Q: This is October 25th, 2006. This is Mike Smith interviewing Roman Gribbs at the Walter Reuther Library. Well, Judge, when we ended our last interview, we had you into the Wayne County Sheriff's seat. This was a year after, in fact, almost a year after the riots in Detroit that you decided to become sheriff. The department had gone through the riots, which was a tough situation for any police department, and of course it took, you know, U.S. Army paratroopers to quell the violence. You had a department that was demoralized, as I understand it, by the scandals in '68 of your predecessor. So, it took some guts to take over. What did you see when you first stepped in the department as your priorities?

A: Well, I've always advocated and insisted on professionalism. It must be honesty, integrity, and then professional, in whatever you do, whether you're an attorney or a police officer. So I thought by requiring them to operate as professional police officers and making them aware of the sensitivity that's required, particularly if you're dealing with different races, whether it's Asian or black or European heritage, a police officer's a police officer and it must be dealt with. I figured between my

experiences and those of Bill Lucas, we could inspire the department to do what they were capable of doing, and they all came to the fore and were functioning properly. And it was a pleasure; it just needed some direction and some administrative judgments that were honest with integrity. So you know, we -- one of the things that my predecessor did was to give any supporters that contributed to his campaign an honorary badge, made them an honorary sheriff of Wayne County, and it turned out that a number of his friends were stopped for violations. They'd flash their honorary badge, "Hey, I'm an honorary sheriff of Wayne County." It was an abused process. Of course, we canceled all of that and we encouraged the officers to take the training to become better policeman, and promoted those that had the talent and the ability to lead the department. We had about 500 persons in our office. A number of townships that were in Wayne County didn't have their own police departments. At that time, we also had an out-county branch office that operated like any other police department, with arrests and police patrol and so forth. So we were able to shape up the department. We did a good job. Bill and I did a number of things that were always reviewed favorably by the press, and that's one of the reasons that I was encouraged to later run for mayor. That

position became available because Jerry Cavanagh decided not to run for mayor in '69, after eight years. I had encouraged persons like Jim Brickley and others to run for mayor. Bill Patrick was a councilman at the time and he had taken a job -- he was the only black councilman for the city of Detroit. He had taken a job in New York, so he was unavailable and so forth. Always in the background was the awareness of the public and the press, and particularly in law enforcement and city administration, of the tremendous damage to the community because of that riot of July 23 of 1967. There was about a week of turmoil, as you will recall: 43 people died, over 350 were injured, 3,800 were arrested, thousands were homeless, a thousand or more buildings were destroyed, 2,700 businesses were wrecked or suffered damages as a result of the riot, and it was estimated that the damages amounted to $50 million. That was a tremendous experience that lingered for years and years.

Q: Did you think about this when you took the job as sheriff?

A: Well, there was turmoil. It required stability and required clear thinking, direction, and a straight approach to doing the right thing to the people all the time. And to bring peace to the community, whether it was sheriff or any other position. It was a tremendous challenge, and I

figured, well, I could do better than some of the other guys so I took the job.

Q: After this time, in the next few years after 1968, one of the problems the Detroit city department had a real imbalance between black officers and white officers in the Detroit department itself. Did you have those same kinds of issues in Wayne County? I realize that the Wayne County is much larger and it's not just the city of Detroit. I wondered if you had similar problems when you first took over as sheriff?

A: Both the sheriff and the city of Detroit were underrepresented by the blacks in the departments. And one of the first things I did -- asked Bill to be the lead -- Bill Lucas to be the lead was to encourage confident black persons to apply for and take a position as a deputy sheriff. That was one of the first things I did -- and did on a regular basis, during the four years that I was mayor -- to bring the department up to a reasonable representation of the community. I don't recall specifically the sheriff's composition, but we did have a fairly good number of black deputy sheriffs, and some good ones. And they had -- in the Detroit police department they were underrepresented as I recall, that in 1970 when I took that position we had about 11% of the total police

officers were black. I solicited and obtained a professional recruitment manager that I borrowed from the corporate arena, from GM, that allowed us to take advantage of his talents of recruiting people and training them. I insisted that half of the candidates that were accepted be black, or as near as possible. As a matter of fact, when I took office, the city of Detroit was about 45%. And by the time I left office four years later, it was about 48% black. As you know, as we speak now, it's something like 85% black. It was important for a lot of reasons to have people respect the law and respect the police officers, whether they're deputy sheriffs or Detroit police officers. They would do so if they saw that they were represented in the personnel, particularly, in command officers. But that's another chapter of what I did when I became mayor, who is to appoint department heads -- almost half the department heads that I appointed were black. I started with the deputy mayor, Walter Green. The city had never had a deputy mayor, and they had never had a black leader had in personnel. I said to the staff, "He's my deputy, and when I'm out of town, he's in charge." He was a wonderful man. He was great help to the city.

Q: Before we continue talking about your time as mayor, you also became sheriff at a time of student unrest and student

protest. So I know that at one point you defended the use of force in ending student takeovers at a Michigan correction association conference in 1969. And I wondered if you could talk a little bit about how you dealt with the student protestors?

A: Well, you made reference to what kind of discussion?

Q: There was a discussion that you defended the use of force when you ended student takeovers at a Michigan Correction Association conference that you were critical of some student revolutionaries, but publicly you emphasized that the police must always reevaluate policies to ensure that they're responsive and reflective in a democratic society. So I mean, what the media reports is that you understood that we're a democratic society, you're going to have student protests, but on the other end of it, you defended the use of force with students on that occasion.

