

The John H. Glenn, Jr.
Oral History Project

Interview 4
(Listed number 20)

at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs,
The Ohio State University

October 20, 2008

Jeffrey W. Thomas
Interviewer

THOMAS: This is the fourth of a series of oral history interviews with Senator John Glenn. Today is October 20, 2008. This interview is taking place at the John Glenn School of Public Affairs at The Ohio State University. My name is Jeff Thomas.

Senator Glenn, today I would like to focus on your work with NASA following your Friendship 7 space flight, and on your decision to enter politics in 1964. First off, after your Friendship 7 space flight you returned to duty with NASA and worked on the Gemini and Apollo programs. Could you give us some idea of what your assignments were with each program?

SEN. GLENN: They were varied. On the Apollo program, I was particularly involved more with the Apollo program than I was with the Gemini. Gemini was pretty well along by that time. And there weren't many things they needed in there. But Apollo was still being formed. I had done a lot of work in cockpit layout, where you put the instruments and each phase of the mission, what is the source of information you need, what instruments give it to you, so you have them in the cockpit when needed. And so I was involved with the early Apollo command

module. Not the command module but the lunar module—lunar excursion model, “Lamb” as we called it, which was going to be the actual vehicle that landed on the moon. Where do you put the instruments?—the altimeter and the radio and counter, the whole layout of instruments. And so I made several trips up to Grumman, which was doing the major work on that on Long Island, and I worked with that with the engineers in Houston, also. That was the main thing I did.

I was involved, during that time also, was still involved with some of the aftermath from Project Mercury. There were a lot of requests and NASA wanted me to fill a lot of these requests, to go around and talk different places, and I did some of that. At that time though, Bob Gilruth, who was the director of the program at that time, was suggesting that I take over the role in management of training, which I didn’t really want to do, because that would sort of lock me into a position where I knew I was not going to fly again. And I did want to fly again. In those days of Apollo they were working mainly with engineers and some of the trips to the plant where they were doing the actual work.

THOMAS: You also participated in the three remaining Mercury flights, that being the flights of Scott Carpenter, Walter Schirra, and Gordon Cooper. What did you do during their flights?

SEN. GLENN: Mainly it was to just make sure that they knew they had everything I could give them from the experience that I had had ahead of them. Scott went right after me, and when I came back, Scott asked, I think he requested, that I be his back-up on the next flight. And I did. I worked with him. The back-up pilot really is a stand-by in case the pilot can’t go. But it’s also—you’re representing the pilot

that is getting ready to go. You're representing him at all the engineering meetings. There were endless meetings and things that they can not attend. So you're acting like an alter ego to go to all of these things that build up, safety reviews that build up to the actual flight itself. And you're trying to take care of any personal concerns that you have with regard to family or last minute phone calls and all kinds of things. So I did that and I was glad to do that because I had been served myself and knew how that would work.

THOMAS: Were you, as I recall, you were at a listening post for one of these flights. Is that correct?

SEN. GLENN: The main one I did was on Gordo Cooper's flight. That was going to be the first 24-hour flight, the last of the remaining Mercury flights. I was on a tracking ship off Japan, between Japan and Okinawa. That turned into a bit more of an important mission than I thought it was going to be when I went out there. The main thing you do out there, you're out there making circles in the ocean at a certain latitude and longitude, and go through all the practice flights that they do with the radio net going on around the world and checking in. And each one of these ships needed a doctor and a small crew in case the astronaut came down near your location. You could pick him up, although we were not designated to be a primary pick-up point. But went through all that and did all the communication stuff.

On the day that Gordo was coming back in, they had some problems with the automatic control system and alignment system, and it meant that they wanted to do a manual countdown into the actual retrofire. And so I had to do that, and

so we had do a very careful check on the clocks, and my clock opposed to his, and do an actual countdown when he came over the horizon, actually counted him down to his time when he pushed the button up there himself for the timing – 4-3-2- right down to the push. And it was right on, and it worked out well. He came down right close.

The reason the timing on that is so important, when you're up there you're traveling almost five miles a second. And you're hoping when you come back in to make a re-entry you come down in the middle of the pick-up area where the recovery ships and people and equipment are there to take you out of the water as fast as possible. So you don't want many errors in counting at that particular time, and we got that one right on.

THOMAS: Now following that space flight you did a tour of Japan along with your family. This was sort of a goodwill tour for NASA? What do you recollect about that tour?

SEN. GLENN: Well, we could always write a book about that trip because it was so great. I had been on the tracking ship and they wanted me to stay out in Japan and make some visits to different towns around Japan. And I thought it would be a great thing to have the family come out there and do this, too. So I suggested this and NASA thought that would be a good idea. The Japanese are very family oriented and so we thought that would be a good addition to this. And so that's what we did. The kids dropped out of school for that little time period for Japan and they were with me and toured all over Japan. It was an education for them and it was an education for me, too, as far as that goes.

It was quite an experience. We not only met with government leaders and their people that were interested in space and space travel back in those days, but met with the Emperor and his wife and people like that. And later on, in 1998, after the flight in 1998, by that time I was 77 almost, and the crew visited Japan, again as a whole crew. This time there were seven people and we visited again with the Emperor. The Emperor's son, he remembered when we were there before, and when we met he brought out a picture of us that they still had there. So it had impressed them some at that time.

