



THE ALEXANDRIA ORAL HISTORY CENTER  
OFFICE OF HISTORIC ALEXANDRIA  
CITY OF ALEXANDRIA



# Oral History Interview

with

## Adam Ebbin

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**Interviewers:** Francesco De Salvatore

**Narrator:** Adam Ebbin

**Location of Interview:**  
500 N Washington St, Alexandria, VA 22314

**Date of Interview:** 07/14/2023

**Transcriber:** Jaclyn Maraldo

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**Summary:**

*Adam Ebbin talks about his early interest in politics and his experience in various Virginia government offices.*

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<b>General</b>	Volunteering for campaigns, campaigning for office, Virginia and New York politics, 1980s political climate, 1980s gay life, Virginia Partisans Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club, passing progressive legislation, working in Congress, running for Senate, Virginia Values Act, Adult Protective Services Act, Medicaid, Medicare, Virginia Constitution, division in the United States
<b>People</b>	Tammy, Ruth, James, Melissa, George McGovern, Gerald Ford, Senator Gary Hart, Walter Frederick Fritz Mondale, Ronald Reagan, Jesse Helms, Tony Knowles, John Anderson, Jimmy Carter, Jacob Javits, Marshall Coleman, Chuck Robb, Bernadette Coleman, Mario Cuomo, Nancy Dunning, Councilwoman Lois Walker, Barry Forbes, Don Pretzer, Jim Moran, Jay Fissette, Paul Smedberg, Mark Warner, Senator Glenn Younkin, Karen Darner, Senator Patsy Ticer, George Floyd, Donald Trump, Mitt Romney, Barack Obama Ken Cuccinelli

<b>Places</b>	Commack, NY, NYC, Broadway, Washington D.C., American University, New Hampshire, North Carolina, Anchorage Alaska, Illinois, Long Island, Auburn Village, Del Ray, Mount Vernon Avenue, Calvert Grille, Calvert apartment building/Del Ray Tower, French Quarter Café, Freddy's, Arlington, VA, Evening Star Café, Fairfax County, Richmond, VA, Cora Kelly and Mount Vernon precinct, King Street, Amazon HQ2, Jamestown, London, England
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**Adam Ebbin** [00:00:00] I'm Adam Ebbin, a Virginia State Senator, age 59. And today is July 14th, 2023. We're taping this at 500 North Washington Street in Old Town.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:00:12] Uh, I'm Francesco De Salvatore. We are at 500 North Washington Street. And today is July 14th, 2023. Um, so, yeah. So, Mr. Ebbin, let's start from the beginning. Can you describe where you grew up?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:00:27] Sure. I grew up in Commack, New York, a suburb of New York City, about an hour and something outside of New York City on Long Island.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:00:38] Yeah. What are some of your memories from growing up there?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:00:40] It wasn't a particularly diverse place, but excellent pizza, bagels, and easy access to the beach.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:00:49] Um. What do you mean by not being a diverse place? Can you say more about that?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:00:55] Yeah, everyone there was either Jewish, Irish, or Italian where I went to school. Not a lot of people of color, not a lot of openly gay people, just kind of a suburban place that wasn't terribly diverse considering it was only an hour and something from New York City.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:01:16] Yeah, it also sounds like New York, too. Irish, Italian, Jewish. Yeah. Well, I mean, as you look back on it now, like, what was that like for you to be in a setting like that?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:01:30] It was okay, but I spent some time in the city on the weekends visiting with my father. My parents were divorced, so that was kind of nice to go into the city and be exposed to a little bit more culture and diversity.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:01:45] What are some of your memories from that? From, like, visiting the city?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:01:51] Seeing shows on Broadway and just bustling and seeing my dad's business that he worked at, Colgate-Palmolive, and, um, just a lot more going on in the city than in the suburbs.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:02:10] How do you think that shaped you?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:02:13] I don't know that it really did. Just perhaps made me a little bit more cosmopolitan than some kids my age.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:02:27] Yeah. Can you describe your parents? Like who were they?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:02:31] Sure, my father was a marketing executive, and my mother was in a few different businesses. Mostly sales. And I grew up with my mom and my stepfather. They wanted to have a good upbringing for their kids. Um, I don't know what else you know about them.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:02:56] What are some of your memories with them?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:02:59] Going to the beach, spending time at the beach. Um, let's see. Family trips to Washington and to upstate New York. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:03:16] And you had siblings, right?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:03:20] Yeah. I have an older sister and a younger sister. Yeah. And stepbrother and stepsister as well.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:03:30] And what are their names?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:03:33] Uh, my older sister is Tammy, my younger sister is Ruth. And my stepbrother and stepsister [are] James and Melissa.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:03:42] Do you have memories that come to mind with them?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:03:48] Um, I mean, just growing up. Nothing terribly exciting. Not really. I mean, I don't know what you want to know. You want to know a little bit of reality or I don't know?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:04:04] That's ok. Yeah, it's nothing specific, I'm just curious. Yeah, I guess. And I'm curious, as you were growing up what were moments that politicized you?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:04:15] Um, well, I was active in student government in school, but my mom was a volunteer for George McGovern's campaign in 1972 for president. So I took an interest in that. I read a lot of books. I think they were called The Making of the President about different presidential elections. I thought that was interesting.

