



All the Best Podcast

Episode 96. Measuring Up to Expectations

96. Featuring Congressman Bill Archer

Sam LeBlond: [00:00:01] January 1st, 1951. Joyous New Year's, oh Bemis! Midland is a fine town, Bar and I really love it. I'm selling oil field equipment and supplies. A task which is great as far as gaining experience goes, but which I do not particularly relish. I'm a poor salesman - that has been rather conclusively demonstrated. I don't know exactly what the Dresser plans are for me, but they do involve moving to Dallas eventually - maybe in a few months, maybe in a year. Have you had any greetings from the Navy Department as of yet? I would, of course, hate to go back into the Navy again, hate to leave the family. And yet I suppose that if this becomes an all out thing, my whole attitude will change. We had a fine year. We like Texas. The kids have been well. Robin is now walking around and Georgie has grown to be a near man. He talks dirty once in a while and occasionally swears, age four and a half. He lives in cowboy clothes. The only thing I feel real badly about is that I did nothing towards helping dad with his campaign. We felt terribly about the outcome after the way dad worked at it. I do feel that he made a lot of friends, though, and I think he will be hard to beat if he runs again in 1952. Love to all the family, devotedly, George H.W. Bush

George H. W. Bush: [00:01:22] I believe that character is a part of being president, and life really must have joy.

Sam LeBlond: [00:01:30] This is all the best. The official podcasts of the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. I'm your host. Sam LeBlond. One of their many grandchildren here, we celebrate the legacy of these two incredible Americans through friends, family and the foundation. This is all the best.

[00:01:48] We're one big country nation.

George H. W. Bush: [00:02:00] I remember something, my dad, Phil, they said, write your mother, serve your country, and he said, Tell the truth. And I've tried to do that in public life all through it. You are a human being first, and those human connections with children, with friends are the most important investment you will ever make. We stand tonight before a new world of hope and possibilities for our children. A world we could not have contemplated a few years

Sam LeBlond: [00:02:28] Ago on behalf of our family and the George and Barbara Bush Foundation. This is all the best. We're one big country nation. That's right.

Sam LeBlond: [00:02:39] Bill Archer is a lawyer, politician and public servant who retired from the United States House of Representatives after a 40 year career of service to his nation in local, state and federal government. As a U.S. congressman, Archer represented the 7th District of Texas from nineteen seventy one to two thousand one in the seat previously held by former President George H.W. Bush during his final six years in Congress. Archer served as chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee. Congressman Archer is married to the former Sharon Sawyer, a lawyer. He has five children Rick Wren, Sharon, Barbara and Lisa, two stepsons Scott and Shannon and 24 grandchildren. It's our pleasure to have Congressman Bill Archer with us on all the best. Congressmen, welcome to the show.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:03:33] Well, I'm delighted to be with you, Sam, particularly when it relates to something that was one of my friend, the President George Bush's entity.

Sam LeBlond: [00:03:43] Sir, thank you again for being here, and I'm sure, as most people listening know, but this podcast is based on the incredible life of service of both of my grandparents, George and Barbara Bush and you, sir, have lived a life also filled with service to others, starting as early as the Korean War when you enlisted and eventually were a captain in the United States Air Force. Sir, can you talk about your time in the Air Force and did that set the tone for your life of service that would soon follow?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:04:11] To some degree it did, Sam. I must say that the Air Force was a real growing up time for me. I did not, however, get picked or drafted. I enlisted. I actually did not want to be in the army. I was subject to being drafted. And so I enlisted in the Air Force. It was a real comeuppance for me. I was a law school graduate and I lived a comfortable life. I really was thrown into a life of basics. I had to serve with 40 members in my squad. Unfortunately, they did not have clothing to issue to me. I had been told by the recruiting officer that all I had to do was show up and they'd give me clothes. The first day they didn't, and I wore out a pair of loafers marching during the first week. But it did keep me from having to go by bus to Wichita Falls and take my training up there when I didn't have a pair of shoes. Then they said, Well, we can't send you away from here. You've got to stay here until you get your shoes. So that was a good thing. Wichita Falls was not a good base and lackland where I was was in San Antonio.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:05:31] It was a good location. It was a good training for me. It taught me basics in the 40 members of my squad and we were intense. By the way, too. Only one was a college graduate. That was a new learning experience for me. But the one that was a college graduate was an African-American, and that was another good thing to go through that experience. That was my beginning. But since I had a law degree, I had applied for a direct commission. After I finished basic training, I got set into an office that had to do with the administration of the base. One day, a couple of months after I'd been in there, a messenger came by and he said, Airman Archer, you have to come with me. I've got orders to bring you to see the general of the Air Force Base. And so I went with him and I was told then that I was the first lieutenant. And before I finished my career, I got to be a captain, but it was quite an experience.