So we had a great time out there. There were a lot of things that come to mind. One was a man named Sadahei Kusumoto, who was the vice president of Minolta Camera. I had used a Minolta camera on the Mercury flight. It was the first of the automatic cameras. And so Minolta had asked in particular that I be able to visit their plant, and I thought that was fine. I had never been to a camera plant. I had no idea what this reception was going to be. When we were still, I guess maybe a mile or maybe even two miles, from the plant they had Boy Scouts lining the streets clear down that last mile or so to the Minolta plant. And we came up in front of the Minolta plant, the whole façade on one part of the entryway, the huge part of the plant there; there was a big picture that had been expanded from a 35 millimeter picture I took, as the first hand-held camera to take a picture in space, of the African Sahara Desert. It had been blown up to this size. It must have been fifty by a hundred feet or something like that. And they had done this and put it on the front of the plant. The welcome, you just couldn't believe what it was; they couldn't do enough for us. They wanted to give us gifts

and cameras and all sorts of things, which we sent back to the Embassy in Tokyo so we could complete the rest of our trip.

One thing that is memorable that I remember about that trip is some of the personal relationships. Sadahei Kusumoto, who was the vice president, he later became the director or the president of Minolta North and South America and was in this country. He spent most of his life actually in this country representing Minolta Camera here. But he was our host while we were in Japan for our family. He not only was with us during the visit to the plant, but then they wanted to set up a tour for about five or six days through that part of Japan, and he was our host for that. He rode with us in the car and took care of all the arrangements and everything. This incidentally, in the realm of modern day thinking about freebies and people giving gifts to politicians, this was all cleared through our Embassy and everybody as to what we could do and not do [Laughs].

But we got to know him very well. His nickname was Sam, so we called him Sam. His real name was Sadahei Kusumoto. Sam was a devout Buddhist and he had two daughters. We had discussed religion a little bit driving around on part of the trip. I asked him one day what the Buddhist teachings were in bringing up his daughters, how did he teach them, what were their main principles. And so he thought a little bit and he started talking about honesty and all the other things. And I swear if I thought about it then, it was like I was back teaching Presbyterian Sunday School again. The principles of Buddhism that he was teaching his family and that they wanted to live by were very similar to what we teach our kids. It just brought home to me how much we tend to emphasize the differences

in our religions and not the likenesses and the things that are the same. I think half the problems in the world, or maybe even more, come from some of our religious differences.

I remember that in particular about traveling with him out there in addition to the visit to Minolta, visiting some of the Buddhist temples, Misihangangi Temple, where they had a green tea ceremony for Annie. And we met with school groups, university/college groups at every stop, and it was a very successful trip. The Japanese seemed to appreciate our visit very much and I think we did a lot of good with that trip.

THOMAS: Another of your duties at this time with NASA, you were liaison with Congress to a certain extent.

SEN. GLENN: Yes, unofficial. They asked would I take that on as a duty and I did. It wasn't anything that amounted to a whole lot. There were a number of committees in Congress, both in the House and the Senate that, because of the [Friendship 7] flight, had sort of wetted their interest in space flight. And so they wanted somebody to come and brief the committees and the committee staffs. So they asked me to do that and I did it. But it wasn't anything that required a huge amount of time. Part of it was spent, not in hearings, but in meeting privately with the committee staffs that put together legislation, sort of chart the course of what that committee was going to do and where they wanted to direct that, either the House of Representatives or the Senate, to go. So that was not an official type thing, sort of unofficial role that I filled at that time.

THOMAS: Also, while you were doing all of this, at the same time were you lobbying to get a slot on either a Gemini or an Apollo flight?

SEN. GLENN: Well, yes, this was not part of a spirited activity, but did I want to go back up again? Yes, I did and I talked to Bob Gilruth about that. He said that headquarters said they didn't want me to go up again right away, and I didn't know until many years later, long after I had left NASA, that that wish came from President Kennedy apparently. It was in one of the Kennedy biographies many years later. I don't know whether he was afraid of a political fall-out or something would happen to me on a second flight, because there had been so much attention poured on me and our family.

But I did want to go up again. I would bring it up once a month or every six weeks and asked Bob again about getting back on flight rotation and he kept telling me this wasn't really something that was in his control. Headquarters said they really didn't want to go up again for a while. And it wasn't put in terms of it would just be put off for a year or something like that. It was sort of an unending moratorium on my going back up again. I didn't want to just sit around doing other things at NASA. So I made the decision after a while to leave. I didn't know for many, many years later that President Kennedy was the one who apparently told NASA that he did not want me used again.

THOMAS: They never really came out and told you that, they just sort of stonewalled?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, at that time. Knowing then what I know now, I probably would have gone to Washington or something. But I was working for Bob Gilruth and I was part of the group that had been selected and he was my boss. I tried to tell him how

much I wanted to go back up again. And he knew that. But he was getting his orders, too, and I wasn't aware of some of these other things at the time.

