Biography

The Honorable David Wayne Baria was born December 4, 1962, in Pascagoula, Mississippi. He attended Moss Point High School, from which he graduated in 1981. He earned a BS in criminal justice from The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg, Mississippi, in 1987. He earned his JD from The University of Mississippi School of Law in Oxford, Mississippi, in 1990. He was the chair and the vice chair of the Moot Court Board from 1989 to 1990; was ABA-Law Student Division Representative; and was ABA-LSD Liaison to the Standing Committee on Judicial Compensation, Selection, and Tenure. After completing law school, he practiced law in Jackson, Mississippi, and when he moved to Bay St. Louis, Mississippi, opened a law office there. Additionally, he is a contractor in Bay St. Louis. In November of 2007, he was elected to the Mississippi Senate, representing Hancock and Harrison Counties.

On November 30, 1991, he married Marcie Fyke. They have three children, Merritt, Bess, and Max. He enjoys fishing, boating, travel, movies, music, and watching his children participate in sports.

Clubs and professional affiliations include America’s Energy Coast Leadership Council, Council of State Governments, Meetings Committee, Southern Legislative Conference, Gulf Coast and Atlantic States Task Force, National Conference of Environmental Legislators, Rotary International, Kiwanis Club, Leadership Hancock County, American Inns of Court, Charles Clark Inn, American Board of Trial Advocates, Fellow of the Mississippi Bar Foundation, Mississippi State Bar Association, past president of the Mississippi Trial Lawyers Association, Southern Trial Lawyers Association, American Bar Association, and Hancock County Bar Association.

Honors and awards he has received include the 2008 Legislative Horizon Award, Mississippi Coalition for Citizens with Disabilities, the 2008 Mississippi Association for Justice Legislative Award, the 2008 American Cancer Society Legislative Champion Award, and the 2009 American Federation of Teachers Friend of Education Award.
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This is an interview for the Mississippi Oral History Program of The University of Southern Mississippi. The interview is with David Wayne Baria and is taking place on May 19, 2008. The interviewer is Bethany Klapwyk.

Klapwyk: This is an interview for The University of Southern Mississippi, Hurricane Katrina Oral History Project. The interview is with David Baria and is taking place on May 19, at 2:10 in the afternoon in Bay St. Louis, Mississippi. The interviewer is Bethany Klapwyk. First, I’d like to thank you for coming today.

Baria: You’re welcome.

Klapwyk: And I’m going to ask you, for the record, could you please state your name?

Baria: My name is David Baria.

Klapwyk: And how do you spell that?


Klapwyk: And when were you born?

Baria: December 4, 1962.

Klapwyk: And where were you born?

Baria: I was born in Pascagoula, Mississippi, over in Jackson County.

Klapwyk: And for the record, what was your father’s name?

Baria: John Robert Baria.

Klapwyk: And what was your mother’s first name and maiden name?

Baria: Marilyn Albin.

Klapwyk: And where did you grow up?
Baria: I grew up in a little place called Escatawpa, which is north Jackson County, Mississippi.

Klapwyk: And can you maybe tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Baria: Yeah. Escatawpa is sort of a, or at least back then, it was sort of a country place. It wasn’t a town. It wasn’t incorporated or anything like that. It was kind of in the boonies. So there was a lot of open space, a lot of wooded areas, and a lot of great places to explore and to run around and to ride bikes and do things like that. So I spent a lot of time outdoors. We were outside the reach of cable television, so we only got three channels. We got two out of Mobile, Alabama, and one out of Biloxi. And if they weren’t coming in very clearly, you had to go outside and turn the antenna. So we didn’t spend a lot of time watching television.

Klapwyk: Sounds like my house. (laughter)

Baria: I played outdoors, like I said. I played sports. I loved all sports, football, baseball, basketball, and those were about the only ones that were offered where I grew up. We had a swimming pool, and in the warm months we lived in the pool. There were very few other kids my age around. I had a little brother and a little sister; my brother was three-and-a-half years younger, and my sister was five years younger. So they weren’t very good playmates until they got a little older. But I had two or three kids in probably a square-mile radius that were my age. So sometimes it got a little boring, you know, and sometimes I wished I lived in a town where there was a neighborhood and other children up and down the street. And maybe that’s why when I grew up and got on my own, I went to a town, a pretty big town to live. But I had a pretty good childhood, I think. My parents weren’t wealthy by any means, but we weren’t destitute or anything like that. I went to public school all the way through school. I never went to private school. And I did reasonably well in school. I was, I guess, a reasonably bright kid.

