about it. I'll think about it." I talked to Carole about it. The one thing that sounded promising is that I didn't get locked down to a time schedule or that kind of pressure.

13-00:18:58

Rubens:

You would be paid as a consultant?

13-00:19:00

Sickler:

No, no, I would actually contract with UCLA. But we had to have funding. I said to Kent, at another meeting following up on that, I said, "Where the hell are you going to get the money, Kent? You don't have that kind of money." He said, "We'll get it from the Building Trades." I said, "In your dream. What are you, crazy? Bob doesn't have that kind of money." He said, "Let's meet with him." I said okay. I was really skeptical about pulling this off with Bob. I was fully expecting him to say, "Are you out of your mind? I don't have that kind of money." I called Bob. Happens to be that he was at his mother-in-law's house out in Diamond Bar. I'm living downtown. Kent's over kind of on the West Side a little bit. I said, "Bob, Kent wants to meet with you, and we'd like to meet with you and brainstorm about a construction academy." He said, "Sure, okay. You want to meet for breakfast?" He agreed to drive halfway towards us, and we met him at a halfway point. Had breakfast with him. I'm sitting alongside Bob, and Kent is on the other side, and Kent drops the question. I'm waiting for Bob to say, "Are you nuts?" Bob says, "That sounds like a hell of a good idea." I said, "Where the hell are you going to get the money, Bob?" He said, "We had that management trust, you remember?" I said, "Oh yeah." He said, "The whole purpose for the management trust was to start an educational program." He said, "What better educational program than a construction academy under the umbrella of the university?" Okay, we were off and running.

He had to go back, though, and get his board to approve it. His board was made up of both management and labor. Of course, the labor guys were in favor of it. The toughest hurdle we had to get over was the attorney for the trust. We had to satisfy the attorney for the trust that this wouldn't just be a big drum-beating for labor, just for the building trades, and not management and construction as a whole. We had to deal with the whole enchilada. There had to be something there. That's the way we structured it. It was 99 percent in favor of labor. We would push project labor agreements, but we had a lot of people on our boards out of management that favored project labor agreements, so that was a positive piece. The other piece that was timely was that Prop 32 had just passed. That was the environmental bill, and Schwarzenegger was pushing it. So there was a lot of questions about what was that going to consist of, what were going to be the requirements of developers and contractors and the building trades, what kind of codes were we going to have to meet, what kind of materials were we going to have to switch to, what kind of new changes, and is that going to effect on our apprenticeship program. So there was a lot of unanswered questions and of course then there was this whole big piece about the switch to solar and the switch to wind and what impact that was going to have. We set about using the Community Scholars Program at the university to do research on a lot of this stuff. I worked with them. We had planned for a big conference in the

South and a big conference in the North, where we'd bring people together and we would provide experts in a number of these different fields to come forth and talk and hand out material and then engage our affiliates in the discussion. That went really well. It was met with a lot of support. As a matter of fact, through the construction academy, through UCLA, through the Community Scholars Program, we developed policy for the city of Los Angeles on energy and construction. A lot of the stuff that we did through that academy ended up being a part of the city council policy and the mayor's policy—

13-00:23:18

Rubens: The community scholars comes out of—

13-00:23:21

Sickler: That's a UCLA program. What they do is they bring people out of the community, out of labor, and they run them through—they'll pick a particular topic to study. One year, Peter and I were very much involved with the L.A. MAP. I don't know if you've heard of L.A.—

13-00:23:40

Rubens: We talked about it in your interview.

13-00:23:41

Sickler: That was a community scholar program.

13-00:23:42

Rubens: I see. I don't think I knew that word, community scholar. So the academy, then, had a lot to do with developing policy, implementing it politically. Did it serve the function as an apprentice program as well, a training program?

13-00:24:01

Sickler: No. No, not so much an apprenticeship program. That would have been something that we would have liked to get into down the road. It served more of a role as it developed in study of environmental stuff, but also a lot of research work on project labor agreements and prevailing wage. We had some real brains. We had a Vietnamese woman that had graduated from MIT on our staff, and she was so smart and so fast, it was startling. You just would sit with your mouth open when she made a presentation. She just stunned you.

13-00:24:50

Beagle: It wasn't an academy in the sense that it was a high school? It wasn't like a high school? Academies, you think of—

13-00:25:01

Sickler: No, no, no. This academy was structured—

13-00:25:05

Beagle: More of a research—

13-00:25:07

Sickler: Yeah, research, basically. Mainly it was research.

13-00:25:12

Rubens: That was what was exciting about what UCLA was doing, that they were **really** working on strategies that had an academic backing to it, but using that academic method to then develop policy that could be applied.

13-00:25:27

Sickler: It was helpful. Daniel Villao. I recruited Daniel to take my place when I left. Bob ended up hating him, detesting him, and actually pulled the plug on the program.

13-00:25:47

Rubens: When was that about? When you go to work for—

13-00:25:51

Sickler: It was well after I went to work for the Building Trades. It was a long time after I worked for the Building Trades. I don't know what happened to him and why he—to me, it was unreasonable. It was wrong. But he claims that Daniel didn't do his job. Part of the problem was Daniel traveled, in my opinion, a little too much. He would spend a lot of time back East.

13-00:26:17

Carole Sickler: Conferences.

13-00:26:18

Sickler: Yeah, conferences and stuff. I think Bob felt that he wasn't doing enough on prevailing wage stuff and project labor agreement stuff. To be honest, there were times when I would go in and I'd sit down with him. We'd have to go up once a year for refunding. The trust fund would discuss whether we were going to get funded again or not. I'd go in and I'd ask Daniel, "What do you got prepared? What's your presentation going to be before the trust fund committee?" He'd lay it out, and I'd have Kent there, too, and I'd say, "Daniel, that's not going to fly. That's not going to fly. If that's all you're taking up there, you better have some stuff on—the meat and potatoes for Bob is project labor agreements, prevailing wage. You better have some up-to-date stuff on that when you make your presentation." He would have to stop and go put that together. We had Yuen Li Wen, a Vietnamese woman, make the presentation, and it blew the socks off the executive board. But then—

13-00:27:29

Rubens: It wasn't enough to keep it—

13-00:27:31

Sickler: We got funded that year. We got funded, because I was there, but then I wasn't there for the next year funding, and they pulled the plug.

13-00:27:43

Rubens: Tell me, how is it that you then go back to working with the state trades?

13-00:27:51

Sickler:

I got a call from Bob, and I really didn't want to go back. He had called me once before, and I said, "You hired Eddie. I'm not going to step over Eddie to take his job." Then he called me and he said, "I fired the son of a bitch, so there's nobody in the job now." He said, "I really need you. Will you come back?" I really didn't want to. I really didn't want to. But because he asked me—he had been so good to me over the years. I really did enjoy work—and I felt like I really did owe him. So I agreed to go back. He said, "Come back and we'll retire together." That's what we did.

13-00:28:41

Rubens:

I think you had mentioned off-camera also that the office was in your house. That you didn't have a—

13-00:28:46

Sickler:

That was the other great thing, was I worked out of my house and out of my car. That's a great benefit.

13-00:28:52

Rubens:

Any particular projects you want to talk about that—so you had basically four years there?

13-00:28:59

Sickler:

Yeah.

13-00:29:00

Rubens:

Four more years before—he knew he was going to retire at the—

13-00:29:07

Sickler:

They were four difficult years.

13-00:29:09

Rubens:

Yeah? Talk about it.

13-00:29:10

Sickler:

The San Diego campaign was miserable. That was just miserable. I'm missing three discs in my spine, and two of them are in my lower spine. Driving a lot just killed me. I'm driving back and forth to San Diego from here, and that's a killer. There were some days when I was in the car eleven hours.

13-00:29:33

Rubens:

You moved up to Carmel in what year?

13-00:29:40

Sickler:

January of 2011, I think. That was over a year of driving back and forth to San Diego, because there were two campaigns I was working on. One was Prop A, and the other one was this problem that we were having in Escondido, where they were trying to eliminate prevailing wage. They were a charter city, and so they were destroying prevailing wage. There were these two campaigns going on at the same time, and they were miserable, miserable campaigns. So

it was very difficult. My back was killing me all the time. She'll tell you, I lived on a heating pad most of the time. Pain pills and a heating pad.