THOMAS: So the lack of being put on another flight, would you say that's the major reason you left NASA?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, if I would have been put on another flight at that time I probably would have stayed there, and been happy to stay there. But starting way back in my high school days, I had a course in high school called civics, which was the study of government and politics. There was always an interest in public matters in New Concord and patriotic feelings and so on. It was just that kind of a town. This course in civics was one that I looked forward to. Our teacher on that was a man named Harford Steele, and he just made the course come alive. He had a lot of examples and really it was a course that I really looked forward to. I guess largely from that, I thought there would be no higher calling than public service and public office, running for public office. I had no idea ever that I'd ever be able to do that myself. It was something that I had been impressed with from the time I was in high school.

So when Annie and I were thinking about what I was going to do and was I going to stick with the space program and just stay there doing some job I really didn't care for, or was I going to go out and get into business or was I going to try other things or what was I going to do, that loomed large in my thinking at that time, that maybe this was something I could do. And so that set off a whole chain of things, that when I finally decided to leave NASA, there were a long series of

things there in the political arena before I ever was successful and finally went to Washington.

THOMAS: When you left NASA in 1964, you still maintained some ties with them. For instance, they sent you on two goodwill trips to Europe, in 1965 and 1966. Could you explain a little bit what your relationship was with NASA after you left?

SEN. GLENN: This was really rather strange in how I went to Europe on those trips and Annie went with me. NASA had a policy that after the flights, they were not going to send people abroad. They thought that's just a copycat of what the Soviets had done. And the Soviets had really just played this for political gain the most they could. [Yuri] Gagarin, for instance, he went to almost every little hamlet around the world and to major cities. His picture was in the paper just one after another after the other after the other. I think he was on about a seven or eight month goodwill trip they called it, around the world. The pictures were always there stands Gagarin with the flowers that somebody had presented to him.

NASA had determined that the best thing we could do was to get back to work and show the world that we were serious about this thing. And we were. And so after the flight in '62, it came up about was I going to go on some sort of trip like that or not. And it was decided, and I agreed with it, I decided that NASA was right in playing it a different way. This had been a result of the Cold War and the competition we had been in. We were on the way back. We were doing very well. Just to copycat of the Soviets on world tours of exultant acclamation, or whatever you want to call it, didn't really add that much to the program. So I had stayed in the states.

Then there came a time later, and this gets in a whole different realm. I had supported the Boy Scouts. I was not a Scout myself, but my son was and I liked the scouting program. I think it's an excellent program. The scouting leaders in Europe were having a meeting and it was run by the American military. They asked me to come to Europe and come to Munich. They were having their meeting at a place just outside Munich for all the scout leaders that was sponsored by our European military. They were having this big meeting and would I come and be their keynote speaker at this thing?

Well, that was something I thought was worthwhile and I wanted to do it. And by that time I had left NASA. So I told NASA that I was inclined to accept this thing. And for that purpose in going over there, I thought it would be good, finally, after the couple of years that had lapsed, for NASA to get on board and we could make a tour of Europe following this meeting of the Scouts. So that's what we did. NASA thought that was a good idea, so they assigned some people to go with me. So I went over for the purpose of going to the scouting meeting, which I was. I was there for a couple of days, talking to people and addressed their military scout leaders. Almost every military unit, major military unit, sponsored Boy Scouts or different groups locally here as part of their outreach program and so it was very popular.

Then the NASA follow-on to that, which was, I don't remember now exactly how long it was, but was like ten days or two weeks. We went to—I think I gave 21 or 22 speeches in maybe 15 cities in 11 countries in 10 days, or something like that. [Laughs] This really was a whirlwind tour. But it was well

received. We had a great time. That whole trip is sort of a jumble because it was so fast and we were going from one place to another. But the people were enthusiastic and even though my flight had been two years in the past, they were very anxious to see an American astronaut and to talk and the press people wanted to ask questions. So it was a very successful trip and NASA was glad they had backed it finally. The basic purpose of the trip was to be over there for a Scout program.

One thing that I just happened to think of—in college I had had a couple of years of German. Let's say I was not all that conversant in German, but I could make out a German conversation and get along alright with it. Now that had been many years before this. I also had had one year of high school French. When I got to Germany, I thought, we were in Munich, which was sort of, I won't say it's a party city, but Munich is a little different. It's more of an open—the further north you go in Germany or in most countries I guess, you get up to Hamburg everything is pretty much very formal and proper. And the farther south you come in the country until you get down to Munich, things are sort of a little more loose with Oktoberfest and things like that. Well I got to Munich and I thought, maybe I could start out my speech with a little bit of German, if I remembered enough of it.

So I put together the opening for this speech, just a little short paragraph, that said basically in German that it's been 20 some years since I studied German in college, and I cannot remember enough words at this point to give the whole speech, so I'll have to use an interpreter. I'm sorry. That's it. And I said

something like that in German. And it was fractured German because I didn't remember all the endings and the proper tenses and so on. But they got the biggest kick out of it, and I got, I won't say a standing ovation, but it was a roaring ovation because I had started this in German.

