BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY: Wilfred Buddy Soares

Wilfred Buddy Soares was born in Honolulu in 1929. He was educated at Saint Louis High School and the University of Hawai‘i.

In 1949, Soares worked as a sales manager for Western Dairy Products. He then worked as an account executive for Pan American Airlines until 1964 when he began working for Amfac Properties, Inc. From 1969 to 1977, he was the director of community affairs for Hawaiian Electric Company. In 1977 he became the director of marketing for Aloha Airlines.

Soares served as a state representative from 1967 to 1975. In 1975, he was appointed to the state senate and served through 1986. He later directed public relations for UH-Hilo and West O'ahu College.
Joy Chong: This is an interview with Buddy Soares which took place in Hilo, at the UH [University of Hawai'i-Hilo] campus there, and it took place on May 19, 1988. Interviewers are Chris Conybeare and Dan Tuttle.

CC: Today, May 19th, we’re conducting another one in our series of oral history interviews with Mr. [Wilfred] Buddy Soares. This is a not-for-broadcast interview for archival purposes, and I’m going to ask you to start out the same way we have with everyone. Can you describe a little bit about when and where you were born and the circumstances of your parents at that time? And we’ll get started from there.

BS: Okay, I was born in Honolulu on September the 4th, 1929, in a place called Kaimuki. My father and mother were both from—not, quote, poor parents, but very struggling parents. My father [Jack] was a warehouse foreman, [my] mother [Alice] was a housewife. My dad had a very unfortunate happening. He had polio for a year, and therefore didn’t work for a whole year, so my mother took in social service [foster] kids to help us along. And so I would say that my beginning was a difficult one in terms of having to be brought up in a difficult family situation.

DT: What about brothers and sisters?

BS: I have one brother, older than I am by five years. And my mother was one of nine children. She was the ninth. So I actually am the last of the Mohicans, so to speak. I’m the last Soares child from my mother’s side of the family and my father’s side of the family. And so I was the baby. When I was born, my Aunt (Mary) who was an old maid, lived with us to help us along. And she was what was called at that time, the lady-in-waiting for Princess (Abigail) Kawānanakoa. (They both traveled) to Tahiti (so) my mother sent a wire to (my aunt in) Tahiti that I was born, and she (my mother) wanted to name me Wilfred, (but) Princess Kawānanakoa named me Buddy. That name has stuck with me ever since. And it came through that relationship with the Princess Kawānanakoa. And that’s how the name of Buddy . . .

DT: That answers one of the mysteries that we wanted to ask you about. (Chuckles)

BS: And that name, of course, has been my name all the way through.
DT: How about elementary school and that kind of thing?

BS: I went to Ali'iolani Elementary School in Kaimuki. At that time, it was called [an] English standard [school], supposedly a little bit better than the other—even though I lived right across the street from Liholiho School. And from there, (sixth grade) I went to Saint Louis High School, (and) became a football player there. Athletics was number one for me. Then to University of Hawai'i for (one) year, and many, many other courses besides that in terms of corporate training programs with Pan American, Amfac, Aloha Airlines, (Hawaiian Electric), what have you.

DT: Were you involved in any politics in those days or . . .

BS: Yes, I (was). As a football player at Saint Louis, we were the campaign workers for then Mayor Blaisdell [house (1944-46), senate (1946-50), mayor (1955-69)] who was our football coach. Neal S. Blaisdell had a very strong influence on my life, and he got me into politics and encouraged me to get involved. Not only as a worker for him at that time, but beyond that for the campaigns that he ran. I became very much involved with Ben [Benjamin F.] Dillingham's campaign for the [U.S.] Senate against Dan [Daniel] Inouye [in 1962], (I was campaign coordinator) for the old 17th district, and I worked on that campaign very heavily. The very next year, [there was a] change over in the [state] house seats in that (17th) district, and I was asked to run for the house [in 1966].

DT: Let's go back a little bit. Were your parents Republicans or did you have any sense of that or did you . . .

BS: My parents were Republicans, yes, because they were very close to, of course, to Neal Blaisdell. But even before that, [we were] very heavily [involved with the] Republican party. My father's big boss (Bill Rassman) was a very heavy Republican and asked us to become workers for them (Republican candidates,) we were just a Republican family.

DT: So it's kind of a natural . . .

BS: Yes.

DT: . . . thing for you.

BS: Right, right.

DT: Did you follow this up with any work around politics on campus at UH [University of Hawai'i] or . . .

BS: Have I?

DT: Yeah, did you, at that time . . .

BS: No, I did not.

DT: In '49, you didn't run for any campus offices?
BS: No, not at all. I was active at Saint Louis as, you know, vice-president of my class and involved in the student government, and becoming very heavily involved with the college. Saint Louis College, at that time, was really the high school.

