Wadsworth Y.H. Yee was born in Honolulu March 4, 1922. He was educated at Lahainaluna High School, University of Hawai'i, and Northwestern University Law School, where he received his law degree in 1950.

When World War II broke out, his schooling at the University of Hawai'i was interrupted and he served in the U.S. Army from 1943 to 1946.

When Yee returned to Hawai'i from law school, he joined Fong, Miho & Choy. He lectured in business law at the university from 1951 to 1953. Yee served as the deputy attorney general for the Territory of Hawai'i from 1953 to 1957. He has been the president of Grand Pacific Life Insurance Company since 1957.

Yee was elected as a Republican to the last territorial house of representatives and to the first state house, serving from 1959 to 1962. He then served in the state senate from 1966 to 1982.
Joy Chong: The following is an interview with Wadsworth Yee. It took place on February 21, 1991. The interviewers were Dan Tuttle and Michiko Kodama-Nishimoto. This is videotape number one.

MK: I guess we can start with when and where you were born.

WY: (Chuckles) Well, let's see, I was born (on) March 4, 1922, in Kalihi Valley, (O'ahu). And eventually went to Ka'ahumanu (Elementary) School. When my parents moved to Maui, I then went to public schools there at the Wailuku Elementary [School], Wailuku Intermediate [School], and then graduated from Lahainaluna High School in 1940. Then (to the) University of Hawai'i (in September of 1940).

World War II started (on) December (7th) 1941. I was then called to duty in the Hawai'i Territorial Guard, (because) we were ROTC [Reserve Officers' Training Corps] students at the University of Hawai'i, and (later) joined the regular army. (I was discharged in February of 1946,) returned to the University of Hawai'i, and went to the Northwestern [University] Law School (in September 1947). Got my degree there in 1950. Came back to Hawai'i and started to practice law with Senator [Hiram] Fong's law firm for a few years. [Hiram Fong was a member of the territorial house, 1938-53; and a U.S. senator, 1959-74.] During that time I also was a lecturer at the University of Hawai'i in business law and also worked in the department of adult education at the University of Hawai'i. Then I (joined) the attorney general's office (as deputy) for four years. In '57, when Grand Pacific Life Insurance Company was formed, I was asked to be one of the original incorporators and (started) as legal counsel for the company, and I've been with the company since. So, in a brief nutshell, this is my history.

DT: You've covered everything! Interview ended.

(Laughter)

MK: Now that we have an outline of your early life, maybe you can go back and kind of elaborate on portions of that life. I was wondering, what can you tell us about your parents' backgrounds?
Well, I was very fortunate in that my parents were well educated. Speaking about parents, I'm fourth generation. (Therefore,) I don't understand and I don't speak Chinese, because my parents never spoke Chinese at home, unless they were with other (Chinese) people who spoke Chinese.

My dad [Alexander Young Yee] attended the University of Southern California, and came back as an optometrist (and) optician. My mother [Emma (Kau) Yee] graduated from the old Normal School. After you finished that school, you (were qualified to become) a schoolteacher. She taught in the public schools. I was fortunate to the extent that my parents were well educated and had good jobs.

Although (I grew up with a good background,) we suffered, still, a lot of hardships that many other people have suffered. But ours was in a different way in the sense that my dad had made some bad investments. And so like anything else, the creditors were on him like vultures. My parents refused to file bankruptcy. I remember they garnisheed my mother's paycheck and everything (my father earned was taken). So for a period of about five, six, seven years it was a struggle with the family financially, but we all managed.

So, it's depression related?

To a great extent, yes. All during that time.

And how large was your family?

Well, we had three boys in our family altogether. I'm the youngest of the three. (There are) two brothers besides myself. And we're all living today. (In) World War II, all three of us were in the service, so my parents were quite worried at that time, too. So fortunately, we all came back in one piece.

You know I was wondering, since your parents were well educated, third-generation Chinese in Hawai'i, were they involved in community affairs or politics when you were a youngster?

Well, no. Really, I suppose my interest in politics really came about through Senator Hiram Fong. Because he married my father's (half) sister, so as my uncle, I used to go out and campaign for him. But before that, I suppose I was always a little active in school in athletics. I can brag a little bit, can't I? 'Cause this is all history, nobody knows, they (forget). For example, when I was in high school, I (ran) the mile. And I was the fastest miler throughout the whole territory (of Hawai'i). That was my biggest accomplishment. Even at the University of Hawai'i, (in 1941) we ran the four-mile relay and we broke the Rainbow record. That stood for twenty-five years before another four milers broke the record. So that's my biggest accomplishment in life.

But I grew up very active. When we lived in Waipāpi, I (joined) the Boy Scouts. Coach Soichi Sakamoto was our scoutmaster. We learned a lot of basic things. Not only from him, scouting, but mostly from my mother. My mom always said to us that we all should be grateful to be in Hawai'i, notwithstanding we see a lot of other people in (lesser) positions. (Most) families grew up from the plantation. We should be grateful in the sense that you can do what you want as long as you get education, so she insists on my education. And there's no need to have a chip on the shoulder, because you can become what you want to
become—there's nobody to hold you back. She used to say, "If you stayed back in China, what would you have?" So I grew up without a chip on my shoulder, where a lot of others have grown up with chips on their shoulders. I grew up with a good, healthy attitude; both from Soichi Sakamoto, the coach, as well as my parents.

MK: And in high school or in college, did you get involved in, say, politics—student government politics?

WY: Yeah. I did mostly when I went to Lahainaluna High School. There I was a (boarder/student for) three years. I became active in dormitory politics. I became active in class politics, where I served as class secretary (one) year. When I went to the University of Hawai‘i, I served (as) student body president (during my junior) year. So I have been involved in student activities. I guess that kind of made it natural to a certain extent to get into real politics in the territory or the state.

MK: When you were active in student politics, did you at that time meet any other men and women who became active in territorial and state politics, later?

WY: (Yes.) One that I can think of quickly is Alfred Laur eta. (He) was about a couple of years behind me (at) Lahainaluna (High School). He was very active in the [John] Burns [Governor of Hawai‘i, 1962-74] administration, became a judge. There was Katsugo Miho [state house, 1959-70] who was from Maui High School. I was (at) Lahainaluna. He was in the state legislature for a while. I'm sure there are a few others, but I just can't think of their names right away.

DT: You mentioned the Boy Scouts, and that's very interesting, because now it seems to have a unique arrangement for the Boy Scouts. They have their own council as opposed [to] the Aloha Council.

WY: That's right.

DT: I know a couple of other politicians--I don't know if you encountered or not, but a person like, I think I mentioned earlier just in conversation, Toshi [Toshio] Ansai [Maui County Board of Supervisors, 1934-42, 1958-62; territorial senate, 1949-57; state senate, 1963-70] who credits the Boy Scouts a great deal. Of course, Meyer Ueoka, both Maui people. Did you encounter them in Boy Scouts or . . .

WY: Yeah, I remember growing up with people like that that were older than I was, and I remember they were up there, (except Meyer Ueoka, who is in my age bracket).

DT: So apparently, you must have had a really going Boy Scout program, gung ho, on Maui.