Sam LeBlond: [00:06:36] Congressman, you soon made the transition from military service to public service as a member of the Texas House of Representatives, eventually serving the 7th District of Texas for 30 years. Many people don't know that you were preceded by my grandfather, George H.W. Bush, in that seat in the 7th District. Sir, what inspired you to get involved in Texas politics?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:06:59] My father had always taught me that you have to pay rent on the space that you occupy in this world. And he had been very politically oriented. I had a background of a father who believed in free enterprise and had started his own business in the depression and gave me an awful lot to think about and to believe in. He would volunteer me to do work in

the political arena. He never wanted to be a candidate, but he supported many candidates who believed in the free enterprise system, and he drilled that into me and. I knew that at some point in time after I had sold it, I went into business with him and then sold his business after he died. And I was in a position to do whatever I wanted to do, so I decided to run for the Legislature as my first step.

Sam LeBlond: [00:07:54] Sir, we don't often get to talk to someone who has known George and Barbara Bush quite as long as you have, and I would love to hear what you remember about George and Barbara Bush from those earlier years. How did your friendship begin and progressed through your long career representing Texas's 7th District?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:08:11] Well, I think it began and occurred over time. I moved into his office in Washington, in the Longworth Building, and I had all of his files right there the way he had left them. And I had quite a number of his staff who stayed with me. And so that built a little bit of a bridge for me from the beginning. As time went on, we found so many things that we shared that we were in agreement on both political things and other things like tennis. He loved tennis and I love tennis, and that became a real factor in our relationship. He was a strong believer in a balanced budget, and when I ran for Congress, that was a major issue that I campaigned [00:09:00] on. I just felt like he and I agreed on so many things financially that built a bridge for us too.

Sam LeBlond: [00:09:09] Well, having him as a tennis playing partner, I know, is a pretty big deal. I would love to hear the story. I heard that he might have brought in a couple of pros to play with you. Is that the truth?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:09:18] Well, he didn't bring them in, but in my second year in Congress, I had a fundraiser in Houston and I always tried to have some sort of unique aspect to my fundraisers. And a friend of mine knew John Newcomb and Tony Roche. John Newcomb was the number one tennis player in the world, and he and Roche were the number one doubles team in the world. And this friend said, I think I can get them to come down here and play tennis with you. I thought, Well, that's great. We'll set up a time. We found a stadium where we could get set up for it. And then I said, Well, you know, we're going to have to have doubles. He and Roche are going to have to play and I'm going to have to play, but who will be my doubles partner? And I thought, Well, it needs to be George Bush and Bush. I believe at that time was the representative in the U.N., and I called him and asked him if he would come down and play with us. And he immediately said yes, and he came. I was so impressed by having John Newcomb walk out onto that court and I went up to

him and shook hands with him, and I said, Thank you so much for coming and doing this because they got paid nothing for it.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:10:35] They did it just because they wanted to be good guys. I said, the one thing I've got to tell you is you're going to be my partner and Roche is going to be Bush's partner. I know it doesn't matter to you who wins this match, but those are my constituents out there in the stands and I've got to win. So that set the tone. And whenever it was a tight game and Newcomb was serving to Bush, Bush never saw the ball. I mean, it just it was an incredible experience. Before we even played the doubles, Newcomb had agreed to play Singles Match for a set with Tony Roche, and Roche beat him, even though Newcomb was number one in the world and singles, but his doubles partner beat him. Bush had a good partner, but the sequel to all of that Sam, which is really kind of fun, is after Bush became president, he would invite me frequently to come and play on the White House tennis court. One day he called and he said, "Bill, I'd really like for you to come down and play.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:11:43] We're going to have some pretty well-known tennis players." So I said, "Sure, I've got to come." So I went. And he had Pete Sampras. Sampras had just won the U.S. Open, and he was, I think, the youngest person to ever win it. So when it came time to play. Bush said, Well, you know, I'm President now, so I picked Sampras as my partner. And sure enough, they beat the heck out of me and my partner but in any event, it was a lot of fun. Another time, he had invited McEnroe and several other pros to come and play on the White House court. I was not playing, but he invited me to come down and watch some. So after they finished, I went up to McEnroe and tried to engage him in conversation and he wouldn't talk to me. He just kind of shrugged me off, and so I was talking to one of his. Professional friends who had come down with him, another tennis player, and I said, what's the matter with McEnroe? He wouldn't talk to me and his. I've forgotten who this tennis player was, but he said, Well, Bill, don't take it too hard. He doesn't talk to us either.