A: Yeah, well, like any kind of activity in our community by the society, there are limits to what you can tolerate and allow if you're in a position of authority. And whether you're a deputy sheriff and there's a gathering in the middle of the street that's interfering with traffic, then you have to do something to dissipate or remove it, and if they choose not to remove voluntarily, then you have to do it with force. Whether it's a neighborhood community,

whether it's an organization, or whether it's students. Of course, as we all know, on a university level when students, usually college people, demonstrate, they go to extreme positions to interfere. So, it requires a great deal of tact on the part of the enforcement personnel, the police department. Then, if the question comes up, "Will you ever have to arrest them forcibly and remove them, if they're interfering with the normal lives or the normal commerce unreasonably?" then you have to take the appropriate action and stop it. And you either tell them to disperse, and if they don't disperse, then you arrest them and take them physically to the appropriate authority for arraignment for disturbing the peace, or causing a riot, or any number of charges that can be brought. But, yes, force --unfortunately if people, if students or any group of people think that oh, well, I can do this, I can throw eggs, or I can stop the traffic, or I will go into a bank and sit in front of the teller and interfere with that business, that commerce, because they think that the bank is unfair or is not doing something that I want them to do -- and I have a reference to the sit-ins and First Federal that we talked about the other time. And, as the police department in that case would advise all of the people that were in the First Federal building and that sat down in

front of a teller and stopped the commerce, customers from doing their business with the tellers, Police Commissioner George Edwards was there on the scene and there's no more liberal person that I can think of than George Edwards during those years, handling a delicate racial matter. And the community in particular, the organizations felt that First Federal had not hired enough minorities and they were objecting to their policy of not hiring minorities and attempting to enforce it by the sit-ins. Well, the goal was laudable, the method was OK until it reached a level -- you know, if they picketed peacefully, that's fine. If they sat in front of the door and stopped commerce, that's not fine. And so, you have to use force whether it's students or persons that sit down in front of the teller. George Edwards would read -- he'd have his officers read to the person sitting in -- "Please stand up because you are disturbing the peace, and here's how you're disturbing the peace, and if you don't stop, we'll have to arrest you." And the people would not move, so the police would pick them up bodily, carry them -- if they had to carry them -- to the paddy wagons, the arrest wagons, and arraign them in court. And that happens in different fashions, particularly here as you and I are talking on the wonderful Wayne State University campus. You've seen the students

over the years, young and old, participate in demonstrations -- peaceful demonstrations are fine. If they're not peaceful, then they can't be tolerated. Those in authority have to do something about it to protect the safety of the persons that are exposed.

Q: This question occurs to me now. If it's an unfair question, say so. What if you were a 19-year old student in 1968, what do you think you would have done? You were in a different position at that time, of course, but do you think you would have been a sit-downer with them, if you were a student?

A: No. No, because I don't think you have to go to that extreme. I think you can talk, you can argue, you can pass out pamphlets, you can write articles, you can go in a parade, and you can get a permit to go down the middle of the street and the police will cooperate; you get a permit, and let's do it peacefully. But I wouldn’t sit down with them

Q: What I'm really interested in having you discuss at this point is this: you had a successful run as Wayne County sheriff, but you were only in the job for one year before you decided to run for mayor of the city of Detroit. I wonder if you discuss what made you run, what made you decide? From what we've discussed so far, it appears that

it was never your ambition to be mayor of Detroit, so I wonder why and how you decided to run, and what ideas were flowing through your mind at that time?

A: Well, when you're sheriff of Wayne County, you're exposed to the leadership of everybody in the community and even the state, and you know, I was a member of the Michigan Sheriffs Association, which is a statewide organization. You meet the leadership of law enforcement. But at the same time, you're exposed to and you meet and you discuss programs, financing, social corrective procedures, with the governor's office, the other mayors, the other law enforcement personnel, and it gives you an opportunity to understand what's happening in the community, in the city, the county, in the state, much better than you can if you just a participant in the audience, and reacting to events or activities. When you're charged with the responsibility of getting the money, for example, for an agency with 500 people, you're charged with serious matters to control and direct. Just by way of one example, when I was sheriff, I knew that we had a big county jail. Now, the jail -- we have a new one since then, of course -- but at that time it was built originally for about 850 people. We [Sheriff’s Department] were custodian when I took office, of anywhere between 1,300 and 1,400 inmates. So, every cell was double

bunked, and that meant control troubles and personnel problems. As you might imagine, if you think about it, people might be arrested for assault and battery, and couldn’t put up a $50 bond, along with murderers, rapists, and robbers who are professional thieves and denied bonds pending their trials. That mixture of people requires some talent in terms of segregation and control, for the safety of not only the people that were working in the jail, but also for other inmates. One of the things that -- when I walked around the first few days, you know, the inmates would look at me, say, "Would you get us some decent food?" Well, I went down to the basement and looked at the kitchen facilities that fed 1,200, 1,400 people three times a day. And a chef had been there for who knows how many years, who would make ham sandwiches, and maybe once a day would put in hamburgers and just rudimentary things. And then I said, you know, "Who's the dietician?" You know, to see that they're properly fed -- some of these people are waiting for trial for five or six months, and some people were sentenced to 30 days, county jail. And they said, "Well, we don't have a dietician." Well, how do you determine what's for breakfast, what's for lunch, and what's for dinner, that's within the dollar means, but is nutritionally what a person should have if he's going to be

there for five or six months, or whatever period of time? Well, they didn’t have one, so I hired a dietician and they worked out a series of meals that were nutritionally appropriate and didn't cost an arm and a leg.

Anyway, by appropriate administration, listening to and promoting the talented deputy sheriffs and command officers that warranted promotion and had the ability to do the job, we -- Bill Lucas and I -- turned the sheriff's department around. And, we were praised for doing a good job. This turned into some good press reports. That next summer, there were a number of candidates that were running for mayor and the only ones that I personally thought were qualified were Bill Patrick -- and he decided not to. He went to New York -- and Jim Brickley, he decided not to run for mayor. Jim had been councilman, and at that time, was the Chief Deputy for the Wayne County prosecutor. Several other council-people who were going to run, such as Ed Kerry, the council president. He was talking about running, and I disagreed with a lot of things that he had planned to do for the city, or how to help the community and to buttress the law enforcement to such an extent that they would receive the support of the community. That was very important because this was just shortly after the riots and crime was a number one issue that summer, as it