WY: We did. It was a very strong activity for all of us. So it was good. Even though, like I said, I grew up in a little better environment than most of the people, but I can remember working three years (in my early teens). When we lived in Waikapū, we used to work in the cane fields during the summer. I remember hoeing grass between the rows of cane—you took twelve steps, you got (paid) one penny for it. (After you) weed, the luna then comes by—and we hated these haole lunas, because they (take) big steps to our small steps, okay?
(Laughter)

WY: Well, they took twelve big steps and then you got one penny for that. So when I used to come home with thirty-five cents, forty-five cents a day, I was proud. Of course, the bigger boys came back with sixty cents, seventy cents for the day. You (get) envious like heck. (Chuckles)

But I experienced these things. So even like Lahainaluna, very quickly, I’ll tell you the kind of life I lived there. People couldn’t believe what happened to us, you know. You get up in the morning at 5:30—no, you get up at 5:00 in the morning—no matter if it’s raining or whatever kind of weather condition. You work from 5:30 to 6:30—one hour. Some (students) milking cows, some feeding the chickens, (others) doing different things. Then 6:30 to 7:00, you wash up, fix up your dormitory room; 7:00 you have breakfast; 7:45 class starts. You get out at 2:15; 2:30 to 4:30 you work two hours; 4:30 to 5:30 you get one hour break to shower, rest, goof off. Then 5:30 you have dinner. Six o’clock, in your room studying till 8:00. Eight o’clock, all lights out. They had community showers, community bath facilities (and) toilet facilities. After you work in the morning, you (take) a cold shower (at 6:30 A.M.). There’s no hot water. (We also) take a cold shower in the night. I tell you! (These) were the conditions we lived in. So when I went in the army, it was nothing. Actually, the army was easier, really, than as a boarder at Lahainaluna High School.

MK: I was wondering, why were you sent to Lahainaluna? I noticed your older brother (Wilbert), four years older, went to Maui High [School], but you went to Lahainaluna.

WY: Well, my second brother (Warren) went to Lahainaluna, and he liked it. So I decided to follow him. Warren, who’s a horticulturist (liked) agriculture, so he [studied] horticulture at the University of Hawai‘i. That was his life. So I followed him, I guess not knowing any better, but once you got there you stayed there.

MK: Earlier, you mentioned working in the cane fields and not liking the luna. A lot of people from the plantation would talk about the plantation system and how it was like back then. How did you see power and influence on Maui? Who held power? Who held influence?

WY: Oh, I think without any question everybody knew that the old-time, the big family—so called Big Five—controlled all the corporations. They were always in power. We were aware of that, but somehow I just never held it against them or felt that I was underprivileged or anything. Because I think I mentioned to you the great power that came from Coach Sakamoto. As our scoutmaster, he taught us these basic things: how to look at things and how to grow up and how to make yourself useful. I think those are the things that were impressive to me at that time.

I used to envy people from Maui, (who went) to McKinley High School (on O'ahu). Those days, McKinley High School was the school, outside of the private schools. And Maui people used to send their kids to McKinley High School. (When) they come back, we used to envy them like heck. (Laughs) So I can remember those days.

MK: You mentioned earlier that Senator Fong was a great influence on you, that you helped him campaign. So even back when you were on Maui, you had contact with Senator Fong?

WY: Even when we were on Maui, 'cause I knew him when I was growing up. When I was in the
elementary schools before I went to Maui, he was dating my aunty. So I (have) known him (for a lifetime). When we were living on Maui, my aunty and Hiram used to come to Maui and meet with us. And of course, he had run for office earlier. Then when I came to Honolulu (to attend) University (of Hawai‘i), I started to help him in his campaign. That’s how I got more actively involved. He was already part of the family.

MK: I think we can stop here and continue.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is videotape number two of the Wadsworth Yee interview.

MK: I think we’re ready to tape number two now. Interview with Mr. Wadsworth Yee. And I guess we were talking about your coming to Honolulu, going to the University of Hawai‘i, and helping Senator Fong in his electioneering. Maybe we can continue on that theme. How did you help him?

WY: Well, those days they didn’t do too much so-called house-to-house canvassing as they do today. What they usually have is rallies in the parks, mostly nights or during weekends. So what I used to do is go with him to these different rallies, when I was going to the University of Hawai‘i, and help pass out cards for him. And meet with the people that he knows and chat around. Weekends we’d do the same thing. Ride all over the country. Those days they’d cover half of O‘ahu. It (covered) all of rural O‘ahu. So basically, this is all what I did to help him. I (went) with him to many, many of these rallies.

MK: And how did you react to all that type of electioneering?

WY: Well, I enjoyed it. I thought it was fun. You know, a little Hawaiian music, guys standing up on the platform making speeches, and people going around. I used to pass out cards. It was just fun, that’s all. Not that what they said meant anything to me at that time. I enjoyed just going out there and helping him.

DT: Most of this was in the Fifth District, right? Nu‘uanu, ‘Ewa side.

WY: That’s right. This was actually in the [19]40s. Forties and middle part of the fifties. Up to the middle part of the [19]50s, I think.

DT: Now, Fong got defeated in ’54, so I think you got until that time.

WY: Right.

DT: So you really got acquainted with an awful lot of the majority of politicians of the day.

WY: Those were the days, yeah. Republicans were in the majority, but not today.

DT: It was probably difficult to find a Democrat in those days, wasn’t it?

WY: That’s right! You couldn’t find any (laughs). I guess Senator Fong, too, they almost tried to kick him out of the party.
DT: He was always a bit of a maverick in his own way.

WY: Yeah.

DT: He could think for himself. I think you know for yourself. And more so, then it seemed to be the case if you were looking at Hawai`i politics superficially. He well remembers most of his battles, some of those in the [19]40s probably better than you.

WY: Right.

DT: But you were able to do this before the war. Then during the war, what did you do during the war? Where were you stationed? What were your . . .

WY: I was fortunate that during the war, I was stationed here in Hawai`i. For some reason, I was assigned to the portion of the medical corps they call the sanitation division. I worked with that department, inspecting commercial establishments that do business with a lot of the military to be sure that they’ve met public health standards. During that time I used to sneak away, you know, take some (evening) courses at the University of Hawai`i. I was able to gain a few credits that way. So actually I didn’t finish University of Hawai`i; I spent only 2-1/2 years, really, at the University of Hawai`i.

MK: And what were you majoring in back then?

WY: Pre-legal, and my minor was economics.

MK: So you had made up your mind that you were going to be an attorney?

WY: Hopefully, yeah. And, again, I guess because Senator Fong was a lawyer. I thought that would be a good profession to follow through.

DT: I guess you had professors like Paul Bachman, probably, or [William H.] George in political science.

WY: Yeah right, and Allan Saunders.

DT: I think Allan Saunders, he arrived in ’45 . . .

WY: Allan Saunders?

DT: Yeah. So you probably had him.

WY: Right. So we had some real fine instructors at that time.

DT: So you were able to campaign for at least two years for your uncle, Senator Hiram Fong?

WY: Right.

DT: But then you decided to go to—well, you had to leave Hawai`i in those days to go to law school. How come you picked Northwestern?
WY: Well, it was one of the schools that had accepted me without a college degree. And because I had three years in the service and only with (2-1/2) years (of) undergraduate work, they felt that the three years in the service was equivalent to my fourth year in college. They felt that maturity in a person is equally important. (I was accepted.) In my first year at law school, (I received) my bachelor's degree. And then (1-1/2 years later) I finished and got my law degree.

DT: How did that work out? You hadn't been away from Hawai'i during the service, particularly, had you?

WY: No, during the service, I was here in Hawai'i all during that time.

DT: So all of a sudden you were on the Mainland, at Northwestern; one of the more prestigious, Big Ten schools. A private school, right?

WY: Right.

DT: Two things, did you notice in particular? One, wasn't it cold; and two, didn't you have an awful lot of blonde gals around you?

WY: Yeah, and that was the fun of it!