Klapwyk: And then where did you go after school?

Baria: I graduated from high school and went to The University of Southern Mississippi in Hattiesburg where I took a couple of years to figure out what I wanted to do when I grew up. And ultimately got a degree in criminal justice; I got a BS in criminal justice with an emphasis in juvenile justice. And I took almost enough classes to get a minor in counseling psychology, and my idea was that I was going to be a juvenile counselor. And just before I graduated, my grandmother, on my father’s side, who was sort of a patron of mine, and she made sure I went to school and made sure I had enough money, and those kinds of things, she encouraged me to take the law school entrance exam, which I did. And I did well enough on the law school entrance exam to pull up my average GPA [grade point average] and get into law school.

Klapwyk: Oh, wow. So did you go to law school then?
Baria: I did; I went to Ole Miss Law School from 1887 through 1990, and that’s where I met my wife.

Klapwyk: What’s your wife’s name?

Baria: Marcie, and she’s the former Marcie Fyke. And we dated for a couple of years in law school, and we went our separate ways afterwards, though we kept dating. She stayed in Oxford, Mississippi. I went to Jackson, Mississippi; that’s the big town I referred to earlier, the biggest town in this state, anyway. And we lived apart for about a year, and then we got married in November, 1991, in Jackson. And she came to Jackson, and that’s where we lived for a long time.

Klapwyk: And do you have any kids?

Baria: I do. I have two children, Merritt, who is eleven, and Bess, who is ten. We had a son who was older, and he died shortly after Hurricane Katrina.

Klapwyk: Oh.

Baria: Not as a result of the storm.

Klapwyk: OK.

Baria: And we are about to adopt; in just a couple of weeks we should have three children again.

Klapwyk: A girl or a boy? Who are you adopting?

Baria: Boy.

Klapwyk: And how old?

Baria: It’s a newborn, or will be. Yeah. The birth mother is due June 2, I think.

Klapwyk: You get to do the newborn thing all over again.

Baria: Yeah. I’m a little frightened by that. I’m getting a little old for getting up in the middle of the night and changing diapers and doing bottle feedings and that kind of stuff.

Klapwyk: Oh, you’ll be able to handle it.

Baria: Well, I have two helpers now, my daughters. They promise they’ll be helpful.

Klapwyk: (laughter) And how old did you say they were?
Baria: Eleven and ten. My oldest daughter’s just about to turn twelve; she would call herself twelve.

Klapwyk: She would. Yeah, that’s typical what little girls like to do, round up. (laughter) OK. So how many generations of your family have lived in Mississippi?

Baria: I think that the Baria side probably goes back to the early 1800s. So without giving this a whole lot of thought, I would say before me, or including my generation there would be one, two, three, probably six or eight generations on that side of the family. On my mother’s side of the family, probably only three, but before that they were from Alabama, Fairhope, Alabama, which is on the other side of Mobile Bay. So you know, multiple generations on both sides have lived along the Gulf of Mexico.

Klapwyk: Wow, OK. So do you know why, originally, they came here?

Baria: I guess I don’t. I know that on my father’s side—(brief interruption) On my father’s side they were farmers, and they came, they migrated over from French Mobile, which was in Alabama just north of the Mobile Bay and, well, encompassing Mobile Bay, and they came to north Jackson County where they farmed. And they were, they had enough gumption to have a little land and farm it themselves, but they also worked in factories and other places like that. So they were just working folks. But I’m not sure why they came to Mississippi, to answer your question.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Baria: Probably just cheaper, better farmland; I don’t know.

Klapwyk: Yeah. Well, it’s hard to know when it’s so many generations back.

Baria: Yes.

Klapwyk: So why—you’re living in Bay St. Louis now?

Baria: I am.

Klapwyk: So why—

Baria: Well, actually I live in Waveland now. I lived in Bay St. Louis until Katrina took our home.

Klapwyk: So what brought you to Bay St. Louis?