was on a regular basis. And I thought we could do a better job. When everybody kind of shaped up -- I will never forget this. I was complaining to Jim Brickley over the telephone about this candidate and another, and he said, “you know what?” He says, "Why don't you run?" I said, "What?" "Yeah, why don't you run?" And so I started to think about it. And I tested the possibility with some close friends, such as my good friend, Vic Oleson, who was in advertising. He was a personal friend that I'd known over the years. Art Cope was another personal friend. And, they said, "Sure, but you know, where are you going to get the money?" and so forth. I said, "Well, let's test the waters and see." And so then I let it be know to some of the press that, you know, people were urging me to run for mayor and I'm wondering about it. It hit the press, and then there was more speculation, And, when it hit the press that I was considering it, important people would come to me and say, "Why don't you do it?" One of the people of means was Jimmy Wineman. The Wineman family owned People's Outfitting Company, which was a department store in downtown Detroit. I had worked for People's Outfitting Company when I came back from the service -- I was a salesman. While I was going to college, I sold their appliances on a weekend, part-time basis while I was going

through my six years to get my two degrees. Jimmy Wineman knew about me, of course. He was one of the executives and owners of People's. And he called, we chatted. By that time, we had made an assessment of the costs of running for mayor and the -- I had no money and I had five children and I had been in private practice, and I made good money private practice, but when you're a sheriff I think the salary then was about $20,000. The mayor was making $35,000. The judges were pulling down about $20,000. And with five children, I had run for recorder's court and I had spent what savings I had, and in fact, incurred some debts and I was able to pay them off. But anyway, I didn't have money so I -- we all decided that it would take testing the waters with the organizations, the homeowners, the various groups. I talked to the police department, the unions of the police and the fire department, and had interviews with them. There was considerable support expressed. But, the reality was that it's going to cost a lot more money than parties where you could charge $10 or $20 a ticket and make maybe 5 or $6,000 with an effort. So, I asked Jimmy Wineman: "would the business community be supportive of my candidacy?" We had decided that if the business community was behind somebody else, then we didn't have enough money to be a candidate with that kind of

support. Wineman then said, "I'm going to sponsor a lunch," and he did at the Detroit Club. He said, "I want you to come, and make a pitch and answer any questions and make your presentation." And Vic Oleson, as I remember, went with me to that lunch. Vic was the advertising guy, he ran an advertising department here in the city of Detroit for one of the big agencies and he knew the monies you'd need for press and TV and radio campaign efforts. So he went with me and so I spoke. Wineman pulled in representatives of all of the large institutions, the banks, the utilities had people come down and get to know this fellow who's thinking of running for mayor. And I said to Vic -- and we talked about it -- if we could get a pledge from this segment of the society to support me financially, then we could make a real race. If they don't, as much as I like the Veterans' Affairs and the organizations and the unions that would like me see to run, but they just aren't persons of means and we can't raise funds in a short period of time. I was thinking about it in the spring and summer, and we had a short period of time, not several years to accumulate monies.

Q: At this point in time, when you say "we", are you talking about your close associates?

A: Yes.

Q: Before you decided to run, did you make contact with the Democratic Party?

A: Never formally. Now I was always active in the Democratic Party. I was a Democratic elected sheriff of Wayne County so I was conversing with all the district chairmen and a lot of Democratic people. And I'd always been active, even in the early years as an assistant prosecuting attorney right out of law school. In law school I was a precinct delegate with the district in which I lived and the sheriff's race was a partisan election. But when you run for mayor, you don't run as a Republican or Democrat -- you run nonpartisan. Likewise, judges always run as non-partisan, but your background is either with one party or the other, and mine had always been with the Democrats. And as a matter of fact, just to reflect momentarily on the mayor's race, Dick Austin -- he was a Democratic auditor, one of three auditors in Wayne County, and a lifelong Democrat. And I had been a sheriff, then sitting Democratic sheriff of Wayne County. The two of us were the two nominees after the primary, both with a Democratic background. But you didn't talk partisan politics and you didn't ask for endorsements for -- you asked everybody for endorsements -- Republicans and Democrats, and you go to organization, "I'm running for this nonpartisan office,"

and so we talk about the issues and not a party platform. And you would like everybody's support, Republican and Democrats, and a lot of homeowners in northwest Detroit and even toward the Grosse Point areas in Detroit. I would go to the Republican meetings; I would go to the Democrat meetings, whether it was running for sheriff or as mayor. But the people that I'm speaking of, that were so instrumental in deciding the stratagems, were some close friends. Bill Lucas was always in that group and Vic Oleson was an advertising friend. He would indicate that, if you're going to run a good campaign, you couldn't do it on $50,000. You've got to be talking about 100 to $200,000. I said, "How you going to raise that kind of money?" So it was very important when Jimmy Wineman pulled together that group of business representatives and they listened to me. And then he asked me -- we've heard you now, let us talk among ourselves. But then I left Vic Oleson there; he said on my behalf to these gentlemen, "Before I leave, we need real dollar support. If you're thinking of $100 contribution, he's not going to run. If he can get the financial support from the organizations and the groups that you represent, and then maybe -- then I'll encourage him to run and he will decide to run. There's no point in running on a shoestring and not being able to have

a fair chance of competing with the other persons with dollars and means." And Jimmy called me back by about 3:00 in the afternoon, he says, "Hey. You did a good job, they like you, I've got commitments -- substantial commitments." And, when we were done after kicking things around, within a few hours Vic and I knew that we're talking between 40, into 50, $60,000. Now that's a hunk of money at that time. And it turned out that -- oh, I don't remember exactly -- but I think we spent about $120,000 for the primary and another $140,000 in the election. I think we reported campaign contributions in cost of about $400,000 at that race. And that was equivalent to today's million-dollar campaign (laughter) as we hear about and read about.

Q: So that was the keystone event.

A: It was for me, financially. And it told me two things: number one, the business community liked what I was doing.

Q: And they're generally Republican.

A: That's right, that's right. And they would contribute to me substantially, you know, at least a sufficient number of them. That would make a difference in the race. It was very gratifying.

Q: So you decided to run. I mean, personally, philosophically, what did you think you brought to the

table, or that you could bring to the table as mayor? You must have had ideas at that point.