DT: You didn't play any football for UH, either, did you?

BS: I played my freshman year there and I got kind of banged up. I was only 155 pounds, you know. (UH) played against Michigan State [University], and Stanford [University]. [There] wasn't that much chance to do much. (When) I got hurt playing ball, I just gave it up and left school. I left school to go into business, again, through politics. Neal Blaisdell was very active at Hawaiian Pine[apple Company] and Dole Pineapple Company. He also had some strong ties with Bishop Trust Company, and so I went to the Trust Company to work and started off as an office boy. I went through there, from there on to other companies.

DT: Did you campaign for Blaisdell in '52?

BS: Yes. Yes.

DT: Remember that? Or were you able [to] listen to it, what Willard Bassett [administrative assistant to John Wilson] did, the type of job he did on . . .

BS: Oh, yes. I remember that campaign.

DT: Radio broadcast. That was devastating to your campaign.

BS: That was something else. Yes, he really was. Again this being young in politics, you know, as a worker handing out cards and all that sort of stuff, we were not part of the strategy group, or part of the decision-making group. And you're right, that was a blow that was far beyond what you could comprehend as a worker at that point in time. But it was a heck of a campaign.

DT: In '54, you were able to turn defeat into victory.

BS: That's right.

DT: Because you got help from a lot of Democrats . . .

BS: That's right.

DT: . . . as I recall.

BS: That's where I think Mayor Blaisdell, Neal, that time realized that his strength was with the independent voter, much more so than Republicans alone. And the wave was coming, though, I think, Dan, the wave of change was coming to the party. They were beginning to become, you know, the big so-called fat cats at that time, and the cries of needs for more, of the majority of the people, were really falling on, I thought, deaf ears already. So Neal became very, very much aware of that. And through his association with athletics—baseball and football—he was being told by other people that, you know, you better go down in the middle of the road and find out where your real friends are, and where your supporters are. Because
many of those who work for us on the campaign were not Republicans; they were Democrats that played ball for him. Hawaiian Pine Packers was his football team along with Saint Louis. In those days, he had a senior league football team besides a high school football team. And he coached both of us. And we used to use the old Hawaiian Pine playground as our practice field. And many people from that side of town came out and said, you know, we'll help you if you just run—campaign Republican yes, but we need more help.

DT: Not many Republicans won that year, did they? Only a couple.

BS: Oh, Mayor Neal Blaisdell he was one of the few, and we (Republicans) got killed in '59 again, you know. So, I mean, at that point in time, you had to look around and see who your numbers were. And he was smart to say, well, I'll go with “Angel” [Shiro] Maehara (his campaign manager) and his boys and that's how they went.

DT: Well, this was—you're another example of the people who were involved in sports and got into politics. It was a route for Blaisdell [which] was a switch to politics.

BS: I coached Punahou [School] football team for twenty-four years. I used to get fifteen kids in school a year, including people like Charlie Wedemeyer and this kid [Mosi] Tatupu playing for the [New England] Patriots [professional football team]. And you build a base through athletics. For every kid you coach, you got two parents, and that multiplies itself by forty-five kids times two and then their families, and before you know it, you've got a good network of people that really respect what you do. And I love kids, and I enjoy doing it (coaching) very much. So it became a good relationship, and it helped politics a lot more. So my campaign crew was (Punahou) ball players that I coached.

DT: You certainly didn’t get rich off of coaching.

BS: Not at all.

(Laughter)

BS: That’s for sure. We had the best, we have the best opportunity, Dan. Punahou School was great to us in that we never got paid, but (for) every year we coached, our kids had a year of free schooling. It was a great investment (of our time) in the fact that you can educate your kids at the best private school just by coaching up there. I spent twenty-four years there, so three of my four went all the way through Punahou School.

CC: When you finally made that decision to put your own hat in the ring, how did it—did somebody come to you and ask you to do that, or how did happen?

BS: Yes. As I said earlier, Mayor Blaisdell told me, “You know, Buddy, it’s about time you ran for office. You know all the people in the (17th) district, you worked hard for my campaign and for Ben [Benjamin F.] Dillingham’s campaign. And even though he lost, you made a lot of friends, and you show(ed) that you have a way of meeting people and you like people. That charisma is there. You should run.”