13-00:30:24

Rubens:

We talked on tape, didn't we, about Prop A, that campaign? Yeah, because that's when we got to talking about difference between charter cities and—so anything particularly to say about the Escondido campaign?

13-00:30:36

Sickler:

It's still going on. They're still fighting them over there. They're miserable people. They abuse the Latino population there to no end. But we fought those bastards. They don't care how much money they spend as long as they can hurt labor. I think it stems from the firefighters taking on the mayor and some of the city council people, and they've just developed this intense hatred for anything union. They don't care if they lose money. They just don't. They don't care if the city has to hemorrhage money, as long as they can keep it from being labor.

13-00:31:20

Beagle:

This is the city council folks in Escondido or—

13-00:31:23

Sickler:

The city folks in Escondido. City council people, yeah.

13-00:31:28

Rubens:

The same time that you're back with the state trades, you become a member of CRA? You're a commissioner of the L.A. City Community Redevelopment Agency.

13-00:31:42

Sickler:

Yeah. The mayor wanted me—well, so did John Perez. John Perez was vacating that position to run for state assembly. John wanted me to replace him, and so did Madeline Janis, who was on the board, because they were worried about losing another labor voice, and all the time, the board is now gaining more conservatives, and African American conservatives. The board ended up having two very conservative—two businessmen.

13-00:32:12

Rubens:

What was the function of the board?

13-00:32:15

Sickler:

The function of the board was to allocate finances for building and construction, and especially in areas that were blighted. The overall mission of CRA was to eliminate blight within the city. But you had some of these very conservative, wealthy businesspeople on the CRA that were more interested in seeing the bigger developers get the piece of the pie. We didn't want that, and we also wanted to make sure that these projects, as they were being built, were being built by labor people getting good wages. Local hire getting good wages. But you had to be a watch dog on that stuff, because the business folks in there would run right over the top of you if you didn't watch them every

second. Madeline Janis was very good at it. She understood the institution. She came out of LANE, the Los Angeles Alliance for a New Economy, and did some brilliant research work there. Actually, they're the ones responsible for the living wage in Los Angeles, which kind of sparked the movement nationwide. Most of the living wage campaigns were started after that model was established, but she—

13-00:33:35

Rubens:

That was back in the late eighties, I think, early nineties.

13-00:33:38

Sickler:

Yeah, right around there. They went on to develop some really important strategies.

13-00:33:47

Rubens:

So you're still on that?

13-00:33:49

Sickler:

Oh, no, no. I had to quit when I left the city. I dropped off, I think, in December, right before we moved up here. December of 2010.

13-00:34:03

Rubens:

So you were there about—

13-00:34:05

Sickler:

I was there for about two years, right?

13-00:34:07

Carole Sickler:

Oh yeah, at least.

13-00:34:09

Sickler:

I must have gone on before 2009.

13-00:31:12

Carole Sickler:

And now they've done away with it by state law.

13-00:34:14

Rubens:

We'll try and confirm that. Do you have some success stories that you—one story you want to tell about that? How often did you meet?

13-00:34:27

Sickler:

You know how it is when you deal with a bureaucracy. If there were any victories, they were just within those threads and fabric of bureaucracies. Yeah, we had victories. We had victories where we pushed for a vote for something to be built union, and it was built union. We had those kinds of victories.

13-00:34:54

Carole Sickler:

Wasn't there a museum or something? You know, with the big builder guy.

13-00:35:06

Rubens:

Oh yeah. The L.A. County—

13-00:35:08
Sickler: Eli Broad. Yeah, Eli Broad. Funny, because it involves the Carpenters. We may not want to print this one.

13-00:35:20
Rubens: Tell it and then you'll see.

13-00:35:24
Sickler: Eli Broad comes. I'm trying to remember exactly how this was—

13-00:35:26
Rubens: You know who he is, Danny?

13-00:35:27
Beagle: I know the name.

13-00:35:28
Rubens: Extremely wealthy.

13-00:35:29
Sickler: He's a billionaire.

13-00:35:31
Rubens: Particularly interested in the arts.

13-00:35:32
Sickler: He comes to a CRA meeting. He wants approval to build this huge parking lot, or parking garage, next to the museum he's going to build. He's hired a contractor that's already cut a deal wall-to-wall with the Carpenters. That's not going to work. So I get a call from the Building Trades—

13-00:36:04
Rubens: It's not going to work because it's a—

13-00:36:06
Sickler: It's because the Carpenters are not affiliated with the Building Trades, not affiliated with the L.A. County Fed, not affiliated with the State Building Trades Council, not affiliated with the state AFL-CIO.

13-00:36:19
Beagle: And they have cut out all the—

13-00:36:22
Sickler: They've raided every jurisdiction that our guys have. I speak up and say, "This is not going to fly. I'm opposed to giving this contractor this contract. No way." Everything is in a flux. People are freaking out. The directors of the departments and everybody else is freaking out. So we call for a meeting. We have a meeting with the director of our department. The contractor himself shows up, and the contractor comes in and he sits down. "I want you to know I'm pro-union. Right off the bat, I'm pro-labor." I said, "Yeah, we hear that all the time." He says, "I also want you to know I'm union. I have a contract with

the Carpenters.” I said, “See, that’s not going to fly with me. We don’t recognize them as a union. They’re not affiliated with us, and they’re representing our work. All of our affiliates work is represented in that. That’s not going to fly with us.” I said, “You’re not going to get my support, and you’re not going to get the support of two of the other board members, minimum, that I know, on the board. We may be able to sway some others.” Everything was in a big flux. We leave the meeting, and their faces are as white as your shirt at the contractor. Later that afternoon, I get a call from the director, and he says, “I just got a call from the director, and they’ve canceled the contract with the Carpenters, and they’ll sign with the Building Trades.” I said, “Okay. Let us know when to sign, it’s sealed and done, and then you’ve got our support.” That was—

13-00:38:10

Rubens:

Good story. Good example.

13-00:38:11

Sickler:

That was probably the cleanest cut and dried victory that we had out of it. I’m trying to remember the name of the contractor. But I’m sure the Carpenters cussed me.

13-00:39:19

Rubens:

The Pat Brown Institute. How do you get to that?

13-00:39:23

Sickler:

Jaime Regalado, when he became executive director of it, started working with Carole, myself—

13-00:39:30

Rubens:

He was a professor of political science at Cal State Los Angeles.

13-00:39:38

Carole Sickler:

Going way back with Jaime. He was on the Education Committee of the L.A. Fed. I chaired—not chaired, but I coordinated—that was one of my committees. He had come to the committee long before, because he had a school in East L.A. called La Escuela for immigrants and people of the community. He wanted sponsorship, or he wanted endorsement from the L.A. County Fed. That’s how I met him. That was like thirty-five years ago. He came to the Education Committee. It’s a long story, but he got the endorsement. He was also a professor of political science at Cal State L.A... Then he became a member of the Education Committee, because he was from the professors union?

13-00:40:39

Sickler:

Professors, yeah.

13-00:40:41

Carole Sickler:

Forget what it was called, but it was the professors union. He became really active with the L.A. Fed and the Education Committee, and that’s how we all met and became friends. Then he later asked Dave to be on his board for the

Pat Brown Institute. He didn't have the Pat Brown Institute when he first came to us, but then he became the chair of that later.

13-00:41:10

Sickler:

He was actually interviewed by Pat Brown himself, and Pat Brown was really impressed with him, and so wanted him to be the executive director. Pat Brown was my hero. He was to me what FDR was to the country. Looking back at what happened under Pat Brown in California, this really was the golden state created by Pat Brown. There's never been another one like him. I don't know that there ever will be. He took massive risk. He was hated for it. A lot of the investments that he made in California at the time, but he made them, and we profited from that for decades.

13-00:41:52

Rubens:

Did you actually know him?

13-00:41:53

Sickler:

No, I didn't know him. I wish I had known him.

13-00:41:56

Rubens:

But Jaime had known him? He had been interviewed when that institute was set up?

13-00:42:00

Carole Sickler:

Pat Brown for Governor -that run was the first vote I ever cast when I became old enough to vote, and volunteered to work on his campaign, just sealing envelopes and doing office work.