And a relative of ours was involved in the state Republican Party. So he got his tickets when President [Gerald] Ford came to town running for reelection to campaign rally. So I went to that and I volunteered for both local Republicans and Democrats at different times, going door to door and handing out campaign literature and stuff. You know, I followed the news and that sort of thing. I used to watch, you know, when there'd be a presidential election, [I'd] stay up late and watch and see who was going to win and that sort of thing.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:05:12] Did you know then that you would want to get into politics? You think?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:05:16] I thought I did. But I think there's a different level on, you know, like, when a kid says they want to be an astronaut or something compared to actually doing it. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:05:24] Yeah. Yeah. And so it sounds like you were thinking about it even as a kid. And like, do you think those moments shaped that? Or was there something else?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:05:43] Well, I was always interested in, like, you know, the national level. But eventually someone came to our door who was running for county legislator, and I volunteered for their campaign. And I don't know that I dreamed of being a county legislator or anything. But I did go to a rally once in Albany. Um, and that was interesting. But then when I moved to Virginia, I met people who were state legislators and went to different campaign events and so forth and thought about it on a more realistic level, I guess. But ultimately, when I got involved, it was because there was an opening and it kind of happened a little bit more spontaneously than a planned trajectory.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:06:40] And so, just to clarify, so you were volunteering like when you were younger, like in high school?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:06:49] In junior high school and high school, yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:06:51] Oh, okay.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:06:52] I don't know how much of high school, yeah, I was.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:06:54] Yeah. Interesting. And so tell us, so you moved to D.C. [District of Columbia] to start.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:07:03] I came here to college at American University in 1981. And then in 1989, I moved from Maryland, where I was living when I was working for an ad agency and for the Washington City paper and advertising sales. I moved to Alexandria and then eventually picked up my interest in politics again.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:07:27] Yeah. I'm just curious, can you tell us a little bit about your experience at American [University]? What were some of the moments that stand out to you that sort of shaped your career path?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:07:39] Well, they did have a lot of speakers who came in, who were national politicians and so forth. And that was interesting to me. I used to attend those things, but I did an internship in 1983 and [19]84 with Senator Gary Hart's presidential campaign. And that was really interesting to me to be involved in a campaign of someone who's running for president from before they were at 1% in the national polls or less, to them winning the New Hampshire primary and becoming an upset, almost frontrunner for a time in the race against [Walter Frederick "Fritz"] Mondale for the Democratic nomination in 1984.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:08:20] Mm hmm. That's great. Were there any other moments from university that stand out to you?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:08:30] Not really. I mean, in what regard?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:08:33] Wasn't there a group that you were part of in college?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:08:41] In college? No.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:08:41] There was not a group? Oh, okay. I thought there was a group where you guys brought speakers in. No?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:08:47] Mm mm.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:08:48] No? Okay, sorry, I must be misremembering. Okay. And I'm just curious, so, you know, you were coming up in the 80s, right? And, uh, and I'm just curious, can you give us a portrait of just, like, what was the political climate you were growing up in? It was a, you know, HIV/AIDS [human immunodeficiency virus/acquired immunodeficiency syndrome] epidemic. Ronald Reagan was president. I'm just curious. Yeah. Give us a portrait. It's like, yeah, well, what was happening in D.C.[District of Columbia]?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:09:13] Well, there was a lot of contrast and combat on the national scene among Democrats and Republicans. I was a Democrat by then, and there were efforts to defeat, like Jesse Helms, who was an arch conservative senator from North Carolina. And I got a job at a political consulting firm in Virginia where I got a chance to meet some politicians and that sort of thing. So that was interesting. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:09:51] And like, who are some of the politicians that you met?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:09:54] I met a guy who was the mayor of Anchorage, Alaska, who ran for U.S. [United States] Senate. I believe his name was Tony Knowles. And just to go to events in D.C. [District of Columbia] that maybe they would expose me to. Or I met, not when I was in college, before I was in college, John Anderson, who ran for president as an Independent against [Ronald] Reagan and [Jimmy] Carter in 1980. That was interesting. He was a moderate Republican from Illinois. And he came to AU [American University] to speak and he ran for president. I helped throw a fundraiser for him when he was running for president, a Long Island fundraiser when I was still in high school.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:10:44] What made him interesting for you? I'm just curious.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:10:51] He was progressive, but he was still a Republican. And at that time in New York, there were liberal Republicans like Jacob Javits and others who were, you know, very much for civil rights and not necessarily arch conservative.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:11:08] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. And as you were kind of forming, you know, some of your political ideas, like were there thinkers or theorists? Or just like, what were things that kind of shaped your idea of being a Democrat?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:11:25] Well I'll tell you, I went to a meeting of the College Republicans when I went to American University because my mom's cousin's husband was New York state Republican chair and I wanted to see what they had to say. And they had a guy who was involved in a campaign in Virginia for a candidate named Marshall Coleman, who was running against Chuck Robb, I think maybe for governor or a lieutenant governor in fall of 1981. And he showed us a handout and he said, "This is a device that Mrs. [Bernadette] Coleman uses with the lady voters. It's a cookbook, if you will, but you won't find any recipes in it for chitlins or black eyed peas, if you know what I mean." And I barely knew what chitlins or black eyed peas were, but I knew that it was not something I was interested in. It was, you know, obviously a kind of race-baiting kind of rhetoric. And it made me feel uncomfortable.