Well, that was my first nightmare to politics because I said “Fine, I’ll talk to my wife and my family. I might run for politics.”
Well, we had one incumbent named Frank Judd for the house. I told the boys... Fred [Frederick] Rohlfing went to the senate, old Web [Webley] Edwards went to the senate. “Hawai’i Calls” [radio program]—you remember Web? Tom [Thomas] Lalakea went to the senate, so we had four seats, one incumbent, three vacancies. I thought, “This is going to be great,” so I (announced my candidacy) first at the [Republican] convention in May, I (planned to) run for the house of representatives, thinking, well, Frank, myself, maybe five of us (would be the only ones running). (But) much to my dismay, there were thirteen Republicans and eleven Democrats (filing). [In 1966, there were eleven Republicans and five Democrats running for house seats in the 17th district.] (Sixteen candidates.) And there were so many of us running for offices, you didn’t know who was running today or tomorrow. You know, I said to myself, “I’m never going to make this, this is a nightmare.” And so we adopted our slogan, “Everybody Needs a Buddy,” and we started walking house to house from June 15th, all the way through to November with seventy-five to eighty guys every Saturday. All my ex-ballplayers. Of course, the primary was going to be the ball game, so we came through in the primary. That’s when you have myself, Cliff Krueger, Tennyson Lum and Frank Judd. We beat the likes of Dennis O’Connor who ran at that time, and who else did we—had bunch of people running against us. That was something else. (Chuckles) We won that and I never lost after that.

CC: Was that ’66 or ’65?

BS: Sixty-six, ’66 election, yeah.

DT: Well, this was really in the height of the Democratic power, too.

BS: That’s right. That’s right.

DT: In recent years.

BS: Oh, yeah. And at that time, of course, you ran from Kapahulu all the way to the Blowhole. That was the old 17th district. It came around the back of Diamond Head to Koko Head, to 12th Avenue, and from there, all the way out. So you had a variety of Republican areas, Democrat areas, and then unknowns in terms of the Niu Valley area, and Kuli’ou’ou, and what have you. But it was a long campaign, and for us, a very enlightening one, you know.

DT: But didn’t Frank Judd sort of take you under his wing?

BS: Yes he did.

DT: You were saying both of you were football players?

BS: Right. He’s a Punahou boy, and went to Stanford and he was a football player himself. And he was happy I was running, and as it turned out, he and I worked very close together. We did from that time on, as you know. But he took me under his wings and, “Buddy, well, we gotta get together,” and we ran a primary together and hopefully we came out all right.

DT: Your association with Frank Judd was much closer than, say, Cliff Krueger’s association with you.
BS: Oh yes. Yes, yes. Frank and I were very, very close. Cliff was more like a loner. He had his own agenda. Very brilliant man. He took his own trail of success and went his way, and we went ours. But as a team, the four of us, we ran that year together. Then two years later, he [Krueger] (ran for) the senate, and lost. But Frank and I and Tennyson (Lum) stayed in the house, and Pat [Patricia] Saiki (joined our campaign). The four of us (ran as a team) and the four of us won. We were the only (two districts)—Kailua and Hawai'i Kai, 'Āina Haina, Kuli'ou'ou—the only two pure Republican districts, as I remember it. (Chuckles)

CC: How many Republicans were there in . . .

BS: When I ran the first time, there were twelve of us [in the house]. And then we increased to thirteen in 1970. Then we had—that was our best year, '70, '74 [when there were sixteen Republicans]. Then I was asked to go to the senate in '76.

DT: Rather than going out or seeking the office, you were appointed, right?

BS: Yes, what happened, 1975, August, Fred Rohlfing decided to take on Cec [Cecil] Heftel in the Congress race from that district. And so he resigned to run full-time for Congress. (Then) Governor [George] Ariyoshi appointed me to take his place in 1975 in the senate, but then I had to run again in '76 for the senate. And then '78, and then '80. Then the first time was '80, four-year term in '80, and then '84 the second four-year term.

CC: When you were appointed, I noticed that for a Republican, you had some interesting support and it wasn't unusual, completely, but the ILWU [International Longshoremen's and Warehousemen's Union] and Eddie [Edward] Tangen [international representative for the ILWU] asked the governor to . . .

BS: Right.

CC: . . . to appoint you.

BS: Right.

CC: What was the reason for their backing you?

BS: What I figure was the fact that the appointment came in from the governor for the seat. And the HGEA [Hawai'i Government Employees Association], who took all the credit in the world for getting the governor elected—not the ILWU they said—kind of rubbed the ILWU the wrong way. I had always had an open (mind) in my style. I called it like it is. I was more like Neal Blaisdell. I (wasn't always voting) Republican all the way, no matter what. I took an issue as it came up and I voted for or against it, and I didn't care who knew it. And I suddenly realized that some of the labor groups were endorsing me. HGEA did not because David Trask [head of the HGEA] didn't like me, I didn't like him. That was no secret. He threatened me, and nobody threatens me. I had one vote like everybody else. And so it turned out where David Trask wanted me defeated. Before I got the appointment, he went and saw the governor, too, to appoint somebody else. And the ILWU said wait a minute now, you know, he's not been unfair to labor. If he's going to vote no, we know why. I made an open book and Dan will tell you that I was a Republican leader in the house, with Joe [Joseph] Garcia and I, and we raised quite a bit of hell trying to keep a two-party [system] going in the
house, even though it was thirty-nine to twelve. Before you start, the only game you start, you lose before you begin. But they [the ILWU] came out and supported me because they thought it was unfair for the HGEA to say (I didn't deserve the seat)—although I was a senior representative there, had never lost an election, and I was [a] leader.