13-00:42:16

Sickler:

I believed in his philosophy and I believed in everything that he did. It was an honor to be on his—

13-00:42:23

Rubens:

So Jaime knows you, becomes head, says, "Join us"?

13-00:42:28

Sickler:

Yeah.

13-00:42:29

Carole Sickler:

He needed somebody from labor on his board—

13-00:42:32

Sickler:

Now I think there are two from labor. Ken Burt from Teachers and John Tanner from SEIU. Annelle Grajeda was on until she retired.

13-00:42:48

Rubens:

I think I asked this before. Did the Legacy Project come out of the Pat Brown Institute?

13-00:42:53

Sickler:

No, I don't think so.

13-00:42:53

Rubens:

It doesn't sound familiar to you. I think that's where the kid wrote from. You want to give a couple examples of what kind of things you did do with the Pat Brown Institute?

13-00:43:04

Sickler:

Every year, we would have a big conference. Jaime would ask me to put on some kind of program about labor, labor's perspective. What was important about having labor on the board was to have labor's voice in some of the policy stuff. They were all liberal, progressive policies. The board was unique, because everybody kind of left their label at the door when they came in, and I think we all just voluntarily agreed that what was the best interest is what would be Pat Brown's vision. How do we best serve that, given our background and what we bring to the table? I really loved working with that board. They were all really competent, great people. I don't say that about a lot of management people, corporate people, but the corporate people that came to that board, they were all—you have to give it to Jaime. He just really had uncanny skills in picking people. He picked people with those inherent qualities, and they brought that to the table, so I really enjoyed working with everybody on that board.

13-00:44:16

Carole Sickler:

The project to get kids out of gangs.

13-00:44:23

Sickler:

One of the great programs they had that they don't have anymore, but they had a project to keep kids out of gangs and out of jail. It was a gang intervention program.

13-00:44:34

Rubens:

The guy that headed it up was—

13-00:44:37

Sickler:

Ex-gang member.

13-00:44:40

Beagle:

What was the overall mission of the Pat Brown Institute?

13-00:44:43

Sickler:

Policy. The mission was to kind of suggest policy for the state, policy for different agencies to follow that were healthy for the state. They had health campaigns, healthy communities campaign, environmental campaigns, educational campaigns. You name it. It runs the gamut. Economic division, inequality. Pat Brown was talking about that a long time before it became popular to talk about inequality. They were talking about that a long time ago.

13-00:45:20

Rubens:

Did Jerry support it?

13-00:45:22

Sickler:

He did, but Jerry's really a flake case. I love him and I would vote for him a hundred times, and I think he's done a great job, but he's flakey. He and I have a rocky relationship, even though I like him and I support him. When he ran for president, and I was the regional director of the AFL-CIO, he had it in his head that the AFL-CIO was supporting Clinton, and we weren't. There's no way we could.

13-00:45:54

Carole Sickler:

In the primary.

13-00:45:55

Sickler:

There were some international unions that were, but we're a federation. We can't pick one person and then tell the rest of the labor movement who to vote for. They tell us. You've got to wait until all these characters finally sifted out, and then you get them in a room and say, "Who are we going to endorse for president?" Then they tell the AFL-CIO who we're going to endorse. But Jerry had in his head that Lane was endorsing Clinton. Every time he would see me, he'd see Lane, and he'd be all over my ass. "You guys are supporting Clinton?" Blah, blah, blah. One time, I fly into Reno. We have a meeting with the Nevada state ALF-CIO at the local Central Labor Council that night, and it's held in the Carpenters' hall in Reno. As we're driving over, Blackie, the president of the state—not president, secretary treasurer of the state—says, "They had a fundraiser there this afternoon for Jerry Brown." I said, "No." He said, "But he's not going to be there." So I told Blackie this whole thing with Jerry Brown, and he said, "Oh, don't worry about it, Dave. He'll be long gone. They had that thing like at one o'clock this afternoon." This is like five o'clock we're going over there.

We drive in to the back of the parking lot, and there are only two cars in the parking lot, and the back door is open. We walk in through the back door, and you know what it's like when you walk into a building and you come in from the sun. You can't see anything. I couldn't see anything. Then I start making out a couple of forms, human forms, up towards the podium, and then they stop and they're looking at us as we're walking up towards them. I'm thinking, no, it can't be Jerry Brown. That's not Jerry Brown. Then he sees me and he recognizes me. Here he comes with his finger, like he just loaded it and he's going to shoot me with it. Sure enough, he's in my face again. "Yeah, blah, blah, blah." I said, "Give me a break. Jerry, I'm only interested in electing one person. That's Lane Kirkland, okay? Give me a break."

13-00:48:17

Carole Sickler:

But she asked if Jerry was—

13-00:48:19

Rubens:

Was supportive of the Institute.

13-00:48:21

Carole Sickler:

He spoke at all the dinners.

- 13-00:48:23
Sickler: Not all of them. He spoke at some of them. He wasn't that supportive.
- 13-00:48:26
Rubens: Then the daughter. Because didn't the daughter run for—
- 13-00:48:30
Sickler: Sister. Sister Kathleen. She ran. She was a little more supportive than Jerry.
- 13-00:48:36
Carole Sickler: She was at every dinner. She spoke at every dinner.
- 13-00:48:39
Sickler: Yeah, she was at every dinner. Jerry wasn't. He was at a couple.
- 13-00:48:45
Rubens: Do you still sit on the board of that?
- 13-00:48:47
Sickler: No, no. I got out, because we moved up here. I wasn't going to go back and forth. I was sick of driving.
- 13-00:48:55
Rubens: I bet. I bet.
- 13-00:48:58
Beagle: Does the Pat Brown Institute still exist?
- 13-00:49:00
Sickler: Oh, sure. Yeah, bigger than ever.
- 13-00:49:03
Rubens: Oh, yeah. Jaime retired, didn't he, as director?
- 13-00:49:06
Sickler: Here's the interesting thing. This is the thing that Jaime accomplished while he was there, is that the media contacts him constantly for his opinion on political races. Whatever's happened politically in the city, they'll call him for his advice on it.
- 13-00:49:21
Beagle: Is it mostly centered about L.A. stuff, or is it statewide in its concerns?
- 13-00:49:26
Sickler: It's mainly Southern California. It's mainly Los Angeles.
- 13-00:49:32
Rubens: What about the Speaker's Commission for Labor Education? I didn't know about that. Two thousand three to two thousand five.

13-00:49:38

Sickler:

I should take that off my bio. I was on that for several years. That was established by the state Senate, and I was put on that committee years ago, and then I would go out and speak at—

13-00:49:53

Rubens:

Oh, I see. Because you have 2003, 2005, I guess, when you were—

13-00:49:58

Sickler:

Yeah, that's when I was doing it, but I haven't done anything in years. I should take that off.

13-00:50:05

Rubens:

Who would call you up and say, "We need the voice of labor"? Is that basically how it worked?

13-00:50:09

Sickler:

Yeah, it would be some staff person. I never did really know who it was. They would ask me to go speak at some schools.

13-00:50:20

Rubens:

And you did it.

13-00:50:21

Sickler:

Oh, sure. I love talking about labor. I love talking about labor.

13-00:50:25

Rubens:

I meant to ask you about something you said when Arnold Schwarzenegger came in, that he fired you from the state allocation board. Is there a story about that?

13-00:50:38

Sickler:

Yeah. What's interesting about that is that he's so slow on the uptake. I sat on that board for almost three years before he found out I was on the board. I don't know why he didn't know I was around, because I was taking on the loudest, big-mouthed Republican on that board, because he was trashing unions every chance he would get. I was questioning some of the bids that were coming in. Some of the bids that were coming in, especially with nonunion contractors, they would be close to \$90,000 over our estimate bid. The contractors would all be within \$1,000 of each other. I raised it in one hearing. I said, "It sounds like some people in Fresno have had lunch together." Because it's illegal for these guys to get together and pony up these bids. Because what happens is, if there's a lot of work going on, contractors will jack the bid up, really jack it up, because they don't necessarily need the work. But they'll jack the bid way up. When things are really tough, when there's a bust cycle going on, these guys, they'll come in under bid. They want the work. They're going to make money either way. They're going to make money. We had some real questionable bidding going on with some of these contractors. What's this guy's name? Bob. He was out of Walnut. He

was an ex-operating engineer, but he was a right-winger. I mean, extreme right-winger—

13-00:52:30

Carole Sickler: Was he a state senator? I know he gave you an award.