(Laughter)

WY: Well really, because Chicago at that time was under the control of Mayor [Richard Joseph] Daley, the old Mayor Daley, and striptease joints close to Northwestern Law School. (There were many students from Hawai'i living in Chicago.) During holidays, especially long weekends, many of our classmates and friends from Michigan, Wisconsin, (and other areas) congregated in Chicago. We always used to take them to these places, have a lot of fun. But it's all good clean fun. But during this time, I made some good friends in Chicago. (Some new and some old friends.) Tadao Beppu [territorial house, 1959; state house of representatives, 1959-74] was there; Nadao Yoshinaga [territorial house, 1954-58; territorial senate, 1958-59; state senate, 1959-74] was there; Patsy Takemoto [Mink: territorial house 1956-58; territorial senate 1959; state senate, 1962-64; U.S. House, 1964-76 and since 1990; Honolulu City Council 1983-87] was there. Hideki Nakamura [International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union attorney], Robert Kimura [state house, 1968-76], Paul Kokubun, (former circuit judge).

DT: You had a regular collegiate assembly there from Hawai'i. This was about the same time, the same sort of thing happened up at Minneapolis, the University of Minnesota. They had quite a few people up there like Nelson Doi [territorial and state senate, 1955-69; lieutenant governor 1975-78], and [senate clerk] James Kamo, and . . .

WY: Right, and you know that made me think, I think my real step in politics was because of this group of friends that I knew. After the war, (we were discharged from service). And all of the AJAs [Americans of Japanese ancestry] came back to University of Hawai'i. We all (returned) about the same time. I think it was 1945-46. My good friend from Maui, Eddie Okazaki (a 442 [Regimental Combat Team] veteran), I don't know whether you remember him, decided to run for vice president of the (university) student council. He said, "Wads,
why don’t you join my team? You and I run. You run for president, I run for vice president.” And that’s how I got involved. (Eddie was a friend from Maui High School.) Patsy Takemoto was running for secretary. Jean McKillop King [lieutenant governor, 1978-82], (Tom McCabe) and I ran for the presidency. Eddie and I (were) elected outright in the primary, so we didn’t have to run for the general. I like that kind of election. You get 50 percent or more votes, you (automatically win). Patsy had to have a runoff with Jane Okamoto. (We supported Jane) and defeated Patsy in that student body secretary race.

And I guess the same group of (World War II veterans) like Ted Tsukiyama [chair of Hawai‘i Employment Relations Board], those that were in Chicago (and those) at the University of Hawai‘i (remained friends of mine). So even when I ran for office, as a Republican, that group still supported me. The [John] Burns group. That was where a lot of my strength came from.

MK: You know at Northwestern, when you were there with these people, did you talk politics or talk about society in Hawai‘i?

WY: Yeah.

MK: What did you folks talk about?

WY: Well, you know they wanted me (to) join the Democrat party (when I return to Hawai‘i), and they wanted to sign me up and everything. I don’t know what made me . . . . This is kind of what tipped the scale. I was a Democrat; I voted for [U.S. President] Harry Truman. What tipped the scale is that when I came back from law school, I applied for a job at city hall. I think Mayor [George Fred] Wright was the mayor then, and I forgot who was the prosecutor—Charlie [Charles] Hite, or somebody then? But anyway, I was introduced to this guy . . .

DT: When you came back in ’50?

WY: Fifty.

DT: That must have been [Mayor] Johnny Wilson.

WY: Yeah, was it Johnny Wilson?

DT: Yeah, I think it was Johnny Wilson.

WY: Okay, Johnny Wilson.

DT: But the prosecutor’s office was where—this was a haven for all aspiring attorneys, right?

WY: Right. (A friend,) Ben [Benjamin] Kong, he’s a good Democrat. He’s a real estate broker, and took me there for interview to get a job. The job was offered to me, but I had to sign the Democrat party [card], join the precinct, become active. That turned me off. I said thanks, no. I didn’t like that. I mean, you know, I was already in heart a Democrat, voting as a Democrat, et cetera. When they put that on me, in principle, I didn’t think that was fair. So I didn’t join and became a Republican. Then I got more active in Hiram’s campaign.
DT: Well, that could do it for somebody who tended to think by himself, why, that could turn you off, all right. I could tell you comparable stories later on, reversing the parties, of course.

WY: Right.

DT: But the fact that you were in Chicago with all of these Hawai‘i people, and some were up to Minnesota and various other places, illustrated one thing, I guess, and that is the wisdom of GI Bill of Rights. A big factor in terms of what happened sociologically to Hawai‘i thereafter.

WY: That's right. And I think all of us, including me, were all under the GI Bill of Rights. This gave the opportunity for all of us local guys to go away to school (who couldn't) afford it.

MK: So you think without the GI Bill of Rights, you wouldn't have gone to law school?

WY: I probably could still afford it with my family support, but many of these others would not have been able to go.

DT: You were able to get both a bachelor of science . . .

WY: (Bachelor degree in science and law.)

DT: . . . and bachelor of law after three years going to Northwestern.

WY: At Northwestern, right.

DT: And you did survive the cold weather.

WY: Oh yeah, it was horrible, though. I didn’t stay for graduation. My last exam was towards the end or middle of December. Graduation ceremony was like January 10 or 12. I said, “Forget it!” I came straight home.

DT: The lakefront, I would think, can be very vicious for a person coming from Hawai‘i, because aside from Candlestick Park, it’s about the coldest place in the country. (Chuckles)

WY: It is very cold, windy. During the summer, it’s hot, muggy, humid. I didn’t like the weather at all.

DT: But on balance, you did enjoy it at Northwestern.

WY: Otherwise, yeah.

MK: And so you came home, you joined the Fong, Miho & Choy . . .

WY: Law firm.

MK: . . . law firm, and also lectured in business law at the UH [University of Hawai‘i]? You lectured at the university?

WY: (Yes.)
MK: And you became a deputy attorney general in '53.

WY: (Yes), for four years.

MK: And when you became a deputy attorney general, you were not presented with any conditions, I guess.

WY: No, 'cause then I was a Republican (laughs).

DT: Samuel Wilder King was then the governor [1953-57], right?

WY: Right. I already became a Republican by then.

DT: Now who was the AG [attorney general] at the time?

WY: Ed [Edward] Sylva. Ed Sylva used to be the AG. Then when Senator Fong and the Finance Factors [Inc.] group thought of forming Grand Pacific Life [Insurance Company], I felt it was time to leave the AG's office, after four years. I joined them as one of the original incorporators of the life insurance company. I've been here since that time, 1957.

MK: Over thirty years.

WY: Yeah.

DT: I think that the senator's businesses didn't really take off, as the saying goes, in quotes, until, quite frankly, after he got defeated, right? In '54.

WY: Right.

DT: They were still pretty struggling enterprises—Finance Factors. Grand Pacific hadn't even been formed. I don't know whether you were involved in the McWayne Marine Supply [Ltd.] for a while. Was this a Hiram Fong enterprise, too?

WY: (Yes.)

DT: But Hiram, during the years between '54 when he was defeated and he got elected to the United States Senate in '59, those were the big growth years, were they not, for all of Hiram Fong's enterprises.

WY: Right.

DT: And you and several other of your friends, I guess, or were they relatives or not? [Real estate investor] Sheri [Sheridan] Ing, [Aloha Airlines executive Ken [Kenneth] Char . . .

WY: No, they were all struggling like anybody else. And I think, like [Judge] Dick Yin Wong, you know, they all came from poor families. Yeah. All. So, everybody had to make it on their own, and that's what happened.