And around that time, they forced out my mom's cousin's husband from the New York State Republican primary for governor, and I re-registered so I could vote for Mario Cuomo in the Democratic primary. And I switched my registration to Democratic at that point, and I never switched it back. I've been a Democrat ever since, both because of that and for many other reasons as well.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:12:47] Yeah. Yeah. Interesting. Um, so you then you move to Alexandria when?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:12:56] In fall of 1989, one of my old college roommates and his wife bought some condos in Auburn Village in Alexandria. And I bought one as well when they told me that I could get a good deal on a condo there. So I did.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:13:11] I am curious so, like, what was your first impressions of Alexandria at that time when you moved there? Like, well, like, tell us, like, what you saw in the city.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:13:19] Well, the area where I was in Auburn Village, adjacent to Del Rey, was a little bit rougher than it is now. Um, you know, I hadn't visited at night before moving, so it was just a little bit rougher than I anticipated. Not rough, but just, it wasn't as, I don't know what the word is. Um, tranquil, as tranquil as Del Rey seems to be today.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:13:54] Yeah and could you describe, kind of paint a portrait of what the neighborhood looked like?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:14:05] It looked similar with less development and, you know, not as much activity on Mount Vernon Avenue in terms of cute little shops and, you know, community-oriented things. Like now you've got the Del Rey Halloween parade and the first Thursday on the Avenue, the Art on the Avenue annual festival. They didn't have those kinds of things. Nancy Dunning, who was my realtor eventually, was involved in a lot of that, as was Councilwoman Lois Walker, whose campaign I managed eventually. She was active in setting up what's now, I think, the Del Rey Business Association.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:14:51] Okay. And can you maybe describe what were the businesses that were there when you were [there]?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:14:57] I don't really recall. Well, you know, there was a place called the Calvert Grille, which was a great diner on the ground floor of the Calvert