13-00:52:32

Sickler: Yeah, senator.

13-00:52:34

Carole Sickler: I forget his name.

13-00:52:35

Sickler: Funny story about him.

13-00:52:37

Rubens: He actually liked you.

13-00:52:38

Sickler: He did. He stood up and he said, “That’s outrageous. You’ve just insulted every contractor in the state of California.” I said, “No, I didn’t. I just insulted the crooked ones. If you’re offended, that’s your problem.” So then when I get ready to leave the board, he gives me an award. It blew me away. Called me up before the Senate, and he said, “I’ve fought more with this guy than I’ve fought with anybody.” He said, “He makes me mad, but he’s the kind of guy you want to go fishing with.”

13-00:53:20

Carole Sickler: We were at some dinner that he was at, and he brought me over, introduced his whole family. He acted like he was your good friend.

13-00:53:30

Sickler: He’s a Republican.

13-00:53:32

Rubens: When you got ready to leave the board, someone on Schwarzenegger’s staff finally figured it out.

13-00:53:38

Sickler: Yeah. What was happening was there was this real crooked right-wing organization called Turnkey that was doing—what do you call them? Manufactured school buildings, if you can believe it. They actually built schools, prefab schools. They built them out in Perris, California. They were junk, and our guys were coming to me with pictures. When they found out I was on the allocation board, they were showing me these pictures that they had taken of these walls that they were hauling up there by trucks, and wire is hanging out. There’s mold all over these walls. They’re putting these walls up, and there’s mold inside of them. They were having a hell of a time. They couldn’t get any help out of anybody. So they brought it to me. I started raising a stink on the allocation board. This was when Schwarzenegger’s

people got really upset. This became a big deal. I put those guys out of business. That Turnkey operation went out of business, because we blew the whistle on them, and then they started coming down on them, and they went out of business.

13-00:54:55

Rubens:

Good story. We're at fifty-six minutes. Let's take a break, and I think maybe we'll turn to some leftovers, and we'll see where we are.

Audio File 14

14-00:00:04

Rubens:

It's come up a few times in our conversation about your history that you've been recognized for the work you've done. You mentioned, when you left the State Allocation Board, that the opponent, the guy that you fought with, acknowledged and recognized you. Then you've had a couple of really big celebrations and honors, and I thought maybe we should just talk about a couple of those. We'll list them. When you left LAOCOC, was that the one that you were talking about, Carole, that you introduced—

14-00:00:53

Carole Sickler:

No. The one where I introduced him was the Orange County Central Labor Council gave him—what was it?—a lifetime achievement award. That was a big dinner. There have been so many. He was always uncomfortable with awards and didn't ever want to be honored. There were a lot of times he would tell people, "No, no, no." We don't have a running list of them. I could probably put them together, because there have been some really nice ones. The Tri-County Central Labor Council gave him an award several years—not several—but a few years ago. Who else?

14-00:01:48

Sickler:

Tri-County Building Trades.

14-00:01:50

Carole Sickler:

Yeah, also the Tri-County Building Trades Council. That's Santa Barbara, San Luis Obispo, and Ventura. Then the Orange County, like I said. When he left the labor movement to go work for the mayor, the Building Trades then, Bob Balgenorth and the Building Trades, put on a big luncheon in L.A., where Bob, of course, spoke. Antonio spoke. Fabian Nunez. Maria Elena. There were a lot of special people there. Most of the city council was in the audience. That was a real nice one. I had just gotten out of the hospital from having knee replacement surgery a week before that, so I was in a wheelchair that day, and that bothered me, but everybody was so nice. That was a big one. When you left the AFL-CIO there was another big dinner.

14-00:02:53

Rubens:

Talk about that, Dave.

- 14-00:02:55
Sickler: That was nice. As a matter of fact, that baseball bat you see up on top of that bookshelf that was given to me by Art Pulaski. Art was there and spoke, and then passed the baseball bat around the crowd, and everybody that was there signed it. That has a special meaning.
- 14-00:03:14
Rubens: And why a baseball bat?
- 14-00:03:19
Carole Sickler: It's a Louisville Slugger, and there was something—
- 14-00:03:21
Sickler: He was comparing me to—I got brain freeze on the name. The baseball player who had the most consistent record of playing. I got his name on the tip of my—
- 14-00:03:34
Beagle: Cal Ripken?
- 14-00:03:36
Sickler: Cal Ripken. Compared me to him, that I was always—
- 14-00:03:42
Rubens: Always there at the bat.
- 14-00:03:43
Sickler: I was always there.
- 14-00:03:44
Carole Sickler: Every union was at that.
- 14-00:03:47
Sickler: Yes, they were.
- 14-00:03:47
Rubens: Where did this take place?
- 14-00:03:49
Sickler: This was at—I think it was then called the Radisson.
- 14-00:03:53
Rubens: A hotel in L.A.
- 14-00:03:55
Sickler: Yeah, in L.A.
- 14-00:03:57
Carole Sickler: But people came from other places to be there, too.
- 14-00:04:00
Sickler: Yeah, that's true. People drove up from San Diego and came down from San Francisco and all over the state.

14-00:04:09
Rubens: Was this when Ed Asner was there?

14-00:04:11
Sickler: No.

14-00:04:12
Rubens: What was that?

14-00:04:13
Carole Sickler: That one was when he left the Building Trades to go work for the city.

14-00:04:19
Sickler: That was in 2005, when I was going over to work for the mayor.

14-00:04:23
Carole Sickler: It was a slideshow of several things that he had done, and the two of us, and Ed Asner narrated it.

14-00:04:35
Sickler: Ed wasn't there, but he had narrated it.

14-00:04:37
Carole Sickler: It was nice. We'll try to get a copy of that. I know Debra Chaplain has it.

14-00:04:43
Sickler: I'd had cocktails several times with Ed.

14-00:04:49
Carole Sickler: Yeah, he's a character.

14-00:04:53
Sickler: When he was president of SAG, we ended up—

14-00:04:56
Carole Sickler: He was fascinated with the Coors boycott.

14-00:04:58
Sickler: Oh, yeah, he loved the Coors boycott, because he hated the Coors Company. Ed was a great liberal, and hated everything Coors stood for. He loved everything, all the damage I was doing to Coors. He just cheered me on.

14-00:05:14
Rubens: There was one other kind of big liberal in Hollywood in the movie crowd. I suddenly can't think of his name. Did he do "All in the Family"?

14-00:05:26
Sickler: Oh, yeah, Norman Lear.

14-00:05:29
Rubens: Did you enlist Lear?

14-00:05:30
Sickler: He has an organization.

14-00:05:33
Beagle: People For the American Way.

14-00:05:36
Rubens: Did you ever encounter that or work with them?

14-00:05:38
Sickler: No. I'd send them a little money every once in a while and subscribe to their publication.

14-00:05:43
Rubens: That was personal?

14-00:05:45
Sickler: Yeah.

14-00:05:45
Rubens: Yeah, as opposed to some connection through the AF L.

14-00:05:53
Sickler: We supported a lot of the same stuff, but it was not any kind of joint work that I'm aware of. Not in my region, anyway.

14-00:06:03
Carole Sickler: And then—what's his name? He played the president in *West Wing*. He was a big supporter of the Farmworkers.

14-00:06:14
Beagle: Martin Sheen.

14-00:06:15
Sickler: Martin Sheen. Oh, yeah, big time.

14-00:06:16
Carole Sickler: He was at several events.

14-00:06:18
Sickler: Yeah, Martin would show up.

14-00:06:19
Carole Sickler: He supported the Farmworkers.

14-00:06:21
Sickler: He was a big-time farmworker supporter. Big-time anti-nuke demonstrator.

14-00:06:28
Carole Sickler: He would come and sort of stay in the background.

14-00:06:31

Sickler: Terrific guy. You wouldn't even know he was there unless you accidentally saw him, because he was just there kind of supporting.

14-00:06:40

Carole Sickler: The Cinco de Mayo breakfast that the L.A. Fed had one time when they honored Artie Rodriguez, he spoke. But before they called him up to speak, he just hung back by the bar. He would talk to people if they came up to him, but he was not a show-boater of any kind.

