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Kathy Betancourt oral history interview by Robert Kerstein, June 13, 2005

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RK: This is interview with Kathy Betancourt who was Director of Governmental Relations during the administration of Sandy Freedman. Thanks for speaking with me. Can you tell us a little bit about your background? Were you born in Tampa?

KB: I was born in Ybor City and I grew up in West Tampa. I went to USF and got two degrees at USF—a bachelor’s and master’s degree in Education. I taught sixth grade in Hillsborough County—mostly sixth grade. I substitute taught, and then one year I taught a combination of fifth and sixth. I then went to work as a lobbyist for Hillsborough Classroom Teacher’s Association.

When Bob Martinez became mayor one of the things he had wanted to do was to set up an office of Government Relations so he hired me, and I set up their first office. Then when he left, and Mayor Freedman had been Chairman of Council, so she stepped in to fill his unexpired term, and I stayed on with Mayor Freedman.

RK: Now did you stay throughout the second administration also?

KB: Yes, through ’94. I was in her second administration, but then in 1994 was when I left.

RK: And what were your primary responsibilities?

KB: State, local, federal, and regional government—anybody who was an elected or appointed official—governmental, not political as much as government, you know, that sort of stuff. Working issues, working the budget a little bit, just whatever was something that a local or state or federal, elected or appointed official was going to do—or regional for that matter.

RK: Did you spend a lot of time in Tallahassee?
KB: Yes, we did a lot. It depended on the issue, what issue was hot. So if we had an issue, like we worked—we were doing our waste-to-energy plant—we worked on some federal legislation that related to that. If the legislature was in session and we were working on a taxing issue, that’s where we spent our time, storm water, whatever. Whatever the issue was. We spent a tremendous amount of time on growth management, when [the] Growth Management Act was being done, I guess that was ‘85, so that predates Freedman, but it was a good experience.

The City of Tampa has a very sophisticated, very professional staff, very respected nationwide. A lot of people here don’t realize that. But you know, they love what they do. You know, the people who run the sewer system love their sewers [laughs]. The people who run the water system, they’re into quality and delivering services to the people of Tampa. The folks who do the bargaining or employee relations, they care about what they do. It’s a good city, it’s a well run city.

RK: Can you give some specific examples of what you had to do during the Freedman administration in Tallahassee, as far as lobbying, whether it be for money or for statutory authority?

KB: You know it’s hard to remember, because so many of those things—they kind of all blur, because the bad ideas that came up in 1979 [laughs] came up in 1980, ‘81, ‘82, ‘83, ‘85, ‘87, every year, you know, they never go away. So I really am trying to think if there was a big issue, and I’m sure that there was one, but I can’t think of it right now, I really can’t. I’d have to search.

RK: During the period that you worked for the Freedman administration, the first and second term, did the state legislature change at all as far as working with them? I was thinking perhaps it became more Republican and that might have made a difference one way or another. . . .

KB: Most of the people didn’t care about the political—people know what a mayor is, and we’re non-partisan mayoral offices in Florida. Constitutionally, they’re non-partisan. Only in recent years have people been talking about whether a person is a Republican or a Democrat. And when Mayor Freedman—she didn’t run the first time—what was, what she had to do, or the most important vote that had to happen was for her to become the Chairman of Council, and it was between her and Haven Poe. But the issue of which one was a Republican and which one was Democrat really wasn’t that big of an issue. It was brought up a little bit, but only in recent years have people talked about whether someone who is on City Council is a Republican or Democrat. And frankly, it’s annoying to me, because we’re supposed to be a non-partisan city and school board elections in our area, and for people to bring up the partisan stuff to try and do it is counter to the [Florida] constitution and to the spirit of what we’re supposed to be doing in city races. But it never was that big of an issue.

Now, it became an issue, when she first—when she was mayor, and Bob Martinez was governor, and she went down to a League of Cities meeting and made some comments on
behalf of the Republican candidate for President of the United States. And Governor Martinez had made some comments about the Democratic comment [laughs], person. And it was a little strained because of that. Because she was involved, even though she was non-partisan, as other mayors have been, she did get involved in some partisan races. Not that many of them, but being mayor keeps you busy.

RK: Did that at all impact what you were able to do in Tallahassee?

KB: Oh yeah. I went to meet—I remember I went to meet with—it worked out very well because I went to meet on a transportation service area issue or something, with the then Secretary of Education, Kay Henderson. Kay was the secretary under Martinez, and he said something about you better tell your boss—you better tell your mayor to stop saying things about these partisan things and I said to him, I said, well Mr. Secretary, I’ll tell my boss to stop talking about politics, but you tell your boss to stop talking about politics. And he just laughed and he said fair deal, that’s a fair deal. So he never brought it up again. But sometimes it was a little touchy, but we could work around it. He could work around it.

RK: Did Hillsborough have a good delegation for you?

KB: Yes, yes. Generally, it almost always has. Reapportionment, single-member districts and term limits later, but single-member districts did make it more difficult for the city to represent the city because of the way the districts were cut up. And right now, if you look at the districts the way that they’re laid out, the city of Tampa—the city of Tampa has several senators who represent it, but it doesn’t really have someone who is seen as the city. And it used to be more of that, you know. You had your delegation lines, [they] were drawn by the counties, and by geographical boundaries like rivers or the bay or whatever. And now, they’re bug splats all over the place and they’re just so oddly shaped that it became—those changes in the legislature did make it more difficult. And that happened during that time, that transition occurred.

It used to be very easy. You had nine members of the Hillsborough delegation. Four represented the unincorporated areas, five were in the city, then they changed it around, it went the other way. And then suddenly people just had a piece of Hillsborough, or a piece of Tampa or a piece of whatever, and it was just carved up in such insane ways that you couldn’t jurisdictionally claim somebody as to run—or carry your water for you. So you had to work on personal relationships or what their interests were.

RK: So was it a major benefit to you that you worked in Tallahassee so long?

KB: Yes. I had a lot of personal, and still have a lot of personal relationships with legislators and the staff that have been around for a long time. And also we worked very closely with the League of Cities. And we worked closely with our other (sister) municipalities. One of the things that Bob Martinez started—and then it kind of atrophied because he got into different things—and then Mayor Freedman really resurrected it; one of the things I think she [Mayor Freedman] really deserves a lot of credit for because the
having a business partner was her idea, and that’s what they now call FUP, Florida’s Urban’s Partnership. That’s the big city mayors. And at that time, the big city mayors from the five largest cities got together on a regular basis. That was Bob Martinez’s idea and Bill Frederick, when they were mayors.

RK: And he was mayor of Orlando?

KB: Right, right. And then it kind of atrophied, and when Mayor Freedman came in, she got with Mayor Frederick and some of the other mayors and talked about resurrecting that, except she suggested a format that they really liked, and which I think they’re still doing, which is an excellent one. And that is the five big city mayors would get together every so often, and in fact they put together a legislative agenda, but each one of them had a business partner—a “business attaché” if you will—that they took to the meetings with them. So you had ten men and women sitting around the table, discussing urban issues as they saw them. And the rule was that they had to unanimously agree or it wouldn’t be a legislative issue. So that way they wouldn’t have some kind of issue that was unique to Miami, or unique to Hialeah, or unique to Jacksonville, or unique to Tampa—or that the business community wouldn’t like, or that was kind of something special for trial lawyers, or special for developers or whatever. And they had different people—the mayor of St. Petersburg had one of the executives from Florida Progress. They had different people all the time that came in with them, like developers, or bankers or whomever. And it was the five mayors—who were of course from Tampa, and then you had St. Pete, Orlando, Hialeah, Miami, and I guess Jacksonville, was six. And now they’ve added, I think they’ve added Ft. Lauderdale, and that when they added, didn’t really fit in the thing. Because all of these are strong mayors. They put Ft. Lauderdale in for political reasons, right before I left, because the mayor of Ft. Lauderdale then was the president of the Florida League of Cities and he was crying to be in it—he wanted to be in it so bad, he couldn’t stand it. So they kind of let him in.

RK: Do you remember any of the private partners with Mayor Freeman?

KB: I think she had Jim Apthorp for a while. Jim Apthorp was the one I think who came to one of our first meetings—I don’t even remember, I’d have to think about it, I’m sure I will. But I hadn’t thought about FUP—Florida Urban Partnership—for a while, I know it still exists.

RK: And does that mean that they would tell you as the representative, what their priorities were?

KB: They, the first—yeah. They would do a round table. They sat, the first meeting they had with Freedman, that they organized, they met over, early in the new Tampa Bay Performing Arts Center. They had lunch there with a closed door meeting—the press was all mad because we wouldn’t let them in—and then at the end, we had a press conference, and they all talked about what they were going to do. And then of course, what was it, Mayor Suarez, Xavier Suarez, gets on, Oh I thought the press would be allowed in, I
don’t know why they wouldn’t. Because I was the one who wouldn’t let the press in, I had a couple cops with me. It was a hoot.

But what they did is they would have a conversation, a round table, and they’d throw out what they thought the big problems were, and threw out what they thought bills ought to be filed, and then they’d talk about it, and they’d vote. And if one of them didn’t want it, they didn’t do it. And it made for great consensus. I mean, we came up with a bunch of bills that we did that were good bills, and we passed almost all of them. And it was fun, because, like, I remember going to Lincoln Diaz-Belart and asking him to do a bill for me in trafficking, because we had some issues with respect to the weight [of] what constituted personal use of marijuana, I think it was like ninety pounds—it was ridiculous, and we brought in this humongous thing and said, this classifies as personal use and this is outrageous, and that was a lot of fun. That was a lot of fun doing it.

But I could go to different delegations—I went to Van Poole in Ft. Lauderdale, and he did a “hooker bill” for us—we did a big bill on prostitution, it was a big problem for all the big cities, but it didn’t go after the prostitutes, it went after the pimps. It was a great bill, a really good bill. I remember one legislator, one woman, said, you’re going against the women. I said, no ma’am, we’re going after the pimps and most of the pimps are men. I learned more about prostitution than I ever wanted to know, about Federal Highway and Dale Mabry and Nebraska and all the places in every big city where the hookers go, and the pimps, and how horrible those pimps are.

RK: Did the mayor ever interact with county commissions, the administrators or commissioners with regard to their views on these urban issues?

KB: These were unique. This particular group was uniquely the big city mayors, and it was only the big city mayors and that’s all. And only strong mayors until they let Ft. Lauderdale in. St. Pete was not a strong mayor when we first started, but there was no way we could not include St. Pete. Although Clearwater kind of got it’s nose out of joint because they weren’t in it. But St. Pete was the only one who didn’t have a real mayor. St. Pete had a city manager form of government. But all the others had real mayors.

Now, we did have several meetings that we had with the county and we did some—one of the things that Mayor Freedman and Bob Martinez both did, was that they did encourage several meetings that we had of elected officials from the cities and the counties in the region. And so we did some work with that, we had meetings with them to talk about—and mainly it was on a topic, and usually it was transportation.

RK: Sometimes, did mutual planning councils get involved with those meetings?

KB: Yeah, we always had—I think all of the cities, and generally counties, generally held at that time because people were still feeling out what their responsibilities were—a love-hate relationship with the regional planning councils, who could come butt their noses in, and for no reason, in the stuff you were doing, and act like they were pure and you weren’t, which just really pissed me off. It did, and it still does. You know, people come
in and they act like they care more about your neighborhood than you do—nobody cares
more about Tampa than those of us who live here and love it and work for it, and for
some outside person to come and say you can’t do this or that because you know, well,
you have to do this or that and they act like a do-gooder and they’re not, is very
annoying.

RK: Can you tell me how it works in Tallahassee? You know as well as anybody—who
do you interact with to try to accomplish what you’re trying to accomplish for the city or
for this group of citizens?

KB: One of the things that we started, and Tampa was in a leadership role in it, both at
the state and at the national level, is actually in Tampa, in Florida and Tallahassee, and
during session, and throughout (I guess it’s over ten years now, it’s got to be, because I
was still in the city, its got to be, I don’t know how many years old), but we started a
group called FAIR, Florida’s Association of Intergovernmental Relations. And it was
under the leadership, the person who was really our main leader, was Teresa Lintz—may
she rest in peace. She was a lobbyist from Pinellas County, and a wonderful lobbyist.
And Teresa doing Pinellas County, and I was doing Tampa, and then Eugenie Suter from
Broward and there were a whole bunch of us.

We started a group, and during session, the lobbyists from the big cities—or the cities
and counties that had lobbyists—would get together on a regular basis and walk through
bills and divvy them up, because there are so many issues that affect cities and counties
that there is no way that one person can do everything on behalf of their city. So we
would pay attention to different bills and spell one another on them so, and not make
somebody have to do the ugly stuff. Like if we were fighting the firefighters on some
stupid workers comp bill, I might take the lead on that bill one year, but nobody would
make me have to do it twice you know. Because then somebody else could take it the
next year. We would take turns. Or if it was something that our bosses didn’t want to be
that public on, we would let the League of Cities carry the water for us
And the League
of Cities always met with us or the state of Association of the Counties, Florida
Association of Counties. So we’d divvied up all the issues.

But we met on a regular basis, ‘cause if you go on and look at the agendas during the
legislature during the session of particular committee weeks, you’ll find three committees
meeting at eight o’clock that affect cities. Another four meeting at ten o’clock, you’ll find
another three meeting at one [o’clock], and their agendas are killers. So what we did, is I
generally focused on the big ticket items, spent a lot of time on water, sewer, solid
waste—cause that’s money, that can keep your utility bill in good shape because you’re
not having to pay as much for water, sewer or garbage, you know. And for you and me
who are very blessed, it’s not that big a deal, but for some people in this city, adding two
dollars a month to their bill makes a big difference. So you’ve got to watch out for them,
and try and keep the price of those departments down, while at the same time having
quality and protecting the environment. So you have water, sewer, solid waste are big
ticket items, and of course land use. You know, letting the city letting people have say in
what their neighborhoods are. And those are things I spent a lot of time on.
RK: Were the rural legislators less responsive to you?

KB: No. Only, we’d get into certain times where we’d get into fights like there were a couple of legislators from Hernando who always had these—from Hernando, Pasco, that area that always filed these bills on water issues, water supply issues, that nobody of the urban area ever liked. So we’d always joke, and say, come on, Mr. Smith—Chuck Smith, I’d say, oh Mr. Smith, you forgot your bill filed your annual reelection bill against Tampa and Hillsborough County and St. Pete and everybody, and we’d just laugh about it. Cause they—if you, you can’t get crazy about it you got to deal with people. You’d be surprised where you find allies on different issues. Sometimes law enforcement issue they might care about or—and you can help them.

One of the things I always felt was that as a big city, we could help the smaller cities with their issues. Just because somebody’s small doesn’t mean they’re not efficiently run or don’t have good business practices. We could learn from our little brothers and sisters. So it was a good team. And a lot of times, like Temple Terrace and Plant City didn’t have lobbyists, so I’d call their city managers and let them know stuff that was coming up and they were very helpful to us on issues. And because Tampa, fortunately Hillsborough County, were blessed, we only have three cities—but it was easy for me, as a representative of Tampa to call the city manager, call Nettie Draughon over in Plant City or Tom Bonfield then in Temple Terrace and tell them, hey there’s an issue coming up, and call—can you call senator so-and-so, or will you do this, and they’d love doing it. In fact I shared my legislative reports with them because, you know, it isn’t going to kill me to do it, and you’re helping each other.

RK: Did it help you then that a former of the city of Tampa was governor for a period?

KB: It helped us in some ways, and in some ways it didn’t. The partisan thing came into play a little bit, and he and Mayor Freedman weren’t that close, so that is different. But like for instance, when he appointed Dale Twachtmann to be head of Department Environmental Protection, which at that time was DER [Department of Environmental Regulation], that was great. Because Dale knew department heads, and he knew our talent, he knew our people, and he moved a number of people that we knew up there, so we had some good access to some very high place people and that was good.

RK: And what position had he held in Tampa?

KB: Dale had been the head of Water Sewer Public Works. He had been the Super Chair [a] position that doesn’t exist anymore. But, and it was unique really, to him, but he had been the Super department head. He did all the water, sewer, solid waste, public works, I mean that was big stuff. So when he went up there, that was a great contact for us. So you know, that was fine.
RK: Did you also get involved at the Federal level?

KB. Yeah.

RK: What did you do there?

KB: We had a number of issues, we had—uh—a couple of them were, well, when Freedman was mayor, well, it had to be Freedman, Bobby was already gone, we worked on a number of issues, one was the Federal Courthouse, because there was a thing that the courthouse was not going to be downtown, it was going to be over in St. Pete, and that was a big issue we worked on. Another one was deauthorizing the channel, so, but that was when Bob Martinez was mayor. We had to deauthorize the channel so we could develop Harbour Island—

RK: What do you mean by “deauthorize”?

KB: When you drive over to Harbour Island, that was designated as a channel, which meant you could not put a bridge there. So we had to deauthorize the channel with the federal government. Lawton Chiles was in the Senate, and was very helpful to us in doing that, and deauthorizing that which enabled us to build a bridge. We had to work with the corps of engineers to put some stuff in place as well, in order to be able to do a sea wall where the convention center is now; and tear down the old customs house there—we had to do that swap with the federal government.

One of the things, the signature issue that we worked with—the thing that I think Mayor Freedman can be very, very, proud of, that I don’t think she gets enough credit for—but that is, what she did for affordable housing in the state of Florida. That, the Bill Sadowski Act was her bill. We—that bill came out of the city of Tampa. It came out of the programs that Fernando Noriega and that—when Bob Martinez was mayor, he let his folks do affordable housing. When Freedman became mayor, she let them dream and let them make a lot of dreams come true. And the partnerships that were put together with the banks and the not-for-profits in order to make a lot of affordable housing possible, and the whole bill that was done in affordable housing, the Sadowski Act, was the Freedman bill. And we lost it—the time that we lost that bill was a heartbreaker, and then it was so tragic that Sadowski was killed in a plane crash, and then we slapped his name on the bill ’cause we knew that that was a way we’d get to pass it. Which Lawton Chiles told me was shameless, but a very good thing to do [laughs]. And Sadowski would have loved it, because he worked very hard on that bill.

RK: What had been his position?

KB: Sadowski was the head of Department of Community Affairs, Bill Sadowski. A much, a highly regarded member of the legislature years ago. In fact, he has a—I have in my office—he has the, kind of a “credo” for, an “ethics credo” for elected officials that I often show to people that they need to pay attention to. He was a lovely, lovely, intelligent man, a wonderful man. And when he was appointed—Lawton made him Head
of Community Affairs, and he was really into affordable housing, and he worked very hard with us to pass a housing bill for the whole state of Florida. And it was named after him, but really the germ, the seed of that bill was planted in the city of Tampa. And it was done, Jimmy Hargrett, did it—we had a meeting, a round table, we all went around the table, and it was Freedman who said let’s get something in there, quid pro quos, let’s work with the development communities so that we can put things in there, things that they need, to make it easier for them to build, but at the same time, keep neighborhoods safe. And I think she needs to get more credit for that, because she really is the one who was the spearhead of all of the affordable housing stuff in Florida. I hadn’t thought about that, but she really needs credit. I mean, there should be a lot of attention paid to that, because she really did that. And I hope she talked to you about affordable housing.

Because you know what happened, too—is that afterwards, when all those stupid scandals happened at the city, I mean, that was nobody’s fault. That was just some people who screwed up the system. That can happen in any system. But the City of Tampa, until we had the disgrace that happened, had the best affordable housing programs in the country. I mean, Fernando went all over the country talking about the bill that we passed, and how we were getting money, it was very important.

RK: Did you have to work with representative—US Representative, Sam Gibbons on issues?

KB: Yes. Worked with him on the “customs house,” worked with him on the “deauthorization of channel,” worked with him on the federal courthouse. That was a big deal, one that’s named after him now, and on the property swap for that. Worked with him to get money—he got us—he was not really into earmarks, but he did get us an earmark in HUD to tear down the old Curtis Hixon, which we did through a federal grant, I worked with him on that very closely.

RK: His seniority [was] helpful?

KB: That was helpful, yeah.

RK: Many a concert in New York City always complained about federal mandates, and I know some mayors complained about state mandates, state or federal government, stepping up water quality standards and mayors saying well, you haven’t given us adequate money and so on. Did the issue of mandates come up?

KB: Well yes, in fact Mayor Freedman was on a federal task force that I think Al Gore chaired, that—yeah, she was on a federal task force that looked into paperwork and nuisance mandates and stuff like that. She was very involved in that. But see, its not that you don’t mind the mandate, you just don’t like stupid “cookie cutter” ones. And its like they’ll come in and they’ll say you can’t have the affluent in from this pipe into the bay that has more this, this, this, and this. Well, that may be true at this bay, but it might not be true at that bay, or the conditions over in this receiving water body. So what was very annoying about all these mandates is that they were all so “cookie cutter.” And the City
of Tampa is surely different from you know, Live Oak or from, any city that—I mean, it was just stupid, this “cookie cutter” stuff. But Freedman was very involved in that. We got a number of those, and we worked on eliminating some of those. That was a good initiative.

RK: And was that primarily the state or the federal level?

KB: At the federal level, we worked with Henry Cisneros. In fact, she [Freedman] had—Secretary Cisneros come down to Tampa and spoke at Tampa Theatre one time when he was at HUD. And we went up and worked with him on a number of issues. But she [Freedman] was very involved, and very well regarded.

RK: Did money become scarcer during the time that you were with the city?

KB: Yeah, yeah, yeah. At that time you had the New Federalism—you had the Reagan years coming into play, and you had what, I guess it was Tom McPherson, former state senator, called the New Federalism—he called it the “shift and shaft”. Because what they did, was they didn’t get rid of a lot of the things that you were supposed to do, but they didn’t give you any more money. And so monies, monies did become scarce.

And Sandy was always very frugal, and didn’t want to increase taxes, and I used to tell her, nobody’s going to believe that you didn’t increase taxes. Because she did not increase taxes. And I told her, if you were to ask everybody out there, the citizens, they’re going to think that you increased taxes because you’re a Jewish Democratic female. So you might as well increase them! Because people are going to believe that you did. And I bet, if you went out there and asked people if she increased taxes, they would say, yes. And she did not. If you look at her record, she was very prudent, very, very, conservative, did not increase taxes.

She caught some publicity crap, for one of the things that she did that was a courageous thing, [which] was taking away the “take home cars,” which was a big waste of money that the cops had. I mean, why should the people of Tampa pay for you to drive a squad car and park it in Oldsmar? We were putting gas in that squad car, driving you to and from Oldsmar, or to and from New Port Ritchie, where you live, and you were parking a City of Tampa squad car in your driveway in New Port Ritchie? Or out in the boonies in Hillsborough County? Why should Tampa pay for that? Now, some of us felt that she should not have taken away the “take home cars” completely. That what she should have done, was gone forward with the policy to just let them—if you live in Tampa, you could take the car home. Because then, you’re fighting crime. But why should the City of Tampa taxpayers pay for the appearance of crime fighting out in the unincorporated areas that are in another county for heaven’s sake? But we were paying for a lot of that. And that was a very courageous thing for her to do, when she did it.

RK: Do you why the decision wasn’t to allow police officers within the city to…
KB: You’d have to ask the people who bargained why. Some of us felt like that was a good compromise. But she didn’t to do that. And the cops didn’t want to do that. And the cops, I remember one of them said something like, oh, if you do that then some of them will lie about where they live. And I went, well, excuse me! You know? And she got criticized a lot for that. But that was not an unreasonable thing to do. Because for the City of Tampa to be paying for the maintenance repair and gas for people to drive a car outside of the city limits, and sometimes way outside—I remember coming home from Tallahassee and seeing one way out near [Highway] 19 and [Highway] 98 parked in a house. And I thought, well, that’s great, my tax dollars at work, you know?

RK: Did that hurt her politically?

KB: Yes. Because the cops, they went crazy. Now, it was good for the auto industry, They sold cars [laughs]. But it—no, I think it hurt her a little bit. People didn’t understand why, they didn’t understand the reasoning. It was one of those issues that was not communicated as well as it could have been.

RK: Did it hurt her when she ran for the US House of Representatives Democratic primary and ultimately lost in the run off to Jim Davis? Did the police work against her?

KB: I don’t know. I don’t know. But see, she was also in—Phyllis Busansky was [also] in that race. And so they had similar base supporters. That was a very crowded field. And because of that, they bled from each other. And that’s what pumped Jim up. So it was more than just that.

RK: So you would describe Mayor Freedman as fiscally conservative?

KB: She was. If you look at her budgets—look at her budgets, she did not, she was not….

[End Tape 1, Side A]

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[Tape 1, Side B]

RK: So Mayor Freedman was conservative, was she liberal in anyway?

KB: Well, the word liberal doesn’t mean anything anymore. I don’t know any liberals. I used to know liberals, there used to be liberals in America, I don’t know very many of them. The old definition of what liberals used to be like, there are not very many of them around.

I think people would say one of the things that she did, that was perceived as liberal was, remember when she did the Martin Luther King street naming? And some of the politicians advised her not to do that until it was a quid pro quo for something that she needed [from] the black community? And she said no, she just thought it was right, and so she was going to pursue that, and she went forward with that despite some people
telling her and despite—it was pretty controversial thing for her to do. Which I think was courageous, and she did it just because she thought it was right. That would be perceived as, be called, a liberal issue. And now, years later, nobody cares about it. But back then, when we did that street naming, that was a big deal. That was a big deal and it was very controversial. And there were a lot of people who were pretty ugly.

RK: Did issues of gay and lesbian rights come up?

KB: Not that much, that wasn’t a big deal. You know, it might have come up with a couple of employees—I remember we had a transsexual firefighter, and that was kind of interesting. But not that much. That wasn’t that big of a deal that I recall.

RK: The Freedman administration focused a lot of attention on neighborhood development….

KB: Right. She was very, very much for neighborhood supporting—affordable housing was an important component of that. “Quad squad”. Remember she did a number of things that were….

RK: Can you explain about the “quad squad”?

KB: That was the drug squad meant to go in and to stop dealers. I mean she was really into neighborhoods. Basic good stuff in neighborhoods.

RK: And in addition to housing programs, is there anything that you did at the state or federal level to try to move that along?

KB: Trying to think—we did some federal legislation on some grants for police officers. And then some of it happened after I left. We also went to war with the feds on an issue that had to do with kids. The City of Tampa—we had put—we had applied for and gotten a grant and we put computers in Boys and Girls Clubs. And then the feds came in and audited, and they said that they wanted some of the money back because we had let children use the computers who were not designated as—they had not filed the paperwork, and so they were not qualified under the program. And we just went to war with them. And we ultimately won, after a while. They finished that case after I left, but I remember going to Washington, and I remember our congressional delegation being very helpful, all of them, helping me meet with people and sit down with people and taking some of the private sector partners we had for the Boys and Girls Clubs with us. Because we were pretty much telling them, you know, we have these two kids, one of them has filled out the paperwork and he’s qualified. The other kid, his mother’s on drugs, he can’t get the paperwork filled out. His mother’s unconscious half the time, but he’s using the computer. And also, when nobody was using it, if a kid who didn’t fit the program was there, you’re not going to say, you can’t use the computer, it’s only for stupid kids. You know, because then, it will be stereotyped and then no body will use it. So we went to war but we won that one. That was a big, that was a big case too. That was
really good, that was a lot of fun. But Mayor Freedman would not back down on that one. That was good.

Just, when you’re doing the city, there’s a lot of stuff going on. And you know, you just don’t think about it. Because there’s so much going on that piles on top of it.

RK: The Sports Authority, the Port Authority, the Aviation Authority, did you have to interact with them?

KB: Yes, we worked with the Port Authority on a number of issues. We worked with them on some submerged land issues here and there. Worked with the Aviation Authority—one time it was kind of butting heads—was on clarifying the laws…what’s it called? It’s a taxation policy, when you’re renting the property, it’s leased. And I had to go to council on that issue. But then ultimately, we just kind of, it was good—it was…what is it called…?

RK: Leasehold…

KB: Leasehold taxes stuff. We worked with the Aviation Authority on that because we felt things were not on the roster that needed to be on the roster. But yeah, you worked with everybody. Worked with Swift Mud, worked with the West Coast Regional Water Supply Authority.

RK: Was the Port Authority and the Aviation Authority—were they willing to work with the city? Because sometimes they’re perceived as strong, independent entities.

KB: Yeah, oh yeah, oh yeah. They’re very strong, very independent, but they’re a delight to work with. Worked with the Sports Authority as well on a lot of issues. See, the Mayor of Tampa is such an important—it’s a bully pulpit, it’s such an important figure in our community. The Mayor of Tampa has a lot of influence, whoever the mayor is, with all of those entities.

RK: During the time that you worked with the Freedman administration, the county was growing pretty rapidly in terms of population. The City of Tampa grew because of Tampa annexation.

KB: Yeah, annexation grew some.

RK: But was there tension between the County Commission and the administration on the issues?

KB: Sure. On everything. There is, was and always will be. I mean you cannot put the county cats and the city cats in the same sack. You just can’t, ‘cause you’re going to hear the screeching and the screaming. Now they worked together more often than not. I worked very closely with Hillsborough County on a number of issues. But you’re going to have that because the issue that comes up often times is dual taxation. And you know
the city will say that—somebody will go to the county and say, *oh, well do you support this?* And the county will say *yea, if the city chips in too.* And then they go to the city and the city says, *wait a minute. City residents live in the county, so they get to pay twice.* And a lot of times the city will do it just for peace. You do get the dual taxation issues [that] are pretty tough, and they come up in a time like now, of limited resources. And you don’t have a lot of money to spread around.

**RK:** What about the annexations, did they bring tension?

**KB:** We had, we had annexations, and we, for instance, we had an annexation of University of South Florida into the city, which made it possible to go in to do all of New Tampa. When we did that, the county opposed it. But they really didn’t know how to work Tallahassee. They would not be as inept now as they were then. The guy that they had doing it did not know what to do. And that was good for me [laughs]. And it’s so funny, because that was the time too, when, you know, I did it all. You didn’t hire, you didn’t hire any hired guns to go outsiders to go and do all that stuff for you. We did the governor and cabinet ourselves and it worked out very nicely. But they did not really know—the administration of the county at that time did not really know how to handle that issue. And that was good for us, and we didn’t help them.

**RK:** How did you—you had to deal with so many different issues that often times were extremely complex, not just politically but technically and so on. How did you acquire an expertise?

**KB:** Right, right. Well, you do—you’re knowledge is a mile wide and about an inch thick [laughs]. But you have people that are really good that you take with you. And that you have, that you know, when I was talking earlier about the very sophisticated level of staff people that the city has—when we were working on the Waste-to-Energy Plant, Rick Garrity, who is now at the Environmental Protection Commission, I didn’t go anywhere without Rick there to answer questions for me. When we would do the affordable housing issues that were so complicated, I had Bob Harrell, Fernando Noriega, the folks from Tampa United Methodist. I mean, I had people there who did this everyday and who knew what they were doing. And you know you learn from them, you hear them. And you know legislators ask the same questions after a while, you learn from them and then you can leave them home. But every now and again a question will come up you don’t know and you just say, *I don’t know but I’ll find out,* and then you know it too.

But when you get into a big issue like affordable housing, or like, street lights—that was a big issue, you know the building of the street lights—you just dive into that and that’s all you think about all day long, you know. And you learn that stuff really quick. But then after a while, you just, you forget about it. Because you don’t use it—it’s not useful information. It’s back there in the recesses of your brain, but it’s not useful so you don’t…

**RK:** Did the National League of Cities provide expertise at all?
KB: It depended on the issue. I worked with a guy at the National League of Cities who, we were working on cogeneration issues in Washington, and he was very good.

RK: What’s that, “cogeneration”?

KB: Waste-to-energy plants. And he, he was Dave, or Dave Gannon, something like that. But see I don’t remember, but the guy I worked with, the US Conference of Mayors was who I worked with on that issue. The US Conference of Mayors was very helpful on those issues and the League of Cities on others. It depended on what we were working on.

RK: Was the waste-to-energy primarily during Mayor Martinez’s…?

KB: It started with Martinez, and then some of the—the issues continued. Because then you’d have, you’d have bills that would disallow you from doing it; or that if it broke you couldn’t expand it, or you couldn’t do whatever, you know, market issues. In order for the health of your plant, for your plant to remain healthy and to operate at maximum efficiency, there were certain things that you needed to have in place and people were always trying to end run and get rid of them, so…

RK: Many cities focus on economic development to some extent, and I know that the Mayor often took trips to try to speak about the benefits of moving to Tampa and Hillsborough County, did you participate in that?

KB: I did not go on any trips, but I did set one up. We had in fact, we had a wonderful trip in the beginning of Mayor Freedman’s administration when Mayor Charlie Royer came from Seattle. And they had [inaudible] for the lobbyists for the City of Seattle, Bill Stafford, who now—he does international trade now. But Bill Stafford and I met, and we put together a group of big city mayors’ staff lobbyists that still gets together, the Executive Staff Institute, lobbyists for big city mayors, has been getting together now for about twenty years. And Bill was the—really, Bill, Tom McCliman and I were the three that helped get that cranked up.

Mayor Royer, before he was Mayor of Seattle, he had been a newsman, and so a lot of [the] business community looked at him very suspiciously. They thought he would not be sensitive to their issues. So Mayor Royer set up this thing where he would take—he took a group of business leaders to visit some city and to look at three issues that they wanted to learn about. Two or three issues, or one issue, depending on where they were going. And I said, wow, that’s really cool, ya’ll ought to come to Tampa. And later on, Bill called me, and said, do you think your Mayor will do it? And I said, well, if you’re mayor calls my mayor, maybe. So Mayor Royer, Charlie Royer, called Mayor Freedman and asked if I would set up a field trip to Tampa, and we looked at health care—they came to look at health care, the Port, and something else. There were three issues.

And in fact, Pam Iorio was on the County Commission, and she came and talked to them.
It always frosts my case that Phyllis Busansky gets all the credit for that health care tax. Because she wasn’t, all the other commissioners worked on it. But Pam worked on it. She was a baby commissioner at the time. But she came and talked to them at Tampa General [Hospital], and about the health tax that we were looking into and some of the things we were going to do in this area. And then we took them, we threw them in a boat, and we took them around the Port, and they met with some Port people and it was a wonderful experience.

And they came, and the people from Seattle came to look at Tampa to learn from Tampa. And it was a really good experience to do that. Mayor Freedman did cultivate some good relationships with other big city mayors. And so they were able to call each other up and spell one another and talk about things.

RK: Did they ever compete with each other to try and to attract businesses?

KB: Yeah, oh yeah. But you don’t talk about that you know. You kind of look the other way.

RK: Did businesses ever ask the mayor for certain incentives that you then had to go to the state to try to…

KB: We worked on something that involved enterprise zones as I recall, and we worked on some tax increment financing issues. We worked on, I guess it started with Martinez—we started on that sales tax for Superbowl with Martinez.

But that was—you know, it was funny because that wasn’t something we offered—that was something that pretty much that the NFL told you you’re going to do.

RK: How does that work?

KB: The sales—that there’s no sales tax on those tickets.

RK: Oh, I see.

KB: You know, you think if anyone can afford to pay a sales tax, it’s the people that can afford to buy a Superbowl ticket. But we worked on issues. I think that some big issues involved the Convention Center, what issue was going to continue with the Convention Center. Because remember when Bob Martinez was mayor, the Convention Center wasn’t going to be A, where it is; it was going to be the Mack Center. They were going to have this multi-use thing, no public money, blah, blah, blah. And then, they got the land, [and] they moved it over there; Bob Martinez went forward with it and acquired all of that property and its—the financing package still wasn’t exactly what would have been as—as good or bad or whatever as you would have wanted it to be. And Mayor Freedman had to make a decision as to whether she was going to move forward with that Convention Center. And she did. But that was a hard decision to make. Because everybody said, a lot of people said, you can’t drop that issue, but the cost of it was going
up, and the question was, *should the people of Tampa pay for a regional facility like that?* Because it is a regional facility. And we ended up paying for it. And [are] still paying for it.

RK: Was this state or federal money?

KB: [pause] No.

RK: Were there certain business people or professional people or others who were really pushing the administration to go ahead with it? The mayor…

KB: All the downtown boys. See I thought, of course, it would have been very irresponsible. I thought if she just said, *I ain’t building it, this is going to be the best park we ever had. We’re going to have a waterfront park, all that property is going to be a park,* that the county would have ponied up some [money]—a bunch of people, the pressure would have been spread to others. But she wasn’t going to play that game.

She didn’t play games. She wouldn’t play games. At all. She’s a pretty direct person. You know, like on the MLK stuff, she was not going to wait for the blacks to come and ask her to do it. She volunteered to do it, because she thought it was right. So she wasn’t going to use it as a quid pro quo or as anything like that. You know, and a lot of people said, why are you doing that? We’re not getting anything for it. But she did, she wasn’t into playing games. Ever.

RK: How do you perceive the media’s treatment of the mayor?

KB: Very unfair. Very unfair. Part of it’s her fault. Because she would not play games, she would not romance them. Doyle Harvill did not like skirts, and he didn’t like her in particular, and she didn’t like him right back. And it was okay for the people who were working for him to be ugly to her. And she was treated very unfairly I think. But again, she wouldn’t romance him. She would not, you know, call up Ed Roberts at the Tribune and chat with him and ask his advice. She didn’t want his advice. She wouldn’t play games. She wouldn’t play. And see, I don’t think you have to do it that bad. There were a couple times where there were things that she could have done that she said, *no, you go do it, I don’t want to do that,* you know? She was not, she just wasn’t into playing games.

RK: Do you think her gender did influence how the [Tampa] Tribune treated her?

KB: Uh-huh. Yeah. Because they liked, you know, editorial writers, they liked to be—Mr. Roberts, I think he liked to be contacted and stroked, and others surely did. But she wouldn’t do that.

RK: During the period of the Key Bank investigation, and the husband being in the news to some extent, did that make a difference? It must have been very difficult.
KB: It hurt, it hurt, I’m sure. Of course it’s difficult, you know. She’s very devoted to her family, very devoted to her family, and she and Mike are very close. So it had to hurt a lot. Because it wouldn’t have been as public if she weren’t public. And that’s when you look at that and say, *why am I doing this? Look what it’s doing to the people I love.* And nothing ever came of it. That’s the thing. That was a sad time too in our community, there were a number of people who were treated very poorly and who were investigated by grand juries here and grand juries there and all that stuff, you know that, you were here. And you wondered why, you wondered how political is this? But a lot of good people had their lives questioned, and their morality questioned, and nothing ever came of it.

RK: How would you place the Freedman administration within the context of the Martinez administration, which you were very, very familiar with, and the Greco administration that you were not a part of but are knowledgeable [on]? How would you…

KB: They’re all different. Every mayor has—they have different personality and a different way that they run their stuff. I just, I don’t, I would say that the City of Tampa has been blessed by having a series of very good mayors going back—to my estimation, back to Nick Nuccio who had the foresight to buy that property on the river and to get that into public ownership and to, do some things that really positioned our community to grow and to prosper. From Mr. Nuccio to Dick Greco, to Poe, to Bob Martinez, I think—I think Julian Lane—I’m not as familiar with things that he did during his administration. The getting that waterfront property into public ownership, to me, was such an important thing that Nick Nuccio did. But I think we’ve had good mayors. I’m not going to criticize any of them.

RK: Would you see the Freedman administration as [having] more continuity with Martinez’s administration?

KB: She picked up—yeah. Because if you look at most of them, the same staff were there. So the bedrock of your top staff, and of people who really were able to do, [or] run their departments, but satisfy the personality of the mayor who happened to be there. So you’ve got some very competent people who were there running the day to day stuff. And the stuff that’s at the top that everybody pays attention to, that everybody talks about, is just a small portion of what goes on. I mean, the most important thing that goes on is, you know, tomorrow morning when I get up, my garbage is going to be gone. And that’s important, you know. When I turn the faucet on over there, there’s going to be water. And those are the things that nobody talks about unless something happens and it’s gone, but those are the things that the city does everyday that the mayor makes sure happens. So, you know, I don’t see—there’s different personalities of the mayors and it’s more like gossip than it is like the real running of the city.

RK: It does appear that at certain times, during the Freedman administration, there was some conflict between the administration and some of the major business people. At least one example was with the crew and civil….
KB: Bamboleo! And again, she wouldn’t play games. You know, she wouldn’t go and do the—give the keys to the city of the pirates. It’s like, who cares? She just didn’t think that was right and she didn’t like it, and she wasn’t going to do it. And because she just, she was not into playing games with them. And see, she just didn’t. That’s the way it was. But if you look at any real conflicts with the business community on a major issue, you’re not going to find ones that were important to the city that she didn’t do what she thought was best for the city. I mean, I can’t think of anything that was public except for that.

And actually, that kind of—as strange as the Bamboleo thing was, it kind of lanced the wound, and then when they came back and did Gasparilla, the Gasparilla now is totally different than what it used to be. Everybody, every crew, any crew, that wants to pay the money that’s got a crew, and they’re in there. You know, you want to run up and down and dance and have your crew, do your thing—you can be black or white or gay or whatever you want to be and it doesn’t matter. And that was the turning point. So maybe it wasn’t all bad.

RK: Was there any different tone with the Freedman administration maybe after the Superbowl controversy, the Whydah controversy regarding race that hurt earlier administrations as far as focusing on racial inequality?

KB: I think the public view was that she was more tolerant. That she was almost, I’d say almost [inaudible] to people who were trying to “satisfy the blacks” or whatever, you know, some people didn’t like that. Well tough. I think it upset her when we had the riots, you know, when we had—well, they weren’t really riots, but they called them riots, but you know burning a dumpster—they wouldn’t even think of calling that a riot in Miami. But she was seen as, I think by people—and I think again, because she’s a Jewish Democratic female, as being too easy on “rebel rousers” [laughs]. But I think her relationship with the black community for the most part was very good and stayed good. She always worked it. And not in a phony way. I mean, she would see people and go to their churches and visit and do stuff, and she was sincere.

RK: When you were in Tallahassee, how did you perceive the lawmakers on Sandy Freedman?

KB: When you’re the mayor of Tampa, they either really like you, or they pretend they like you. Because you have a lot of power. And people like power. And they want to be seen with power and they want to meet power. And so it went very well. And some of it was relationships that I had, that I could open doors, but most of it was because she was the Mayor of Tampa. You don’t need to hire somebody to make an appointment for the Mayor of Tampa. You just don’t. The Mayor of Tampa is the Mayor of Tampa. That’s it. That is a very important position. Everybody knows who the mayor is.

RK: Did your position carry over to the Greco administration? I know you weren’t in it, but did they have someone in that position?
KB: Yeah, yeah. See, when I left the city, Mayor Freedman was very kind and let me leave. And when I left, because they didn’t know what they wanted to do or how they were going to shape it, the mayor contracted with George Sheldon to do certain issues for us, and then worked with the League of Cities. And my Assistant Director, Debbie Stevenson helped track a lot of that stuff from here. She probably could have had my job, but she didn’t want it. Her children were young, and she just did not want to have to travel and do all that stuff. As it was, she was putting in fifty-, sixty-hour work weeks here, you know. And the idea of doing that—she didn’t want to do it.

When Mayor Greco became mayor, that’s when Cindy Miller, who was [doing] the internal audit, she was doing it. Because she had a lot of experience at the federal level and was very good. But the Tallahassee level and the federal level are two different things, and although Cindy did a very good job, she was, she didn’t really want to just do that. And that’s when Jeanette Fenton was hired. And so, Jeanette, Jeanette is still there. Jeanette’s working for Pam now, so…

RK: This I should have asked you before, I apologize. Some people have suggested that by the time [of] the Freedman administration, Hillsborough County didn’t have the clout in the legislature—didn’t have any powerful legislators that they had earlier with Mr. Terrell Sessums and so on. Is that your perception at all?

KB: No, no. That’s just not true. We had—well, it comes and goes. We had Terrell, and then Terrell left, and then later on we had Lee. You know, you had Lee years later and Lee was, was pretty good. So it depended on who you had and where they were, I mean it moved around. I mean, Malcolm Beard, Senator Beard was very, very helpful. On a lot of issues. And no, I mean, I went to Senator Beard on all my transportation stuff. And he had a good relationship—you know, it was okay. He and Mayor Freedman didn’t have a relationship that was that great—it was neither good nor bad, don’t get me wrong, I mean, he was okay. But he, he told me he thought it was very courageous of her to take the cop cars away, he thought that was a smart thing—a tough thing to do. You know we’ve had legislators in and out, dependent on who they were, you know. Some were strong, some weren’t. It varied. Pat Frank, when she was there, she was chairing—she was doing land use, she did community affairs, she chaired that, so that was good for us. Jimmy Hargrett was very helpful on affordable housing, incredibly helpful on affordable housing. Les Miller was very helpful on the House side. Jim Davis, when he first got elected…

So no, what you didn’t have, because of stupid-single member districts, was you didn’t have a cohesive delegation. So whereas you have a delegation, the people are more free-agents than they are. You don’t have the team feeling for a county or a city that you used to have. People see themselves as Hillsborough County legislators, but they really aren’t. In some cases, they have a piece of three or four counties. You know, look at little Temple Terrace in the congress. They’ve got three congressmen. I mean, a bedroom community with three congressmen? Give me a break. It’s silly.
RK: I’d like to follow up on your career after leaving the city, what did you do after leaving the administration?

KB: USF.

RK: Same position?

KB: That’s why I went, yeah. That’s why I left, was to go to USF. I mean I didn’t leave the city, I wasn’t looking to leave the city, I was very happy there. I was very pleased with the organization and the people and the way it’s run. But I had an opportunity at the—and I had been at the city for fourteen years, which surprised me, I never thought I’d be there that long, so… Fourteen years is a long time.

RK: You grew up in Tampa...

KB: Uh-huh, Ybor City.

RK: …what would be your impressions about how Tampa has changed?

KB: Some for the good, some for the bad, you know, it’s a mixed bag. A lot. That might be the better suggestion.

RK: So Tampa has changed in different ways, for the good and for the bad?

KB: It’s a mixed bag, it’s a mixed bag. What I don’t like is that the people who come here from other places don’t show it the proper respect. But that’s a Florida problem. Since most people are from other places, they think that where they came from is better than here, and they don’t take the time to appreciate the rich history of the City of Tampa in particular. And they also don’t mind, you know, tearing down stuff around here. You know Florida was so late into the historic preservation, that there’s precious little left that’s worth keeping from the olden days and a lot of it is still being gone.

I mean even some simple things like a lot of the high-rises that are going up here on Bayshore, the integrity—the spirit of Bayshore is threatened by so many of them. And some of these nice little neighborhoods—you know, putting, getting these stupid mansions on these ninety-foot lots, and then wondering why they have storm water problems when they moved all this permeable surface you know, off the inventory. But you know, it’s still a wonderful place to live, people still keep wanting to come here. But we’ve had good—we’ve had some very good mayors. I just don’t like—I don’t like people not loving this community. I feel like, if they don’t like it they just ought to go back where they came from. I wish they would.

RK: Thank you very much for speaking with me.

KB: Yeah, Yeah…. 