apartment building, which has since been reconstructed and changed its name to I think it's called, I don't know if it's called Del Rey Tower or something else.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:15:15] Mm hmm. Okay.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:15:16] Yeah, but that was great. It was nice to be able to walk over on the weekend, or any day, really, and get breakfast there. Or dinner.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:15:24] Right. Yeah. And I'm curious. So can you talk about, like, what was gay life in Alexandria at that time? Like, late 80s?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:15:32] Well, I didn't know a lot of gay life in Alexandria at that time. But, you know, we're not really a suburb, but we are a suburb in that a lot of the gay attractions, if you want to call them that, are in Washington, D.C [District of Columbia]. But there was a, um, a bar eventually that opened at 808 King Street called the French Quarter Cafe or 808 King. And I think that might have been the first gay bar in Northern Virginia, or at least the first one that I became aware of. The only one really, at that time. Now there's Freddy's in Arlington. Um, but that was pretty popular. I was a young person in my 20s and 30s and I think that there were more, like, house parties and that kind of social scene for gay people than a lot of commercial establishments.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:16:34] Mhm. So yeah. Could you describe that bar to us? Like what did it look like?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:16:41] Uh, just like any other restaurant slash bar. I mean it wasn't that exciting. I don't mean to demean it. It was a bar that happened to be gay.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:16:52] Yeah. And were there any events that they held?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:16:58] Not that I recall. I mean, I'm sure they must have. And eventually there was something behind Evening Star Cafe. Upstairs there's a room, a bar, and they would have something like once a month. I don't know if it was like the 3rd Thursday or 2nd Wednesday or what it was, but a monthly kind of a gay night that some local people set up.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:17:22] Okay. And like, what would they do? It would just be a hang out?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:17:32] Yeah, same thing at any bar. Just a gathering, but a chance for people to see each other, yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:17:34] Yeah. And, like, who were leaders at that time, like in the community, in the LGBTQ [Lesbian Gay Bisexual Transgender Queer] community in Alexandria that you remember?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:17:48] Um, 2 people come to mind, one named Barry Forbes and someone else named Don Pretzer, who really lives in Fairfax County. And he was very involved in politics and helped me co-found the Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club that we started in Virginia. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:18:14] Wow. Yeah. And so can you tell us more about that?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:18:17] Yeah, that was called the Virginia Partisans Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club. Don had been active in getting other gay people involved in politics, and I think he was involved in a fundraiser that people in the community had helped organize for then Congressman or candidate for Congress, Jim Moran, who was elected in 1990. And then, some of the folks who he had involved in that, he recruited to form a gay and lesbian Democratic club that we had that was pretty successful for a time. Yeah, we would organize people to run to be delegates to the state and local Democratic conventions around the state. Um, we ran a big ad, a full page ad in the Washington Blade a few times, encouraging people to vote for a slate of candidates, like in the 1992 presidential election for people who would select the delegates to the national convention.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:19:21] Okay. Did you face challenges creating this club?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:19:28] Well, a lot of people were really encouraging and happy to see it, but I think there might have been some trepidation from some political leaders in how much openly gay involvement they wanted in, at least at the state level, in Democratic campaigns, because it could be seen as perhaps a liability. You know, some people might not be comfortable with it. But among Democrats, people were pretty supportive, at least in Alexandria, Arlington, and in the parts of Fairfax that we worked in. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:20:04] It sounds great. Yeah. Um, and I'm curious, so, like, were there any, like, local campaigns or things that you worked on or this organization worked on in Alexandria at that time?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:20:16] Yeah, uh, eventually, in 1993, in Arlington, I ran the campaign for Jay Fisette, to run for the Arlington County Board, and he was