14-00:07:01

Rubens: We'll make a list if we can of some of the recognitions and awards. We mentioned a few through the course of the oral history. The last big one was the tenth anniversary of the labor center at UCLA. That was an honor to be—

14-00:07:19

Sickler: It really was.

14-00:07:21

Carole Sickler: It was really special to me, because they honored both of us.

14-00:07:29

Sickler: That's what made it really special, is it was a joint reward. We were given an award as a couple.

14-00:07:35

Rubens: Oh, that's wonderful. Maybe what we'll do is Xerox this program from it.

14-00:07:40

Sickler: Without her, I couldn't have done any of this stuff. Just wouldn't have happened.

14-00:07:0043

Carole Sickler: Not true.

14-00:07:44

Sickler: No, it wouldn't have happened.

14-00:07:44

Rubens: That's pretty obvious.

14-00:07:46

Sickler: No, it wouldn't have happened. If she'd insisted that I stay home when I needed to go someplace, I would have stayed home, because she's more important than anything else I'm doing.

14-00:07:55

Carole Sickler: Because the labor movement was just as important to me as it was to him, and that's how we met.

14-00:07:59

Sickler: That's a sacrifice we made. We spent a lot of time apart.

14-00:08:03

Carole Sickler: We worked on a lot of projects together.

14-00:08:07

Sickler: The Coors boycott was three years old, a little over three years old, by the time we got married. When the boycott first started out, it was just in eleven western states. Then by the time it was over, they were in every state. The one state they had not moved into, and the reason they settled the boycott, was because they were worried that we were going to kill the New York market for them. So they settled. That meant I was on the road everywhere, all over the country, a lot. In Canada. And she put up with it.

14-00:08:46

Rubens: It's very significant that each time you made these moves and they became more rapid, you consulted with Carole. Carole who was encouraging.

14-00:08:58

Sickler: She backed me a thousand percent.

14-00:09:02

Rubens: All right, let's talk just about a couple other activities that you were engaged in that we, I think, did not cover.

14-00:09:12

Sickler: Before we get off Carole, though, the other thing about her is that she's smarter than I am. No, it's true. If I'm going to say something, a speech, I give it to her, and then she corrects it. She makes changes in it. She's kept me out of a lot of trouble in the past.

14-00:09:31

Rubens: You're a team.

14-00:09:33

Carole Sickler: Yes, we are.

14-00:09:35

Rubens: That's great. I think we'll scan that. I think that might be nice to have as an appendix. It really would.

14-00:09:41

Carole Sickler: They had a video that they showed that night, and it had a lot of pictures of us, even in Europe and different places—they wanted things of just the two of us. I took them out of our scrapbooks and stuff, and I never got them back, but I'd like to get that video.

14-00:10:02

Rubens: Somebody has them. They'll find them on their desk.

14-00:10:05

Carole Sickler: Because people that worked on that dinner are no longer there, and the guy that put the video together, I guess, they contract it with him or something.

The coordinators, everybody is scattered, and nobody seems to know where it is.

14-00:10:21

Rubens: They'll find it.

14-00:10:22

Carole Sickler: I'd like to get those pictures back.

14-00:10:24

Sickler: I should call Julie Monroe. She's a miracle worker.

14-00:10:27

Carole Sickler: I don't know if she'd know.

14-00:10:32

Rubens: Have we said enough about that right now, for now?

14-00:10:34

Sickler: Yes.

14-00:10:36

Rubens: The plant closure movement. Let's locate this in time. This is?

14-00:10:42

Sickler: That came about at the end of the seventies, beginning of the eighties. We had massive plant closures in Southern California.

14-00:10:50

Rubens: You're the Regional Director with the—

14-00:10:52

Sickler: I wasn't regional director then. I was just the AFL-CIO field rep at that point. We had a huge rubber industry, tire industry. All the major tire-makers were located in Southern California. Bethlehem Steel was there. Harvey Aluminum was there. All the auto plants were there. Southgate. You had aerospace. So you had tens of thousands of manufacturing workers in Southern California, and it seemed like almost overnight within a matter of a few years, just these massive plant closures. Workers would show up for work. I think one of the big tire factories was one of them. They didn't know they were laid off until they started to show up for work and the gates were closed, locked. Just locked. No notice, no nothing. This was happening in other places around the country as well. It was happening in the Rust Belt and the Midwest. There's just this sudden transfer, and we had all of these companies, just like overnight, moving offshore and out of the country. The AFL-CIO was working hard for plant closure legislation, and we were pushing hard for it on the ground here. Every single day, another horror story. We had guys in their forties and fifties out of work. We always had gangs, to one degree or another, in South L.A., but where all these manufacturing plants were located was a lot of them, in South L.A.... I watched, overnight, how things got transformed

down there. Not just in terms of unemployment and loss of good union manufacturing jobs, but the family breakup. The family breakup started then. You got all of these African American guys who were working in the rubber plants, steel plants.

14-00:12:53

Rubens:

Good jobs.

14-00:12:54

Sickler:

They don't have jobs now. The way the welfare system was set up is that if the husband, the father, was living in the house, they couldn't get assistance. They could not get welfare assistance. So those guys had to move out in order for their family to get welfare assistance. They couldn't get jobs anywhere. There were no other jobs. Nothing came in to take the place of those jobs, except, eventually, McDonald's hamburgers and Popeye chicken, and that was it. These guys had no place. Whatever kind of job training was a joke. We had HRDI, the Human Resource and Development Institute of the AFL-CIO that was trying to help, but these were lousy computer jobs that these guys were trying to train for, and the whole time they're taking the training for these computer programming jobs, those jobs were being off-shored to Ireland and other countries. So when they came out, if they could land one of these cheesy jobs, it was for one-third what they were making in the plant, with no benefits. But most of the time, those weren't even available, those kind of jobs. There was nothing for these guys. So you had kids growing up with single moms, and then nothing ever took the place of those jobs, ever. Generation after generation after generation after generation of kids grew up without fathers in the house, on public assistance, no jobs. So what are they going to do? Stand in line to take a job at McDonald's hamburger, or sell drugs and make a few bucks more? So they got not only into drugs; they got into gangs, because that was the only support system for these kids down there. Nobody did a damn thing down there for those kids. That's the sad thing, and that was plant closures. That's when it started.

14-00:14:45

Beagle:

What was going on in the economy that suddenly all these plants were closed. Did you ever understand that?

14-00:14:56

Sickler:

Yeah, I understood it. It was part of Reagan's plan. This all started right after Reagan got elected. They targeted the heart of the labor movement. Where was the heart of the labor movement in the United States of America? It was in manufacturing. So wherever there was concentration of unions and manufacturing. When I came to Los Angeles, 1976, the biggest unions, the biggest guys on the block, was the UAW, the Machinists, the Steelworkers. They had huge locals. Everywhere you looked, there was manufacturing going on. Within a matter of seven, eight years, gone. But it happened. It really happened on a massive scale after Reagan got elected.

14-00:15:48
Rubens: PATCO was the—

14-00:15:51
Sickler: I guarantee you this: that was Joe Coors telling Ronald Reagan what to do.

14-00:15:58
Rubens: We talked about that. That was really insightful. Dismantling of the NLRB, the whole change in who sat on it. As field rep, was there AF of L programs at all that were trying to do something about this?

14-00:16:17
Sickler: Like I said, we were pushing very hard for legislation, on plant closure legislation on one hand. On the other hand, trying to do whatever we could in terms of training dollars to retrain these people that were being laid off. Where we had good, strong union contracts, you could get some kind of severance pay for your guys. These were all little Band-Aids.

14-00:16:43
Beagle: There was a plant closures project.

14-00:16:46
Sickler: Yeah, there was.

14-00:16:46
Beagle: At least up in Northern California.

14-00:16:48
Sickler: There was in the south, too.

14-00:16:49
Rubens: Ellen O’Leary?

14-00:16:50
Sickler: As a matter of fact, I think Larry Frank was involved with it.

14-00:16:53
Carole Sickler: He was involved with it, Miguel was involved with it.

14-00:16:55
Beagle: What did they do? I don’t remember.