Sam LeBlond: [00:12:55] That's great.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:12:55] Anyhow, that's enough about the tennis.

Sam LeBlond: [00:12:58] Well, congressman, it sounds like as the friendship grew and a lot of trust between you also grew and advice because I heard there's another story that I'd love for you to touch on when my grandfather decided to run for vice president. I heard you helped push him towards the office. Can you talk about your involvement in his decision to join Reagan's ticket?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:13:17] That's a great story. I had become friends with a couple of the closest advisers of Ronald Reagan, one of whom was Dick Allen, who later became a part of the Reagan White House. And Dick Allen called me one day and he said, Bill, you really need to talk to Bush and encourage him to give up his campaign for president. Because if he doesn't, there are people up here close to Reagan who will never let him become vice president if he will give up his campaign Now for president. I think I can get him named as vice president. I found out this number where he was, and I [00:14:00] called him and Barbara got on the phone. I said, You know, I really hope we can get him to run as vice president and I need to talk to him. And she said, No, you shouldn't talk to him. He is a real grump. You know, he was not happy. He had lost a couple of primaries and I said, Well, I need to talk to him and I hope you'll let me do that. So she put him on and I said, George, I could still call him George and because he wasn't president. I said, I really think that you've got a great opportunity to be the vice president candidate, but you're going to have to pull out of your race for president. And there are people close to Reagan who will see that you get to be vice president. And he said, Well, I don't know. I don't know who I really am going to let down some people in Ohio who have been supporting me by not running in the Ohio primary. I said, Well, I hope you'll consider it because I think it's your one opportunity. And if you get to be vice president, that's a real stepping stone to becoming president. He said, Well, I'll think about it. So he didn't make a commitment, but that probably had some impact on his ultimate decision.

Sam LeBlond: [00:15:15] Sir, similar to George and Barbara Bush, you and your wife have stayed very active after your retirement from politics. One thing that sticks out to me is your support of the Archer Fellowship program with the University of Texas system. Can you talk about the program [00:15:30] where it stands today and why did you decide to lend your name to this wonderful cause?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:15:35] I have always been interested in young people and have spent a lot of time talking to young people, and I created a high school program for my district, where I took one high school student from every one of the high schools and brought them to Washington at my expense for a full week, and they met with the top people. One group actually met with Gerald Ford in the White House when he was president, and these meetings were not just some sort of quick meeting of introduction. They were sit down and talk and spend a half an hour with some of the top people in the government, and these were juniors in high school. So they were really impressed. They went on to a lot of other wonderful things. One of the students

was African-American. His high school happened to be in my district, but he didn't live in my district. I had made the decision that if you went to a high school and you were chosen to be an archer intern, it didn't matter whether you lived in my district or not. I guess that was not smart of me politically. But but anyhow, that's what I did. I've forgotten his last name, but his first name was Marcus, and Marcus did not have a camera, did not have the basic things that we asked.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:17:01] Every one of the interns have a navy blue sport coat, and so his homeroom pitched in and bought him a coat and bought him a camera. We had a private plane that brought all these students to Washington, so he got all of his transportation to Washington. It was a very touching thing because with every group I had chaperons, I knew that the families of the mothers and fathers of these [00:17:30] junior students needed to be satisfied that their children were going to be taken care of when they got to Washington. So I got this wonderful couple to agree to come up with them and chaperon them. And Marcus became very close to these people. They were in one of the higher economic areas of my district, and they even had a party for all of the students in the summer swimming party. We had asked [00:18:00] a post reporter to come and cover it because we thought it would be good publicity for us. And the reporter came out and it was just unbelievable what she did. She went up to Marcus and said, Aren't you uncomfortable being out here in this affluent area? And he said, No, I'm not uncomfortable. These are all my friends. It was really sad to see how he was treated by that reporter when he finally got into his senior year. [00:18:30]

