





K: He came from Jacksonville, and basically, one of the, Keith Scales, I think, who had been a member of the Florida Citrus Commission, I got to know, he was from Leesburg, and I got to know Keith pretty well. He was a conservative. There weren't very many republicans as such then. There were conservatives and there were !

D: Sure.

K: liberals, and as we, I think, discussed before, Robert King High, defeated Hayden Burns in the primary and he became the candidate for the Democratic Party in the general election and Claude Kirk emerged then by a group of Republicans, of course, but the ones that were significant in his election were Democrats that were conservative and did not want a South Florida liberal, as Robert King High was !

D: From Miami.

K: was, and from Miami, that made him even more liberal. And so, Keith Scales, though, called me and said that a group of people that I knew in Leesburg, Orlando, and Ocala, and that kind of area, were impressed with Claude Kirk and wanted to know if I would arrange for him to meet some people in the Lakeland area. I had never met Claude at the time, but I agreed to do that. One of my closest friends, Jim Wellman, who had a construction company that did a lot of work with the phosphate industry, Wellman – Lord and people that had been in Lakeland a long time will remember that. Jim was a very active citizen. He was, no good community effort met without Jim being heavily involved in it. He was also very involved in the political scene and he was a big conservative. He later was on the National Republican Finance Committee. But Jim, when I called him, and I called several others, Scott Linder, I think was one and Jimmy Sykes perhaps, those were three of my close friends and we did a lot of things and had interest in hopefully doing things politically and civically together, and we, Jim immediately offered a place he had out at his Wellman - Lord engineering complex for

somebody that had never been in political office before, but I think the margin was, I mean, it was, it was !

D: So the Democratic primary really hurt the Democrats.

K: And, oh, that about just destroyed them. And that's the first time you saw that a Republican could, would be elected to State office in Florida. And, of course, we know the pattern subsequently, you know the registration is still Democratic, I don't know 5:4 or something like that, but it's, Florida is basically more of a conservative state than a liberal state, I guess, is a better way to say it. But the decisions no longer were going to be made in the Democratic primary, whether to have a conservative or liberal governor. And Claude, he was, as I say, he was a very interesting fellow. He didn't have anyone that he really was obligated to very much. He had, a lot of people supported him and he didn't have but one or two people that put in massive amounts of money in his campaign, though Jim Wellman put in more than most, I guess, in the campaign. Campaigns didn't cost quite as much back then as they do now. And Claude was attractive. He was a very good speaker and he was a very bright fellow. He had a very, very quick and entertaining, he had, I had high hopes, I thought he would be one of the really fine governors and in some ways he was. He wasn't a bad governor. But he didn't have a very long attention span and became bored with being governor really after a while, in my judgment, and he decided he wanted to be vice president and then he decided, I think, he wanted to be president. And he went through these and he got a lot of encouragement in the national media and a lot of people, and he was a showman, sort of, as I remember the incident, I think you referred to about, in St. Augustine, but he was, Rap Brown, I think was a black activist that had, I may be confusing the area, but I think that was, that may have been Jacksonville !

D: I think that was subsequent !

K: I think it was Jacksonville.

D: I think that was subsequent to !

K: And that was after the St. Augustine, I am.

D: Yes.

K: I think St. Augustine was when, you're right. But I do remember that, when he confronted him, he came and went to the, and people, you know, they thought here was basically a rally of Afro-Americans and it was thought it wouldn't be safe for somebody who would take a strong position, a white man to go into the neighborhood at night, and Claude went up there and confronted him and they didn't quite know what to make of

K: But he had done some things that probably gave some credence to that kind of application. But Claude was, he had a chaotic administration in many ways. You know, he had the Wackenhut scandal

D: Yes.