A: Openness, fairness, integrity. In politics, I decided that there were -- first of all, most politicians over-promised, and I resolved to myself not to promise something that I couldn’t do. Number two, I was gifted with I think an analytical style of mind, and I would look at a problem, I'd come up with solutions. Or if I couldn't, then I'd find somebody that is expert enough to find the solutions. And always they would have to have honesty, integrity, and ability to do the job. And so I spoke to my staff and I thought there was such confusion, such turmoil, that we could bring some stability to the city of Detroit, after the riots. And the way to do that is to involve the participants of the community to involve the black community much more so than they were involved up to that point. You don't campaign and say that except to say that: "You have to know that I will make sure that you'll be satisfied with the Department of Public Works or the police department by appointing competent persons that are aware of your needs, whatever your skin color, whatever your ethnic background," because that's what democracy is all about. And you'll be honesty and ability to the -- and if we don't do the job, then that's time for us to move on.

And in addition, when you think of it -- running the city of Detroit, we had at that time over a million-two people. Now it's -- as we speak it's about 850,000. The city had almost 25,000 employees. You have critical departments, police departments, garbage department, parks department -- the one thing that the mayor couldn't deal with, had no real official say into, is education, which is unfortunate, because I think that education is such an important element to any family in any city, any community. So I did speak with the school boards later on and so forth. But if you're going to live in a good city, in the city, you want to stay in the city, you got to feel safe and you've got to be able to rely on the services such as lights, such as picking up garbage, such as safety, and with education, whether you have kids or not, you know, you've got to have the opportunity. And I could impact it by putting in proper, talented personnel. When I was elected, after the election, my first decision was to appoint the police commissioner. Crime was the number one issue in most of the cities throughout the United States, including Detroit -- was crime, and most -- broadest underlying issue was race relations. But what we could deal with is how do you solve the crime problem? By having a good police department, and that means trained personnel and good

leadership. So I started a national search. I got some search organizations and told them: "I want the best cop in the country." And I lucked out; I got a great one by the name of Pat Murphy. He was so good that John Lindsay, Mayor of New York City, stole him from me a year later. He became commissioner of the city of New York. He was so good that you couldn't -- you know, he said to me when he was first called: "Lindsay called me and he said (laughter) I need a new commissioner, and your guy Murphy is one of the best on that list. I want to talk to him." I said, "Well, of course you can talk to him." So, that's another story, but Murphy came to me, said, "You know, I moved here, I planned to be here four years, as long as you were going to be here, maybe longer, but I've got this request from Lindsay." And he said -- you had to know that Murphy started as a police officer, a beat officer in the city of New York and worked his way up to high rank, and then he became Chief of Police in Rochester, New York, then he was in Washington with the Police Foundation when he decided he wanted to get back into police work and not the administration of the foundation. And that's why, when I offered him the job and he came over here to Detroit. So this is less than a year later, he says, "I hate to tell you this," he said, "but I'd like to go." I said, "I don't

blame you!" I said, "I'm not going to stop you." Because the police department in Detroit was about five thousand. In New York, it was 25,000. And the pay was higher, and there was a little bonus that he told me about. There's either a law or tradition that if any beat cop becomes a police commissioner, he gets the salary for the rest of his life. Full salary during his retirement. And Murphy says, "How could I turn that down?" I said, "You can't." (laughter)

Q: Well, let's step back a bit.

A: Yes.

Q: So, you decide to run, you've got the support, and you win. How does the primary election go, and who ends up being your competitor for mayor?

A: Dick Austin, highly principled, well-respected CPA auditor for Wayne county, he was one of those that ran in the primary as well as myself. Mary Beck was in -- she finally decided to run. She was a councilwoman for eight or 12 years or more. She was a thorn in the side of Jerry Cavanagh, very outspoken. There's a story about the tablecloths at the Manoogian mansion, I don't know if you remember that.

Q: No, please.

A: Let me tell you that story. Jerry Cavanagh, in the middle of his administration, the Manoogian family donated their residence, which is on the water, to the city of Detroit as the mayor's residence. It's a large building, and it has a large dining room, and Jerry decided to move in there, and he did, and one of the things they had to do was to buy new tablecloths for the dining room -- they needed tablecloths. Well, the tablecloths at that time -- I think they'd paid something like $125 for them, and Mary Beck found it in the list of items when they furnished the house and she made a big deal of the fact, you know, "We can't afford a tablecloth for $125. Why, Sears sells them for $18 or $22," and she made a big fuss (laughter). So that was a big deal -- lot of quotes in the local newspaper back and forth, and she was kind of criticizing Jerry, and it wasn't unreasonable because there was a huge table (laughter), as you might imagine. It was a very comfortable home. Much bigger than we needed, and I had five children. We had a very nice home that I lived in for almost 35 years, as it turns out, in Rosedale Park.

Q: If you don't mind me switching gears slightly and then I want to get back to your campaign. But as long as we're on the subject, I wondered if you could give me your

impressions, maybe your connections or relationships with Jerome Cavanagh, your predecessor.

A: Well, yeah, but there really wasn't that much of a formal connection. Jerry and I, as it turns out, graduated from the same class at the University of Detroit School of Law, but he was a night student and he finished in January. I was in the regular classes and I finished in June. And we're both on the same plaque with the students that graduated that June; Jerry and I are pictured as graduating the same time. But he was much more active, politically, at the beginning than I was. And by the time I'd gotten to any position of responsibility, such as the traffic court referee or sheriff, Jerry had been in the limelight for eight years when he decided not to run again for a third term. He was very talented. I went to some of his events. I was probably like, the periphery of maybe 200 people that were in the background. Classmates at U of D would see him. He appointed me to the Detroit Youth Commission, which is a voluntary advisory organization. So, we would meet once every two months and look at some programs. But that was the only connection. I wasn't one of his close confidants. He had a lot of good friends that I knew, but we knew each other, both essentially from the same background, Democrat party. He decided not to run again.