nominated as Democratic nominee in a special election in the winter of [19]93. And then soon, within a few years, Paul Smedberg ran for the City Council in Alexandria and became the first openly gay nominee for City Council in Alexandria. They both lost their first general elections, but both went on to be elected within a few years separately.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:20:52] Okay. And yeah, so as you're working on these campaigns, like, what was it like being in Virginia at that time, working on these campaigns, talking about these issues?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:21:05] Yeah, I'd say empowering because people, in the gay community at least, liked the idea of being represented and participating. And openly gay people were in some cases more of a novelty than a commonplace thing. There was no Will and Grace. And, you know, you didn't see gay characters on mainstream TV [television]. And in, you know, in the movies now it seems like there's always a gay nextdoor neighbor, if not a gay main character in some cases. So that was a really big deal then. You just didn't see it. And so people were very, in the community, were very encouraging. And I think a lot of straight people were supportive as well.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:21:46] Mm hmm. That's great. And so, okay, so you're working on these early campaigns. And so then when did it kind of crystallize for you, like, maybe it's time for me to run?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:21:58] Well, our Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club continued to be active. And I had been involved in Mark Warner's campaign for governor. And I decided to seek a position with his administration. And he appointed me as his Chief Deputy Commissioner of Labor and Industry. And I thought that would be a good place to learn more about how state government works and eventually perhaps to become qualified to run for office myself when, you know, when there was an opening that I felt like I could compete for, but I thought that would be in the future. And then I was not in Richmond very long when a state delegate from Arlington whose district went into Alexandria as well, Karen Darner, announced she was going to retire. And I've been pretty active in Arlington as well as Alexandria. So I decided to run and I won a 5-way race by 43 votes. A really intense competition. The 2 largest precincts were in Alexandria, the Cora Kelly and Mount Vernon precinct, and I won those with about 50 something percent of the vote. And then in Arlington, there were 4 candidates. And among the 5 of us, we split the vote. So, you know, Alexandria really put me over the top and gave me that big 43 vote edge to get elected.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:23:26] Yeah, I'm curious, so on that campaign, like, what are some standout moments for you as you look back on it?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:23:38] A lot of the people who I had helped with our Virginia Partisans Gay and Lesbian Democratic Club had really shown up and helped me. I had left my job in Richmond, which was a good-paying job, to run for this office, which is not a high-paying office, and really knocked on a lot of doors and raised a lot of money. And everything seemed to just kind of gel together. My parents came down from New York, my mother and stepfather, and campaigned for me, and that was really helpful. I brought my mom with me and my stepfather to some churches. And also they they stood at Cora Kelly during the Alexandria municipal election in 2003. And then while I stood at one precinct, they stood at the other. And then, you know, we switched on the day of the general election. And a lot of people would ask me for years afterwards about my mother and stepfather from meeting them.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:24:56] Yeah. And what did you learn about politics during that campaign? What were things that you're like, oh, this is a lesson?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:25:10] Well, I don't know that I learned any, like, secret sauce. But it's pretty basic that just knocking on doors and asking people for their votes and raising enough money to send the mail to follow up is very, uh, what's the word? It pays off. And also that your first campaign is always your hardest because people don't know you, they don't have as much a reason. You don't have a list of people who've written checks to you before for your campaign fund. So, you know, you really have to put a lot of effort into that first race and it pays off. You know, you don't want to take a few days off and then lose by 43 votes. I'd rather work straight through and win by 43 votes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:26:04] Yeah. Yeah. And so you entered the House of Delegates and so you were there for, you know, almost over, or about a decade, right?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:26:13] 8 years.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:26:14] 8 years. So what are some pieces of legislation that you worked on during that period that you want to mention?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:26:22] Well, my first year I passed amendments to the Adult Protective Services Act, which had to do with adults who were at risk or incapacitated or taken advantage of, that sort of thing, and mandated reporters for people who became aware of adults, seniors, who were being taken advantage of. So that was one. Eventually, in a coalition, we passed a bill to allow life insurance beneficiaries in Virginia to be other than just your legal spouse. We passed a bunch of things. Let's see what else? Oh, eventually we expanded Medicaid to, um, this might have been in