That carried forth in the next election, I might say very happily for me, because then the HGEA went right after me. They put up Keo Nakama, a former house member [1964–72], against me. And he came to see me and told [me] he couldn't win, but he was told he had to run. He didn't have a choice. He didn't want to run. And they put manpower and dollars behind this candidacy. They had manpower all along (Kalaniana‘ole) Highway in the afternoons. When driving home from work, you saw these guys standing out there along the highway. And again, Eddie [Tangen] came through with [the] ILWU and they supported my campaign. And it became a little joke because they had all these workers from the union holding signs for me, all through Kapahulu and Kaimuki. Across the street would be the HGEA for my opponent, and the ILWU for me. (Chuckles) And we beat 'em. And they did a hell of a job on that campaign. I had to run again in '78. Again, the HGEA did the same thing (i.e., endorsed him and put all resources behind him) with Donald Nishimura who was having some problems that year, so it was [Dennis] O'Connor, Nishimura, myself, [Patricia] Saiki and Steve Cobb, I think, at that time. And Nishimura lost. But I was the only Republican to be unopposed twice in the senate, in '80 and '84.

DT: Keo Nakama retired from politics after that, didn't he?

BS: Yes. Well, you know, he actually had not. He ran for the house [in 1974], and I think he lost in the house first.

DT: Then he lost before he went to the senate.

BS: Yeah, to Lisa Naito.

DT: Oh, yeah.

BS: And she won the house race along with—when [Hiroshi] Kato retired (and) went to the bench to become a judge, Lisa and Ken Kiyabu came in, and they beat Keo Nakama. And then he worked for the HGEA full-time [as their community relations specialist]. But he was told as an employee, you have to run. No, he didn't want to run, he had to run, so we beat him.

DT: Did you participate in any of [Fred] Rohlfing's campaign for the . . .

BS: For Congress?

DT: . . . U.S. Congress?

BS: Yeah, I actually helped Freddy by speaking for him at coffee hours, helping, my campaign people held signs for him. We included his brochure in our house-to-house campaign every Saturday. And that kind of work allowed him to campaign someplace else, so we did work very closely with him. I was really hoping he would have won that race, but money really did him in because Cec [Heftel] had a lot of money to run with.
DT: Well, in retrospect, would it be your opinion that it was a winnable contest for him and he got a lot of support after the primary?

BS: Yes.

DT: But there was an impression around that Fred really didn't know what to do with the support that he had. In other words, the HGEA support, the union support.

BS: Right, right.

DT: So virtually all the organizations were supporting him as over against Heftel, but he didn't have enough time or else he wasn't . . .

BS: Yeah.

DT: . . . he wasn't exactly a . . .

BS: Yeah.

DT: . . . as close to the voting public. The rank-and-file, the voting public across the whole spectrum, as you and Frank Judd were.

BS: Yeah. I think Freddy lacked a—not being critical of him as a person, but he lacked the people relationship. He didn't, he didn't warm up to people. He didn't even enjoy being with people. He didn't enjoy the idea of knocking on your door and meeting with you, and I love that. I enjoyed that. Frank did, too. And I think you'll find that those who've been successful have that, I call it charisma in politics, but the feeling that you like the guy you're dealing with, he comes across as being sincere, he's honest, he wants to serve you. And I think what Fred did not do, he didn't get down himself, plus the fact that his campaign was not well organized. When you have grassroots support of people, like [George] Ariyoshi did with his grassroots stew-and-rice dinners, you got to be there with them. You gotta be out there with them. You gotta lead the fray. You're the candidate, you have to work twice as hard as anybody else. Freddy didn't do that. He didn't have that kind of campaign group that were really down with the people in the grassroots level, and didn't utilize them.

CC: Well, we'll pick up the story of this campaign as soon as we've changed tapes.

BS: Okay.

DT: Every twenty minutes we have to pause.

CC: Yeah.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is videotape number two of the Buddy Soares interview.