When I was one of the two nominees with Dick Austin, then we had to say what was good with the city, what's correctable. So one of the concerns we had was the housing problem, and the fact that they were deteriorating. And I had some thoughts on solving it, and Jerry Cavanagh decided to stay out of the race. He wasn't going to be pro-Gribbs or pro-Austin. He said, I'm going to stay out of the race and good luck to both of them. And he did, but I did criticize his work in the housing area, so he, in a speech before the Economic Club or some organization, rebutted it and came after my criticism. So that was the only time that we differed, you know, on what's good for the city and it's the only time that he spoke out because I criticized what was going on in his administration. And he was able -- he did respond with what he had done and what was good about it, and I just stayed off anything that reflected negatively on him, personally, and his administration, as a campaign tactic. And there was no need for it. You didn't need to criticize. Everybody knew the problems. What you needed is good law enforcement, what you needed, was a better police department. Cavanagh had come in with a new police commissioner named Johannes Spreen eight months before the end of his last year in office. And Johannes came in from New York: he was a police officer there. He

came in with some ideas, and I decided to meet with him and all department heads to get an idea what their thoughts were for their department, and I had recently read an article that he, Spreen, had printed indicating that after the interview with the mayor-elect, which means me, Gribbs -- this is after the November election -- he came home and his wife said, "How'd it go?" and he says, "Well," he said, he was kind of pumping" -- I'm quoting it, I think, correctly -- "he was kind of pumping me for information," and I really was (laughter). His little -- his pet program was the scooters. And it worked out, it was working out well, and his question is, you know, "How many scooters for the police department, putting police down amongst the people? Police scout cars, with the windows closed and the air conditioning had separated police from the people. So having them mingle with the people was a good concept. You're either a beat cop or someone with the scooters can get around quicker and meet people, and that was his thing. Then, I looked at his background and, at that time, I was in the process of looking nationwide for a police commissioner. So then he made it known that he's withdrawing his name from consideration to stay as police commissioner under my administration. So that resolves that with me. He withdrew from consideration.

Q: So, tell me about the campaign where you ran against Dick Austin. If you could tell us a little bit about your platform, what you told the folks you were going to do, and about how the campaign went.

A: Well, I'm standing there as the sheriff of Wayne County, and the sheriffs -- I never wore a uniform. I was always in plain clothes or a suit. The issue was crime, the number one issue with the underlying problem over race relations; the underlying concerns about having race relations resolve itself, or help resolve it. I wanted to make sure that I was not a law and order candidate. So I never used the term. Law and justice, that was my approach, I'm a candidate for justice, and we need that. We need good, fair, honest enforcement and justice.

Q: That's an interesting point, because law and order would seem to be sort of the standard motto when you have a crime problem.

A: Yes, but it had a ring to it in the black community that means dominance of the black community, because of race, by the police. I had to communicate that this was going to be a little different. “Law and order” was a phrase that meant that to the black community, and I said, "How can you deal with crimes and law," and so my phrase was "Well, I'm

not a law and order man. I'm a law and justice man, and this is what I seek to do." You had to talk about crime because that was the number one question out of any audience. And so I had been an assistant prosecuting attorney, I had been traffic court referee. I was then sheriff of Wayne County. I've got the background; I've got some ideas as to what to do. I will get the people to do it. And then you dealt with other issues like housing. You dealt with the lights, you dealt with DPW, you dealt with the parks department, and that means good management. That means a public employees putting in an honest 40 hours. If you've got a public job, you put in 40 hours. Incidentally, one of the first things we did when I became mayor is cut -- well, let me rephrase it. At that time, the employees for Detroit worked 35 hours a week. I said, "We can't afford it, we're running out of money. You're going to have to work 40 hours a week." And that was very unpopular with the employees. We had fiscal problems. City of Detroit, Jerry Cavanagh left me with a deficit that was at that time estimated to be about $35 million, and that was a big deficit. So we had to cut back to balance the budget because that's all we can do, the city by charter, must balance the budget. So I had layoffs in May or June 1970, because I knew that we couldn't balance the

budget on the monies that we had. When I took office, the projected deficit of $35 million for that fiscal year forced us to act quickly. By immediate layoffs, I trimmed most of the deficit for 1969-1970. I did have a little deficit that year, that fiscal year, but I cut it down by the layoffs. And the headlines in the press were, "First layoffs since Depression days." It was a traumatic time. A couple of my departments that may have been six or eight people, I just cut out the whole department, just stopped it. We had to bite the bullet and manage with less money, and we did. And I said, "We'll need to put in more time, not 35 hours a week, 40 hours a week. We have to do that, we don't have the money and we're not going to hire more people, and work has to be done."

Q: Regarding your campaign, I was interested in what you have told us about law and justice and your campaign platforms, but your opponent was Richard Austin, and he is, of course African-American. As I understand it, both of you agreed not to inject race into your campaign.

A: That's correct. God bless his soul, Dick was very aware of it. And he was a very talented guy. He was a CPA; he's one of the first black CPAs in the state of Michigan.

Q: Sounds like you were friends?

A: Well, we were acquaintances. When I was sheriff, we both worked for the county: he was the county auditor. He was another department in the county, so I got to know him and all the auditors. We were acquaintances and we were friendly. Because of the delicacy of the racial matters, I spoke with Dick directly when he was nominated and I said, "Let's not" -- and he agreed -- "Let's not discuss racial matters except in a conciliatory tone because we just went through a terrible riot. We don't want to stimulate more anger, and let's just do it in a professional way," and he did, and we agreed not to talk about racial matters as such. But, I promised representation, the appropriate appointment of department heads. When I was elected mayor, I said, "Who could we have as my right-hand guy?" And I had met Walter Greene. When I was sheriff, he was the director of the Civil Rights Commission for the state of Michigan, and I was impressed with a couple of his commentaries. He was one of these fellows who was very just, very balanced, not an extremist, and very articulate. So he'd be a perfect guy to help me. He's got command, he knows the problems, he knows the city, he knows the state, and he's got an administrative background having run that (Civil Rights) department. So I called him and we met, I said, "I would like to appoint you