Well, I got to France then, in Paris I was going to give a speech in Paris. And I thought maybe I can do the same thing in French with what little I remembered out of high school. So out of a phrase book I put this little type opening in and it went over with a dull thud. The French do not like their language to be mis-handled. [Laughs] That was the last time I ever tried that. Once you get out in the countryside around Paris, we were out at Angers and some of those places, why people are just as friendly as could be. They were friendly in Paris, too, but I never tried the language thing again. That worked in Germany, but I remember it did not work at all in France.

That was a great trip and I had a little slide show we had put together for it. So we showed some slides and pictures, the launch and some of the results of it, and had some of the graphs that I could present to the scientific people. It was really a great success. But I think NASA was wise in the first place, though, in not sending people out right after their missions to do like the Soviets had done. It did show that we were serious about this; we were in it for the long haul and that the scientific results were the important thing and that's what we were going to share with the rest of the world. We drew that difference at every stop so that they would know, and gave them as much information as we had of what the scientific results had been up until that time, and they appreciated it.

THOMAS: So the trip in '65 was so successful that they repeated it? '66?

SEN. GLENN: It was much the same type.

THOMAS: I forget which year it was, but one of those years you met with the Pope, as I recall?

SEN. GLENN: Yes we did. He was in Rome, and they had set up a meeting with the Pope.

There was a man travelling with us on that, Gil Ousley. He was particularly helpful in that area. We had a very good meeting and the Pope came in. We're not Catholic, but he gave Ann a rosary that we have in a frame at home, one of our most prized mementos of trips like that. We had a lengthy, well I don't know if it was a lengthy meeting, but I think as I recall now, it was like a half hour, forty-five minutes. For an audience with the Pope that's a huge amount of time. It doesn't usually happen that way. He wanted to talk about—wanted to know some of the specifics of what it was like to be in weightlessness and the spiritual aspects of it, about the bigger picture of one humankind, and those things. And so that was a very memorial meeting, also.

We've had the opportunity to meet a lot of religious leaders through the years—met Makarios, Archbishop Makarios, from the Greek Orthodox. That was quite a different experience. He was quite a flamboyant type character I felt. In this country I got to know Billy Graham and some people like that. I mentioned about Sam and some of the Buddhist people and the Buddhist temples we visited in Japan. I wish more people had a chance to visit some of these places like that, because I think it gives a little—tends to make you a little more tolerant

of some of the other religions. We tend to be left alone, prejudiced in the way we are brought up ourselves.

THOMAS: Let's leave NASA and sort of jump into politics a bit. After your Friendship 7 spaceflight, you became friends with President John F. Kennedy and especially with his brother, Robert Kennedy. Could you give us an idea of how they influenced your decision or did they influence your decision to go into politics?

SEN. GLENN: I think the general feeling out there is that I was pushed into politics by the Kennedys, but it was sort of the opposite in a way. When I had left NASA and was thinking about what I was going to do, I had known Bobby Kennedy pretty well by that time. We had been up around the White House. Bobby wanted us to come over to Hickory Hill for dinner one night. And so we did, and what he wanted to talk about was encouraging me to run for the Senate in Ohio. That was something I had thought of before that time, of course, and so it was great to think that they thought that I was capable of doing something like that. It would be a good addition to the Senate.

So I thought it over, and turned it down. I went back to see him again in his Senate office and told him I didn't want to do that, and for the reason that I hadn't been out of the program long enough, the space program. I still wanted to make my own contributions to the program. This was when I was still in the program. I still wanted to make my own contributions and thought it was my duty to do that. We hadn't had that many people go into space, and each one of us that went up had a duty, I felt, to really work with and get the other upcoming people

prepared for what they were doing to do, so we got the best return out of every space flight.

So I told him that, and he appreciated that. And so then, and that's what I was doing. Then we went along and we had November of '63, when President Kennedy was killed, and I guess along with every other American, I just sort of sat back and thought about our responsibilities to the country and how we could contribute the most. And it was a time when a lot of people were doing the same thing. I decided that I would run.

So I went back to Bobby again and told him that I had changed my mind. This was some time later. I told him that I was going to try and do it. The time was going to be short, and he felt it was too short, to get together a state-wide campaign and really go ahead and get it all together to be elected. So he advised against doing it at that time. I decided to go ahead and try it, and that's when I fell and got hurt and was out of circulation for a year after I had just started the campaign. And so it came back and later on ran and did not make it the first time, and was elected later on, and spent 24 years in the Senate.

THOMAS: When Bobby Kennedy first approached you about running for the Senate, was this part of the overall strategy in the '64 elections, to get his brother re-elected as President?

SEN. GLENN: Oh, if that was in the mix, he never told me that. I suppose politics being what it is, that may have been one thing they were thinking of. But it was never presented to me that way. It was just on the basis of, they thought I would be a good Senator, and if they had some other motives there, they never conveyed

those thoughts to me. It was on the basis that this was an opportunity, when it was first presented that they would back me and support my candidacy. That's when I turned it down, and then came back later, after President Kennedy was shot, and said I'd do it. By that time it was too short, and so there was no advance planning for me.

THOMAS: When you did decide to go ahead and run in '64, you were going to challenge the incumbent, Senator Steven Young. Did you have any sort of political organization behind you at that time?