Baria: Well, I never got comfortable living in Jackson. I guess the little country boy grew up on the Coast and wanted to be back in a place where he felt more comfortable; that’s the explanation I’ve come up with. It’s just different on the
Mississippi Gulf Coast than it is anywhere else in Mississippi. In Jackson it’s different; in the Delta it’s different. In the Northeast Hills it’s different; Mississippi’s a pretty diverse state. You may not have appreciated that yet. If you stay here long enough, you will. But we lived in Jackson. I had a very successful law practice, and my wife did, too, and I just wanted a better quality of life, I think. And we had three kids, and so you know, after years of trying to talk my wife into it, I had given up. And one day, just out of the blue, she came home and said, “Let’s move to the Gulf Coast.” And so we decided on the Gulf Coast, but we didn’t decide on Bay St. Louis until one day we were coming through Bay St. Louis. We’d looked at a house in Pass Christian. We were on our way to New Orleans to spend a night or two over there, and my parents were keeping our kids. And we stopped at a little place just south of Old Town called Da Beach House, and they made smoothies, and it was a coffeehouse, and they rented kayaks and bicycles. And we sat there, and we had a smoothie and just looked out over the Gulf, and Marcie said, “This is where I want to live.” And so we started looking here. We ended up moving here in May of 2004.

Klapwyk: So can you maybe describe the community you were living in before the storm?

Baria: Well, you know, I hesitate to use the word “utopian” but we sort of felt that way. It was a small community with a small downtown where all the merchants knew one another, and everybody knew everybody’s children, and you could get on your bike on a Sunday afternoon and leave your kids at home if they didn’t want to ride with you, ride into town and sit on the Dock of the Bay, which was a restaurant that used to be here, on the back deck and have a cold glass of beer or whatever and watch the sun go down, and do so with your neighbors and people who were coming in to just enjoy what we had here. And public schools were good. You could take your kids to school and not be late for work. You could coach a baseball team because you could leave work fifteen minutes before you had to be there. It just, it had everything that we wanted and needed in our lives at that time. And in addition to those things, it was beautiful. It was a boating community. We had a boat that when we lived in Jackson; we didn’t get to use it nearly enough. But there’s good fishing around here. There are islands offshore, which are just pristine and beautiful. And we wanted our children to grow up with all those things.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. So did you have a law—were you still working in law then?

Baria: No—well, then, yes. Yeah, at that time I had a law firm. I was the main partner, a main partner in the law firm, and I told my partners, “We’re going to move to the Gulf Coast.” And they wanted to keep the firm together, so I opened a Coast office of our law firm. My wife was not practicing then. She had stopped practicing a year or so before that to just be with the children. And so when we moved down, I continued to practice law, and she stayed at home and kept house and ran the children around where they needed to be.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. That’s OK. (brief interruption)
Baria: I apologize for that.

Klapwyk: That’s OK.

Baria: And so anyway, that was our situation when we moved down; I was working, and my wife was not. I mean she wasn’t gainfully employed; she was working her tail off being a mother.

Klapwyk: Yeah. So what kinds of things did you really enjoy about the community? Do you have any sort of religious affiliation?

Baria: Yeah, I’m an Episcopalian. We were married in the Episcopal Church. That was another—it was pretty neat to have your church less than a half mile down the beach. Our church was on the beach, and our house was, as well. And so we could literally walk to church. The kids could ride their bikes to church functions and those kinds of things. It was, our church was in between—(brief interruption) The church was in between the beach house and our house, and then just beyond the beach house was downtown, and we had a really neat, little downtown area with shops, and we knew everybody who owned the shops. And you know, there was a little ice cream, candy store where they knew our kids by name and a couple of little restaurants, and everybody—you had a good group of people who came to visit from other places, but everybody who lived here knew everybody. And you had a group of New Orleans people who came over on the weekends and had weekend houses, and they were known to everyone. I’ve forgotten what your question was now. You asked me about church affiliation.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Baria: I’ve gone on and on since then.

Klapwyk: No, no.

Baria: Sorry.

Klapwyk: That’s all right. So where was your neighborhood?

Baria: We didn’t really have a neighborhood. We lived on Beach Road, Beach Boulevard. And there were just houses along there, and then there’s beach across the road, so I wouldn’t call it a neighborhood, but to tell you the location, where Washington Street comes into Beach Boulevard, there’s an extension and a pier. We were just about probably six or seven-tenths of a mile south of there. We were about two-tenths of a mile north of the Bay-Waveland line. And we were right on the beach. It was a house that was built in 1875. It was on the National Historic Register. It had seen and survived, no telling how many hurricanes before Katrina. It was just a really, really neat place. It was a camp for years and years and years; it was called Camp
Onward, and it was run by some Catholic nuns out of New Orleans, and it had a huge Olympic-sized pool that many, many children who grew up in Bay St. Louis learned how to swim in that pool, and everybody knew the place. I could try to explain where I lived, and people would get this quizzical look on their faces, and then I would say, “Camp Onward.” And they would go, “Oh, yeah, I know exactly where you’re talking about.” So it was an iconic sort of place.