the Senate, to include immigrant mothers for prenatal care. Um. Yeah, that was in the Houses. I'm not sure if that was in the House or the Senate, but I was in the minority, so it was challenging. It was a lot of defensive against legislation, but it was pretty negative against gay people. There were bills to try and restrict gay-straight alliance organizations in schools, bills to petition the US [United States] Congress to pass a federal marriage amendment, bills to restrict gay people from being able to adopt children, all kinds of things. Those particular ones didn't pass, but they did pass, in some cases, the House of Delegates. Yeah. I had an easier time getting more done when I entered the Senate.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:28:21] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. So sounds like it was a tougher period, I guess, for you?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:28:28] Yeah, well, we were more on defense in the House. And also, I was 1 of 100 in the minority. At one point, we got close to as high as, like, 46 out of 100 seats, but we needed 51, of course. And then in the Senate, I'm 1 of 22 majority legislators now out of 40. And, you know, even when I got there, we've never been below 19 seats or something since I've been there. And we've had a tie a number of times with lieutenant governors breaking the tie.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:29:16] Yeah. What were some of your greatest challenges in the House Delegates? You said just the amount of anti-gay bills that are being passed.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:29:28] Yeah, a lot of anti-gay legislation. More dominance of, you know, rural conservative views over, you know, what I would consider Northern Virginia's character, which is more progressive. Um, so just kind of learning the ropes, you know? And I would say that, you know, if you're going to learn, if you're going to be in the minority, I'd rather be in the minority getting started, learn what you're going to learn, and then learn the rules and then be in the majority than to be in the majority and to, you know, lose that majority would be, you know, frustrating.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:30:12] Uh huh. How come? Like, why?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:30:16] Because the whole reason to be in Richmond or to be in a legislature is to get things done and to pass legislation. I didn't mention 1 fun bill I passed. I heard about [how] there was a place in Alexandria that was selling sangria from vats, and they were told it was illegal because you can't, in Virginia, do some things with alcohol, like you can't remove it from the bottle before it's been ordered from the server. So you can't soak fruit in it. You're also not allowed to mix alcohol, you know, spirits, with wine as you would in sangria, like if you put triple sec or

different spirits with wine. And so they actually gave them a hard time and told them they couldn't serve it that way. The whole place was like a tapas-themed place on King Street and I passed a bill to legalize sangria, so to speak, in Virginia. And then I have an annual sangria party every year for that.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:31:30] That's interesting. And so what led you then to run for Senate? Why switch?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:31:38] Well, I wanted to get more done. Senator [Patsy] Ticer was retiring and I thought there was a chance I could win. I'd been in the House for 8 years. Um, just saw an opportunity and went for it.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:31:51] And so, yeah, walk us through, like, what was the campaign like for Senate?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:31:55] And that was a pretty intense campaign and also a close one. That one was just won by a few hundred votes. Um, I competed with an Alexandria City Council member who's a friend of mine, and an Arlington school board member. And we all raised a considerable amount of money. It wasn't a negative campaign in that I directed most of my negativity to Ken Cuccinelli, who was the attorney general at that time, who was a very unpopular figure in Northern Virginia. And, um, people were happy to see I put in bills to limit him, the lawsuits that he could engage in on the state's behalf. And, um, he was pretty anti-choice, anti-gay, pretty right wing. And people up in this district really were not aligned with that.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:32:57] Hmm hmm. What was it like running against people you knew, were friends with?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:33:04] It was, um, it was, you know, competitive. And when I said we were friendly, but we all thought we had something to offer. And, I just, you know, it's easier to win than to lose, I would think, but it was okay.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:33:25] Right. And so, yeah, tell us a little bit about, I know you worked on a lot of legislation in the Senate and you were saying that, you know, once you entered that there was a majority for most of the period.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:33:38] Well not most of the period, I'd say maybe half or less.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:33:42] Half yeah.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:33:44] You know, we had a Democratic governor but we had a Republican majority or a Republican lieutenant governor breaking a tie for a while. But we had 2 years where we had Democratic control of the House, the Senate, and the governorship. That really made a difference. But the rest of the time, not a clear Democratic path for bills to all get passed. Yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:34:09] Okay. And so yeah, what were some of or what are the pieces of legislation that you're most proud of since your time there?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:34:16] Probably the Virginia Values Act, which is our statewide nondiscrimination bill, protecting rights in housing, public accommodations and employment and credit, um, that's probably the most significant one. And that includes sexual orientation and gender identity, which I believe we're the only southern state to have those protections. That was a real landmark bill, in my opinion. And then I also passed some legislation first to decriminalize and then eventually to legalize cannabis for adult use in Virginia. Um, and that's been more challenging because we're not done yet in that Republicans in the House who have the House majority as of now and our current governor [Glenn] Youngkin, have resisted efforts to provide for a commercial marketplace for a tested, safer product that's limited to adults 21 and older. So we're kind of fighting against, you know, how people can have access. I mean, you're allowed to grow it in your own home and you're allowed to give that to someone else, but you're not allowed to sell it to someone else. And there's tremendous market for it. And um. We could be making a lot of money if we were taxing it and putting that to good use.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:35:57] Mm hm. That's great. What other pieces of legislation? I know there's many that you've worked on in the Senate.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:36:03] Um, well, let me think for a minute. I've passed legislation to cut down on unlawful evictions, penalizing landlords who would, you know, just evict someone without going through the proper legal channels. I passed legislation, it's largely symbolic, to desegregate public transportation in Virginia. I mean, it was already desegregated, but there were still laws that provided for segregation. It was nice to just remove that from the books. Um, what else? It was illegal for same gender people to get married in Virginia. Technically, the Supreme Court ruling disagreed with that so we repealed the part of the code that had that. I made it easier to absentee vote without having to give excuses for why you wanted your absentee ballot. Um, you know, a variety of areas.