as deputy mayor," and after consideration, he said, "OK." It turned out to be one of the best things that ever happened to me because Walter was such a solid guy. He was in on every meeting of the in-house advisory council that I had with persons that were friends and coworkers. His wife, Frieda was a principal of a local school here in Detroit, a very talented person. It turned out to be one of the finest associations that I was able to experience during my years as mayor. Walter Green was great for the city. He would go to the areas where there might be racial tensions and talk to the leaders, and talk to their leaders, and talk to church leaders, and come back and talk to me, and we would do what was appropriate. He was spearheading and he was just a great guy. You know, I've been lucky because I've had some really outstanding people on my team. Starting with Walter Green, and Jerry Tannian, who was my administrative assistant and became police commissioner after John Nichols. There are so many -- Vic Oleson brought in the advertising community to help the city on a voluntary basis and he was very helpful. And there's Bob Roselle, who was an outstanding. He was a department head under Jerry Cavanagh and I brought him in as comptroller, the chief fiscal officer for the city. He did an amazing job at that, and he went on to take a

position with and serve on the board of directors of Campbell-Ewald. Very successful after he worked for the city of Detroit. He came up from the budget department. And Walter Stecher, and John Kanter as well, were all kinds of wonderful people that worked with me, and did a tremendous job.

Q: So you ran a close race. In fact, as my records tell me, that was the closest race in the history of Detroit to that time. And so tell me how the campaign went. You agreed to have some ground rules, but you received some flack from the Detroit Free Press saying that you were not an aggressive campaigner. Of course you're going to catch flack (laughter) from one side or the other. But I just wonder if you could tell us about the flow of the campaign and finally how you pulled out the victory?

A: Well, because Dick Austin was a good candidate, the race was very close. And the big point was this was the first time in the history of Detroit (45% of the people were African-American at that time), Black voters had a candidate survived a primary and could be the next mayor, the first black mayor in Detroit. It was hard to argue with that. I think because I was younger: I was about 43; Dick was about 50, 55. His style was thoughtful, rather slow, and very thorough in his discussion of the issues.

And we did have debates, by the way. During the campaign we had five debates that were scheduled, and they were covered by TV. Each of the big stations, Channels 2, 4, and 7, had a debate. Channel 50 had two scheduled where we would appear with formats, with questions and so forth, so that the people would be able to see us. And I don't remember whether or not Jerry Cavanagh ever had televised debates when he ran against Mariani eight years before that. My advisors would say: "Be aggressive, be firm," you know, "You've got the energy." And that was my style. In comparison to Austin, the impression was kind of, well, he's an older man, he doesn't have the energy and the drive you got to have to change the city and direct the course of activities and that kind of thing. But it was, in my assessment, humbly speaking, two good guys, either one who could have done the job, and it was a very close call. My background was in law enforcement and how to solve crimes. His was accounting and finance. Well, there was a fiscal problem, the city did have financial problems, but the more important problem was the safety of the streets. And I think that's why the race was very close. And I think that's what tipped it. It was so close, you know, 7,000 votes between us, like maybe one half of one percent was difference.

Q: Who was your campaign manager?

A: Arthur Cope. Art Cope was an acquaintance, and he was working for a sign firm. He and Vic Oleson, my advertising guy, were two fellows that knew each other well, and we were able to get him to assume those responsibilities on a voluntary basis, and he did well.

Q: Did he have previous experience in politics?

A: No.

Q: So you had a campaign manager who did not have political experience.

A: That's right.

Q: That's interesting.

A: Yes.

Q: Well, obviously he did a good job. You were elected mayor! (laughter)

A: And the beauty of it was, he had good experience because he was the sign company business: he'd dealt with cities and organizations and communities on that level. When I was elected, I asked him to head our purchasing department -- you know, you spend the money, you buy the toilet paper and you buy the supplies for the streets and the lights and whatever. The whole purchasing department demanded a person of absolute good judgment and integrity, and he personified that, so I asked him to take that job and he

did. And he did a heck of a job. Good common sense. We still see each other from time to time over the past years. He's now retired, lives in Florida, but I see him every summer when he comes to town.

Q: So, then crime is the big campaign issue for you, and that's what you believe pushed you over the top in terms of votes.

A: I think so. Without talking about it that much, I would simply say, "I've got some ideas about what should be done to keep the streets safe," and it was exemplified ultimately by getting a heck of a police commissioner, and that was the outstanding guy in the United States, Pat Murphy.

Q: One of the impressions that people have is that whites voted for you, blacks voted for Austin. Did the voting fall down that strict racial line in your campaign?

A: Well, I guess a fair statement would be, predominantly, yes. But I did have a lot of black support from the responsible blacks, the people that had homes and had kids in school, and wanted a fair, safe city, a city to live in that was fair to everybody. And I think I feel confident that we accomplished that in the four years that I was mayor by bringing in people like Walter Green as deputy mayor, making a black man the director of the Department of

public works. In the Department of Transportation, a black man. Many of the federal programs that dealt with the poor or the homeless or the housing projects were all directed, appointed by me, and they were black representatives and black persons of ability. That just helped the community, be they black or white, understand that this is a community need and this is how we're solving it. Drugs were a big problem back then, they're a problem today, of course, but even back then we started methadone clinics and I sought federal funds to establish clinics, and we were successful in that regard.

Q: OK, I'm going to set the stage for you here, Judge Gribbs. So it's January 6th, 1970, and at Cobo Hall you became the 67th mayor of Detroit. You won the election. So, sort of like Franklin Roosevelt -- he of course had his first 100 days in office and made a lot of changes -- I wonder if you could discuss your first few weeks in office, what you faced in your first few weeks as mayor, and how did you get your career rolling as mayor?