14-00:16:59
Sickler: I wasn’t a part of it. I was aware of it. It was there. I didn’t work directly with those folks. The AFL-CIO had its own program, so we were pushing for the legislation, lobbying hard for legislation. Then we were working on job training stuff.

14-00:17:20
Rubens: Is there anything more to say in terms of your involvement or understanding of that?

14-00:17:25

Sickler:

No. That was a really frustrating period of time for me. I really felt really angry about what was going on. I think the only thing I would add is a conversation I had with a young guy on a plane over to Hawaii. I was on my way over to speak to the Hawaii state AFL-CIO convention. I'm sitting next to a young kid. Come to find out, he's out of the steelworkers, and he was laid off. He's out of Ohio. He's on his way to Hawaii to join up with family or somebody over there. We get to talking about politics. I mentioned that this was part of Ronald Reagan's program. This guy is a Ronald Reagan supporter. I said, "You just lost your job." I kind of gave him a breakdown like I just gave you about who was responsible for this stuff happening. He's not arguing with me. We talk for about two hours. By the time we get off the plane, he says, "I can't help it. He just makes me feel good. I'll probably vote for him."

14-00:18:32

Rubens:

Morning in America.

14-00:18:34

Carole Sickler:

You got very involved in the PATCO.

14-00:18:37

Sickler:

Oh, yes. I was very involved in PATCO.

14-00:18:42

Carole Sickler:

Lots of huge rallies.

14-00:18:46

Sickler:

That was another depressing nightmare, was PATCO. Kirkland had put a boycott on all airline travel, which was kind of funny, because we had this one pompous ass that worked in the headquarters back in Washington. He's one of these guys that has to dress to the nines every morning, come into the office and check himself out in the mirror every couple of minutes. Take care of the hair. Hair had to be just right. He had to give a speech in Seattle, and he was in Seattle when Lane put the kibosh on air travel, so he had to take a Greyhound bus.

14-00:19:28

Rubens:

How long did that last? You got caught up in that, too?

14-00:19:32

Sickler:

I had to take the train to Oakland all the time. But that was not bad duty.

14-00:19:38

Carole Sickler:

That wasn't bad. Some people were taking the train across country, Greyhound.

14-00:19:43

Rubens:

Other ways that you were involved with the PATCO strike?

- 14-00:19:47
Carole Sickler: A lot of huge rallies you would go to.
- 14-00:19:49
Sickler: We put together rallies and picketing, and coordinated picketing for them, rally for them, raising funds for them, supporting them in every way we possibly could.
- 14-00:19:59
Rubens: Big campaign.
- 14-00:20:00
Sickler: Yeah, it was a huge campaign.
- 14-00:20:02
Carole Sickler: The guy who was the president of the PATCO local became a good friend of ours.
- 14-00:20:08
Sickler: Yeah. Matter of fact, he and his wife got married in our little condo. Became family with them.
- 14-00:20:20
Carole Sickler: He developed a serious heart problem because of that strike and—
- 14-00:20:27
Rubens: The stress of all the—
- 14-00:20:30
Carole Sickler: He's dead now. He was way younger—
- 14-00:20:32
Rubens: Have we said his name?
- 14-00:20:34
Sickler: Chuck Sheehan.
- 14-00:20:35
Rubens: I think you mentioned him before.
- 14-00:20:38
Carole Sickler: He was in line to get a heart transplant at one period of time. He passed away. Probably when he passed away, I think he would probably only be in his forties, maybe.
- 14-00:20:56
Beagle: Am I wrong? I'm kind of remembering that strike that the leadership of that union was not always doing the right thing.
- 14-00:21:05
Sickler: They were totally derelict. I mean so out of it.

14-00:21:10

Beagle: They didn't need to go on strike.

14-00:21:14

Sickler: What was maddening about it, if you talk to Lane privately, Lane would tell you that guy should have been hung up by his heels and quartered, because he put his membership through pure hell. He never sought the counsel of the AFL-CIO or anybody else. He didn't reach out to talk about—

14-00:21:35

Beagle: That's what I remember.

14-00:21:38

Sickler: He had no preparations made for relief for his members. You build a war chest for your people, and you make sure that everything you can possibly do to take care of them before you pull the pin. He was another idiot that thought if you go out on strike, you only have to stay out there for a couple of days. When you go out on strike, you plan to go out forever. For as long as it takes or forever. That's what your plan better be. Because if you go out on strike and you think it's only four days and you tell people it's going to be four days—

14-00:22:11

Beagle: Then it's day five.

14-00:22:14

Sickler: You're in big trouble.

14-00:22:14

Carole Sickler: A lot of those members were Republicans. They made pretty good money. A lot of them were Republicans until the strike.

14-00:22:26

Beagles: Torchia was the name. T-O-R-C-H-I-A.

14-00:22:31

Sickler: I can't recall. Lane was furious with him. It cast the death knell for us in a lot of respects, PATCO did. But man, Coors' fingerprints were all over that. When Coors was forcing strikes there, it was almost unheard of in the country. Most employers weren't pushing for strikes back in the fifties and the seventies. It was kind of unheard of. But Coors was. They were pushing for strikes, because they knew if you could keep them out for a year, you could decertify them, and then you were non-union for almost ever. That was his plan. What did Reagan know about strikes? He didn't know anything about strikes. Joe Coors was on his kitchen cabinet. He was one of his closest advisors. Joe Coors gave Ronald Reagan more money in 1976, when he ran for president, than any other single person in the country. Then he established that Heritage Foundation, which became Reagan's blueprint.

14-00:23:39

Rubens: You do a good job on that. We talked about that.

14-00:23:45

Sickler: Maddening.

14-00:23:46

Rubens: Since we're a bit back there in time, I didn't get you to talk about what it was to be vice president of the Denver Federation of Labor, and then you were vice president of the Colorado State.

14-00:24:03

Sickler: There was no really special designation to it. There was about fifteen or eighteen other vice presidents of DALF, we called it, Denver Area Labor Federation. Vice president of the state fed was kind of the same. It was just one of a number of board members. I think probably the most distinctive title I had there and the work that I did was I was chair of the Strike Committee for the state. Whenever there was a strike going on someplace, I would help out. We would turn out support for strikes. As a matter of fact, I helped campaign for Pat Schroeder, who was a liberal democratic congresswoman from Denver who was really supportive. I would call her and she would turn out and get her staff to turn out and support a lot of our strikes in the Denver area. Then I was also chair of the Union Label Committee.

14-00:24:59

Rubens: You talked about a T-shirt that you—oh, that was for the boycott, I guess.

14-00:25:04

Sickler: No, the T-shirt that I did was for Pat's campaign. "Vote: Just Do It," with a checkmark.

14-00:25:12

Rubens: But Union Label. You were chair of the—

14-00:25:15

Sickler: What I did was interesting with the Union Label Committee was I would ask every single delegate that was a union member, for the following month, I would ask a particular union to come and talk to us a little bit about what their union label meant, how it came about, what was a little bit of the history of their union, and give it to us in about ten minutes, no more than ten minutes, and if you could bring stuff to display as well. It was helpful for them, because they had to go back and do a little research on their own union. There was a lot of pride involved in them doing that, too, so they got to kind of showcase their union. It was kind of fun. It was a fun thing to do. I learned a lot about these various unions by listening to these guys come in and talk about the history. It was amazing. Some of these business managers didn't know that much about the history of their union. They had to go back and look in. How it was founded. Some of it was pretty exciting stuff, some of the wars they went through to get started. They started by another name, and then they merged and they became different through the years. So what you knew them

today, in that time in the sixties and the seventies, was totally different than what they were a hundred years before that. They were forgers and—

14-00:26:38

Beagle:

Sounds like you had, consistently, through your career, kind of an instinct about how to build institutions, how to build bonding between—just how to pull people together. That's a real good example of what is it—

14-00:26:52

Sickler:

That's one of the things I like to do.

14-00:26:53

Beagle:

Give these guys a sense of belonging to something.

14-00:26:58

Sickler:

That's what you learn when you organize. You have to give people ownership. If they feel invested, then they'll stick with it and they become more supportive of it.

14-00:27:12

Rubens:

I think you were talking last night—am I mistaken?—about growing up with a history, that it permeated Colorado in a way, and certainly your area, because of the Ludlow strike.