DT: These were close friends and associates, right? And I guess, pretty much, lifelong friends.
WY: They’re lifelong friends. (They are my closest friends.)

DT: Dick Yin Wong, of course, passed away some years back.

WY: Ken Char passed away last year. Sheri Ing and I are about the last two survivors of that group.

MK: And then during that time you have your Democratic friends building up the Democratic party and winning big in 1954.

WY: Mmhmm.

MK: What were your observations of the changes happening here politically, in terms of Democrats and Republicans?

WY: Well, I think at that time, it didn’t bother me that much, because when I was elected in 1958 to the territorial house of representatives, many of these so-called friends of mine were already in office. They treated me like a long-lost friend. Even though I was a Republican, I was no threat to them, because we knew each other, we were able to relate to each other. (They) know I wasn’t out to embarrass anybody, just wanted to do a good job. It didn’t bother me at all about the transition, the change, I saw it coming. To a certain extent, I guess inside of me, I was happy to see that local boys are finally taking over and running the legislature. So I had that kind of a local feeling, so it wasn’t traumatic to me at all.

DT: The door was opened up to you because of reapportionment, right? We finally, in ’58, put into effect the state constitution, which increased the legislative size to seventy-six.

WY: Right.

DT: And so that gave you an extra chance.

WY: Right.

MK: Shall we end it here for the next tape?

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

JC: This is a continuation of the Wadsworth Yee interview. This is videotape number three.

DT: Okay, we were talking about your entry into the territorial house of representatives. I think you had mentioned one factor, and that is, the legislature had been enlarged. I think another thing that gave you and many others a chance, or at least you thought you had a chance to jump in, was that Hawai‘i still had a multimember district system. There were a few single-member districts, but most of them were multimember.
WY: Right. That, I think was a motivating reason for me to run, because I felt that when I first ran for the house, it was a four-member district. And I figured, well, I know I won’t have a chance to be number one, number two, but there’s a good chance that maybe I can get to be number three or number four. So on that basis, you know, it was enough encouragement for me to go ahead and take a crack at it, and that’s what I did. So I think the first year—I don’t remember where I placed, but I (think I placed second and the next election I came first.) So that was a big help.

DT: You got into a sort of a historic session . . .

WY: Yes.

DT: . . . not unlike your uncle had been involved in, sort of in reverse, back earlier in the [19]50s, I guess. Seems to me that was the year the Democrats got in—had problems, I guess you had a front-row seat to their problems, right?

WY: Right.

DT: Just before statehood [in 1959]. You want to talk about that?

WY: Yeah, fine, ’cause I think that was a very interesting part of our life, because at that time we had some very prominent people. Even one of them today, Tom [Thomas] Gill [territorial house, 1959; state house, 1959-62; U.S. House 1963-64; lieutenant governor, 1967-70], is still a very influential person. I remember my first year there we were involved in a dispute and finally ended up with a coalition in the house. And the Republicans lined up with Elmer Cravalho [territorial house, 1954-59; state house (1959)-67; Mayor of Maui 1967-79] and his group to (deny) Vince [Vincent] Esposito [territorial house 1951-59; state senate 1959-66] (who was bidding to be speaker of the territorial house. Tom Gill was Vince Esposito’s strongest supporter.) That set the tone of the Democrats having a split. I think this was the beginning of the split of the Democrats between the, I guess, so-called (local boy) faction versus the other more liberal faction. So we sided with the faction of more of the local boys—Elmer Cravalho, David Trask [Jr.—territorial house, 1955-56; state house 1959-64; state senate, 1965-66], Mamoru Yamasaki [state house, 1959-68; state senate, since 1969] and that group. We felt more comfortable with them. We had some powerful house members on our side, too, on the Republican side. We had like Yasutaka Fukushima [territorial house, 1951-59; state senate 1959-66], Hebden Porteus [territorial house, 1940-58; territorial senate, 1959; state senate, 1959-70] former governor Sam [Samuel Wilder] King. You know, he was in the house with us.

DT: Ward Russell [territorial house, 1951-54, 1956-59; state senate 1959-62;], I guess, was there?

WY: Yeah, Ward Russell. So you know, we had a very good group of Republicans as well. I can’t remember the number of Republicans versus Democrats at this time, but we were significant enough to turn the election. So it was a meaningful session. We didn’t ask for any seats, any privileges. The majority party had everything, but Elmer, as speaker was very fair to the Republicans. He gave us all the opportunities to introduce bills, speak up on the issues, and he’s supportive of certain things we support. So it worked out very well. And (Representative) Katsugo Miho, (a Republican, if I remember correctly, introduced the Horizontal Property Regime Condominium bill, and it passed the legislature). So you know,
at that time, Republicans were able to introduce bills and were passed.

DT: And you also had an ace in the hole, too. You had a governor.

WY: Right. We had a Republican governor, right. We had Sam King, and then we had Bill [William] Quinn [governor 1957-62], those days.

DT: So you managed to get through that session, but a number of things happened, I think, at that session. One is, I think, a number of sort of Far Eastern programs, international relations things happened out of the legislature. And you also got word of something very important to Hawai‘i, right during the session, wasn’t it statehood.

WY: That’s right. We had statehood (then), you know.

DT: You must remember where you were when you heard about statehood passing through.

(Laughter)

WY: I was, I think I remember then, that was a very exciting part of our legislative career—my legislative career, anyway. Serving in the territorial legislature, and then no sooner you get your feet wet, you become a state. We all had to run for reelection. Fortunately, I was reelected again and served (in) the state’s (first) legislature. So it was rewarding, ’cause it was all, what you may say, the building years of the foundation of what Hawai‘i is today, I think. It was the start.

DT: Yeah, well that was quite an exciting time, I guess, in a sense, much of it happened on the administrative side, but you must have been involved in that because, I guess one of Bill Quinn’s really great claim to fame and for all of the pluses and minuses, I suppose, any governor accumulates, one of his big pluses was that he did a yeoman-like job of developing a new state administration, and that took a bit of doing. So, do you remember anything about that particular period? ’Cause you were in the legislature.

WY: Yeah, I recall that, (we adopted) the first state master plan (submitted to us by the governor).

DT: Possibly, yeah.

WY: I (believe) that (it) was the time we came out with a master plan, and for many years, this was the basic plan that we followed. During that time, we had all these new land use (laws passed, horizontal property regime, funded the University of Hawai‘i to be equal to Mainland colleges, East-West Center, et cetera). Lot of these ideas that are in existence today, were all created during this period of time.

DT: In the beginning the Republicans did have a majority in the state senate?

WY: (That’s correct.)

DT: So that increased your chances, even though you were a minority in the house. ’Cause a goodly number of your people, Republicans from the house, I guess, moved over to the senate.
WY: Right.

DT: And managed to win with Bill Quinn, in the statehood elections.

WY: Right.

DT: About '62, anything else you care to talk about those years?

WY: No, I think I would say those were good formative years. One thing I'd like to say about, during that particular period of time, is that the friendship that I had built up in the house continued on into the senate. And when I went to the senate, the Democrats controlled the senate and not the Republicans. At that time, we had ten Republican senators and fifteen Democrat senators. So you know, we had some very good dialogue on that basis. And because we had a certain amount of numbers, we could have been and we had been a very forceful opposition party. And I think that's been helpful in generating a lot of good bills.

DT: But you got defeated in '62, did you? Or . . .

WY: I was defeated in 1962, (for the senate). Went back in 1966.

DT: But this time for the senate.

WY: For the senate—right.