DT: I get the impression you really enjoyed every political campaign that you were ever in, right?
BS: I did. You know, I—that, people can't understand. I like campaigning, I enjoyed it. We had fun at it. You know, we had a very close campaign group, and that's important, that you have a campaign family that you believe in, they believe in you. You have to work twice as hard as they do. That's my philosophy. If I'm the candidate and I'm going to win the election, I can't win without them. And therefore, I have to make them understand that for every hour they give me, I'm giving myself two hours. And many candidates forget that. They expect you to go out there and campaign for them, to win an election, but you work half the time. I think that's not fair either to the workers. And we made it a very close family affair in the sense that we had seventy-five to a hundred top people that were out there every Saturday. I worked every night, you know. So, I wanted them to be sure that I knew what they were giving me, I want to make sure that I give them the same kind of support in return. And I enjoyed it. I really did.

DT: How does it happen that you didn't really get some serious thought to running for governor? You'd been a ticket leader and enjoyed campaigning, you know, you'd been a fixture in the senate, even though in the minority. The Republicans were really looking around for a candidate for governor. How come?

BS: Well, I think there were three things that I look back at as being factors in not becoming a top candidate for office. One was that I was convinced in my mind that I wanted to become somebody that was well respected and liked on the floor of the senate, and likewise in the house. That was my role. I also was very much aware that I had a family that I was very close to, and that's why I'm here [in Hilo]. They're up here. And I felt that there were three priorities in my life. First, my wife, second, my children, and third as a family together, my business. And that's the way I was looking at it. I never did, and this may . . . look toward [the] governorship or lieutenant governorship, and I did not even think about going to Congress. That was beyond my concern. Didn't want to live on the Mainland anyway. But I really felt that the party—and I say it now because I think [tape inaudible] coming from—the party never really came to me, and maybe if they had done that, [it] may have been different. I never was one of the party's so-called standard-bearers. Andy [D.G. Anderson] was. [D. Hebden] Porteus was. In the house, Fred Rohlfing was, you know, the party's so-called persons. I never was. The party never really supported me as being a guy they thought [they] could win with. And maybe if they had come out and say, you know, "Buddy, you go with Andy as lieutenant governor."

In fact, at one time (1968), I had the honor of being asked to run with Fred Rohlfing for governor and, me, lieutenant governor because I would bring the votes he would never get. And he would get the votes that I would never get. It may have been a good combination if we ever tried, I don't know. But, I would be strong in the other islands. Lot of Portuguese there, my father was a blue-collar worker, I relate to them. I relate to the ordinary guy on the street, the independent person, to the athlete, and there are many of them. But I was never asked or really egged on or urged on by the party as being someone that [they] should think of to run. And that not coming, didn't get me excited. I was aware that we had people like Andy and Freddy [Rohlfing] and Wadsy [Wadsworth Yee] and people like that had more party support than I did, and more money than I did, more Big Five, the Downtown support than I did, and so I didn't really get excited about it. So I just passed it off saying, "Well, I'm not interested." And it never came.

DT: The party, not only in that instance, and perhaps earlier instances, but also on more recent
instances, the party has sort of become its own worst enemy, hasn’t it?

BS: It has. It has. In this sense. Looking at, you know, politics in general, the Democrats have come in to power to do good, and they’ve done very well. They’re doing exactly what they said that they should throw us out for. You see people like [Matsuo] Takabuki on the Bishop Estate [board of trustees], and Henry Peters at Bishop Estate. These people came in saying, “Throw the other guys out. Let’s make sure that we don’t have this monopoly of landholding and everything else.” And these are the very guys who have the power today. But they know how to use it. They know how to use the party, they know how to use the people.

And the Republican party has not stepped back saying, “Wait a minute, now. Who can do the best job for the people?” And take that approach and get to the grassroot people, younger people, newer people, guys like myself, athletic people, who don’t know how to lose, see. That’s what I learned. I was taught how to win. I was taught self-discipline as an athlete. I was told you were meant to work hard to win. Then it comes easy. And unless you find people that are hungry like that, you’re not going to win. The party’s not doing it any longer. That’s why I welcome, between you and I and the gate—because I told this to Mary George, and I told [Andy] Anderson—the idea of the [Pat] Robertson group is a blessing in disguise. This is a new breath of fresh air, a new breed that would probably, not probably, surely. They were former Democrats, now, they’re Republicans. Embrace them. You have more today than you had last year. Get them interested, get them involved, find new candidates. That’s how the party’s going to change. And unless you do that, the party wouldn’t do anything at all for you.

DT: It hasn’t exactly happened, though, has it?

BS: No. (Chuckles) I’m afraid not.

DT: Well, I wanted to suggest almost that perhaps the party gave similar treatment to the trial balloon [that] Senator [Richard] Henderson floated about the governorship [in 1986].

BS: Right.

DT: If you remember, he floated a trial balloon.

BS: Right.

DT: Apparently, he got no encouragement from the party.