14-00:27:25

Sickler:

The Ludlow strike. Joe Hill spent a lot of time in Colorado with the mines. There's so much history in Colorado with the Miners union. Leadville and all of the mines that were up there. Labor was organizing in the 1800s in Denver. I think I said this before. When I got out of high school, almost every place that was hiring was unionized. Good job, benefits.

14-00:28:01

Carole Sickler:

Same with me.

14-00:28:04

Rubens:

But you weren't learning that history in school? I think we talked about that.

14-00:28:06

Sickler:

Oh, no. No. You didn't learn that stuff in school.

14-00:28:15

Rubens:

I think what you were talking about was the sense history permeating—it was just there. The old union—

14-00:28:28

Sickler:

When I was working at Coors, a lot of the guys that got on at Coors worked in the mines in southern Colorado, like around Trinidad and Pueblo, there were a lot of mines down there. So these guys were hardcore union members when they came up and went to work for Coors. They come out of families that went back generations of union members. They were great to talk to, because they could tell you some of the really hard history of Pueblo. Ludlow, of

course, being the most blatant example, but they had other stories, strike stories and hardship stories, that their parents and grandparents had gone through to keep the union alive. These were hardcore supporting union members. Then when the locals struck Coors, they were the strongest supporters. They stayed out for the entire time.

14-00:29:27

Rubens:

I think maybe we'll wrap up for now. I always wonder if we should make a concluding statement, but let's wait until we read the transcript. I think there might be a few parts of the transcript that we need to clarify. There were a couple of pages where the audio faded in and out.

I meant to ask you about when you first met Maria Elena Durazo.

14-00:30:07

Carole Sickler:

LCLAA meeting. She came. You were speaking about the Coors boycott.

14-00:30:12

Sickler:

Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah. I forgot. That was a long time before. She was at a LCLAA meeting, and I'd met her there. When I really start paying attention to her was when she got involved with hotel and restaurant. I didn't realize at the time she was actually running for Scottie Allen, against Scottie Allen. I was just starting the immigration project. I knew she was really smart, but then I talked to Al Hernandez and some other Latino labor leaders, and they were telling me, "Man, if you could get Maria Elena Durazo to run your immigration project, she'd do a really great job." Offered her the job and she turned me down, because she was running for the president's position of Local 11, that big Local 11. That was a huge deal in Los Angeles, because, for years, this guy named Scottie Allen, a white guy that ran the hotel and restaurant local, refused to translate the contract into Spanish. His membership now was, by overwhelming majority, Spanish workers, Spanish-speaking-only workers. He refused to have translation at the union meetings for these folks, and just wasn't representing him. It was treating them like trash. Maria Elena Durazo was fed up with it, and so she ran. She ran against him, and she defeated him. Probably one of the great romantic love stories of the labor movement is Miguel Contreras came in from the international to put the local in trusteeships, so he was the enemy coming in. She ends up—

14-00:32:04

Carole Sickler:

She hated him.

14-00:32:05

Sickler:

She hated his guts. They were picketing him and everything else, and she ended up marrying him. Matter of fact, Carole and I went to dinner one night at Edward's Steakhouse before they closed it, and this was when this was going on. It must have been right after they started getting together, because Maria Elena and Miguel were in a booth, talking lovey-dovey.

14-00:32:29

Rubens: So she remained president of that local?

14-00:32:32

Sickler: She remained president of that local until she went over to the county fed.

14-00:32:37

Rubens: And she replaced you at the labor center, right, at UCLA Labor Center?

14-00:32:44

Sickler: Let me back up. When Miguel died, she called me and said, "We've got to do something to make sure Miguel's legacy is not lost. Whoever fills his spot has got to be the right person." She said, "What do you think about Martin Ludlow?" Martin was Miguel's political director at one time and had—

14-00:33:13

Carole Sickler: After Fabian Nunez..

14-00:33:15

Sickler: Yeah, after Fabian, when Miguel died.. He had moved on to the city council. Martin was at the city council, and a guy named Charles Taylor was the political director for Miguel then. We all agreed we did not want Charles Taylor taking Miguel's place.

14-00:33:33

Rubens: I think Carole talked about that.

14-00:33:35

Sickler: Maria Elena called up and said, "Will you join me and a couple of others, work together with me and we'll pick somebody?" I said sure. We met. We met several times. We started meeting at our house, our place. Martin and his wife would come over. Came over several times before—

14-00:34:01

Carole Sickler: Our condo downtown became like a gathering place.

14-00:34:03

Sickler: It became like central headquarters for the campaign. We kept after Maria Elena. Myself, Brian D'Arcy, Carl Friedlander. Who else did we have on there?

14-00:34:19

Rubens: Friedlander was with?

14-00:34:21

Sickler: Teachers. I think that was the committee. Was Maria Elena, myself—

14-00:34:25

Carole Sickler: There were some others. I don't remember exactly.

14-00:34:28

Sickler:

I think that's all. Martin, like I said, was sitting on the city council. So we got Martin talked in, finally got him talked into going. He had economic concerns. We had to do some gyrations on money and all that kind of stuff to get it put together. We finally got it put together. Trying to get him to make the final jump. Finally, I called him on the phone and said, "This is it, goddammit. You're going to jump. You're going to jump now, because we can't wait any longer." And so he did. He did the jump and we got him in there. That was Maria Elena, Maria Elena's leadership that pulled that off.

14-00:35:11

Rubens:

Then she went to the Fed? She became the—

14-00:35:15

Sickler:

Well, no. Then what happened was Martin got in trouble running for city council over fundraising, so he had to leave the L.A. County Fed.

14-00:35:44

Sickler:

Then we had to replace him.

14-00:35:54

Carole Sickler:

Had to really talk Maria Elena into it. She did not want to run.

14-00:35:59

Sickler:

No, she wanted me to run.

14-00:36:01

Carole Sickler:

But she did it because of Miguel. She's been great.

14-00:36:07

Sickler:

Oh, no, she's done a great job.

14-00:36:09

Rubens:

She's got a school named after Miguel now.

14-00:36:12

Sickler:

She's done a fantastic job.

14-00:36:13

Carole Sickler:

And the Miguel Contreras Foundation has an annual award ceremony that honors business and community leaders who help workers.

14-00:36:18

Rubens:

Oh, we didn't talk about *We Do the Work*.

14-00:36:25

Sickler:

I defer to the expert, Danny Beagle.

14-00:36:29

Carole Sickler:

That goes way back.

- 14-00:36:32
Rubens: When did *We Do The Work* form?
- 14-00:36:35
Sickler: It started not long after '86, when I became regional director. I remember, early on, it was called California Working.
- 14-00:36:58
Sickler: I think it was Ed Herzog and Shelly Kessler that met with me. Shelly was head of the San Mateo Central Labor Council. And Ed had been with SEIU. And he was the producer of California Working. They just wanted AFL-CIO's support.
- 14-00:37:11
Beagle: Needed the blessing of Washington?
- 14-00:37:15
Sickler: When I heard him talk, this was fantastic, and it wasn't just people with some pipe dreams. These were really pros. These were people that knew what they were doing, putting program together.
- 14-00:37:26
Rubens: The vision of it was to—
- 14-00:37:28
Sickler: Tell labor's story. Tell workers' stories.
- 14-00:37:31
Rubens: On television.
- 14-00:37:32
Sickler: Yeah. A lot of people come up with these pipe dreams. Those are easy words to say, but I was impressed with the knowledge of these people.
- 14-00:37:39
Beagle: Ed was already doing it for SEIU Local 790. We basically took that Local 790 thing away from 790 and made it much broader, and 790 was fine with it?
- 14-00:37:51
Sickler: That's right, because he had actual examples that he was telling me about. I thought this was the real deal, and it made all kinds of sense to me. I was really happy to see it. I did everything in my power to help it along.
- 14-00:38:07
Rubens: So you were on the board.
- 14-00:38:08
Sickler: Yeah, I was on the board.
- 14-00:38:11
Rubens: Danny Beagle was on it.