DT: And a goodly number of your house colleagues by this time were in the senate, so you were one of ten then of the minority. That also includes a person such as Heb [Hebden] Porteus, right?

WY: Right. 'Cause when I went in the senate, let's see, 1966, you had people like Heb Porteus there, Toshi Ansai, Webley Edwards, "Doc" [William] Hill, and (others).

DT: What happened in '62 when you lost? Sometimes it's interesting to have you reflect upon your losses as well as your victories.

WY: (Chuckles) Well, I had four years of vacation, '62 to '66. I didn't think I would get back into politics and concentrated on building Grand Pacific Life Insurance Company. At that time, I believe I was executive vice president. Hiram was president and he was in Washington [D.C.]. So basically . . .

DT: You ran the shop.

WY: I ran the shop. And one day, if I recall, I think (it) was [D. G. "Andy" Anderson [state house, 1963-66; state senate 1967-82], Fred [Frederick] Rohlfing [territorial house, 1950-59; state house, 1959-66; state senate, 1967-75; state house, 1981-84], I think Porteus, and Toshi Ansai, (also) went to see Hiram Fong. They said, "We want Wads to run for the senate for the Mānoa area." I told them "no" originally, because I said I had my job to do and I'm happy with what I'm doing. I just don't want to get through another campaign. So they talked Hiram into it. (Later,) Hiram called me in the office and said, "Wads, I think you better run for office; I think they need you. And they think they have a good chance of perhaps gaining
control of the senate then.” So I decided to run, and Andy [Anderson] and Fred (both) agreed to run, too. They both were in the house and I was out. So finally Hiram said, “You go ahead and run, and you can still take care of the business on the side.”

DT: Now ’62 had been a bit of a debacle for the Republicans. At that time I don’t think they realized there’d be years before they’d ever had a majority in anything, but ’62 was rather bad; and you may have suffered along with a goodly number of other of your Republican colleagues because of something that was out to haunt Bill Quinn, his Second Mahele. Did that sort of embarrass you? And the fact that Jimmie Kealoha opposed him in the primary?

WY: Yeah. Well, that was ’62; that’s the election I lost.

DT: That’s what I’m saying. You sort of bore the whole brunt saying you lost, period, but there were other factors that...

WY: Right, no question. Because at that point, I think it was Ward Russell and myself teamed up on the Republican side, and on the Democrat side, (were) Vincent Esposito and Vince [Vincent] Yano. (Two to be elected.) Vince Yano was unknown, (and) never ran for office before. That was when Quinn ran against Burns, and Quinn lost that election.

DT: There may well have been another reapportionment in there, after the ’60 census. Do you remember that? I can’t recall exactly.

WY: I don’t remember how that went by, but again there was that reapportionment, so there were only two to be elected at that time. So both, unfortunately, Ward Russell and I lost to the two Vinces in ’62.

DT: But by ’66, I think you’re quite correct, Senator Fong was beginning to want to fill in some more local seats with Republicans, because otherwise, it left him sort of high and dry as a lone Republican on the federal level.

WY: In Washington, right.

DT: In ’66 election, it seems to me the Republicans had problems finding I think this was the year that Ansai was mentioned for governor, was it not?

WY: Offhand, I don’t remember. I can’t remember whether he did or not. I just don’t remember. But I know Ansai had been very active, and I don’t [remember] whether he actually ran or who ran.

DT: No, no, he’d been prominently mentioned. Once again, it was somewhat like later, when [state senator] Richard Henderson was mentioned for governor. But never quite realized, because, once again, did you ever feel a little bit like you were on the fringe of the Republican party? Hiram always had been the semi-fringe, even going back into the [19]40s. Did you feel that way? Or did you feel responsible for the mainstream of the party?

WY: Well, for a while, and I can’t give you the dates, I would say that we were part of the mainstream of the party for a while. That was the time when we were quite active, and the party, I would say, majority of the party members, a lot of them were local people. You
know, people like Katsugo Miho, [attorney] Walter Chuck, even [attorney] Wally [Wallace] Fujiyama. All during that time, they were all Republicans. And we used to fight the Liz [Elizabeth] Kellermans [Kellerman was the Republican national committeewoman for Hawai‘i], the conservative group.

DT: I was going to come to that . . .

WY: I kind of remember that. The local boys were calling the shots, and I was active then. After we stepped out and the other group start getting more and more strength and we start(ed) moving away, then I've kind of stayed on the fringe of the party ever since.

DT: Yeah, well let me mention, too, I'll be a little blunt here, if I may. A Randy [Randolph] Crossley or a Mary Noonan, was this exactly your cup of tea in the party or . . .

WY: They were never my cup of tea to begin with.

(Laughter)

WY: That's why I said we eventually moved to the fringe.

DT: Yeah, because Crossley did become even more prominent. He'd been state [territorial] chairman [of the Republican party] back in the early [19]50s. Now, I think he ran for governor. If it wasn't '62 or close to that.

WY: Mm hmm, mm hmm.

DT: You moved back into the senate, but you were in a minority. You stayed there for how many years?

WY: I stayed in the senate for sixteen years, which isn't too bad.

DT: Why don't you try to recall a few things that happened during that sixteen-year period. I know you felt you were able, at least indirectly, to have quite an influence on what was happening in Hawai‘i, even though you were in the minority and the Democrats weren't all that cordial to the minority.

WY: Yeah, well, I would say that I had an effective role, in my mind anyway, being a minority in the legislature, because we (added and amended Democrats' bills which) the Democrats supported and (our ideas became) law. One of the things that we fought as a minority and which I led the fight on the Republican side was to stop Magic Island from becoming an amusement park. The Department of Land and Natural Resources, at that time, had recommended [development] and the governor had approved, and they were going ahead and have a bid for the amusement park development. I opposed it and asked the Republican senators to support me. We went to court, we filed a suit against the government to stop the auction for Magic Island as an amusement park. I guess pressure was built up, and Governor Burns and his group withdrew the request and killed Magic Island. So today we have it as a park, instead of an amusement park. So this was strictly, I believe, Republican influence. That's one of the things I was happy about.
The other thing that I did personally was introduce a bill to give tax credit to renters. And it passed the senate, couple of sessions, but it was killed in the house, because it was a Republican measure. But then, because of my close friendship with the Democrats in the senate, even though it was a Republican bill, they let it go through. Maybe they knew it was going to die in the house anyway, so it (chuckles) didn't matter too much to them. But at least they gave me the courtesy of letting it go through the senate. It was a good bill, but for political reasons, it died. So then I went to see Governor Burns. I explained the bill to him in detail, he liked it, and he says, “Okay, I’ll introduce it as part of my administrative package.” And it passed, and this is how renters were given a tax credit. Because I felt that they were entitled to some kind of benefit, because they paid rent, they get nothing back in return, you know. And many of the renters were just moderate income people, poor people, and whatever break they could get I felt it was necessary.

MK: Stop here?

JC: Yeah. Ran out of tape.

(Taping stops, then resumes.)

JC: This is a continuation of the Wadsworth Yee interview. This is videotape number four.

MK: This is tape number four with Senator Yee. And I guess we can pick it [up] with the time that you were still in the senate. It’s 1970, there’s a gubernatorial race, and the Republicans are trying to find a candidate. And I think yourself, and Andy Anderson felt that Hebden Porteus would be the most viable candidate. Can you explain why you folks decided to support Porteus then?