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:18:30] He called my two chaperons one day and he said, I need your help. I've got an opportunity to play basketball for Nebraska on a full scholarship. And I can go there, but my mother doesn't want me to. My mother says that my older brother is pushing drugs and my younger brother is about to get on drugs, and she needs me to help her keep my younger brother off of drugs. And so my chaperon said, Marcus, [00:19:00] you have a great opportunity ahead for yourself. But if you want to really be in a position to help your family, you need to go and get your college degree at Nebraska. A couple of weeks later, he called them again and he said, I just wanted to let you know that I'm on my way to the airport. I'm going to Nebraska and I love you. It was a very, very touching thing that almost brings tears to my eyes, and certainly [00:19:30] it did for him. But he went on and played basketball for Nebraska, and then he went to Michigan. He got a degree in dentistry, so he had a great life. It made a great life. I felt really good about that. And so I decided that really, we ought to upgrade that to a college level and try to make something good happen.

Sam LeBlond: [00:19:53] And it's thriving now more than ever.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:19:55] Unbelievable. We've had over fifteen hundred graduates. Now remarkable. I'm very proud of it. But a big part of that is attributable to my former chief of staff, Don Carlson, who spent an awful lot of time getting it set up and to the people who have been running. Just have done a fantastic job.

Sam LeBlond: [00:20:18] Congressman, my grandfather, you know, never liked to talk about his legacy when he was alive, and he would always get asked by friends and family and reporters. But when pressed, he always said that the students at the Bush School at Texas A&M would ultimately serve as his living legacy after he was gone. When you look back on your career, do you feel similarly about the Archer Fellowship program and as you mentioned, fifteen hundred plus alumni who are currently working in positions that influence our world?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:20:47] Yeah, I absolutely do. I just feel so benefited by it. One great experience that has come with it is that we had two of the Archer fellows who worked at the Supreme Court as interns. And I had occasion to try to set up a reception at the Supreme Court. I didn't realize you could do it, but you actually can reserve the Supreme Court and hold a reception there. I called the administrator for the court and talked to him, and I said, You know, I'd really like to get this set up for this group. He said, Congressman, I'm sorry to tell you, but we can't do it. The only groups that we can accommodate are ones that have something to do with the law. And your group does not have anything to do with the law. But let me tell you, while I've got you, we have had two of your interns here and they are outstanding, and I want you to know that we will have a desire to have more. So please send us some more. And that was a great comment that I will always carry with me.

Sam LeBlond: [00:21:53] Well, how rewarding that must be for you, sir. Well, we just celebrated the three year anniversary of my grandfather passing on to his great reward this week, and it always gives me pause to reflect on the lessons I learned from him and my grandmother throughout the years. Thinking back on your friendship with George and Barbara Bush, what are some of the things that you reflect on from your time together?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:22:16] I reflect on the tremendous respect that both of them had from the very beginning. I remember when they first campaigned for the congressional seat and how much Barbour put into it to help

George get elected. I think they always measured up always to what people expected of them. You know, I called him George, and I always call Barbara Barbour. But Bush got elected president. It was never George anymore. It was always Mr. President. And one day I was at a Ways and Means Committee meeting, and a tough issue came up and the chairman, Rostenkowski, who had served on the committee with George Bush, said, Well, we can't really work that out today. But he said, George and I will work it out. This is in an open public meeting. And I thought, Hmm, that is so disrespectful. But whether they worked it out or not, I don't know. But I will tell you that the respect that each of them had almost equally in Houston, Texas, was beyond anything you can think of. One of the things that I really respected him for was my number one issue when I ran for Congress was to get a balanced budget at the federal level, and I used to campaign by saying Texas has got to have a balanced budget every year. And what's good enough for Texas ought to be good enough for the United States of America. But we could never make it happen. But Bush did yeoman work in trying to bring that about, and it was something that ended up maybe costing him reelection because at one point in time when the federal government went through something that's never been through before, where there were representatives from Congress, bipartisan representatives who were isolated at Camp David to try to reach an agreement that would move us toward a balanced budget.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:24:26] And I'll never forget that from the very beginning, the Democrats were determined that they were going to get in the tax increase into that agreement that they could use against Bush when he ran for election from the very beginning at the end. They finally did get a very small, I thought, noncontroversial tax increase into the bill. It became very controversial. Clearly, the Democrats were going to use that as a negative item. I felt like, well, you know, he has reduced the deficit by over five hundred billion dollars in this bill. We should be pleased with that. That's a small tax increase in it. So the Republicans were very much up in the air about what? There to approve it. And so Bush had all of us down to the White House. All of us that were representatives in that group. Newt Gingrich was one of those. And Gingrich walked out of the White House and would not agree to support it when we voted on it in the past because most of the Democrats voted for it. I felt that that did a lot to cement my relationship with President Bush because I had supported it and I had been with him. Gingrich and several other Republicans would not go along with it.

Sam LeBlond: [00:25:53] Well, congressman, what an honor it's been to have you on the program today and thank you for your stories and your friendship with my grandparents. I know they held both you and your wife, Sharon, in such

high regard, and I can't leave without asking you one more question. And it's actually for some advice. We have a lot of young listeners who want to serve others and listen to all the best to learn how to do just that in their communities. What advice would you give to a young person who wants to get started serving others and make a difference?

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:26:23] Well, obviously there are many, many ways that you can serve others. At one point in my life, I thought maybe about becoming a teacher, teacher, serve others. And that is one function that a young person can look to, but they can also look to getting into politics. I think I was basically lucky to get to the point that I did to be a member of Congress and over the 30 years that I was in Congress after my first election, which was a very tough one. After that one, I got the highest percentage of the vote of any Republican in the country. I had to campaign and I always did, but I never felt like I was threatened politically. But I got there just by hard work. I worked the precincts. I worked the so-called grassroots and that elected me in the first election. And then after that, a lot of good things happened. I had school intern program, I'm sure helped me. I worry about the young people today because I think that the young people today don't realize the value of individual freedom. To me, that is the biggest hallmark of this country is individual freedom, which we've been able to hold onto. And it's true that there was slavery for a period of time, but there's slavery all over the world. We threw it off. We did it by losing an enormous number of lives. We ultimately moved ahead. And I think we're in a much better place today, and I think the future looks very good in that regard. Getting into working with your schools, working with volunteer organizations. There are any number of ways that you can make yourself valuable to society. I think young people are hopeful to be able to do that.

Sam LeBlond: [00:28:18] Well, we need all the help we can get these days. And Congressman, thank you for being a part of the show and thank you for all that you do to support your communities and all those amazing fellows coming out of University of Texas.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:28:30] Sam, thank you. And my wife Sharon is sitting here and she's been a part of everything that I've done and deserves a lot of credit for everything that's happened.

Sam LeBlond: [00:28:40] I'm sure similar to my grandfather with my grandmother, you're a team. And I think my cousin, Pierce once said without Barbara Bush, there wouldn't be a George Bush. I don't want to say that's the same with you, sir, but I know that was the case with my grandfather.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:28:54] Well, I think probably it is the same for me. But when I first asked Sharon to marry me, I invited her to Washington and gave her the opportunity to meet and visit with your grandparents. They were kind enough to invite both of us to the vice president's residence. They both were just tremendous with Sharon. So that was an awfully sweet thing that they did as part of our relationship.

Sam LeBlond: [00:29:20] Well, thank you so much, both of you, and thank you for being such great friends to my grandparents, as I said before they held you in such high regard. So it's a thrill for us to have you on the show with us. We look forward to spreading all your stories out there, and thanks again for being a part of all the best.

Congressman Bill Archer: [00:29:35] Well, it's a thrill for us. Thank you, Sam.

Sam LeBlond: [00:29:38] I'm Sam LeBlond reminding you to listen, share and subscribe to all the best on Apple Podcasts, Spotify and everywhere great podcasts are found. Thank you for joining me as we celebrate all the best.

George H. W. Bush: [00:29:58] That while the White House is important, the country's future is in your house, every house, all over America, preparedness, strength, decency and honor, courage, sacrifice, the willingness to fight, even die for one's country. America, the land of the free and the brave. And God bless the United States of America, the greatest country on the face of the Earth.