**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:37:15] Hmm. And so as you, like, sort of compare, like, can you compare what it's been like in the Senate versus the House of Delegates for you? I mean at any different periods?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:37:26] Yeah, I mean just for anyone. I mean, the Senate, the House of Delegates has 100 members. Generally there's a lot of talking, a lot of people want to make a speech on a lot of bills, a lot of extremism when I was there. And now in the Senate, there's a little bit less talking, more legislating, more progressive environment, more collegial. It's definitely more collegial. People are willing to vote for bills from people, from the other party, regardless. And, you know, we don't have as much time to be involved in certain things. In the House, there's, you know, there's 22 people on a committee and there's lots of committees that are going over every comma and period in a bill. In the Senate we're stretched a little thinner with 40 people to deal with the same complexity of legislation. So maybe not picking it apart quite as much, but more working together to get things done. Mm hmm.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:38:27] And I guess so, like, I'm curious. So over the past 20 years, since you've entered state politics, like what have been moments or individuals that have shaped your politics? The politics are always shifting and your beliefs are, so like, what -

**Adam Ebbin** [00:38:53] Well, I think in terms of changes in Virginia, both the pandemic and the George Floyd murder led to a lot of reforms in criminal justice reform and looking out for people to get housing and health care. And we voted after a long time to expand Medicaid to about, eventually, I think it's close to 800,000 Virginians, or let me just say, hundreds of thousands of Virginians. Federal health insurance coverage for people who were low-income and to expand it and that was a big step forward. So I think those were pretty influential.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:39:41] Mm hmm. And what are things that you want to see happening in the state of Virginia going forward?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:39:47] Well, I'd like to see us maintain our making it easier to vote. I'd like to see us get rid of the Virginia marriage amendment in the Virginia Constitution, which I've been working on getting rid of since we put it there in about 2006. And I said we I mean, it was put in the Constitution, not me, part of that, but that, I'd like to do that. I'd like to see marijuana regulated. And in those hundreds of millions of dollars in taxes put to good use, hopefully for pre-K[indergarten] and for other needs for disadvantaged people. Um, there's a lot we can do to make it easier for people with healthcare and I'd like to see a little bit of balance for renters, make it a little bit easier for renters because they have a tougher time sometimes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:40:45] Mm hmm, that's great. And what about in the City of Alexandria? What changes--

**Adam Ebbin** [00:40:49] Well I think housing, you know, and, like I said, for renters, we have a lot of rental housing in the City of Alexandria. The cost of rental housing is going up a lot. Not as much affordable housing. It's a challenge. I don't know that we're going to be able to really completely solve it. But I think that there are future opportunities. It was nice to be able to vote to encourage Amazon to locate its HQ2 [Headquarters2] in my Senate district here in Northern Virginia. But with it, it brings demand for housing, which can price out some people at the bottom of the economic ladder. And it's something I'm mindful of, and I don't know that I have a great solution, but it's important that we have people in office who are mindful of helping people who may not be advantaged.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:41:49] Mm hmm. Mm hmm. Yeah, so I'm curious, you know, you've been in politics for most of your life, I guess. And so, like, what -

**Adam Ebbin** [00:41:58] Not most. Well, not elected office, but for a long time.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:42:01] Not elected office but you've been involved in politics for a long time.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:42:05] For a long time, yeah.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:42:05] And so, like, what's your assessment of the, just, current climate?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:42:11] Oh, people are pretty strident and people are dug in on both sides, both my side and on the Right. Um, people who follow Donald Trump really still believe in him after him losing the popular vote in two elections. And it's unfortunate, but it's a divided time in this country. And I hope there could be some more unity in this country.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:42:39] So, do you feel like there's more division now than you've seen prior?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:42:45] Yes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:42:46] Yes.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:42:47] Yeah. Yeah, I mean, we used to, Democrats used to, you know, rail against people like Mitt Romney and say, "Oh, my God," you know, "it would be awful if Mitt Romney beats Barack Obama." And when you look at it, you know, compared, there's still a lot of decent people on both sides of the aisle. But there are also some tremendous polarization with people who follow Donald Trump, who don't really look for commonality and don't really care about other people's life situations I would say.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:43:28] Mhm. How has that played out for you on a day-to-day? I'm just curious like-

**Adam Ebbin** [00:43:35] In political office?

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:43:35] Yeah, what does that division look like to you?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:43:40] Well, I mean we saw people, like, someone voted, someone introduced a floor amendment to have a full forensic audit of the Virginia presidential election of 2000 and, uh, I guess it was 2016 or [20]20 or what was the year that they [trying to remember year]? Of 2020, you know, after the ballots had even been, you know, discarded, they want to recount them. I mean, you know, it's just you see people voting a certain way because of their district or because of Republican fear for Republican primary. It's unfortunate. So it's harder to build coalitions sometimes.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:44:29] Uh huh. Uh huh. So it sounds like, so, within making legislation, it's been harder to build those coalitions.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:44:36] Yeah and on gun violence, I mean, it's really hard to get Republicans to vote for alternatives. We have a red flag law and we have a background check bill, but we want to improve things. And if you're a Republican, you can't in many cases vote for those types of bills. We used to see more crossover on both sides.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:45:06] Mm hhm. And how would you describe your politics today? What are your -

**Adam Ebbin** [00:45:10] I consider myself a progressive to moderate at times, but um, I'm, you know, trying to look out for the little guy and for people while at the same time having our economy and, um, uh, society, you know, advance.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:45:34] Mhm. And you feel like that's been a constant throughout your career or has it changed or shifted?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:45:39] Well, when I first got elected, I was more like, you know, a voice of resistance. Uh, but now, uh, we'll see if we win the majority in the House in this fall's elections in 2023. The entire House of Delegates and Senate are up for election, and there's a chance that we can, Democrats when I say we, can reclaim the majority.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:46:06] Mm hmm.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:46:08] So it's, you know, it's different governing in the majority than in the minority.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:46:13] Yeah. Yeah. So I have some closing questions, but is there anything I haven't asked you that you, before I get to those, that you want to say?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:46:25] Not offhand, I mean, that I can think of.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:46:29] Okay, yeah. So I'm curious. Yeah. What are some of your most important lessons you've learned in life?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:46:35] In life? Well, I guess today's adversary can be tomorrow's ally in politics and in life. A lot of things aren't as final as they seem. I learned that when you're knocking on doors in politics and you run into someone who vehemently disagrees with everything you stand for, not to spend too much time trying to change their position because you're not likely to be able to change people's deeply held beliefs.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:47:20] Mm hmm. And if you could hold on to a memory for the rest of your life, what would it be?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:47:27] A memory? Um, gosh. One memory. I don't know. Probably things with family or, um, the night I won my first primary, a friend of mine said, "Remember this feeling." So that was a good feeling, I guess. But -

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:47:51] What was that feeling?

**Adam Ebbin** [00:47:54] Uh, victory. It was good to accomplish something. But I would say, one memory, you know, I don't know if it's just one memory but I've had a lot of good memories. I had an opportunity to be present at an event commemorating the 400th anniversary of the ships leaving for Jamestown in London. I went over

there on a trip and did that. And I also have visited with prisoners in Virginia prisons and observed people in solitary confinement and talked with people in prison. So, you know, I guess, you know, in spite of how bad we think things can be, they can always be worse.

**Francesco De Salvatore** [00:48:35] Mm hmm. Yeah. That's great. Great. Well, thanks so much for speaking with me today. It's been great.

**Adam Ebbin** [00:48:42] Sure, I enjoyed it.