SEN. GLENN: No, I didn't. We had a person who had been part of the NASA selection team. He was Navy lieutenant, Bob Voas, who set up our first training program for the first seven astronauts. And so we knew Bob and Bob and I had talked about this. He was very interested in politics. Bob was going to be my campaign manager here, and he came back and was actually working in Ohio at that time. He had left NASA and came back. The man who was going to do our publicity work, public relations work, was a man named Ford Eastman. He had been with NASA, PAO, public affairs office, at NASA. Ford was going to handle all of that.

So we had those two, and then we had some people in Ohio—Judge Bell, Jim Bell, who is passed away now, he was very encouraging. He was on the Ohio Supreme Court. For a while he had been out of that. He had left the court and was back in private practice. He was very influential in Democratic politics.

But as far as an organization, no, we had no organization at all. And of course the party itself was aligned with Steve Young as the incumbent Senator. And we had to back off from him. So we were pretty much starting from scratch

here. And I thought we could do it, and we had enough people expressing interest from all over the state, that I was quite encouraged by the way things were going.

The first couple of fundraisers we had were planned. We couldn't do them because I was still caught under the Hatch Act when we first came back here. All this time that I was with NASA, I was in the Marine Corps. And as a government employee in the Marine Corps, as a Marine, I came under the restrictions under the Hatch Act, which means that you cannot do active political campaigning. So while I had announced that I was going to run, I could not actually go out and campaign until the time period when I actually was out of the Marine Corps. I had some unused leave. I had taken all the leave that I could take that they would pay you for the leave back in those days—if you had excess leave because you couldn't take leave during the war and things like that. Most people had a lot of leave built up. Some of it you could take in pay and some of it you could not. And so it was in that period, I had I think it was 45 or 60 days of leave, and that's when I was here in Ohio organizing. I was on leave officially. But we couldn't go out and actually do campaigning. So that restricted us a little bit.

That's when I fell and was hurt. People who had been involved in the campaign wanted me to continue on, some of them did, wanted me to continue on and thought we could probably make it through and win, even though I wasn't able to campaign. But I didn't want to do it that way. That wasn't fair to people and I didn't want to do it anyway. Not that way. So the injury kept me tied down for about nine months before I got out of recovery from it.

THOMAS: As far as the relationship with the Ohio Democratic Party you had at this point in time, had you talked with anybody other than Judge Bell with connections with the Ohio Democratic Party?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, I had talked with some of the Democratic Party people, and they, in turn, had done considerable publicity work. There was a state convention about that time of interest because the state convention normally would just endorse the incumbent Steve Young. My impending candidacy, though, was one that a lot of people at the state level were backing, even though we weren't really organized yet. And so when we had the State Democratic Convention at that time, they didn't endorse. They stayed neutral. Well, that was—we considered that quite a victory, because here I was coming in as a new person against an incumbent senator, and that was looked at as a real switch in the party. That was one of the things that gave us a lot of confidence; that we were going to be able to do it.

THOMAS: I've read at the convention, due to the Hatch Act, you really couldn't go down on the floor, but people were coming up to you where you had a suite there in the hotel.

SEN. GLENN: Yes, we did. I couldn't go down and they had a public presentation of what I thought and what I hoped to do and why. But it was like a hope, I remember that very well. We did have a hotel suite and that was all legal to let people come, and if they wanted to come and talk to me, that was fine. And there were a lot of people who felt it was a new day in Ohio politics and they were going to back me. And so it was quite a time. The party was very much split over whether to back Steve Young as the incumbent, or to go with me as a new challenger.

THOMAS: I bet Steve Young wasn't too happy about any of this.

SEN. GLENN: Steve Young was very bitter about this as a matter of fact. [Laughs] He made no bones about it. His statements were very deprecating type statements towards me of all kinds. As I recall there were statements along the line of, I was last in the line of chimps who had been in space—on the monkey flights of course. I made the first orbital flight for a human being for this country, but in preface to that we had had some of the monkeys or chimps up on space flights.

So Steve tried to make a lot out of that. He was a very bitey acerbic person in his personal comments at that time, and was known as that kind. He was a very outspoken type person. He wrote a book once, and it was a compilation of letters he had sent back to people. Some of them were really insulting to people who had written to him as a Senator, and he had thought their questions were so stupid, that he had sent them back with rather nasty replies. One of them I remember, he had written back to somebody and said that, "I'm letting you know that I got this letter from some idiot who said so and so and so and so and signed your name to it." [Laughs] And letters of that type. Anyway, Steve was known for that sort of thing. So he was not enamored with my going to be an opponent to him.

THOMAS: Speaking about sort of old line politicians, Congressman Wayne Hayes was involved in your campaign at that point in time?

SEN. GLENN: Well, he was, and he had backed me and made some speeches on it and he sort of bucked some of the state people. I think he was maybe at the convention and taking a part in that. And later, when I was hurt and had to get out, I was in the

hospital, and when I made the decision to get out, I remember he was very much against my decision to get out. He thought I should just stay in and run from the hospital bed. And when I could get up I could get up and until then keep running.

But the doctors were predicting at that time it was going to take somewhere from nine months to a year before I would have full recovery. There would be about a third of the people who had the injury that I had to the inner ear—left ear that messed with my balance system—and it would be about a third of the people who would have some lifetime residual difficulty or something like that. Would not get a full recovery.