K: had the war on crime. And he would go off on these programs and commit private monies to, to them, and get people to go along and they raised an awful lot of money. I think a lot of people during Kirk's administration thought Kirk was getting a lot of money, you know, that, and put to improper use, that he maybe profited himself. He may have, I don't know really, but I think not. I think Kirk liked to live pretty well. He liked to be entertained but, most of the things in his ambitions, he really wanted to do some good things. He wanted to do, clear up crime in Florida and the Wackenhut program did that to some extent. It was an unorthodox way of doing it, and I don't know, it's been reviewed and all and a lot of people didn't like Kirk. Liberal Democrats just despised him, and, but Kirk ended up, he'd take unpredictable positions. Kirk really wasn't doctrinaire conservative and subsequent, of course, to his being governor, he has been a Democrat two or three times, he has been an Independent, I don't know, he's been, he flip-flops back and forth, and he's kind of like some others that had a lot of talent but didn't have the consistency that was needed to be a viable, really political personage through their career. It's kind of sad in a way because Claude had a lot of talent and he's still likeable.

D: And another thing there was he was so young when he was governor, it was almost like he was just this..

K: Yeah, he was in his early forties.

D: It was, this was the beginning of a great national career.

K: And Claude, if he had not been so impatient and he'd had, but a lot of it was that, I don't know that he really, he wanted to do other things, I don't think he quite knew what he wanted to do, but he, suddenly he had been a successful insurance executive, had done very, very well



just became addicted. He said, "You haven't appointed a single supporter of mine as an architect". And I said, "Claude, they weren't the best ones there". And he said, "You

D: And Miami being the site of the convention probably helped too.

K: Yes. That was the only national convention I ever went to. I didn't, I went because Jim Wellman was such a, we had a !

D: Was there really at that time in the convention, was there serious talk of Kirk? Or was it !

impeccable reputation. He wasn't colorful, but he was a very good public servant.

D: Were you involved at all in his administration? Were you appointed to anything that you recall?

K: Yeah, Reubin appointed me to, I should go back and review, I think, I get some of

D: Um-hmm. And go ahead and go on up, you know, to the present if you'd like. We haven't talked about the rest of them, but !

K: Well, you know, it, I think probably that many would say, and I don't totally disagree, that Leroy Collins, because Leroy Collins was correct on a lot of positions that most people had not yet come to. That may be the true test of leadership, and, but whether he was, and he, he was certainly a fine person. I liked Roy very much, but I would not

D: I guess that was '88 instead of '86.

K: Yeah, it would have had to have been because Lawton was elected in '70 and that was the end of his third term, 18 years, so it was '88, yep. And then, and Reubin, and Connie Mack had been announced against Lawton, and I know because he came by ("as a due"?) and then I talked to him. I said, "You know, he was, you know, I'm certainly, supporting Lawton and I don't think you've got any chance". And he said, "Well, I've decided I want to run and I know Lawton", and he had nothing but fine things to say about Lawton. He was, he said he was a fine senator but I think we would be better served with a Republican, but, you know, the things that you would normally say. And then when Reubin got in, you know, it was pretty well thought that Reubin would be a natural successor to Lawton's legacy there, and he, they were basically the same kind of moderate Democrats. And then when Reubin decided to drop out, he just couldn't stand the fundraising.

D: Yes, well that's what he told me. I asked him !

K: Well he told me, I was, we were !

D: The fundraising by that time in the '80s, late '80s, had become so extremely different than when he was governor, and he just said he refused to really try to adjust to the new process and it was just, I remember he told me that he sat down one day and had to,









D: ! the state rep?

K: No, it is the state rep. He's the one that's in the, real estate broker ! Gene Strickland just went with him into Saunders Realty.

D: Okay.

K: And Dean is, as I say, Dean is probably in his forties now.



election and I think he had a birthday that he celebrated as he was walking into Tallahassee to actually attend the State Legislature. They timed it so that they would walk into Tallahassee, celebrate his birthday as part of the walk and then assume his Legislative duties. It was a big; I don't want to say spectacle, but kind of a big event.