Klapwyk: So when you heard that Hurricane Katrina was coming, what were your initial thoughts?

Baria: Well, having grown up down here, you’re used to that, you know. Katrina or any other storm is just a storm when it’s way out in the Gulf, and they start predicting where it may end up. And you learned to follow, but you learned not to get alarmed until they really narrow down the cone, say the three-to-five-day cone, and then if you’re in it, you’ve got to get prepared. And this one appeared to be—it was going to be a pretty serious storm. Even when it was way out in the Gulf, you could tell that, though they change a lot. Direction, intensity, all of that changes. On Friday before the storm hit, we had planned to go to Jackson where my wife’s best friend from childhood was having a wedding shower; she was getting married. And I remember being a little nervous about leaving, but the function was the next day, on Saturday as I recall, and this was very important to my wife, and so we packed everybody up, and we went to Jackson Saturday morning. We went to the function that evening, and I remember not being able to sleep very well that night because I was just, I was concerned about it. You’re hearing reports of the intensity of the storm strengthening and heading toward the Mississippi Gulf Coast or New Orleans or wherever. And so I got up at about five a.m. that next morning, Sunday morning, and it had increased in intensity and size, and had become a Category Five storm, which is, as you know, the most serious storm you could have. And it was predicted to come right here. So I hurriedly got everybody up. We loaded into the car, and we raced back down to the Coast. And I was on the phone with friends who were making preparations all the way down, and one of my friends offered to get my boat out of the water. When you have a boat sitting in the water and a storm’s coming, even if it’s coming fifty, sixty, a hundred miles away, you get a big tide, and you get choppy waves, and it bangs your boat around, so you’ve got to get it out of the water. Someone offered to do that for me, and by the time I got down here, they had pulled the boat out of the water and put it at my law office, which was a good spot. It was on a trailer. So I was able to just say, “Thank you,” and go straight home and start work. And what we did was we spent the rest of the day—we probably got home at 9:30, ten o’clock in the morning. We spent that whole day making preparations, loading the car with the essentials, deciding what to take and what not to take. Remember, we had three children at that time. We also had two dogs and a cat. And we had to get all that in a vehicle and decide which one to leave. And we did that; my wife mostly handled that stuff while I was shuttering the house and boarding up windows that didn’t have shutters, and just making preparations. And then everybody’s got a funny story about it, not funny, necessarily, but an interesting story about Katrina. Ours is that it starts to get really dark once the storm starts to come in. And this was probably four o’clock, maybe five
o’clock in the afternoon, which down here in the summer is usually well lit, but it was pretty dark. We loaded up, cranked up the car, and packed to the gills, got to the end of my driveway, and I could tell something was wrong with the car, but we had to go. So we turned north on Beach Boulevard heading toward Highway 90, and I was going to go down the beach because I figured everybody had moved inland and any congestion, traffic congestion would be up north. So we were going to go down the beach as far as we could, then turn north. And we were going to my brother’s house; he lived in north Jackson County in a place called Hurley. High and dry. We couldn’t get up onto Highway 90. There’s a small, you know, like a four-foot incline there at the red light, and we couldn’t get up there because my truck just didn’t have any power. And so we ended up turning around, going back home, unloading everything, putting everything we could into my four-door sedan that I had at the time, and there wasn’t enough room for me and my son. So the idea was we would send my wife and the girls and the animals and stuff, send that ahead and call my brother out to come get us. And it’s an hour-and-a-half from his house to our house. So my son and I sat there and watched the Weather Channel with the house boarded up, so it was completely dark except for the overhead light, for about an hour-and-a-half and just watched the storm continue to get bigger and stronger, and it was obviously coming right at us at that time. And the waves were menacing, right out front. And my brother ultimately showed up at about, I think about seven o’clock, and I remember that we were the only vehicle I saw between our house and somewhere way over in north Jackson County. Everybody—

Klapwyk: Wow.

Baria: —had gone or had gone inside not to come out.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. And so then were you at the house with your wife and your daughters then? Is that where you went?