A: Well, that's a very good question. The trouble is it's 35 years ago or more (laughter). But as far as I can recall, it was very gratifying, very challenging, and I consider myself fortunate because I was able to acquire assistance from talented people, starting with the police commissioner

which was my answer to the question raised: "How are you going to make the city safe?" By getting an outstanding person -- and Pat Murphy -- I interviewed Pat and offered him the job and he agreed to come to Detroit, he had been in Washington, DC, as the President of the Police Foundation, and he was happy to get back into active police work. So, after having been with the New York Police Department and the Rochester City, Rochester, New York, Police Chief, and chief in Washington, DC and so forth -- a highly qualified person. He had the ability to inspire the police officers to do the job honestly, conscientiously, and fairly. And likewise, you know, bring honesty to the purchasing department by appointing people like Art Cope who took the job, who stepped down from a successful, private business. Getting Walter Greene as deputy mayor -- Walter, as I mentioned, had been the director of the Civil Rights Commission for the state of Michigan, and he left that job to come work with me as deputy mayor. I had good staff work. Jerry Tannian, who was with the FBI and had been assistant to Jim Brickley in the prosecutor's office offered, was able to come as one of my staff persons, and was a liaison and the direct contact for the safety department, the fire department, the police department, and the ambulance service. And we had a number of ideas to

establish good rapport and to get talented people to come work for the city of Detroit. I was able to get that kind of talent because you have to remember, Detroit -- we had 25,000 employees. The police department alone was over 5,000 -- by the way, we added 1,000 police officers during my administration, but we can talk about that in a minute. One needs to get competent people to run each department whether it's the police department or the DPW, Department of Public Works, or it's the Parks and Recreation Department. All of that required talented people and I could get them to join us, and that makes a difference. When you're the chief executive of an organization that has 25,000 employees serving 1.2 million people in a glass house, that's what you do as the mayor of Detroit. You don't do things sub rosa. You decide what's to be done and you make it public, and if citizens object or the press objects or evaluates, that's the nature of the job. There are so many entities that you have to deal with, and I was able to pick up on some of the mistakes, criticism that came as a result of Jerry Cavanagh's last few years. For example, he was argued frequently with a lot of the council people, and I determined that I'm going to be on a first-name basis with all of the council people that were elected. Mel Ravitz was elected; Carl Levin was elected.

Billy Rogelle was a member of the council, and a number of other people that I had met while I was sheriff. They were all decent, hardworking, honest people. You just had to talk to them and meet with them directly. The same thing happened dealing with the governor's office or dealing with the legislature in Lansing that had so much to do with the monies that were coming or not coming to the city of Detroit. In this respect, one of my earliest acts was to go to Lansing just to meet the governor. We had corresponded, of course, but to say hello and chat with him and go to the leadership of the House and Senate in Lansing and meet with them and talk to them informally about some of the problems and concerns and mutual responsibilities. And these types of liaisons are what makes the city work, and what makes government work. And you need good people. You need honest people. And we were able to do that very shortly. One of the unfortunate things, which we determined with substantial analysis was that we had a severe deficit that was projected to be anywhere between $35 million and $55 million dollars by the end of the year. The fiscal year ended in the summer, in July.

Q: Did you know this --

A: Oh, we knew there was going to be a deficit --

Q: -- before you came there?

A: We knew. The question was how large was the deficit? We knew there was going to be a deficit because the revenues were not there. So, one of the first things we faced is: how do you balance the budget? And my budget people, and Bob Roselle, the fiscal officer, said, "You got to lay people off. You just can't handle that many people." And so we did, but first, we had to evaluate each department, which we did and were advised to cut -- I forget the number, 5% or 8% of your staff. So, planned to get ready for it, and asked departments which who you're going to lay off, and then send out the appropriate notices because under the contracts they’ve got to have certain time before you can commence the layoffs -- you can't lay them off tomorrow. Send them notice that they're going to be laid off in two weeks or four weeks or whatever it was. And the headlines were devastating, as I may have mentioned.

Q: When did this occur? I mean, how long after you became mayor?

A: Oh, within the first few months, we're making the decision. Then in May and June the notices were sent out, and that hit the press. Within a few months, they were actually laid off. Those were page one stories, of course. I'll never forget it because the Detroit Free Press and the Detroit News declared it was the first time since the Depression

that the city of Detroit had laid people off. One of the things about government is that most people understood it to be was, when you work for the government, you don't make as much money, but you’ve always got a job. It's a stable and reliable employer, and if you do your job, you'll always have a job. Well, we had to lay them off. And, if they did the job, sorry, but we can't afford to keep you: we're going to lay you off until further notice. That was very difficult, but it was required. It had to be done because there was shortfall in a budget, and the economic conditions were not good. I think our deficit the first year came down to about $8 or $10 million, and after that, for the remaining three years, I always ended up with a surplus. Economic conditions turned up somewhat, but still and all, we ran a tight ship and I was able to generate more revenue. My major effort was going to Lansing to help pay for the services that were citizen-wide. For example, the city of Detroit owns art department, it's a regional facility. It's enjoyed by, not just the citizens of Detroit, but those of the metropolitan area as well. In fact, all the citizens in the state, but certainly, those from the metropolitan area. And how about the library? We had a magnificent library. It's used not just by the citizens of Detroit, but also by suburban communities. And

I would go to Lansing and say, "I need some help in that regard." I was invited to and I joined the boards of the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the National League of Cities, those are the two national organizations that speak for the cities. National League of Cities, membership is not just the mayors but it could be council members or department heads. They have a conference at least once a year where they get together and discuss the problems and solutions. The U.S. Conference of Mayors is a much smaller organization because it includes just the mayors. But those were the spokesmen for the cities before Congress and in the President's office. I was on the board of both those organizations in my first year. I remember meeting with Mayor Lindsay of New York, Mayor Stokes of Cleveland, Landrieu in New Orleans, and D'Alesandro of Baltimore, and all of those major cities. We'd meet and I'd ask, "What's your major problem?" Sometimes they would respond, "Well, we have a deficit to face. Our revenue is off. How are we going to do that? Where do we get the money?" So we decided on an action plan. We called it the “Mayors Road Show.” It was a joint effort with all the other major mayor -- the mayors of major cities -- to go to one place and share the problems of the cities. So I invited them to come to Detroit, and it was great. I proposed, "Just come