- 14-00:38:13
Beagle: You were good at pointing the AFL-CIO back east. Of course, we're always looking for money. You were very instrumental, and Carole was very instrumental in L.A.
- 14-00:38:26
Rubens: You were on the board. Carole was on the board as well.
- 14-00:38:29
Beagle: At pointing us at folks and making that introduction and introducing the idea to people.
- 14-00:38:36
Rubens: Didn't you get Ed Asner? Wasn't he involved with that, or was that the awards?
- 14-00:38:41
Sickler: Probably the awards.
- 14-00:38:41
Carole Sickler: He was involved in *We do the Work* and he used to be on a lot of the shows.
- 14-00:38:52
Beagle: There was an event called the Joadies and an award was given for outstanding media coverage or attention to labor. It was named after Tom Joad in the *Grapes of Wrath*. It was an annual dinner.
- 14-00:38:53
Carole Sickler: It was a fundraiser that they had once a year in San Francisco, named after Tom Joad.
- 14-00:39:02
Beagle: Danny Glover was one of the honorees once.
- 14-00:39:05
Rubens: So people were picked from media or labor or all over?
- 14-00:39:09
Beagle: From the world of media and entertainment
- 14-00:39:14
Carole Sickler: That supported labor.
- 14-00:39:17
Sickler: Didn't we have Ann Curry MC one year?
- 14-00:39:21
Carole Sickler: No.
- 14-00:39:22
Sickler: Who was it that we had that was like a broadcaster?

- 14-00:39:24
Carole Sickler: Oh, yeah, she was an Asian woman that was on *Good Morning America*.
- 14-00:39:29
Rubens: Oh, yeah, she was a big name.
- 14-00:39:21
Beagle: Belva Davis. Ed had made friends with Belva Davis.
- 14-00:39:34
Rubens: This was an African American woman from northern California... What were the Crystals?
- 14-00:39:43
Carole Sickler: The Joadies were so successful. The event was usually a dinner in San Francisco, but a lot of people from L.A. wouldn't go up for it.
- 14-00:39:50
Sickler: Yeah, so we decided to put something on in Los Angeles..
- 14-00:39:52
Carole Sickler: They decided they wanted to have the same kind of dinner in L.A., so they named it the Crystals, after Crystal Lee Sutton, who was the actual Norma Rae. The woman's name was really Crystal Lee Sutton, but in the movie, it was Norma Rae. We named it after her, and we put on a big dinner in L.A., and that's when I coordinated that dinner.
- 14-00:40:20
Sickler: We actually brought Crystal Lee Sutton out for the first dinner.
- 14-00:40:22
Carole Sickler: Yeah, Crystal Lee Sutton came out one year with her husband.
- 14-00:40:25
Sickler: They were nice people.
- 14-00:40:27
Carole Sickler: They were really nice. She lived in a real small-town—she couldn't let anybody in the town know that she was Norma Rae in the movie, because she would have been fired from the job she had with J.P. Stevens after the strike.. Her husband would have been fired too. When they came to L.A. for that dinner that was the first time they had ever even gone in an airplane anywhere, or stayed in a hotel. She was so excited.
- 14-00:41:00
Sickler: She was overwhelmed. And, then, of course it's at the Biltmore.
- 14-00:41:03
Carole Sickler: They ordered hundreds of dollars' worth of food -they were so fascinated with room service. When it was over and we got the bill from the hotel, they were

ordering all kinds of room service all day and night. It was fine because she was great.

14-00:41:22

Sickler: She was, yeah.

14-00:41:24

Rubens: How long did the Crystals go on?

14-00:41:30

Sickler: Quite a few years.

14-00:41:32

Carole Sickler: Yes, several years. I don't remember exactly when we stopped—

14-00:41:35

Beagle: I remember when I left the ILWU and kind of went out on my own, I didn't have time. I kind of lost track of it, and I felt bad about it, but I just couldn't be as connected as I was to it.

14-00:41:54

Carole Sickler: Art Pulaski was the president of the board for *We Do The Work*, and then he became State Fed. President. When we had, I think it was one of the last dinners, Jim Wood was going to be running for State Fed. President, and he got all upset because we had Art Pulaski chair it. I had asked Jim, "What role would you like to play in this dinner? Do you want to chair it or do you want to do the introduction?" He wanted to introduce the celebrity—

14-00:42:42

Beagle: The honoree.

14-00:42:43

Carole Sickler: Yes, the honoree. It was a guy that was on that show, *Home Improvement*. Remember that?

14-00:42:50

Beagle: I remember the show, yeah. I don't remember the person.

14-00:42:53

Sickler: Tim Allen. Oh, no, it was the other guy.

14-00:42:54

Carole Sickler: No, it wasn't Tim Allen. It was another guy. Jim had some kind of connection to this guy, and so he wanted to introduce him. After the dinner, Jim came up to me and he said, "Well, I see you're supporting Art Pulaski, because you had him chair the blah, blah, blah." I said, "Art Pulaski is the president of the board, first of all, and usually chairs these. Second, I asked you if you wanted to do that, but you wanted to introduce the celebrity. So I don't know what your problem is." He just walked away.

14-00:43:32

Beagle: You were not close.

14-00:43:34

Carole Sickler: Oh, no. Not long after that is when he got sick with cancer, and of course he didn't run. He also thought Dave was going to run. He called me in his office one day and said, "Well, I understand your husband is going to run for State Fed." I said, "I don't know why you understand that, because that's not true." "Well, that's what the word is out there." I said, "Jim, there's a lot of gossip out there about you, too. There's a lot of gossip about everybody, but it's not true." But he was real paranoid about that, and he never did get to run after all.

14-00:44:11

Rubens: How long did that board stay together? Ten years?

14-00:44:19

Carole Sickler: Yeah, I'd say ten years. I think when they stopped having the show is when we stopped doing the dinners.

14-00:44:28

Beagle: Yeah, probably.

14-00:44:30

Rubens: That's a story. Someone should put those programs together. Those should be online.

14-00:44:34

Carole Sickler: They were great shows.

14-00:44:40

Sickler: When I kind of started losing interest in them, they kind of got away from doing the worker stuff.

14-00:44:49

Beagle: That's when I got away from it, too. I just wasn't that interested in it. But the feeling was, Patrice's feeling, and she was director and producer of the program, that it would have a broader appeal.

14-00:45:24

Rubens: So ten years, it was on the air. There must be an archive of that which—

14-00:45:30

Sickler: Oh, yeah, I'm sure.

14-00:45:33

Rubens: Were you trying to steer it in a certain direction? Would you feed them ideas about stories?

14-00:45:39

Sickler: I was really involved in it as long as it was telling workers' stories. When it was talking about the value of unions, then I felt my stake in it was worthwhile.

14-00:45:51

Rubens: So the board talked about stories to cover?

14-00:45:55

Carole Sickler: A lot of times, they would need workers to interview for those shows, and they would come to Dave, and Dave would go to whatever union was involved to get some of their members.

14-00:46:05

Sickler: We would line up various unions. I forgot about that. We'd line up unions to be interviewed. They would set up their workers and the scenario. I played that function for a while. But then when they got away from doing that—

Beagle:

But these guys were particularly important. Dave and Carole were particularly important again in just the connection and the legitimacy and the funding. If you wanted to talk to John Sweeney or Gerald McEntee or somebody, these guys were people to go to.

14-00:46:35

Carole Sickler: And I think introducing it to Southern California, because it was mostly a Northern California thing before that. Then everybody in L.A. loved it. Oh my God. They'd hang from the rafters for the dinner. Made a lot of money.

14-00:46:50

Sickler: I think that broadened the appeal to the rest of the country, too, because it wasn't just a San Francisco thing, it was a whole California thing.

14-00:46:56

Beagle: There's broadcasting stations all over the country. We penetrated that PBS market. I think it ran out of gas. It ran out of money and it ran out of gas. Maybe part of it was a decision to not be a union thing so much. I kind of lost interest in it.

14-00:47:15

Sickler: I know the national AFL-CIO did, too.

14-00:47:17

Carole Sickler: They started making it more like comedy, with Will Durst. I love Will Durst, but before that, they had different people, like Ed Asner and different celebrities to do the shows. But then they went to Will Durst, who was the host of every show. I think it kind of lost appeal.

14-00:47:47

Sickler: It was kind of like a comedy tilt.

Rubens: Dave, Carole, as I've said earlier, there's more to talk about. But we need to stop now. Thank you so very much for your time and reflections. You are terrific informants –this is truly a truly wonderful oral history.

End of Interview