Baria: Yes, we all went to my brother’s house. Now, this was Sunday evening at about seven p.m. My wife and my daughters, animals, everybody, everything had already arrived at my brother’s house, and we came in later at about 8:30. And he had some friends staying with him. And this is a strange phenomenon if you’re not from a storm-prone area, but whenever the storm is bearing down, you find a place to go. And usually extended families get together or family and friends and neighbors. You get together; you pool resources, and you get your batteries and your lanterns and your flashlights and your canned goods and your water and your fuel and your generators, and you get it all ready, and then you just kind of hole up in somebody’s house. And my brother’s house was, as I said, a good bit inland, probably twenty miles inland on high ground. And while we knew that it was going to get wind and maybe tornadoes and lots of rain, it was not going to get a flood or a storm surge. And so we went there, and the house was full. Nobody knew how long we were going to be there, but we assumed it would be a day, maybe two days.
Klapwyk: Um-hm. So can you maybe describe what it was like to go through the storm? I mean what was happening?

Baria: Yeah. I had been through many storms. I remember Camille as a child, and while my family’s home was forty miles or so from the eye of Camille, we got hurricane winds over in Escatawpa where I grew up. It was a bad storm even where we were, though not nearly as bad as near the eye, and Katrina was much the same. I mean we got hurricane winds in Hurley, which is north Jackson County, probably from the time, probably from five a.m. Monday morning through ten a.m. Monday morning, and good strong gusts after that. And it’s just torrential rain, and the wind howls around the corners of the houses, makes a howling noise, and trees, you can hear limbs snapping all the time. And you remember we had animals; they’d have to go outside to go to the bathroom, so you got to go out in the storm and try to coax your animals into going to the bathroom. And the younger kids, you know they’re frightened because it’s pitch black at eight a.m. But I’ve actually been through storms that were worse where I was during the storm. I went through Frederick in [19]79 when I thought our house was going to blow apart, and I remember the eye passed over our house in Frederick, and we got out in the middle of the eye and sawed trees so that we could get out of our driveway and go see if we could help neighbors. So in terms of where I was at the moment the storm hit, going through Katrina was not as violent as some other ones that I’d been through. But it was nevertheless a—the perception I had during Katrina was, if the eye is hitting Bay St. Louis and I am fifty, sixty miles away, this must be a terrible storm. But it really didn’t dawn on me how bad until the next day when my brother and I—well, I say the next day—that same day, late that afternoon, four or five p.m. in the afternoon when we felt like it was safe to get out. We drove down to Pascagoula to check on one of his rental houses, and we were shocked to see the devastation along the beach in Pascagoula, which is probably forty miles as the crow flies from Bay St. Louis, maybe more, and I thought then, “If it is this bad here, forty, fifty miles from the eye, there’s nothing left of Bay St. Louis.” And that wasn’t too far from accurate.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. Were you hearing anything in terms of the radio or television, or had you lost all power?

Baria: We lost power probably seven a.m., maybe six a.m. that morning, but we had weather radios, and we had generators, so we were able to, we were able to watch the news for a while. But it got so bad, I mean, cable went out. We had an antenna, rabbit ears or something, so you could get WLOX until it just got too bad, but I think we continued to monitor by radio. So we knew it was really bad; we knew the storm surge was really high. We knew it was hitting Bay St. Louis, but at some point you kind of lose contact. And I don’t know whether the radio station quit broadcasting or went out, or I don’t know what happened there, but there’s a couple of hours there where you just don’t know what’s going on, and that was true of this storm, too.

Klapwyk: So when you went down to Pascagoula, did you continue to Bay St. Louis, or did you go back?
Baria: No. That mission, if you will, was just to go down and check on his house. It was too late in the evening to try to venture over. And you’ve got to understand that if you try to go more than just a few miles, you need to pack food, water, fuel. I mean everything gets shut down. And while we didn’t know how bad it was going to be after Katrina, it just makes common sense that you have to have those things, and we weren’t prepared to do that. We all had just gone through it, and frankly, my brother and I just wanted to go out and take a look real quick and get back home. It took a lot longer than we thought because there were so many roads underwater, even in north Jackson County. Katrina’s storm surge pushed water so far inland, up through tributaries that had never flooded in my lifetime. It was just amazing. We passed a bridge that I had crossed my entire childhood and adolescence, and even as an adult, and I’d never seen water up near that bridge, and it was, for a half mile either side of the bridge, that little branch or creek or whatever, was flooded.

Klapwyk: Wow.

Baria: And so you just, you immediately understood that this was something that was vastly different than what we had seen before.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. So continuing on, what did you or you and your family decide to do for the next couple of weeks after that?