BS: And you know, I served with him twenty years at the capitol. And I’ll say it without any reservation. Richard Henderson [state senate 1970–78, 1980–87] is the most talented senator I’ve ever worked with. He’s brilliant, he’s compassionate, he’s got a flair for people, he enjoys people. Conservative in many, many ways. But you remember at one time, you, yourself and I—and we had a lunch at the Red Vest. And you told him, “Why don’t you consider the senate race? You have all of the qualities.” And I never forgot that, Dan. And I saw that in him after I served with him. Didn’t know him before, hardly knew him at all. But boy, this guy had, I thought, all the qualities to be a real top-notch governor.

CC: But once again, he didn’t seem to be engaged with a certain part of the party or something
because he never got, he never really got taken seriously for the top races.

BS: Because he and I had the same situation. We had the [Andy] Andersons, we had the Wadsworth Yees, we had the Pat Saikis who embraced the party, and yet, nobody did any more for the party than Henderson did. And this guy has done so much for the party, so much for candidates, running surveys and polls and stuff on his own to help the candidates. But nobody looked at him as being a top-notch guy because he was not the person that Andy and Wadsy and Freddy [Rohlfing] and, you know, that appear to want the higher office. See, these people, they displayed the desire for the higher office. Did you know Pat [Saiki], of course, used the party very effectively to become a Congresswoman, all through the party. She was able to become party chairman, and she wanted to see that as being a chance to go further. Maybe Henderson's corporate affairs, running Hilo Motors and all of his businesses, gave people the impression that he was more of a corporate entity than anything else. But I, again, I would say that [if] they really would push him or they really would get behind him in a showing of support that he may have felt the same way I would have thought, that maybe he had a chance to become a much better, higher candidate for office, but they never did.

DT: Was it a matter of money or. . . A lot of the big money, of course, switched over to the Democrats.

BS: Yes.

DT: What big money was left went to these certain areas in the Republican party rather than for you or even to Senator Henderson.

BS: That's right. Oh, yeah. And I think that the idea about money. . . And the thing that is very discouraging, it's never going to change here, from what I can see. As long as you have these corporate giants giving Buddy Soares money, money for a book of tickets, and two for Dickie [Richard] Wong, and one for Buddy and two for Dennis O'Connor—you know, feeding the alligators, they will not take one side or the other—you're not going to have that kind of support. But I think the party support, the so-called Republican support for a guy like Richard Henderson, I mean, a real thrust for. . . Not a draft as much as saying, "Look, we really will get behind you, we need someone like you," and really push it, you're not going to find a guy like him go into office. I think it's more than just the money, Dan. I think it's a dedication, if you will, of people that really want to see somebody win. Democrats have that with [John] Waihe'e. You know, in the very first part of the campaign two years ago for governor, he was way down the totem pole. Nobody dreamed he'd beat Cec Heftel. But the grassroots workers kept on working and working and the idea of, you know, keeping Hawai'i Hawaiian, and the theme that they used, and the strategies they used, it just turned the tide for them. And I think that's where we have not had the kind of support in the party, to push somebody like Richard Henderson.

DT: No one's ever quite able to put his finger on that fellow, right.

BS: Yeah.

DT: That seems to be the big stumbling block for the Republicans.

BS: Yes. And I think again, as I said earlier, the recruiting of young people that have a desire to
move ahead has not been done.

CC: Do you miss it?

BS: I miss the people. This job [director of public relations for the UH-Hilo and West O'ahu College] offers me a lot more challenges than I really bargained for in that we've got to build a whole new image here at the university. I've got some great people I'm working with. I miss the people. I miss the people like Dan (Tuttle) and (Milton Goto) who you work with, and you can confide in, you talk story with. It makes the job that much more interesting. I miss the battle lines, you know, I like a good fight. I enjoy just taking somebody on, and you know, having them justify what they were doing. I have the pleasure every year of having, somewhere along the line, an issue or two that I latched on to, and was able to either defeat or support. That became a reality, and I miss that kind of reward, you know.

DT: Is this becoming a trend? You resigned from the senate, Henderson resigned from the senate, [Virginia] Isbell resigned . . .

BS: Changing party, yeah.

DT: Changing party [in 1988].

BS: Yeah, yeah.

DT: You didn't change party, did you?

BS: No, not at all. I had two things in mind. I had two more years to go on my term. I was unopposed and I knew that the time was going to be coming, I had to make a decision: Do I continue in the senate for four more years? I would not—see, I don't believe in the idea of running to run. I want to win. I don't know how to lose. I'm not going to start knowing how to lose. And I knew that if I'd stay in for two more years as I was going to be doing, that I would be, probably, running for four more. And I decided, how long do I want to stay in this business? And my family, being on the Big Island, three of my four kids are here, eight of my ten grandchildren are here. We have three homes up here. We've been spending more time back and forth up here. And the opportunity for a job had come up where a new chancellor (Edward Kormondy), a new student services director [director for community education and community services], Judith Kirkendall moved up here. We began to look at that chance of maybe living up here and working up here in a brand-new setting, a brand-new challenge. And that appealed to me at that point in time. Had this not occurred, I probably would still be in the senate. I did not dislike it. Lot of guys will resign because they don't like it or they—I didn't dislike it, I enjoyed it.