WY: Yeah. Well, Andy and I served with Heb in the senate. We developed a good rapport. We found Heb to be a very gracious and fair person and we worked well together. On that basis, we felt that if he gets to become governor, then we know that we’d be able to work very closely with him, and work as a Republican team. This is the reason we went all out for Heb Porteus. Whereas Sam [P.] King was not in an elected office but was an active person in the community, and well known. But we were not aware of or close enough to him to say that we know whether we can work with him or we couldn’t work with him. Of course, we had all our respect for him as a person. But that’s the main reason we went all out to support Heb Porteus. Just because of the current working relationship we had at that time.

MK: In doing our research, prior to this interview, we found out that you also had a plan in regards to the lieutenant governorship and coming up with the dream team for the Republicans. Could you share that with us?

WY: Yeah. After some reflection and some reminder by you (chuckles), I kind of recall somewhere down the line that here we had two outstanding Republican candidates for the governorship. Would be sad if we lost one and had maybe a very weak lieutenant governor. So we tried to develop a scheme that whoever loses would run as lieutenant governor. And in order to do that, whoever ran as lieutenant governor would have to resign so that the party would then have the choice of nominating someone to fill that spot. So that was the scheme that we tried to work, but it didn’t pan out that way. It’s one of those things that you’d like to see happen, but didn’t happen. Well, it’s almost like when Anderson ran for governor, the second
time—the first time, you know, he had a very good lieutenant governor candidate, Pat [Patricia] Saiki. This time Pat decided to run for the U.S. House, and we were looking for a good lieutenant governor for Andy. John Felix [chief aide to Governor Quinn, 1960-62; Honolulu City Council, since 1988] wanted to run; and many of us tried to talk John Felix out of running for lieutenant governor. We wanted a more racial balanced ticket and maybe a female. We looked at possibly, Ann Kobayashi [state senate, since 1981], then, Donna Ikeda [state house 1975-86; state senate, since 1986], people of that caliber. But evidently, we weren’t able to do it, so John Felix ran. And, nothing against John, he’s a nice person, but we just didn’t think that he added any more strength to Anderson running for governor. But anyway, so you know, a lot of these things you try to work out, try to pit the best two Republicans against the two strongest Democrats, so you have a good contest, a strong contest.

DT: But in spite of all of your primary manipulations, in 1970, that was one that you really should have won, whether it was Porteus or [Samuel P.] King, and it turned out to be King.

WY: That’s right, we should.

DT: Because Burns was so desperate that he finally went for the big bucks campaign and [campaign manager] Joe [Joseph] Napolitan and [advertising consultant John] Seigle and company, and as a result of that, he was able to fend off Tom Gill. But the Democrats were pretty badly split, which should have left you the opening.

WY: Right, no question. And I think that could have been our year if it worked out right. It could have very well been our year.

DT: In other words, if it had been Porteus.

WY: Yeah.

DT: I don’t want to put words in your mouth, but I think the fact that King made a, I think, a major boo-boo in trying to hold Burns responsible for [Larry] Kuriyama’s assassination, he was a state senator, influenced that a lot. Now, maybe I’m wrong.

WY: Well, that had a very negative impact, let me put it that way. That had a very negative impact, and I’m sure it didn’t help King’s campaign at all. But by the same token, King didn’t have an organization behind him. Just the Republican party is not enough to get a Republican elected, because number one, they’re not that strong, they’re not that big. You have to really run your own campaign. My strength, I think as I mentioned to you folks before, is that my Democrat colleagues would love to see me in there. Even when I run (for) the senate, even Burns and [George] Ariyoshi [governor 1974-86] quietly tell their people, “Hey. Help Wads where you folks can.” Plus I’ve always had the HGEA [Hawai‘i Government Employees Association] and ILWU [International Longshoremen’s & Warehousemen’s Union] endorsement, and occasionally HSTA [Hawai‘i State Teachers Association] except the time I ran against [Neil] Abercrombie [state house, 1974-78; state senate, 1978-86; U.S. House, 1986-87; Honolulu City Council, 1988-90; U.S. House since 1990], HSTA abandoned me and supported Abercrombie.

Talk about that, I was a little disappointed in the HSTA for doing that, because they had short
memories. I recall there was a bill for teachers' pay raise; and the teachers' pay raise was
(not included in the senate budget). So I filibustered in the senate, (and) killed the tax bill, so
there was no tax bill. I filibustered for about three-and-a-half hours. The senate and the
legislature adjourned without a tax bill. So Governor Burns called the legislature back into
session after one hour so we could pass the tax bill. In the tax bill the teachers' pay raise (was
included). I was a hero for the schoolteachers at that time, but they forgot when I ran against
Abercrombie.

DT: Well, this I think was a result of, and I may be wrong, because I wasn't involved directly in
any way, but John Radcliffe, who was the executive director of HSTA, becoming something
of a compadre of Neil Abercrombie, I think he did not have any background—Radcliffe did
not have any background—in previous politics, because there were two people the
schoolteachers should have remembered well, even after '69, was Andy Anderson and you.
'Cause, quite apart from the other pluses and minuses, you know, you had been there when it
counted, and you just recounted something that happened after '69. It was well into HSTA's
tenure as an organization.

But again, on '70, why wasn't—I never asked you this question before—why couldn't you get
Heb Forteus into a little better posture for TV? In the '70 campaign, he stacked up the
Revised Laws of Hawai'i and did what he was doing way back in 1952 and '54 (WY
chuckles) and says, "I have been here when all of these laws were passed." And this is not
very good television for 1970.

WY: Well, unfortunately, he had hired this PR [public relations] firm from the Mainland. And
(why) they went back (that far) I don't know, I don't recall what happened, but they just
about, more or less, told him what he should do and he went ahead and did it. I guess we
went along, you know. It was a different kind of philosophy, what Dan (Tuttle) taught me
way, way back. He says, "Wads, anytime you run, you run as if you were running for the
first time and forget what you did for the people. Think of what you're going to do for them
tomorrow, 'cause that's what they want to hear." I mean, those are two simple principles that
I respect from his guidance. He doesn't tell me how to run a campaign, but he gives some
good philosophical points that make sense.

DT: We were talking about Andy Anderson, and you were a colleague of his for a long time. I've
never been able to figure this out, why he became so infatuated with Mainland public relation
firms, because they'd not only done in the Republican party in a number of instances, but also
Andy himself.

WY: I know. That---I really don't know why. He got infatuated with a couple of the people that he
had met and got carried away with them and still maintains close contact with them. Like in
Pat Saiki's campaign, they brought back Ann Stanley to manage Pat Saiki's campaign for the
[U.S.] Senate, this past election. I (shook) my head, I says, "Andy, I don't think she's the
right person." I told Pat, too. And she says, "No, no, she knows (what she is doing)." So
I'm not going to argue, but just (gave) my opinion. It's been that way all the way.

DT: I think it, again, ties in with the Hawai'i philosophy that if somebody comes out, especially
from the Mainland, then they know what's best. They've got the latest techniques. In other
words, it's been that way for almost a hundred years now and I guess it's going to remain
that way maybe for another hundred years. Is this a lack of self-confidence on the part of
people of Hawai‘i, you think?

WY: I just really don’t know why he feels that way, but I know that with this particular group, he has developed a very close relationship. Somehow he’s always believed in them. Even, you remember Doug [Douglas] Eagleson? You know, I don’t think much of him, but Andy, for a great period of time, supported him. [Eagleson campaigned for Republican Andy Anderson in 1982. In 1985 he became a Democratic party official; and in 1987 he served a six-month prison term for stealing from the Democratic party.]

DT: He actually, ended up, I think, getting himself into some trouble with the law, too, right? I don’t [remember] whether he actually went to prison or not, for a little while.

WY: I don’t know (who) he was working for.

DT: I lost track of him.

WY: I forgot who it was, but shortage of funds. He borrowed some money and never paid back and this and that.

DT: Of course, it’s interesting that, too, we mentioned Pat Saiki’s most recent campaign [for U.S. Senate in 1990]. She had her Mainland person. So did Danny [Daniel] Akaka [U.S. House 1976-1990; U.S. Senate, since 1990]. But local Democrats took over, ultimately, Akaka’s campaign. Whereas that didn’t happen for Pat.

WY: Well you know, when I saw the way it started to turn, about couple weeks, I realized that Pat was really in trouble. ’Cause I helped her to raise money for her campaign. The organization that the Democrats came up with was just awesome. It was the old Jack Burns gang coming through, you know . . .

DT: Not only that was it, but also all the pressure groups, most of them had lost in the primary, and they had to redeem themselves. Otherwise, no politician would have believed them, if they hadn’t gone all out for Dan [Daniel] Akaka. Does that make sense?

WY: Yeah, right.

DT: Let me run some names by you, some former Republicans. I mentioned Toshi Ansai, for example, earlier. As I recall, there was one time when Bob [Robert] Sevey was mentioned as a Republican candidate for governor. Was this just some newspaperman’s idea or was this actually a Republican party idea?

WY: No, I think it was Toshi himself. I think people had talked to him, that he was quite qualified, which he had a good rapport that he was able to get along with big business at that time, working for C. Brewer [Company, Ltd.] in an executive position. He was a 442[nd Regimental Combat Team], veteran. He was an ideal candidate to run for governor on the Republican side. So his group seriously considered that he was a viable candidate.

DT: In the case of Toshi, I think that was true that once again he was not mainstream Republican, so he got left out.
WY: No, he was not. That's correct.

DT: Then I mentioned Bob Sevey. And in the case of Bob Sevey, here's a person who had been in the news, a reporter, and an anchorperson, and so forth. Was this Bob Sevey's idea or was this a Republican party idea, or a small group of Republicans, or do you remember?

WY: I recall they were talking to Bob about that, too. But I would say it was a small group that thought that Bob would have a better chance because of the exposure in the news media, but it died pretty fast. (It) didn't go very far. If I recall, Bob wasn't even interested, (I also had talked to Bob).

DT: That's what he said all the time, that he wasn't interested . . .

WY: Yeah. He wasn't interested at all.

DT: At the same token, it might not have been such a bad idea, given the fortunes of the Republican party.

WY: Right.

DT: Back to Andy Anderson, why was it that he could run and run and run for major office and not get elected? But as a legislator, he managed to win easily and apparently, he's been a considerable help to your new convert [to the Republican party], Frank Fasi [mayor of Honolulu; 1968-80 and 1984-1994].

WY: Well, I think I would say that Andy lost his own race to a great extent. He relied upon just a handful of people and many of them, I think, they fell down on the job when he ran the second time for governor against [John] Waihee. At that time, he had a good chance, if I recall. Early polls showed that he was good. Waihee was practically nobody against [Cecil] Heftel [U.S. House, 1976-86] and that group. There was a lack of follow up in (the Anderson campaign. I do not know who was responsible). Even I, close to Andy, offered help here and there, but (was) never called.

DT: Really?

WY: No. "Wads, we need your help here, here and here." All they said, "Wads, help us raise money." I thought, "Hey, you guys are not clicking; you are not running it right." You know, basically, I think this is what happened.

DT: Even John Felix felt left out of the campaign, I think, because [tape inaudible] Michiko?

MK: If I can move back to say 1970; that was the year you became a senate leader. At that time, you had high hopes for the Republican party. I think one of the complaints you had about the Republican party was that it was like a ghost—ghost of the old plantation days, at least in the minds of the public. Maybe you can talk about that; the impression that you felt the public had of the Republican party.

WY: We, during that time, tried to change the image of a Republican candidate. Because during all my years of running, it's been that, "Oh, Republican party's the party of the rich; the party
of the Big Five," et cetera. So we tried to change that image by letting people know that, "Look, we're not the party of the rich; we're not the party of the Big Five," but somehow, it just never caught on. I don't know why. You can get a rich Democrat—multi-millionaire Democrat—run for office, people don't think anything about it. But when you get a rich, multi-millionaire Republican run for office, immediately the average person, "Oh, rich Republican—to heck with him." And it's an image we tried to overcome, but even till today we can't. Because if you look in local politics here, there are more rich Democrats than rich Republicans. No really, you look at all these businesses here, owned by island people—they're practically all Democrats. Chinn Ho's Capital Investment [Company Ltd.], Democrat; Hung Wo Ching, [president of] Aloha Airlines, whatever, Democrat; Clarence Chin; [Hawai'i National Bank; Loyalty Enterprise[s], Democrat; [Frank] Hata, big business food processor [wholesaler], Democrat; Sakae Takahashi, chairman of the board of Central Pacific Bank, Democrat; Jimmy [James] Morita, chairman of the board of City Bank, Democrat. Hey! You know, what's fair? But you can't win. People just don't believe you. So that's a problem.

END OF SIDE TWO

TAPE NO. 17-85-1-91; SIDE ONE

JC: The following is a continuation of the Wadsworth Yee interview. This is videotape number five, and the last videotape in the series.

MK: Now we're on tape number five with Senator Wadsworth Yee, and we were just talking about the high hopes that you had in 1970 and your efforts to try and get more people to join the Republican party. I think you had the senate caucus club, and you were going to do more fundraising, and you were going to have more aggressive Republican action in the senate. (WY chuckles.) So I was wondering, what happened to all of those actions that you were planning?

WY: Well, let me put in one simple sentence: They just never worked out. We just couldn't make it work. We did spend a lot of time, we called hearings, but afterwards, it just didn't go according to what we had hoped would take place. So the effort just died away.

MK: Why weren't people attracted to the Republican party then, despite your efforts to recruit?

WY: Well, I think there are people that respect what we do, but then a lot of people felt that the Republican party would have a difficult time (to win). Well, let me put it this way, it was not the party—forget the party. But if you (are) a Republican, it's very difficult to get elected to office. There's a tendency to support the candidates of a winning party. As a result, as you see today, the Democrats are so strong. You try to recruit and rebuild a party up or get Republicans to run, it's very difficult, especially under a single-member district. Because when you run under single-member district, people normally are Democrats. People from the Mainland, when they come here, I would say, especially if they come from certain parts of California, wherever they come, most are the blue-collar workers, working people. They have a tendency to be Democrats themselves. And Hawai'i, being a very strong labor state, again, the workmen's influence is there within the Democrat party. So it's very difficult to find good
candidates, because they know if they run as Republicans, they don’t have a chance. If they run as a Democrat, they have a better chance of getting elected if they want to get elected to serve in the legislature or the council. And that is why it is difficult to recruit people today.

So-called Big Five firms today, I’m sure their campaign funds are given more to the Democrats than Republicans. (Chuckles) So, you know, all the money isn’t there. The monies are usually with the winners. Unfortunately, the winners are Democrats, so they’re going to be in power for a long time. Unless you’re a unique person like Senator Fong, as a big example, and myself in a small example, in a smaller race where you have some strong union support. Like Senator Fong was able to get elected because ILWU was supporting him very strongly. HGEA supported him very strongly. So you (have) two of the most powerful unions in the state behind him as a Republican. So he was able to garner a lot of the working people’s votes. And I have that kind of support myself, you know. But a Republican who doesn’t have this kind of support going to have a rough time. And that really showed in this Akaka-Pat Saiki race. Pat never had, I don’t think, any union behind her of consequence. So she didn’t have that kind of groundswell support to support her. So here you had ILWU members going out, HGEA members going out, HSTA members going out, Unity House members going out—hey! You know, Republicans don’t have a chance. And that’s why when you say, try to build Republican candidates and build up the party, almost impossible today. Almost impossible.

DT: A lot of your people sort of gave up, I think including yourself. Let me juggle some names by you, people who might have done something and rather sort of gave up. You may disagree with me, please do. But Frank Damon [administrative assistant to Hiram Fong] for example. Bert Turner, whose father Farrant Turner was the secretary of Hawai‘i.

WY: Secretary of Hawai‘i, yeah.

DT: Sheri Ing, for example, who’s a well-known name but he sort of—politics, decided he wanted to opt for business, right?

WY: Mm hmm, mm hmm [yes].

DT: Ken Char, your close friend again. Yourself. Wads, I mentioned Senator Henderson. All these people walked away, quite literally, from the [Republican] party. Now, Senator Fong, I think in terms of heart and soul he walked away from the party himself, but he’ll be there for ceremonial purposes, right, because he won’t let the party down. Am I right? That’s about the extent of your interest today. To be there for ceremonial purposes, but you’re not really ready to get into the trenches and fight anymore.

WY: No, I think my days are over (laughs).

DT: You shouldn’t say that. Remember, Ronald Reagan was seventy when he ran for presidency.

(Laughter)

WY: No, what you say is true. I guess when you’re personally involved, like Sheri Ing, Kenny Char, Frank Damon, like that, were all personally involved because we were all close to Hiram. We all got active—supported Hiram, my campaign. So they were active all from
personal friendship. More from personal friendship than party. So I guess when we're out of office, you know, you kind of drift away and tend to [your] own businesses and family life.

And in my case, regrettably, I have to a great extent been disenchanted with the Republican party, especially the last 1980 reapportionment fiasco that they went through, with people like Carla Coray [became Republican party state chairman in 1971] John Carroll [state house, 1970-78; state senate 1979-80, Jim [James] Hall [executive director of Republican party, 1972-74; press relations, Reagan and Bush campaigns, 1980]. Here the reapportionment committee came out (recommending) a multiple senate district. Two senators per (geographical) area. And this is where the Republicans have a fighting chance of trying to gain one of two seats in the area. But the Republican party didn't go along with the reapportionment commission. They filed suit in federal court (to block the reapportionment plan). It was the federal court that made the reapportionment on a one man-one vote philosophy, (to) single-member district. And when they put me into a Democrat area, how can I win? But if they put me into a larger area, I guess Abercrombie and myself, I'm sure Abercrombie and I would have been in. I would have been back in, but when it's one for one, unless you're in a strong Republican stronghold like Kailua or Kāhala, one or two more areas, that's all, you're out. Because Republicans have no chance. So it was the Republican party that really has defeated and made it difficult for the Republican candidates to get elected today. And that was my biggest disenchantment with them. I kind of wash my hands of that.

And of course the [Pat] Robertson group later on came aboard and tried to control the party. They gave Donna Ikeda and Ann Kobayashi a bad time. (As a result) those two switched parties and became Democrats. Again, you know, when Republicans, like you said, shoot themselves in the foot, what else can you do? So this is why I say, when these things happen like this, I don't know how the Republican party ever is going to get out of it. Anderson tried. One thing I'll say about D. G. Anderson trying to rebuild the party—I think he did the right thing with (adopting a) target approach (in financing candidates). Because you have only so much funds (available—you) support candidates in (certain) areas where they have at least a decent chance of winning. You cannot spread (your finances everywhere). So you're going to get some disenchanted people, okay? They're not happy, because they weren't helped. You have to help yourself if you want to run for office. Even the Democrats, the party can only do so much. You have to do it on your own. So I cannot see, for a long time, the Republican party ever coming back as long as there's a single-member district.

DT: You mentioned the Robertson group, just for the record maybe we should clear it up. Correct me if my characterization is wrong. This was a group, essentially the follower of a Mainland leader, a minister by the name of Robertson, who decided they were going to capture control of the party as a sort of an ultra-right-wing, semi-religious group, is that correct?

WY: That's correct. That's the group. And they captured majority of the delegates to the Republican convention out in Kahuku that year. That's what happened. So you know, (chuckles) I'm just drifting farther away. The farther I drift to the South Pacific for Grand Pacific Life, the better for my company.

DT: We still have time. May I work in a couple of things more?

WY: Sure.
DT: One of your big interests, apart from politics, I think deserves mentioning. You've been interested for years, I think, in the Boys Club [of Honolulu]. Could you just briefly state your interest in that, Senator?

WY: Oh yeah. I was in the senate (when) Charlie [Charles] Spalding came to see me, and he was in charge of (the) McCoy Foundation. He wanted set up a Boys Club, patterned after the national Boys Club of the United States. So I helped him get a piece of land at Washington Intermediate School to put the first Boys and Girls Club [of Honolulu] there. I used my, so-called pork barrel money of quarter million dollars to help the Boys and Girls Club (build) the facility there. So since that time, I guess it must have been about fourteen years ago maybe (more), I've been an active participant of the Boys and Girls Club of Honolulu. Every year we (raise) funds for the kids. I'm real proud about it, especially with Charlie Spalding. He's an example of a Big Five, okay. His heart and soul, he put his whole effort into trying to build this club up, too. And he goes out and see all those old kamaaina [kama'aina] family foundations for funds to put it up. A year and a half ago, we finished a Wai'anae complex. Charlie was able to raise about four hundred thousand dollars from the foundation to help us.

The concept is that we put the facility on an elementary school ground. During the day, the elementary students would be able to use the facilities; it was like a miniature gym. And after school hours, we have a full-time staff of about five people come in. The youngsters come in; they pay a dollar a year. To keep them off the streets, they get all of the year supervision, training. We have art classes for them, woodcraft shops, photography shops, computer class, dancing schools, Ping-Pong tables, pool tables, and a gym. So we've been very successful in helping the underprivileged kids. And, hey, they pack it up, doing a great job. So I spend all my free time helping these kids (by fundraising events).

DT: Ironically, it's a little bit similar to A-Plus, is it not? [Lieutenant Governor Benjamin] Cayetano's program?

(Chuckles)

WY: Yeah?

DT: Or hadn't you ever thought of that?

WY: No.

DT: You should have.

WY: I should.

DT: Also, I think you've been interested in big fish or deep-sea fishing, and you have served on a commission or two that went out to . . .

WY: Right. Well, quickly on that, I served eleven years on the Western Pacific [Regional] Fishery [Management] Council. It's a federal council where you manage the fishery resources within 200 miles of the jurisdiction. And members of the council are from Hawai'i, Guam, American Samoa and Northern Marianas. I (have) served the first eleven years of this council as chairman until I got off about three years ago, serving four terms, which was adequate.
And I enjoyed it, because it gave me a chance to preserve our natural resources, like our plans for coral beds, harvesting of precious coral, lobsters, bottom fish, billfish. The whole essence is that we conserve what we have, yet we'll still permit fishing, but enough so that they will continue reproduction for years and years and years and not wipe it off. So that was an interesting portion of my life, too.

MK: Shall we close the tape?

DT: Well, I'm about to say thank you, Senator. I don't know about Michiko, she maybe has some final words, but we do thank you.

MK: Thank you. I think we'll close it here then.

WY: Thank you very much.

MK: Thank you for being so patient.

WY: Oh, no problem.

END OF INTERVIEW