Baria: Well, the next day my Uncle Rudy, who lives in Mandeville, wanted to go check on his house. I, of course, wanted to see what happened to Bay St. Louis. My brother wanted to go to help. So the three of us loaded up in my uncle’s truck, and we took some extra fuel. We took some water and some other supplies that we thought if we found people who were essentially refugees that we would try to help them. And so we loaded up the truck, and we brought chainsaws and saws, chainsaws, hatchets, axes, whatever we could find, because you just don’t know what you’re going to have to cut your way through. And we had been hearing on the radio that morning that I-10, Interstate 10 was closed to all traffic. And you hear things like that; it’s not always accurate because people are reporting what they’ve heard, and they’re just doing the best they can. But because of what we heard, we went north and tried to come across on Highway 26, which goes from Lucedale to Wiggins and on to Poplarville, and it’s some twenty miles inland, so we felt like that road would be open if somebody had been along there and cut it open, because trees fall across it. And sure enough, somebody had been through there with a chainsaw and had cut—at least one lane was open all the way across. We found a place over near Wiggins that was selling fuel, but the line was incredibly long. We got in line, nevertheless, because we didn’t know when we might see a fuel stop again, and we topped off his truck. And then we decided to take a chance and go down [Highway] 49 because it was a four lane. We thought maybe it’ll be open down to I-10, and then we would check at I-10 and see if we could go across, and sure enough we could. So we hit [Highway] 49 in Gulfport, and we went all the way over to [Highway] 603, which is our four-lane coming down across Bayou LaCroix, and then we came in that way. And the road was not closed.
We had heard that the bridge was down or out or something and the road was closed, but it was not. And I tell you; I’ll never forget coming down from Interstate 10 down [Highway] 603 the day after Katrina. There were boats in the middle of the road. There were houses in the middle of the road. There was a, probably a two-inch coating of this, the most slimy mud you’ve ever seen, all over the road, all over everything. And in fact, I heard later that someone was coming down on a motorcycle, and they slipped in that mud, and it just scraped their leg up horribly, but also because the mud had so many, so much bacteria in it, that it infected their leg, or maybe it was their hand. I can’t remember which. And it was a flesh-eating sort of bacteria. And we only learned this later because we saw them at the hospital where my son was later hospitalized, and they told us what had happened. But we ultimately made it down Nicholson to the point at which you get to the railroad tracks, and you just couldn’t go any further. There were four or five houses in the road; I mean literally in the street between the railroad tracks and Beach Boulevard on Nicholson. And so we parked the truck there and tried to walk in to see if my house had made it.

Klapwyk: So you walked in. You said there was three people. Who was it that was with you?

Baria: My brother and my uncle and myself.

Klapwyk: So what was it like just to see all that while you were walking?

Baria: Well, you’re looking at your friends’ and your neighbors’ homes that are collapsed in the middle of the street. You know that everything they owned and cherished, other than what they were able to put in a box and take with them, has been destroyed and is laying out in the middle of the street for all to see. And I mean there’s sheets and pants and underwear hanging from trees. There are bodies wedged in trees and stuck in fences. And while I personally cannot tell you I saw bodies that day, I’ve been told that they were all over the place, and I just didn’t know it because they were covered with debris and mud. And I’m glad I didn’t, didn’t see any of that. But it’s an awful feeling. We turned down a street that I thought would be the best entry point to get in from the back side of my house. I thought that there would be no way to go down Beach Boulevard, so we went laterally down the beach to a street that I knew that cut through almost all the way through. We climbed over rooftops to get to a point where we had to go through a wooded area, and then it was basically walking along downed trees and jumping from tree to tree to try to get to a point where you could walk. And we ran into this guy. And the few people that we ran into—there were probably three or four—were just sort of dazed and confused. They had ridden it out, and they were, they just weren’t in a normal state of mind as a result of it. But this one person I ran into, I asked him, I said, “Are there any houses standing on the beach?” He said, “Yeah, there’s one. It’s a big, white house.” And my house was a big, white house. I said, “Tell me what it looks like.” And he said, “It sits back on a hill, and it’s got a porch across the front and gables on top.” And that described my house, and immediately my spirits rose. I thought, “The old girl, the old 135-, 130-year-old house survived another one.” But ultimately we got down
there and learned that he was talking about another house, which did survive just up
the beach.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm.

**Baria:** My house was gone; there was nothing but the front steps, the back steps, and
the piers that it rested on, and there was no evidence other than that that a house had
ever been there.

**Klapwyk:** So then did you call your wife?

**Baria:** Well, there was no cell service.

**Klapwyk:** Oh, yeah.

**Baria:** I couldn’t tell her until I got back, and I really wanted to tell her face-to-face
anyway. I didn’t want to tell her on the cell phone and then have her—you know it
took about three hours to get over to my house, and I didn’t want her to sit there for
three hours without me being there to give her a hug then.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm.