DT: What about—I know that Henderson, when he left, said he was tired of being in that small a minority. Did you also feel frustrated?

BS: Oh, yeah. I felt frustrated because we had three seats we should have never lost. Ralph Ajifu's seat to Clayton Hee should never been lost to us [in 1984]. We shouldn't have lost [Lee Champion, Jr.'s seat to] Mary Jane McMurdo. We should have never lost [Wadsworth Yee's] seat to Bert Kobayashi [in 1982]. These are Republicans that have had a chance to win before. And when you have eight or ten people. . . . We, Scotchy [Richard Henderson] and I
had the pleasure of being in a coalition and we had a ball doing that because we now had a chance to do things as a majority member. (When you’re) down to five, you can’t get enough votes to make thirteen, that’s the magic number. But if you have eight or nine, four or five votes could be moving back and forth very quickly. And that’s frustrating. As I said before, Scotchy Henderson is an articulate, smart, smart guy. And it became for him, very frustrating because here’s a man [who has] been very successful in business. He built an empire of all kinds of companies, and he knows what’s going on, and he couldn’t do it over here. Try as he might, from eight to seven to five, you know. It became very frustrating for him. And it’s harder for an outer-islander to leave his community and spend his time down there [at the legislature] knowing full well that it’s not going to change. And that’s what he thought. And he feels that way very strongly. Unless we have a change, and people want a two-party system—right now, they want to have all Democrats in the senate if they can.

DT: That was the next question.

BS: Sure.

DT: What about the idea of changing parties and working on that side of the street without changing your own . . .

BS: You can compromise an issue, but you should never compromise your principle. A Republican philosophy I believe in and I never will change it. That, to me, is critical in a man’s decision. I’ll be very blunt. The change that Virginia [Isbell] made was very obvious. She was unhappy because she didn’t get a seat. Pure and simple. And if people elect that kind of people in office, that’s up to them. I happen not to like that kind of people who compromise their wishes for a job over their principle. Scotchy’s frustration was—that we needed better business minds [in] politics, we needed to work on these things, and I just can’t see us getting any better. And I’m just giving myself that much more time away from my family, kids are all gone, wife by herself back here, came to the capitol, and it becomes very difficult to do. Harder for him, to me. I’m in Hawai‘i Kai, I go to work every morning, come back every afternoon. [A neighbor island legislator] take off on Sunday, come back the following Friday—it’s a little different.

DT: Is keeping in touch with the Big Island Republicans then a possibility for [the] future?

BS: No.

DT: There’s all sorts of possibilities.

BS: I promised my family that I served my twenty years, I think I served it well, I’ve done my thing, and I’m through with politics. I don’t intend to get involved in politics anymore.

DT: Is that a Sherman-like statement or just a preference?

(Laughter)

BS: No, no. It’s an ending of a career that I enjoyed for twenty years.

DT: Was your reaction similar to other people? We’ve talked to some Republicans who said, well,
the Democrats are in power for the next fifty years. It's inevitable, the Republican party is dead. Do you feel that way or do you see . . .

BS: No, no. I see signs along the way that I think, if you get the proper candidate in the proper frame of mind and properly organized, I think we can bring back a lot of seats. I really do. Again, you've got to find the right ingredient, the guy who really wants to win bad enough to give it 110 percent, not just file and go run, you know. But I think we can take some seats back. I really do.

DT: Well, another leading question, perhaps, and that would be beyond just a matter of partisanship and that sort of thing. What do you see in the future for the state of Hawai'i? Do you express your disappointment, disillusionment by the way—in terms of your principles—the way things have been going in recent years. Do you still remain somewhat optimistic or quite pessimistic about the way things are going?

BS: I'm a little optimistic in that I see a real opportunity for growth in the whole state. I'm not happy with some of the ways I see the governor [John Waihe'e] taking over the county functions and taking away home rule with his so-called planning czar (Harold Masumoto) that he has. I do believe that part of that whole philosophy is to control everything, and now that you have it, don't give it away. And I think people will soon recognize that this administration, while having a lot of new creative ideas, these ideas were expressed by us a long time ago, the whole idea about economic development. We've been pounding the walls for that for years. And I think that sometimes you get too strong, too powerful, as the Republicans did for fifty years, that people begin to get uneasy and look for new alternatives. And I saw that a little bit in this last session in the house where you had, unfortunately, when Richard [Kawakami] passed away—Kawakami died [in 1987]—a new speaker [Daniel Kihano] comes in, and but he's a hell of a nice guy. Trying to hold fifty-one guys together is a very difficult task. Likewise, Dickie [Wong] in the senate. He had a difficult time with Clayton Hee his last session. That was a mistake giving him [chairmanship of the] judiciary [committee]. But that's who you have in office now, that's why I think people will have to take a look at that, say now, "Is this the new breed? Is this what you want to have?" I think there's a movement, Dan. I really believe optimistically that this, the leadership up there now is [in] the first two years. The honeymoon is going to be over pretty soon. Then, little different.