Well, that put the odds in my favor certainly with two-thirds of people getting a full recovery, but I just didn't want to run on that basis at all. And not knowing what I was going to do or whether I'd get full recovery and try to run a campaign or not. I just wasn't going to run that way. And so when I went through—as I recall Wayne was pretty unhappy when I withdrew. But that was what I had to do.

THOMAS: He was doing this; he was making a grab, to head the Democratic Party in Ohio?

SEN. GLENN: I don't know, I couldn't say what the motivation was there. He had been active for a long time, been in Congress for a long time. Whether his motivation for backing me was anything other than just straight wanting me to run, I couldn't say.

THOMAS: Another person, I've read, who advised you and helped you a bit, was someone from the Saturday Evening Post, a reporter, a Don Overdorfer.

SEN. GLENN: Well, Don Overdorfer was a reporter and he wrote a lot of things back at that time. And he was willing to be an advisor, although he wasn't full time. As I recall, he wasn't full-time with the campaign. But we knew him well.

THOMAS: He covered politics prior to this and so he was well versed on how things went.

SEN. GELNN: Yes, very much so.

THOMAS: One of the results, we touched on this a little bit, as far as the Steve Young criticism, but you received a good deal of criticism, both from people in the party and Republicans, and just the general public, for leaving NASA and going into politics.

SEN. GLENN: Yes, there were some people. I think some of it came, and I hate to even talk about this because it sounds like I'm not being very modest—lack of humility to say some of this, but I think at that time we'd been sort put on a pedestal by a lot of people. We were looked at as being above politics and above all sorts of things. I'd been willing to risk my life for the country and so on in war and in the space program. And we had sort of—people had sort of admired us to the point where they were pointing us out to their kids and other people and then you declare yourself as one political party or the other was—and I had approaches from the Republican Party as well as the Democratic Party when I was getting out of NASA. And so to have me declared and run for public office I think disappointed a lot of people.

I mean, I don't know what people think you're supposed to do at that point, stay above it all and never do anything more in your life than what you've done because you're afraid you'll foul it up. When I think about that though, I'm

reminded about what Eisenhower once said, that one of the biggest mistakes of his life, if he had been interested just in his own benefit, then one of the greatest mistakes of his life was getting into politics at all and running for President, because he lost, the day he declared he lost 50% of the people of the country in support. And I think that may be what I went through to some extent.

I'm not trying to compare myself with Eisenhower and his presidency or anything like that. But he was right. People sort of had him on a pedestal. He was our commanding general. We looked at him as being the brains, sort of a major contributing factor to winning World War II. He comes back triumphant with all the people coming back from Europe. People sort of had him in a category that was above politics. Then when he declared that he was Republican and going to run for President or they talked him into it, he went down in many people's estimation just because he was going to be involved in something lesser than he had been involved in before.

I think maybe that same thing occurred in my case or our case. People had—I'm not overstating when I say that we were received back in those days almost with adulation. It was something that was hard to believe. If you're in a parade and have kids and you meet people, they break down crying and things like that, just because it was just such an emotional experience. It was hard to believe that it actually happened many, many times. Eisenhower wrote some later about that experience that he had had, too. So I think he was right, that probably 50% of the people approximately, the country being split politically almost even, he lost 50% of his admirers the day he declared for political office.

Well, does that mean that you should sit back and not do it and just rest on your laurels? No, I couldn't see that. I think at each point in your life you look out and see what the possibilities were and whatever the odds are on the possibilities. You pick the one that you think is most advantageous, the one where you can do the most good, and decide to go for it. There will be a lot of people who will admire you for that and back you for that and there will be some other people who will say, "I can't bear to see him get mixed up in the nastiness of politics." And yet politics is the—you know it comes from the old Greek word meaning business of all the people. So being involved in politics, whether you are Eisenhower or in a lesser position as we were, I saw it as one of the most honorable professions you could have because you are representing other people. You are representing their hopes and their desires and dreams of the future, too. And I think it much more of a responsibility than that.

Anyway, that was sort of—you asked about whether we were universally received well. No, we were not and I think that is what was behind it.

THOMAS: You talked a little bit earlier about the Hatch Act and the restrictions you had on that. That law really restricted the types of things you could do during this campaign, didn't it?

SEN. GLENN: During the first part of it, yes, while I was still in the Marine Corps. Let me spell that out a little bit because that explains some things. When I was hurt—I had this bathroom accident and fell and hit my head on the rail along the tub. The doctors couldn't find what the problem was for a while. If I moved my head fast at all, not even fast, if I moved my head even at a moderate rate, it was super

sensitive and I'd spin up in the whole world and I'd have to sit and be very quiet for a minute or two to get my balance again. Finally by taking x-rays at some different angles, once I got down to Houston at Wilford Hall, in a hospital down there, they were able to determine there was a crack down through that labyrinth area that let blood and fluid collect in that area. And just made it super sensitive and the doctor said that the recovery I would get would probably take somewhere in the area of 9 to 12 months, something like that. Whatever recovery I got at that time I'd have to live with for the rest of my life. About two-thirds of the people would get full recovery and about a third would get some deficiency in their balance for the rest of their life. So it was something that I couldn't take lightly.