**Baria:** And I didn’t want her to have to deal with the children and their questions, so I
waited till I got back. I may have had cell service at some point and just chose not to
tell her until I got back.

**Klapwyk:** So what were your plans when you, like in the weeks after that?

**Baria:** Plan is an interesting word. We didn’t really have a plan for this eventuality.
I just, I didn’t believe that house would go down. It withstood Camille, and Camille
was the benchmark for storms along the Mississippi Gulf Coast. And while I
anticipated we would have some water damage and some wind damage, not in my
wildest dreams did I anticipate that there would be nothing left. So you know, how do
you process that? What do you do with that? It took a while for us to come up with a
plan; it took several days, and that was several days of us sleeping on the floor or on
the couch at my brother’s house with an extended family and some of his friends and
no power. And it’s hard to get any clarity of thought. I mean the loss is so
devastating, and you have friends and family who need your help, too, so you can’t
really focus on your own situation too much. But ultimately what we did was we
decided that we wanted to get back down here as close as we could and try to help
people. And so what we did was, we went to Hattiesburg, which is a town an hour-
and-a-half north of here, ninety miles or so, and we bought a pull-camper. A lot of
people got FEMA [Federal Emergency Management Agency] trailers, and I guess this
was before we understood that we may be able to get a FEMA trailer, but we just went
ahead and did this. And we bought this trailer, and we pulled it down. In the few days
following the storm, everybody was trying to get in touch with each other to make
sure everybody was OK. You just, you got to know that your friends and your family and everybody’s all right first. And so we managed to get in touch with some folks. My brother had decent cell service at his house in, maybe not the next day, but a couple of days after. And a friend of mine was in the hotel business, and he was dating a girl who ran a hotel over just off the interstate in Gulfport, and he said, “Why don’t you pull your trailer over here? We’re over here in a motor home staying in the parking lot, and we’re trying to get the hotel up and running because FEMA wants to send people in. The Red Cross wants to send people in, and they’re willing to pay for a room even if there’s no AC [air-conditioning].” So we did; we pulled our trailer over there and parked it with them, and we sort of camped out. And every day we would come into Bay St. Louis and just drive around and try to check on people. We had water; we had food; we had gloves. By that time, I had friends in Jackson who had loaded up trailers, and I would go up there and pick up the trailer and pull it down. The trailers had fuel; they had paper products. They had canned goods; they had water. This outpouring of support was incredible. And we would bring it down and stage it, and then I would take it in my truck, by the load. My next-door neighbor, who was out of town in San Francisco when the storm hit, he was an airline pilot. By that time he had hit the ground here; he had gotten a pull-camper, and he was having friends that he knew from California and elsewhere to send supplies into Mobile where they were delivering them via UPS [United Parcel Service] to my brother’s house in a facility he had there, like a big Quonset-hut type storage facility. So we were staging them there, as well, and bringing them in at the same time. And so—

Klapwyk: Where would you distribute the stuff? Just kind of like you’d drive around and find people?

Baria: We did some of that, driving around, and you’d just ask, “Hey, you need some water?” We had cases of water. We had everything you could, you know, the essentials that people needed, shoes, clothes, Band-Aids, Neosporin, acetaminophen, just whatever you could think of that you might need. He even, my partner, I mean my neighbor and later-to-be business partner, even had a couple of generators flown in and gave those away to some people. Fuel was a big need, ice; everybody needed ice. So, and tents, those kinds of things. We would stage it; we would bring it in, and you asked where we distributed it from—we did some riding around, but there was this really incredible girl who led a group of people who ended up at Second Street Elementary School, and people started depositing stuff there because it was just a—that was a good place to leave it. And they had a couple of grills, and they were cooking. And they were just trying to help people there, provide them a dry place, and the food began piling up. Her name was Trisha Blayley or something like that, an incredible girl who I think was a waitress before the storm. She had no real training in how to run something like this. But she ended up running this, you know, this—I don’t know what you would call it. It ended up being a grocery store and a place for you to come. And I mean the Red Cross set up there and gave hepatitis vaccinations, at one point. The Army Corps of Engineers had people there. There were Army MPs [military police] there. When they eventually got big enough, they had to guard all of
the stores that they had there, and so they posted an armed MP, and he answered to her. It was just incredible. But that’s where we brought most of our stuff.

**Klapwyk:** Do you have any interesting stories of people that you met through that?

**Baria:** People that I met through that?

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm.