to Detroit. We'll spend an hour, show you some of the things in the city," and then I would have a luncheon and we'd invite all the press. So, when they first came to Detroit, the first city that we visited, they came here at my invitation. When Lindsay came from New York, and Alioto came from San Francisco, and Landrieu came from New Orleans and I gave them each three to four minutes -- which means it took five or six -- at Cobo Hall, and in an hour and a half, you'd see half a dozen or maybe ten mayors stand up and say, "We have the highest percentage of the poor people of my state," and you know, that was Detroit's problem. We had a poverty problem. We had a hospital -- Detroit Receiving Hospital ran a deficit from 10 to $20 million a year that we'd have to plug the monies in it. Why? Because the poor people were centered in the city of Detroit, the unemployed, and the poverty programs were inadequate to solve the problems, so we needed more money. So the mayors would talk. We started in Detroit and then we would go to New York. I still have a picture walking down, hand in hand with Mayor Lindsay and all of the other mayors that I've mentioned, going down Fifth Avenue in pictures in all the New York papers about the mayors here to pound a hammer because they don't have the money to run the cities. Then we got Congress involved and we got the

president involved and Nixon said, "OK, I will support revenue sharing" -- direct revenue sharing. So, it was that program that brought $52 million of federal money to Detroit within a year and a half. They had all kinds of grants for special programs, but we needed money to pay the payroll for the police and the fire department. So, they began a federal revenue sharing program that would allow us to spend it in three specific departments: police, fire, and another. It was limited, yes, but we were free to spend it as needed. So I was able to hire 1,000 more policemen for the city of Detroit to reduce the crime by having enough policemen available. That helped solve the fiscal problem. Then the governor helped pass a revenue sharing program that sent some monies to the cities that needed it. It was not just Detroit, but Grand Rapids and the others, and they were able to give us some monies that helped us solve the fiscal problem. Because the argument was, and the reality was, when you have so much of the poverty problem in Detroit that's disproportionate -- let me just grab a number. Let's say 40% of the people that were poor in Michigan lived in the city of Detroit. The others were scattered, some in Grand Rapids, maybe 3%, or maybe some in Lansing, maybe it's 5%, but when you have a disproportionate share of that society here, we need

support from the society as a whole, which means the state of Michigan, which means the United States as a whole. We're short of revenue and we need revenue not just for special programs, but also just to pay the bills. So the general revenue sharing legislation was passed through the efforts of the mayors -- the "Mayors Road Show" as I called it -- by going to New York, going to New Orleans, going to San Francisco, going to L.A. Every month we would pick a place, sometimes every three weeks. The big city mayors would go there and talk to the community and you had all the press, you had all the TVs. When Lindsay came to town, the TV cameras were there. When Alioto came to town and he's meeting with me and Lindsay and others, the press is there. So the problem went out to the public. When it went out to the public it goes to the legislators, the state legislators. They see it's a real problem and they read about it, and they read about it in Washington. And when we would go to Washington on a regular basis and meet with the Congressmen, both formally as the organizations, National League of Cities and the U.S. Conference of Mayors, we would have regular meetings with legislators and they met annually in different places. There's always a Washington meeting for the U.S. Conference of Mayors every six months, or at least, once a year. After our

discussions amongst ourselves, we would then go to our Congressmen and say: "Here are our problems, would you help us?" I remember meeting with Martha Griffiths. Martha Griffiths was a Democrat and she was from the 17th Congressional District, my district. I lived in that district in Rosedale Park, and she was my Congresswoman, and she was very unhappy with Nixon. She said, "It's Nixon's program, I'm not going to support revenue sharing." Well, I went to her office locally, and I went to her office in Washington. I said, "Hey, this is the problem. Detroit needs that help. Even though it is Nixon's idea, and he's supporting the legislation, here's why I want you to support it." She finally said, "Well, I'll bite my tongue and I'll vote for it when it comes up." It's that kind of persuasiveness, that kind of understanding that you must build on to get a solution that is a real solution. And as I say, as a result of this joint effort, revenue sharing was around for a number of years. But we started it, and the first check that the city of Detroit received was for $52 million and it was a great, great help, as I'm sure you will appreciate.

Q: Maybe we could finish today's interview with a bit about another story during your time as mayor? According to my information, in 1971 you were on TV with Lou Gordon, who

was a local television pundit, long before the Rush Limbaugh’s and the O'Reilly’s that we have on TV and radio now. Lou Gordon was a hard-hitting journalist, who was somewhat of an icon in Detroit. He accused you of being lax on crime in narcotics in 1971. I wonder if you could tell me about that television episode and your relationship with Lou Gordon.

A: Well, you have to understand, as you just indicated, that he's kind of the sensationalist, hard questions, attacking -- what's the buzz word?

Q: Aggressive?

A: No, sneak attacks. Anyway, he was very vocal and very critical. It turned out that in my early years, when I was -- my early years, publicly when I was sheriff -- I would be interviewed from time to time or maybe have a portion of his program. He had a Sunday night program, every Sunday, at 5 o'clock or something like that. It was taped on Fridays. I had a show on Channel 50, *The Mayor's Show*, which was taped on Friday afternoons. At any rate, I would appear with him at different places and he would ask some very sharp, hard questions. In the first year, my team didn’t solve the crime problem. We had worked on it by getting more police officers, demanding more training, demanding -- one of the things, for example, that Murphy

instituted, he said, "You want to be a command officer, you want to be a rank above a Lieutenant, you got to get a degree in law enforcement." Well, that's a tremendous challenge and a new requirement. You can be a Sergeant, you can be a Lieutenant, but if you want to go above that, I want you to have more education. And that's one of things he instituted. Well, it takes time to select the personnel to train and to upgrade the department. So, yes, we still had an increase in crime the first year I was there. But we reduced crime by something like 6% the second year, 15% the third year, and something like 12% the fourth year. Those are the statistics, so we were able to, by that time, get the money, train the police, have them working on the streets in law enforcement and fairly and acceptably, while having the response from the community that you needed to have good law enforcement and a safe community. Well, Gordon was critical, of course, because I didn't do it overnight. I expected that, and some sharp questions. And, if he exaggerated, I would call it exaggeration. So, it was one of these kinds of shared commentaries, but that comes with the territory. That's what you get for living in a glass house (laughter) and running a business, so to speak, being the CEO of 25,000 employees living and serving a million-two -- over a

million people. That just happens. I think ultimately he kind of came around. Because the fact is that we were fiscally responsible, we did get more revenue. And when you get something like $50 million per year from the federal government that you can throw into the police department, you can see the effect it has on the street when you hire more police.