Now, this happened when I was still on this extended leave period here in Ohio and was still technically in the Marine Corps. I had submitted my resignation from the Marine Corps. But then when I was hurt and I was in Grant Hospital here in Columbus for several days, and then they took me on a Medivac flight to Milford Hall Hospital in San Antonio. At that point, I didn't know how long this was going to be a problem, but I knew that I'd still rather be in the military with the military healthcare guarantee, than be outside. So I withdrew my resignation from the Marine Corps. So I was still technically in the Marine Corps and the Marines of course were not going to boot me out because I'd been hurt.

So all the time I was recovering I was still in the Marine Corps and didn't resign until I very fortunately, about nine or ten months later, did have full recovery. It sort of occurred in plateaus and stages that I went through over the

part of the year. So I was still in the Marine Corps and so I was still covered under the Hatch Act, which is what you asked. So during that year I couldn't actually—I didn't know whether I was would be back on active status politically or not. But anyway, I stayed in the Marine Corps during that time period, while I was in the hospital, just to make sure of that and had the best of the medical help. That's the reason I stayed in.

During that time period Annie—before I had made the decision to get out—Annie and her good friend, Rene Carpenter, Scott Carpenter's wife, they decided they would continue campaigning and try to keep this alive until I had made up my mind whether I could get a recovery or not. So they spent a lot of time campaigning around Ohio. Annie at that time was still a severe stutterer. So it took a lot of guts for her to stand up before a political crowd and very haltingly try to make an introduction of Rene, who would then give the principles of the campaign that I had planned to say myself. But when I finally decided to get out, why they stopped of course, too. But because of the Hatch Act, I could not put out any press releases or anything like that myself at all during that time period.

THOMAS: You got injured about, I would say, timeline-wise here, you declared in January, were injured in February, and withdrew in March '64?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, late February. Then went into Wilford Hall and was making no improvement and I don't know how long it was exactly before I decided this was not going to work—just wasn't meant to have people on the hook for that length of time, and ask them to stick with me through the end of that. Because we didn't know what might occur. That wasn't fair. It wasn't fair politically. It wasn't fair

to the people of Ohio, and it wasn't the way I wanted to run a campaign. So when I finally bowed out, then Rene and Annie stopped their operation and that ended it.

THOMAS: Okay, so they campaigned for three/four weeks there?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, a month or six weeks, something like that, whatever it was. We had other people. Judge Bell, he had been a big supporter back then and the person working in his office, one of his lawyers, was Bill White. Bill White was very interested in this and had come on to work in the campaign. Those people were all being active while I was in the hospital. But when I made the decision the whole operation stopped completely.

THOMAS: And so you just didn't want to run on your name only?

SEN. GLENN: No, didn't want to. And there were people who thought that we could make it on "John Glenn," big name from the space program, but I didn't want to run that way and I didn't think it was right, number one.

THOMAS: So there you are, you're out of NASA, and you're injured. Would you say this was one of the low points of your life looking back?

SEN. GLENN: Yes, that whole thing. That really, I'll tell you, talk about peaks and valleys in life. Here I was in 1962, all at once, bang, the world knew you. You were the subject of headlines all over the world. And you're lauded by Congress and everybody else, and so it was a crest we just tried to take in stride. I think we did a pretty good job of that. But then you go from that kind of a peak and you have the attention of President Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy and people wanting me to get involved in this other area. From that kind of a peak and then, bang, in an

instant you have an accident. You can't perform the way you want to perform. There you are, flat on your back in a hospital bed, able to move your head a little bit, but not much. You've gone from a peak to nothing. It's brought home how tenuous our lives can be sometimes.

But we came back from that later and were active politically. Even after that, the first time we ran, that I ran again after that when I came back, was against Howard Metzenbaum in the primary, the Democratic primary. Once again, Howard had been a very active person in the party for many, many years. He was wealthy and he had submitted, contributed to most of the Democratic Party entities around the state, and had been an active Democrat for all these years. So he was very popular.

So when I finally ran again, I did not make it that time. Howard beat me by 13,000 votes state-wide, and we did run a full force campaign that time. One of our problems was, we couldn't raise enough money. People thought I was a shoe-in against Howard Metzenbaum in the primary, and so we had trouble raising money. And people would say, "Save your money and we'll really get behind you in the general." I needed the money in the primary. I'm sure I had a lot of failings, then, too, but that was one of them. We couldn't raise enough money to put on the campaign like we wanted. And so I lost to Howard. That was a bitter pill.

But then I had to decide, was I really serious about this or was I going to just go into business and go a different track with the rest of my life. So while we did go into business and we were with—that was another story about the business

we got into—but we got into the business world. So we did have a better income than I thought I would ever have at the time.

I decided that I would stick with politics enough to see whether I really could make it or not. So it was about a three-and-a-half, four year period, where Annie and I attended almost every Democratic function in the State of Ohio I think. We drove thousands of miles around Ohio. We joke about it, saying, back in those days almost every dinner was rubber chicken and 22 caliber peas. The political food has increased dramatically through the years. I think most political dinners are pretty good now. Back in those days we went to county dinners and county fundraisers and state-wide functions as well as all the local functions we could attend, as many as we could attend. We built up our cadre of support around the state. So then I finally was elected and was elected four times in Ohio. So we served 24 years.

THOMAS: Getting back to your time of rehabilitation from your injury, one of the things that came out of this was a book of letters that you had gotten following your flight. Could you explain a little bit about how this book came about?

SEN GLENN: Yes, I thought that was sort of interesting. The book was called, *I Listened to Your Heart Beat*. What it was, after the flight, we just received tons of mail. I mean just sacks and sacks and sacks of mail. NASA decided at that time, we were getting so much mail, the amount of mail in the first six months after the flight, nobody has an accurate count. It was somewhere between 350,000 and 500,000 pieces of mail. NASA thought we were duty bound to answer all of that mail and obviously I couldn't answer all of it myself.

So NASA set up a separate Glenn mail room; called it the “Glenn Mail Room.” A fellow who is gone now, his name was Steve Grillo, who was in charge of administration at NASA headquarters. He set up this mail room with some people in it to actually answer all of this mail. He wanted to sign it by robo. I didn’t want to do the robo thing, so Steve signed it. He had the letters all made out, “Dear so and so,” whatever it was that they had commented on. There was my spot to sign down at the bottom, and he signed them “By Steve Grillo,” and signed his name to it. So that’s the way we handled the mail.

Anyway, out of all that mail that came in, there was a lot of it that was funny, some it was exhilarating, some of it was pitiful. People sort of let their emotions all hang out in whatever their interests were when they wrote a letter after a big event like that. In fact, some of the sociologists they did a study on some of that mail later on to determine when people wrote and what type of people wrote after an event like that, and so on. There would be a number of letters, though, that were very interesting, some from kids and some from older folks, wanting all sorts of things. Because you were famous at all once, you were automatically famous; people had to feel that you were, I guess, you were like God or something. If I wanted to I could grant their wish, almost.

So I had seen some of this mail that Steve had his people save out while they were going through the mail. One day I told him, when you’re going through this stuff, when you find letters of particular interest like that—and we called this kind of mail “special interest mail”—when you find one that’s funny, that’s very human or very emotional or whatever it is, just toss it in a separate box

over here. So we had wound up out of that first year or so after the flight, they wound up with a number of boxes that we called “SI mail” that they had saved. So that was still available.

When I was out of everything for a year, I was flat on my back during a lot of it. I decided I’d like to look through some of that mail. We came up with the idea of maybe taking ones that were particularly interesting and putting them together and doing a book with them. So that’s what we did. That was my major activity. I worked with Annie and worked with Rene Carpenter from next door, and went through the mail and then broke it down into different categories of mail; what was religious mail and engineering type mail and kid mail and things like that. Religious mail of the type, “God is going to get you because you should not have gone into God’s heaven.” Signed by “so and so.” And things like that. A little girl writes—you can just see her mother telling her every time she left to go to school or someplace, “Don’t forget your hankie.” And so this girl writes me that she hoped I didn’t forget my hankie. Well, you can just see her mother. And there were a lot of things like that that were very interesting. Some of them very humorous, some of them very touching. Some people thought you could do wonders for them if I would just do it. Some wrote their son is in prison and “He’s a good boy,” and his mother would go through a whole big part about the great things this boy had done before he made some mistake and he’s in prison. If I can get him released he’ll be a better person, and things like that.

Anyway, we put together this book. One of the kids—when I was in orbital flight there was an EKG that was on my body, electrocardiogram, and the

thump of that was put on radio once, of what my heart rate was. They put that on the radio. This little girl had heard that and so she wrote in her letter about how she had listened to my heart beat. And there was a P.S. at the end of it. I thought that was sort of indicative of the whole thing. In fact, I had almost listened, with all of the things these people had written, I had almost listened to the heartbeat of this country. And so that's where the book title came from, "P.S. I listened to your heartbeat." As I recall, the publishers didn't like that. They wanted the title of the book to be, "Letters to John Glenn," which would sell a lot more books. I guess they thought it would anyway. I insisted on it being the other way because I wanted to express what I wanted to express.

THOMAS: It was sort of a productive way to pass the time.

SEN. GLENN: Well, it was. You couldn't put all the letters in you know. It's not anything that was a huge bestseller or anything, but it was interesting. We had a lot of comments on the book after it was over. I still have people to this day, here we are how many years later, 40 or 50 years later, something like that, and I get one in the mail every once in a while still, wanting autographs. I have picked it up a time or two since then, too, and looked back through some of those letters. I still get a big kick out of them.

THOMAS: That is pretty much what I wanted to cover today, unless there's anything else about life in NASA after the flight or the '64 campaign that you'd like to talk about.

SEN. GLENN: Well, let's see. What year was it when Gilligan won?

THOMAS: That would have been in 1970. I thought we'd get into Bobby Kennedy's presidential campaign, and then on into Ohio politics in the next session.

SEN. GLENN: Okay. I was going to say that was when Gilligan wanted me to run for lieutenant governor. That was real political pressure.

THOMAS: Okay, we'll get into that next time.

SEN. GLENN: Okay, I can think a little bit more about what I want to talk about.