DT: You're suggesting that there's a gap between the public relation side and the actual accomplishment . . .

BS: Yes.

DT: . . . of the current administration.

BS: Yes, I do. Very obviously. And I think a good example is the [Waikīkī] convention center. And I will predict this, and I will say this also, if I was a senator that never would have happened. I would have fought the way this thing happened because I'm a firm believer that [Frank] Fasi [Republican mayor of Honolulu] is right. This deal for the International Market Place took place before session even started. All this shibai about these poor guys screaming and crying, but the die was cast already. It was already over. And that's the way I see it happening. And you know who's running the governor, it's Nadao [Yoshinaga] on the second
floor. Yoshinaga is sitting in the office of [Norman] Mizuguchi every day, and all the top
guys are his protégés. Mizuguchi, [Yukio] Takemoto, the budget and finance director, John
Waihe'e one of his people, you got Patsy Young who worked for him before, Harold
Masumoto, your [office of state] planning director, was his aide in the ways and means
committee. One man has about ten people in the proper places, and he's running the whole
show because he could never do it himself, other than being a senator. And I guarantee you,
it's going to come out more and more, that all of a sudden, they get the—more power you
get, the harder it is to give it away. The word greed takes over. And if you look back at it,
and you go through these interviews, you'll find out more and more that this [International]
Market Place for the convention center is a lot deeper than you're going to see.

DT: I guess we're going to have to pause once again. I don't know whether we have much more
to pick up, but we have to change tapes.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: The following is the final part of the interview with Buddy Soares. This is videotape number
three.

DT: The conclusion is that we're going to have to endure a lot of give-and-take before they come
out with the convention center then, probably.

BS: I do. I think you're going to be in for a real surprise in the sense that what may have been
concluded as being the site, and this is it, the governor's saying this is it—I don't think the
governor himself believes this is the place he wants to go. I think this deal was cut, it was all
set, and I would say that it's far from settled. I predict it'll be one of the biggest campaign
issues in the coming campaign.

DT: In other words, you're suggesting a considerable power struggle within the Democratic party,
then . . .

BS: Yes.

DT: . . . which may give an opening to the Republicans.

BS: Yes. I am saying that I see signs of weakening in the party structure in that, while they're so
powerfully ingrained now, they get it all together, it's going to start falling apart pretty soon.

DT: Do you think the Republicans will then be in a position to take advantage of this? They've
had several opportunities . . .

BS: Yes.

DT: . . . in the past, but . . .

BS: If they don't do it now and really see it now, they'll lose a good four years of real
opportunity, I think, to bring in more people, to see exactly what's happening.

DT: One question I want to deal [with] by way of a flashback, and that was, it seems to me that a
lot of the Blaisdell Republicans disappeared from the scene. Am I incorrect in that or how would you view it, you worked directly in the Blaisdell campaign.

BS: Yeah, well, yeah. I think many of them came back in Andy [Anderson’s] campaign. They came back for Andy’s campaign, and that’s where I think Andy missed the boat. Andy did not take advantage of the talent that he had available to him. A lot of the old-timers wanted to help him. And he didn’t help himself either. The saying was that he didn’t really make an effort to embrace the Neal Blaisdell people who were independent, who had a lot of grassroot support, had some money. And they came back. And unfortunately, they weren’t used properly, they weren’t taken advantage of to make things happen.

DT: For example, Angel Maehara seemingly disappeared for him.

BS: Yeah.

DT: Yet he was a very effective organizer.

BS: Very effective. Very effective. Again, he volunteered his support.

DT: To the Anderson campaign.

BS: Yeah, sure did. But nothing happened.

DT: Well, do you have anything else, Chris, that you would like to . . .

CC: No, I think it’s been enough. Pleased that you could share some of these thoughts with us today, and we really thank you for taking [the] time.

BS: Thank you for including me. I enjoyed doing this and I hope that I’ve given you some insight on what I’m made of, anyway, and again, as I said, I want to thank Dan for all you’ve done for me.

DT: Well, thanks to you for [tape inaudible].

BS: Had a great, great time. Thank you.

DT: I don’t think we’ve written the last chapter, yet, probably.

BS: Maybe not, maybe not.

(Laughter)

BS: Maybe not. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW