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Marty McKenna oral history interview by William Mansfield, May 13, 2005

Marty McKenna (Interviewee)

Bill Mansfield (Interviewer)

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Interview with: Marty McKenna
Interviewed by: William Mansfield
Location: Lake Wales, Florida
Date: May 13, 2005
Transcribed by: Wm. Mansfield
Edited by: Wm. Mansfield

[Tape 1, Side A.]

Bill Mansfield: I always put a label on it by saying; This is Bill Mansfield from the University of South Florida’s Globalization Research Center talking to Mr. Marty McKenna in his offices in Lake Wales, on May 13, 2005.

Mr. McKenna, we always get people to start out by having them state their name and telling us when they were born and where they were born. So, Let he go.

Marty McKenna: Marty McKenna, born November 20, 1955 in Rockford, Illinois.

Mansfield: How did you get from Illinois down to Florida?

McKenna: Well, my mother was actually from Lake Wales and she married a serviceman and had a baby up there and moved back down here, right after that.

Mansfield: So you grew up in Lake Wales?

McKenna: Grew up in Lake Wales, yes.

Mansfield: Okay. Tell me about your education, where did you go the school?

McKenna: I went to Lake Wales High School, but I graduated from Santa Fe Catholic School and went to the University of Florida and graduated from there with a Bachelor of Science degree in fruit crops. I graduated in 1980.
Mansfield: Okay. How would you describe your current occupation?

McKenna: Citrus grower.

Mansfield: How many acres do you have under cultivation?

McKenna: Well, I personally own two hundred and fifty acres and my brother and I manage right at five thousand acres.

Mansfield: Wow. That’s a lot of oranges.

McKenna: A lot of oranges.

Mansfield: And how did you get stated working in citrus?

McKenna: Since I was—my mother’s family was in citrus and I always wanted to come back and live in Polk County and the Lake Wales area. I actually live in Sebring, Highlands County, the county south [of here] which is very similar. But at that time, if you wanted to come back here, you needed to be in the citrus business. So that’s how I decided to pick that niche, I guess.

Mansfield: Okay. Everybody has been talking about free trade and citrus and it always comes back to tariff protecting Florida’s citrus growers against imports from Brazil. When did you first become aware of that?

McKenna: I probably first became aware of production of citrus in Brazil at the University of Florida in the late 70’s. I knew they were down there and knew they grew oranges. Probably, when I got out of school, in the early 80’s, is when the freezes started hitting, and that is the point where the Brazilian [citrus] industry really grew, tremendously, rapidly and actually over took Florida in worldwide production. Kind of
like, our loss was their gain, so to speak. We knew they were there and we knew they were getting bigger as our acreages were getting lower.

**Mansfield:** How has the arrival of the Brazilian citrus industry affected your practices, your farming?

**McKenna:** Basically, it’s just given us a huge competitor. It has increased the supply and [in] all agriculture, price is determined by supply and demand. Our demand has increased but not nearly as rapidly our supply. And the Brazilian supply has actually—uh—made it—up until the hurricanes we just had a tremendous over supply of oranges in the world market, basically.

So, they expanded way too fast, during the freeze years and Florida did too. We got busy and said, *Hey; we want to get back in the citrus business.* So we all went out and planted trees and when our trees matured, as Brazil’s [trees] were maturing, we had over production. We didn’t have any idea [as to] how we were going to get our hands around that production. We probably thought that there was going to be a freeze that would limit production in Florida. Brazil, we didn’t know. I mean they don’t have freezes. They do have problems. But it turned out to be three hurricanes that have changed the whole situation, tremendously.

**Mansfield:** The hurricanes from last year?

**McKenna:** That’s right.

**Mansfield:** You said, “they changed the situation tremendously,” was that for the better or the worse?

**McKenna:** We don’t know. We don’t know. It definitely has decreased the supply of oranges. The problem with that is that [the hurricanes] decreased it in Florida again, just like the freezes did.
Now, does that mean it’s just going to be another windfall for Brazil? While we’re busy spending money to get back on our feet are they going to be able to take advantage of our misfortune and get and even bigger share of the market? We don’t know at this point.

**Mansfield:** When I talked to Mr. LaVigne this morning he talked about the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee, and I believe he mentioned that you’re the chair [of that committee]? [See Andy LaVigne’s interview with Bill Mansfield, 5-13-05.]

**McKenna:** No, I’m not the chair, but I’m on it. The chair [of the committee] is Steve Sorrells.

**Mansfield:** Okay. I’ll see if I can’t arrange to talk with him.

**McKenna:** Oh yeah, he would be a good one to talk to.

**Mansfield:** Well, tell me your involvement with the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee. How did I get started?

**McKenna:** Now what he may have mentioned is [that] I am actually chair, or the president of Florida Citrus Mutual. That’s the organization that Andy [LaVigne] runs. And so—oops excuse me! [Knocks recorder off the desk.]

**Mansfield:** That’s all right.

**McKenna:** And I am on the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee. And both of those groups are voluntarily financially funded by citrus growers. The funds of Florida Citrus Mutual are used to pay the day-to-day bills and other operations. The funds of the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee are used strictly to [to maintain the current citrus rate of tariff, on imports] from anywhere, but [the imports] happen to be mainly from Brazil.
Mansfield: [Laughs] Well, I was going to say they’re about the only place that’s importing [orange juice into Florida]. Tell me, how did you get on the committee? I mean how did they approach you about that?

McKenna: Well, I’m thinking how that kind of takes place. Basically [six years ago] I decided to run to be on the board to represent my area of Florida Citrus Mutual. I was elected to that. And then this past year, twelve months from this June, I was elected president of Florida Citrus Mutual. One of the great fringe benefits of being president of Florida Citrus Mutual is you get put on the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee. So I evolved on getting in there and then also, with being president of Florida Citrus Mutual. It’s my responsibility to appoint any new members to the CTOC [Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee], whether we need new members because some of them resign—decide for some reason that they don’t want to serve any more, or if the committee sees a reason to change members. Then it is my responsibility to appoint new ones.

Ant [the committee is] made up of citrus growers, large and small—corporate [growers] and family type [growers]. So it’s been tremendously effective and tremendously good for the industry, in getting those people together with one common goal. And they all kind of—everybody agrees on the goal. And when you agree on the goal, even though you might have a few different ideas on how to get to the end, it’s pretty easy to get a “map” to get to the end. So it’ been pretty gratifying to watch it come together and work. And it has worked tremendously well.

Mansfield: When you say, “It’s been tremendously effective, could you tell me how it’s been effective?

McKenna: Uh, yes. Basically, since trade agreements and tariffs and duties are extremely political items, the money that has been generated, which is a cent and a half per box, that each of the growers voluntarily donate, that money has been used in the political arena. All most—I think, exclusively in Washington. So it has increased our presents there tremendously. Tremendously.
We happened to have—during the hurricanes, the president decided to come down. And actually, he came and was in a grove right across the street over here. So he walked through the groves with my brother and me. So of the conversation that we had was—he asked us how much we’d lost, ‘cause he could see the different fruit on the ground.

And [He said] “Well, what do we have here boys?” [We said] “Well, the green fruit’s from Hurricane Jean.” (Which happened, maybe five days before his arrival.) “The yellow fruit is from Frances and the brown [fruit] is from Charlie.” It was just as distinct as it could be, from the three different storms.

And he said, “How much you boys think you lost?” And [my brother said] “Well, at least 40%.” And he said, “Will the price go up?” My brother said, “Well, if they keep importing from Brazil, it won’t go up. And he said, “This tariff is important to you, isn’t it?” And we said, “Yes sir, Mr. President, very important.” And he said, “Well that’s why you need me as president.”

So I guess that was about as an effective thing as you could see. You know? And I feel that Adam Putnam was extremely influential in getting him here. But don’t think if we had not had the Citrus Tariff Oversight Committee and had not had the growers all coming together and financially supporting that cause, we probably wouldn’t been able to get the President to land over here ad walk through an orange grove with us. That’s the best example of our effectiveness that I can give you.

**Mansfield:** That’s got to be very reassuring to hear the President say that, particularly right there—

**McKenna:** Yeah, right there looking at you.

**Mansfield:** But the President is just part of it, there is also congress.

**McKenna:** But he signs all of the bills. And we have lobbied. We use that money to lobby and of course we fortunate, we’re so fortunate to have Adam Putnam up there. He—it amazing. You’ll be amazed, when you do interview him to see how young he is.
But it’s kind of like that stockbroker commercial, when he talks, people listen. I mean it’s hard to comprehend when you’re in Washington and he opens his mouth and everybody is paying attention. So we had him as a guiding light.

But the key, in my opinion, is the administration. Yes, and we can get the congressmen and we do need to work them. But when they decide what battle to fight and, as you probably know, President Bush, his first term had what we call—gosh—TPA, Trade Promotion Authority, which means he can negotiate trade agreements without congress. So you can get all of the congressmen saying, *Yeah, yeah, yeah. We’re going to help you! We’re going to help you!* And then all of a sudden you get an administration up there that cuts a deal, and you’re left out here in the corner and [neither] the congressman, nor the senators had an opportunity to help you or do what they wanted to do. So I think [with] trade [issues] that the administration is extremely key, extremely key.

**Mansfield:** Is that what they call the fast track [trade authorization]?

**McKenna:** Fast track, yes that’s exactly right, exactly right.

**Mansfield:** But still, like I said, the President is crucial but he’s just one piece of the puzzle. So I’m curious, [and] future historians would [also] be curious, to know how you’ve have worked in Washington. Because when you say you’ve sent a lot if money to Washington, but that could mean a lot of different things.

**McKenna:** Well, and we—probably the best thing—Most of that money wasn’t sent up there, most of it was taken up there. You’re right [the phrase “sending money to Washington], can mean a lot of things. It’s kind of a distasteful thing to a guy that works for a living. And how much it costs to get the right the—advice, if you would. And you know a lobbyist is somebody that kind of tells you where you need to go and who you need to see. And when you get there it always helps to donate to their re-election. I mean that’s just the facts of life I guess [laughter].

But, myself, as president of Mutual, since the hurricanes [of 2004], I’ve probably made a minimum of five trips to Washington and probably spent twenty days up there.
And once you get access, to not only—we had very good access to our state congressmen and our state senators. But once you get access—as a matter of fact, on the 19th we’re going up to see Henry Bonilla, who is [a congressman] from Texas, who is the chairman of the Agricultural Appropriations [Committee]. So ah—those guys [they’re all so busy, but they’re] people and once you get access to them, you sit down ant tell them your story, it resonates with them.

It costs money to figure out how to get up there, and who to [effectively] tell your story to. I don’t know if it should [cost money] but it does. [chuckles].

Mansfield: In an ideal world it shouldn’t.

McKenna: It shouldn’t. You feel like you ought to be able walk to Washington and get a directory and say, I need to see this guy, and walk [right] in. But when you go walking those halls, [you see] a constant stream of people. And I think they’re up there doing [the same thing] what we’re doing, asking somebody for something.

So it’s—that’s probably what I’ve gained the most—a different perspective and probably respect for the whole system and how it works. On one hand you feel extremely proud of the American system, [that] you can get involved and see it work. But then on the other hand you think, You know, these Florida Growers donated two and a half million dollars to get this. Why did it take two and a half million dollars?

Mansfield: That money, you said you donated it, was that to different re-election campaigns?

McKenna: No, it’s a penny and a half that they put into a [fund] and the CTOC decides how to spend it.

Mansfield: Okay.

McKenna: They decide how to spend it. Most of it [is spent for] hiring lobbyists. And you know, all a lobbyist is, if you and I were up there serving in the House together, and
we kind of saw eye-to-eye on most issues and felt that you were a pretty good guy and I was a pretty good guy. And you decided not to run [for re-election]. And you wanted to be a lobbyist.

And then you’d say, “Marty, you know, I got some things I want to run by you. These guys are pretty good and they’ve got a good story to tell. Would you mind [talking to them.]” [I’d answer] “Yeah, sure.”

But if they came up [on their own], they may get past my receptionist or not. It’d be like you, if you drove in here with out an appointment, saying “Can I interview you?” Everybody would be ducking under their desks, you know. So a lobbyist is basically a door opener, and somebody who says “The real guy who can help you with this is Allen Johnson.” Okay, then we need to sit down and talk with Allen Johnson.

**Mansfield:** Who’s Allan Johnson?

**McKenna:** Well, he happened to be Bush’s trade rep. But that’s just a name I pulled out [as an example]. So, it’s a little bit distasteful that it cost that much money to get it done. But on the other hand, I guess that’s part of the system.

**Mansfield:** Well, the last time I checked, it was not an ideal world outside.

**McKenna:** But on the other hand, when you get up there, and you see the system work, and it can work. I mean, you have to work. You have to go up there and walk those halls and figure out who to see. And once you get [your] story out—

‘Cause you see our story is extremely different from any other commodity. A free trader, by nature, he wants [free trade] because it will [lower the cost] of goods that are [coming into the country.] That’s their basic thing. They don’t care—or it’s not a factor to change their minds—that they can do it cheaper in another location. If they can, they should. And the people that are doing it in the high cost area should do something else. Then when we get the cheaper product, whether it’s orange juice or not, the price is going to go down, so the rest of the country is going to enjoy cheaper orange juice and they’re going to be better off for it. And they are buying cheaper clothing and cheaper shoes.
The difference is, the difference is, there are only two producers [of orange juice] in the world. So if one of them is able to run one of the producers out of business in the biggest market. And you only have one producer left, I’m pretty sure I know what human nature will do and that’s they will charge as much as they can charge. So, that is not what free traders think.

Free traders say, “Free trade opens for bigger competition.” And in most cases it does. So it is difficult to argue, “Protect [the Florida Juice industry] when they keep saying, [free trade] will make it cheaper for everybody. If this country brings it in, so can this other country. So we’ll open the whole market up there.”

But with orange juice, that’s not the case. [With free trade,] there will be Brazil left. Nobody would want to—shouldn’t want to put their country in that shape, to have one supplier of anything. So, I think our story is one that resonates and we had to invest in the political process to be able to get people to hear it.

**Mansfield:** That’s what somebody said, that lobbying efforts were really an educational effort, to make people who make these decisions understand it from your perspective.

You said you’ve been to Washington, about five times?

**McKenna:** Yes.

**Mansfield:** Tell me about those trips. I think that’s something people would be interested in [learning about.]

[Cell phone beeps and interview is interrupted while Mr. McKenna takes a call.]

**Mansfield:** I was asking you to tell me about trips to Washington, because it sounds like it was an education for you as much as you were educating the politicians.

**McKenna:** Oh yeah, absolutely. It was an extreme education for me, an extreme education. I’m certain it would be for any American that hadn’t done that. Other than big
groups walking the halls and meeting guys and saying *thanks*, whether it’s Senator Nelson just kind of breaking him in to the trade issues.

‘Cause when we started on this the industry didn’t know really what the effective argument was. We kept saying, “Oh Brazil has cheap wages and low [production] costs,” and all that. Also, the free traders were saying “Yeah, that’s why they ought to grow it!” [and we said] “Oh, we need to figure out a different argument on this.”

So [in] our early trips up there it was evident to me that we need to change gears on how we presented out case. It took us a while to figure out how unique we were. We didn’t really understand that we were different from the “shoe people.”

I’d read things in the newspapers and they’d talk about free trade and the textile industry in the Carolina’s is really struggling and was not very successful. And it happened to them. [And we] were trying to figure out how can we be different. We don’t want to wind up like that.

I’m not sure exactly when the light [came on for] us, but at some point the CTOC, with Adam Putnam, and everybody working together on this thing. And that was probably one of the things that the lobbyist helped us with. We told them our story and they had heard all kinds of stories before, [people] saying, “protect me, protect me.”

But I would imagine that they were the ones that really pulled out the differences. They said, “Okay, if we go up there and we say [Brazil does] it cheaper, they don’t care. That’s what they hear all the time. They’re callous to that. The free traders, the guys that put this [together] that’s almost more reason for them to get excited about implementing it.” So, when they heard out story, they said, “Hey, you got a unique story. And this monopolistic story is what you need to be telling. That will make sense.”

So as we learned that and the lobbyist helped up get a little more expertise in how to get around those halls and who to see and everything, it evolved from stumbling around, stuttering around and walking around.

We went into a meeting one time, twenty citrus growers and the staff of a representative—I can’t remember his name, Andy LaVigne could tell you who it was—but it was the staff for the head of the budget committee, so all the money had to run through him. We were going to sit down and really talk to these guys and just tell then exactly the way it was and walk out of there and they were going to under stand it.
It was right before the president had gotten trade promotional authority, or fast tack. We were actually opposing that.

We walked in there, in this nice Washington conference room, you know. [There’re] all these young lawyers walking around [saying] “What can we do for you today?” [We replied] “We’re just up here on the fast track issue and just visiting our representatives and congressmen and senators.” [They said] “Well that’s nice. Which position are you advocating for this vote?” We said, “Oh we’re opposed to it.”

She pretty much—I’ve been chastised pretty hard over the years, but never quite been chastised that hard by [a woman] that pretty and not even a slang word came out. [laughs]

But she explained to us that we didn’t know. We needed to go back down to Florida and re-think our position. That we had no clue what we were advocates for. All the rest of agriculture was in favor of this. This is something that the President needed. And if we were in the President’s way we needed to go back and reconsider our position. [She concluded with] “If that’s all you got I’m in a hurry and got to go.” She got up and walked out of the room.

So from that to where we’ve evolved now, having the President visit an orange grove, we’ve learned how to get our message out pretty effectively and get it out in the right places. Andy and I and some other growers, I think, are going up to Congressman Bonilla, from Texas. When we first started down this road, without the CTOC, we would have never gotten to go up there and do that, you know?

**Mansfield:** From what you’ve said, it sounds like the lobbyist helped you refine your argument, so that it would make sense to the people in Washington.

**McKenna:** Exactly.

**Mansfield:** Can you tell me who that was?
McKenna: Yes, mostly Bill Paxton, with Aiken and Gump. He was our primary contact with that firm. I’m sure a lot of [other] people in the firm worked [on our issue] but Bill Paxton was the one who—

Mansfield: What was the name of the firm again?


Mansfield: The name’s not promising, but it sounds like they can deliver.

McKenna: Yes. So—and now we’ve got to learn and we’ve got to figure out to stay playing in that same level and financially be able to take care of it. See the hurricanes—the growers were financing this based on a per box tax. We had somewhere around two hundred and twenty million boxes, before the storm. We don’t know that for sure because the storm blew them—Well, we’re going to wind picking one hundred and fifty, so that’s seventy million boxes that we don’t have for the growers to contribute to this cause, so income to finance this thing is going to be significantly less. But we think we’re in a stage where we can shift back.

Mansfield: And shift back means?

McKenna: How much it costs.

Mansfield: You mean cut the lobbying costs?

McKenna: Right. We’re going to have to cut the expense.

Mansfield: Well, will individual growers make contributions to the—

McKenna: To the CTOC?
Mansfield: Yeah.

McKenna: Only through the per box tax, so yes they do but they don’t have to write a check.

Mansfield: But if they chose to write a check, say—

McKenna: They could, yeah.

Mansfield: This trip to Washington, where the lady lawyer chastised you, when was that?

McKenna: Probably five years ago.

Mansfield: Five years ago, and your next trip up there, how was that different?

McKenna: It changed progressively, in that um—the significance of the President being in an orange grove, it was unbelievably significant. Now it wasn’t that significant as to who’s grove it was, but now when I go to Washington, probably half the staff people of any senator or any representative [recognizes me]. “Oh yeah, the President came to see you.”

Same thing with the USDA people. They know that he was in an orange grove, so they know that it’s got a fair amount of importance to him. You know, he could have gone a lot of places and there are a lot of places that would have liked to see him show-up and state his support. It’s extremely significant that he was down here in an orange grove and it’s recognized in Washington, whether they are politicians or bureaucrats. They recognize that he was down there and many of them recognize me.

That isn’t that significant, but there is the difference from almost being kicked out of an office to now, when you walk in [and they think] “Oh yeah, I’m shaking the hand that shook the President’s hand.” So it’s been a tremendous change.
**Mansfield:** What about um—the governor, who happens to be the president’s brother? How have you all worked with him?

**McKenna:** Closely. Closely.

**Mansfield:** Could you describe that “closely?”

**McKenna:** The governor has always been extremely open with the [citrus] industry, as far as being able to contact them and communicate with them. So, you know, we had a lot of things—all the stars lined up to get the President down here. Number one, his brother is the governor. That was probably as big as anything. Number two, It was an election year and Florida was a swing state. Everybody knew that. It wasn’t all our—there were some things that we didn’t have any control over that wound up being hugely in our favor. So the sheer mater—

Actually the governor was the one who came up with the idea. We had been trying to get the President down here to make a statement about trade. Working hard, trying to do it. You know, that’s a big job [laughs] He’s got a few other things going on [laughs].

So we had it close to getting set up a couple of times. I don’t know if you remember this but he was actually in Sarasota when 9/11 occurred. We were hoping that as he finished up in Sarasota we were going to get him to come by an orange grove in Central Florida, some where and make a statement concerning trade. Well, “something” came up and he couldn’t quite do that.

During the campaign we working, so we had been really working to try and put this together. Well he was coming into MacDill, to meet his brother. They were going to fly across the state to Palm Beach, where Mrs. Bush had an engagement the next day. The following night was the first debate. So the governor came up with [the idea]. “Hey, we’ll be flying right across the center of the state. This would be a great time to get him.” So that’s how it all evolved. The governor, he has allowed us to ask him to use his influence. [laughs] So I would say, [we’ve worked with the governor] effectively and closely.
**Mansfield:** Hearing you tell that makes me realize that most folks don’t understand the efforts that go into getting the President’s ear.

So that was the time that worked, but there were other attempts?

**McKenna:** Yeah, but I don’t know too much about them. I would hear (mostly from Andy LaVigne,) “He’s going to make a bus trip down the center of the state.” You know, and then we’re going to get him in a grove. So, on a day to day basis, I don’t—I kind of show up when all the work’s done [laughs].

**Mansfield:** [Laughs] That sounds like a good plan. From my limited experience with politicians, and what I have read and heard, you’ll go in and talk to a politician and he’ll look at you and he’ll nod his head and he’ll smile and say, “That’s important to me. We’re going to do something about it.” And that’s as far as it gets. So how do you all make sure that you get more than just empty rhetoric when you talk to these people.

**McKenna:** I would say [you] follow up and make sure they remember what they said. And that’s why the repeated trips [to Washington]. And I guess that’s also why you have a lobbyist. Because seems like they are always thinking about some reason to stop in that guy’s office. And then they can “casually mention” a lot of things. That’s just an outside observation you know. But [they are always saying] “Oh yeah, we’ll stop by there tell him we saw his ‘buddy.’” So I think that’s what the lobbyist does, just keeps it in front of [the legislators] and letting them know that, “Hey these guys in Florida are paying attention and they are going to know what you do and I’m going to know what you do. We’re not going to beat you over the head with it, but we expect you to do what you say you’re going to do.” That’s a huge part of [what the lobbyist does] is the follow-up.

**Mansfield:** So when you say “the follow-up,” is that just seeing that he does what he says?
**McKenna:** Well, no. Just, we know that we don’t have a vote coming up yet. But this tariff is so important to us. If there is any other information [they] need, or if there are any other guys on the committee that need [to be informed], whether they are from Florida or not. [If they] are really wavering on this thing. And the [lobbyist] will say, “Maybe you should go talk to Bonilla.” It’s kind of a team effort. Once you get—and, you know, it seems like to me [that the politicians] get so many requests. So many [people are asking for something] that if they hear [one request] and never hear of it again, they can’t remember. And [his] staff doesn’t [remember].

But if it is repeated and it is an argument that resonates with them. And I would say a lot of [the legislators have taken to heart] what we’re saying. “Wow! We don’t want to have anything coming from one place.”

Our argument has really been a fun argument to make. And now, when you go up [to Washington] they know it. It’s like they are telling it to you. We’re confident, because we’ve kept [the tariff issue] in front of them. Even though they get so many [people] asking [for something]—and like you say, a lot of times people look at [politicians with skepticism]. [They realize the importance of the citrus industry] to this state. It’s of huge importance to this state.

**Mansfield:** The second biggest industry.

**McKenna:** Exactly. I think that’s really what’s worked, is just keeping it in front of them [Now they know it. [Also] offering any help that we can. Quite frankly, most of the help is “Could you come to a fundraiser?” [It might not be] their personal [fundraiser], but for somebody else. And if he can deliver some guys there, he can get a vote. If they are voting against you, you think “AH! That’s dirty politics.” If they are voting for you, you say, “Shoot, I’ll be glad to be up there. When is it? We’ll be there.”

**Mansfield:** So you go to a fundraiser and put in an appearance and that works?

**McKenna:** Right.
Mansfield: Who would you say some of your biggest supporters are in congress? I’m certain of the Florida senators and representative, but what about outside of Florida?

McKenna: Well, that’s where we’re needed to learn more and do more. Bonilla’s from Texas, we’re going to go visit with him. And the last time I was there –boy, I should remember these names—but this was a shocker when they told me who we were go visit. We were going to go visit Marion Berry. I thought, “Dadgum, what are we going to be doing up there? [laughs] This might be a wild trip.”

But it wasn’t the mayor [of Washington].

Mansfield: It was someone else?

McKenna: It was a congressman from Arkansas. He just happened to have the same name as the mayor of Washington.

Mansfield: Talk about name recognition, that adds to his problems.

McKenna: And he was very receptive. The way we really got a nice good welcome is that one of his constituents and one of his supporters has come down here and gotten a citrus visit. We’ve gotten to know him and he says, “Oh shoot. You need to go by and see Marion Berry. I’ll call him and tell him you’re coming.” So, we’re starting to work the outside delegations. We’re probably a little bit more behind the curve, going up there and doing that, than we were when we were going up there in the beginning, when we were stumbling and fumbling. But we’re doing that. We are trying to establish [a presence with other legislators].

See, that’s another disadvantage that Florida has, in the Washington political scene. Not necessarily Florida, but Florida citrus, because citrus is really only grown in three states. You could stretch it and say four, with Arizona, but that’s a very small amount. There’s a small amount in Texas also. It’s small in California too.

So what ever happens, our delegation has to be the one that really has to do the heavy lifting to get the ball rolling. Most other agricultural crops, like soy beans, they can
let the southeast boys, from Georgia, Alabama and South Carolina, carry the ball this year and the next year, Oklahoma and Texas and Mississippi take it and the next year Ohio and Indiana take it. Tobacco is very similar, you know. So when we need [help in Congress] we have to go back to the same guys to gee the ball rolling. They can carry it, based on the relationships that they developed over the years. Then they can ask us to go [speak to other congressmen. “This guy is a good guy, but he needs to hear it from you.”

I would say, whatever the cause is; the real true American that is effective has a better chance of making the argument. Now, you need the lobbyist to get the door open and help you get [through]. But if you just send a lobbyists up there—[the congressmen] see twelve or thirteen [lobbyists] a day. [To the lobbyist] it’s “Okay, what do you got now?” But when it’s the real guy that it really effects, they tend to try and think it through better. I believe that.

**Mansfield:** As Ben Hill Griffin III said, the lobbyist knows what he’s read in books, but you know what you’ve lived your whole life and that makes a big difference.

**McKenna:** There you go. Right!

**Mansfield:** But when you went in to talk with Representative Berry, from [Arkansas] who has no experience with citrus, what did you tell him?

**McKenna:** At this point we were telling him, number one, about how important the industry was to the state of Florida. He said “I don’t have any citrus in my [district]. We said, Yes sir, we understand that.” But he said, “You know, I voted for you on the hurricane disaster relief.” We said, “We knew that and appreciated it.” We told him that—

At the time we went up there and got that money, in the back of my mind I was thinking, “This is going to be a little windfall. This is going to be a pretty nice little check.” Citrus guys never have gotten a government check. But when we came back home and really realized how much damage and how much loss, how much cost, that with out [the government relief] it really would have been a disaster down here.
So he was interested in knowing how that [affected us]. Was it a good program? Was it implemented [affectivity]? Did it do what it was intended to do? Then he said, “I am out of an agricultural background. I understand where you are coming from. I’ll be there to support you.” He said, “But, you got to let me know what I can do.”

You know, he doesn’t wake up in the morning thinking, “I wonder what my old buddies down in Florida want to do?” So you got to communicate what you want them to do on what issue and everything. And most of that we get a lot of help from our delegation. They’ll say “Hey, this thing’s coming up and we need some help.”

[Cell phone interrupts interview] Let me see who this is.

**Mansfield:** Okay. Let me pause this.

[Interview resumes] But [with] the Florida representative you can say, “Well if you don’t support us we’re going to vote for someone else, come November.” But like the [Arkansas] representative, what did you say to him?

**McKenna:** We don’t have a big hammer to hold over him, you know. All we can do is just plead our case, so to speak. And when he—When they open the door to somebody from another state, they know that Congressman Putnam sent us over there. They know that at some point in time they are going to need to get a vote to help Arkansas, or Mississippi, whatever.

There again, that’s one of those things. Is it a good thing or a bad thing, trading votes? But on the other hand it’s part of the system and it’s a good way that it works.

But we can’t say we’re going to campaign against them, or we’re going to send—

[End Tape 1, Side A. Begin Tape 1, Side B.]

**McKenna:** —money to their competitor, or anything like that. By the same token, if he needs to get some votes to bring something back home, that does help him. Or if he’s got a real problem and he wants to send some of his constituents to some Florida guys and say, “Hey make your argument over there. If you can convince them, they are good guys.
They’ll listen to you and if you convince them, they’ll vote your way.” So I think that’s more of what it is, not really a “We’re going to beat you.”

**Mansfield:** I think people would be interested in learning that, because most people’s understanding of how it works is very limited until they’ve seen it.

**McKenna:** And believe me, mine was extremely limited, up until very recently and it probably still is limited. But I do feel like the perspective from somebody that’s not involved in politics and can really see it work, it’s been a great opportunity.

Excuse me. [cell phone call interrupts interview.]

**Mansfield:** What about—you know you talked about the people that you worked with, do you have any perception of adversaries in Washington? People you feel like you especially need to work on or people who are—

**McKenna:** I would say that most of our adversaries are free trade purists. The number one, the citrus scenario that we [presented] is extremely unique. But I think a lot of the—It just seems like most of them are extremely highly educated. So what they learned was free trade is good. And you’re going to hear a lot of arguments why free trade is not good, but those [arguments] are just protectionism; just projectionist of a small amount of people at the expense of the good of the whole. That’s very simplistic, but that thought process is why it’s difficult to get somebody to really listen to your argument.

And I will say that if the administration desires to have trade agreements in place—free trade, fair trade—is a good thing. It’s a difficult thing to do, with all the different types of economies, and customs [and everything], it’s an extremely difficult thing to do. But in a perfect world, if we had no barriers, everybody had the same social desires and everybody paid the same amount of environmental precautionary costs, you could grow it where you could grow it.

In fact (this is my opinion but I think it’s—) if that were the case, Florida is where all the oranges would be grown. I mean we grow more oranges per acre, cheaper than
Brazil. Brazil happens to harvest it [for a lot less than] we do. Extremely cheaper! Well, that’s because harvesting is a labor-intensive thing.

We happen to pay our people above minimum wage and they have worker’s comp insurance and worker protection and everything else, which Brazil does not. But free traders don’t care about that. It’s like, “If we would let them participate in the world economy, their standard of living is going to go up, therefore, we’re going to raise everybody, even the low guy.”

Well, factually, when you get into third world countries, the top guys get fat and the little guys stay little. [laughs] It seems that way to me, anyway. But that’s an opinion, not a fact.

**Mansfield:** But it does seem kind of ironic, because when I think about President Bush, my understanding is that he is in favor of free trade.

**McKenna:** Very much so.

**Mansfield:** And keeping the tariff in place for the Florida orange growers flies in the face of—

**McKenna:** Except that he has, for whatever reason, came out with a bigger tariff on steel. Now in his opinion, dialogue—he likes to talk of himself as a fair trader. Fair trade and free trade are two—they get thrown around and [used interchangeably] and they shouldn’t really—I use fair trade and free traders use fair trade [with] two totally different interpretations of what that means.

That’s why we’ve got to make sure that fair traders, free traders, whoever they are, understand that there is a distinct difference in the orange business in the world than what shows up in any text book that’s ever been written by any economist. It’s the only thing [of its kind] that I’m aware of.

That’s our real argument. And once we can get people to [understand] that we’re not just another bunch of projectionists coming up here doing a dog and pony show, with smoke and mirrors for why they should be protected. We’re pretty successful.
But it’s a difficult sell to get from the projectionist mode, to “Wow! This is unique.” I don’t want to create a monopoly. Free trade breaks down monopolies and increases competition. Free trade doesn’t decrease competition. But you point out an instance, well here is an instance where you could actually decrease competition and [they go] “Whoa, that’s not our intent at all.”

**Mansfield:** Well, getting back to the Tariff Oversight Committee, Tell me again how the members were chosen.

[Cell phone rings and interrupts interview.]

**Mansfield:** You were going to tell me about how the people on the [Citrus Tariff] Oversight Committee were chosen.

**McKenna:** My predecessor, as the president of CTOC was Squire Smith. It was his job to select all of the committee members. I mean looking at who he selected. Knowing him, he selected them, number one, to try and get a geographical spread, with in the industry. You know, some east coast, some south Florida. We call this area “the ridge,” some ridge area [people]; big growers, medium growers, small growers. [He made] a successful attempt to get a broad slice of [orange growers] so that nobody, no part of the industry, felt like they left out.

**Mansfield:** When you said that some members had been, I can’t remember if you said they’d either asked to leave or chose to leave. Could you tell me more about that?

**McKenna:** All of this takes time, so some guys said, “Hey I’m going to be busy doing something else, so when my term’s up don’t reappoint me.” I happened to want a different person on there so when somebody’s term was up, I didn’t reappoint them. I wasn’t made at them or anything. I just thought that this guy would be a good fit and contribute a lot to the group. So I decided not to reappoint somebody and appointed a new person.
Mansfield: Okay. Let me ask you then, what qualities do you look for in serving on the committee? What, to you, makes a good fit?

McKenna: This particular guy was a grower who [laughs] who happen to have similar views that I had. [laughs] I was the chairman, so I put him on there.

Mansfield: When you say views similar to your own, would you care to share those?

McKenna: Oh! I’m a small grower, not really a corporate type mentality. So I look at things a little more in that perspective. That doesn’t mean its good, or better than a large grower. A small grower tends to see the greater need for a CTOC because they don’t have the finances to go [to Washington] by themselves and get anything.

A large grower, sometimes thinks, “I don’t need these guys. I’ll go spend this money and represent myself and get just as good.” So that’s one of the perspectives that is just a little different. We’re all a bunch of individuals in this thing. And that’s another reason I said it’s been very gratifying to see us all come together. No matter what our perspectives are, we all came together on protecting the tariff. [That’s] extremely important. Maybe we all had a different road, idea, on how to get there, but in the end we made them all converge to the same place.

Mansfield: You said there were some different idea about how to get to this goal, what were some of the different ideas?

McKenna: Some of them were like, you alluded to them, “Let’s collect four times the amount of money. And let’s go tell those politicians, if they don’t do what we want to do, we’re going to campaign against them and throw them out!” That was way out [to one side]. And there were some that said, “Guys you all don’t need to do this. The governor is the President’s brother. He ain’t going to let anything bad happen to Florida. We don’t need to spend this money. As a matter of fact they might take it as a threat and it might backfire on us. So let’s don’t do anything. Let’s sit back here and the Bush’s will take care of us.”
So, we gravitated towards the middle and it’s turned out to be a very successful thing.

**Mansfield:** Okay. When you say “the Bush’s are going to take care of us” did you mean “hide in the bushes,” or the Bush in Tallahassee and the Bush in Washington?

**McKenna:** [Laughs] Tallahassee and Washington.

**Mansfield:** Okay. I just wanted to make sure I got that straight.

This is kind of changing channels here, but it’s something I have ask about and that’s the law suit against the Department of Florida Citrus. Tell me you opinion or understanding of that.

**McKenna:** Well, let’s see. My understanding of that is probably—more of an economic lawsuit rather than free speech lawsuit. I think that’s a good way, in the courts to win the battle, but it’s probably more of, “We don’t want to pay the taxes any more.”

So, I think in the long term of the industry, the department of Citrus has been extremely effective in increasing the market of orange juice. The business has evolved so dramatically, I think the Department—you may even know this—was it 1939? Is that when they [were founded]?

**Mansfield:** I want to say it was a little bit before that, but it was back in the 30’s.

**McKenna:** 1936 or somewhere in there. The statute that allows its existence is 601 and Very little modification of 601 has occurred since the 30’s to today. We’ve talked a little agriculture and the business from mules to what we have today. So it was extremely effective, with out a doubt. I don’t think could make a factual argument that it was not effective, in the 30’s all the way up to the 70’s. Maybe an emotional argument, “It was effective but we paid too much!”
But it grew the market. Increase in demand is a wonderful thing, particularly when you only got one supplier. If you got one supplier and demand goes up, everybody is in good shape.

So, when the 80’s came along you probably didn’t need to advertise. The demand can stay right here [holds up hand] because the supply was way down here [demonstrates with hand]. As we mentioned, the Brazilians jumped in the thing. Then all of a sudden we had Brazilians growing more oranges than Florida. Imports were high. Why grow the market when you’re just benefiting the Brazilians. Prices got cheap. Nobody’s happy when prices are cheap. Not only are they not happy, they want to find somebody to blame. [laughs] So, everybody is pointing their finger and you and me. And I was pointing it back at you. It’s a total economic thing now.

I don’t want [the Department of Citrus] to go away. I want to change some of 601. I want to change how it done. But it’s left up to the courts now. Anymore, who knows what a judge is going to say?

**Mansfield:** Some of the people I’ve interviewed say “Do away with it. It’s giving the Brazilians a free ride.” Other people I’ve talked to have said “The Brazilians get a free ride but it has done so much for us and it can continue to do a lot for us.”

**McKenna:** To me the free ride is a shortsighted, very shortsighted. They didn’t get a free ride up until recently. They had the equalization tax. And I don’t know why, okay? We weren’t going to charge the Brazilians the equalization tax any more. A terrible decision! Terrible decision! Number one, the free ride argument, nobody likes anybody to get a free ride. Even if you say, “It gives then a free ride but—” Nobody likes it.

We had it where every box that was imported paid the same tax that the Florida grower pays. We let that slip through our fingers.

**Mansfield:** When did that happen?

**McKenna:** Five years ago, and that’s a little bit of a guess. But the equalization tax was dropped three to five years ago. That really opened the door wide for the free rider
argument. My whole opinion of this is—and unfortunately we don’t get to debate it—and we don’t get to argue it, like we did with the CTOC, start way out here and finally wide up with some common ground. And that doesn’t mean it wasn’t rough and rock and bumpy to get there, but we got there.

Because it’s in the court system I haven’t spent a lot of time or energy trying to figure it out. Because the court’s going to do what the court’s going to do.

Now when that happens then I’m hoping and I’m trying to get the industry to listen and pay attention. [I’m saying] “Now look, the courts going to rule something. At this point we can’t make a whole lot of plans for what to do, but we need to be thinking about [what to do.]” And hopefully everybody is saying, “What ever the court rules we want to get together and figure out how we can have a functional effective Department of Citrus.” Nobody wants to talk about it much.

**Mansfield:** Seems like it’s getting harder and harder to have folks talk about anything any more.

**McKenna:** Right, right.

**Mansfield:** Well, I’ve been throwing questions at you for about the past hour, or so. Are there any questions you want to answer that I haven’t asked?

**McKenna:** Oh boy.

**Mansfield:** Or anything you want to comment on, that I haven’t asked about?

**McKenna:** I’m just trying to think through here. And what’s the main topic now?

**Mansfield:** We’ve been looking at the effect of Free trade on Florida’s citrus industry. And you’ve done a great job explaining how Florida’s citrus industry has worked to educate legislators.
**McKenna:** And to keep or tariff, to keep our tariff. The net effect, if we loose the tariff, we’ll loose this business. There will no longer be a citrus industry.

There will always be store-yard things and your fruit stands and that type, because, [citrus] is a novelty item along with a staple. There will be roadside stands, but as far as what we know today, it will be gone. There’s just no argument about that.

**Mansfield:** What do you see as the future of Florida citrus, assuming that the tariff stays in place?

**McKenna:** I think if the tariff stays in place we’re— there is, right now, there are three things that are the determining factor if the citrus industry stays viable in the state of Florida. One, is the state of Florida has got to want us here. Two, the federal government has got to want us here. And three, unfortunately, the Brazilian processors have got to want us here. Brazilian processors own at least 50% of the capacity.

If having oranges grown in this hemisphere is not an advantage to them, in their worldwide marketing scheme, we’ll go away. So, that is something we don’t know. We have no clue. Maybe it’s a temporary thing. If they can keep us choked down and keep the price down and we’ll go away anyway, and that’s what they want. Then the tariff is a moot point. I’m not a real proponent of that. However, we’ve got to fit their business plan, because the Brazilians bought 50% of the concentrate capacity here—the processing capacity. And they own 70% of the world’s production. So they’re the driving force and it’s in very small very rich hands. So I think they almost have as big a decision [to make] on where this business winds up in the next ten years as anybody.

**Mansfield:** I was driving past the Citrosuco Plant out there and I saw they had the Brazilian flag flying. What do you think when you drive past that?

**McKenna:** Well, we’ve gotten used to it, pretty much. That was actually owned by the Updike Family, who [also] owns all this property who manage for. We have business relationships with them. And they sold it to the Brazilians, because they realized that they couldn’t compete in the world market, with ships and currency exchanges and everything.
[It was probably sold seven or eight years ago and] we’ve gotten over the emotion of seeing that Brazilian plant right there.

Now when Adam Putnam, when the President came down, said “You know Marty, they’re in the shadow of a Brazilian owned plant right here.” I said, “Is that good or bad?” He said, “I don’t know.” [laughs]. I said, “I don’t know either.”

But any way, it’s an extremely dynamic changing thing and we’ll probably all tell you something different in another three years. I think it’s going to change that fast.

**Mansfield:** That’s why it’s important to do this [oral history project] now, while it’s still in flux.

**McKenna:** Yeah, I’m excited.

**Mansfield:** And I appreciate you taking the time to talk with me this afternoon. I feel like I’ve learned a lot and enjoyed it a great deal too.

**McKenna:** Good. I’ve enjoyed it. If you do a follow–up, put me on your list.

**Mansfield:** I always want to remind people, on tape, that the information you’ve shared with me this afternoon, will be deposited in the Special Collections of the University of South Florida’s library and be available to researchers. But in order for them to have access to it we need your permission.

**McKenna:** Sure.

**Mansfield:** And there is a release form that I have to ask you to sign.

**McKenna:** No problem.

**Mansfield:** Well, let me again say thanks and shut this thing [off].

[End of interview.]