**Baria:** Probably so, but I can tell you the day that I came in after the storm looking for my house, I ran into somebody that I had already known. Our children played soccer together; his daughter babysat for us. And he told the most incredible story of having spent several hours in the middle of the storm in the boughs of an oak tree with his two or three oldest daughters just hanging on.

**Klapwyk:** Wow.

**Baria:** Richard Johnson and his, I think his three oldest daughters. There’s three daughters; his three oldest children.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm.

**Baria:** They just clung to a tree when they got washed out of their home, and they stayed there for hours until the storm passed and they could climb down. And he just had this wild look about him, just hair all over the place, and his eyes were big as saucers when he told the story, and it just, it was just a wild experience he had, and he was out riding his bicycle down the beach. And you know nobody really knows what to do, but once you start to get your bearings after a day or so, then you start looking around for what you can do to help yourself and help others. There was nothing I could do at my house; it was gone. And my family over in Jackson County was fairly well taken care of. My brother’s house didn’t sustain any damage. My mother’s house had a little water, and it was going to need something, but it was not something she couldn’t deal with by herself at that point. She had a dry bed to sleep in and a roof over her head. So we came this way to try to help. We met a lot of people eating under the tents in the months after the storm. I mean, there weren’t any restaurants open. You went to a tent where some volunteer group was cooking breakfast, lunch, and dinner. You stood in a line, and you got whatever they were serving, and you loved it, and you thanked them for it, and that’s the way it was. And it was everybody there from the president of the largest bank on the Gulf Coast to the guy who works as a welder or as an oysterman. We were all reduced to one class of society at that point. We were all pretty much homeless and destitute without any grocery stores, power, any ability to make ice or refrigerate anything, and we were reliant on the kindness of volunteers and on one another, and that was about it. And I’ve heard lots of fantastic stories, but the best one I’ve heard, I think, is, if not the Johnsons clinging in the tree, and there’s several of those with people hacking their way through their roofs and hanging onto their roofs. There’s a man named Julius, down on the beach, who
refused to leave even though he lived in a very, very low place, and he ended up, I think, surfing his car back to Third Street or something, and escaping that way. But the best one: there was a couple who have a daughter and son-in-law, and they had a newborn grandchild, and they lived in a relatively low place down in Pearlington, Mississippi. And Pearlington was a place that was just devastated. It went completely underwater, and I mean it’s as if it didn’t exist after the storm. But they went to their neighbors’ bigger house, and as the water came up, they moved from the top of the furniture up into the attic. And there was a—the neighbors were older folks; they were probably late seventies. And so the person that I met, his wife and their granddaughter, and their daughter and granddaughter. I think their son was in the military or in the police department or something, and he was on duty, as I recall. So it was basically this one man who was in his fifties, another man who was seventy-something, and three women and a baby, a newborn. And they get up into the roof of this house, and the water continues to rise. It’s coming into the ceiling area, at this point, the attic area, rather. And he said to himself, “I’ve got to do something.” They had tied a boat to a tree in between their houses, but they had tied it so well that it didn’t rise with the water. When the water rose, it went under. In other words, it didn’t have enough extra rope to rise to the top of the water, and so it was underwater. And he decided that he would try to get back and find the boat, and he didn’t know this at the time he left the attic of that other house, but he kicked out the window of the attic and jumped in the water. And the wind was blowing so hard, the current was running so hard that it just carried him very rapidly back toward his house in the water where he hit, or it hit him in his chest, a limb—I didn’t say that very well. But he basically hit a big pecan limb as he was floating through the water, and so he found it with his feet, and he held onto the pecan tree and the limb he knew to be twenty feet off the ground, under normal circumstances. So the water was twenty-something feet high there because it was over his ankles. And he realized that that boat was under the water, and he realized, also at that point, that he could not swim back to the house that he’d just left from, and his house was underwater. So he’s in a fix, and he said to me, he was standing there just praying, wondering about what he was going to do, when suddenly that boat popped up to the top of the water. Apparently it had broken one of its ropes, or something, or the hand of God, or who knows. But it popped to the top of the water, and he was able to get the boat and get in it, and just pulling himself with downed trees and limbs, hand-over-hand. He said it took at least an hour, but he pulled himself back over to the house, up wind, up current, and tied it off to [an electrical service masthead] or something, one of those pipes that comes up out of your roof, and he stuck his head in the window and said, “Y’all come on; let’s get on the boat,” because water was still coming up in the attic. They all got on the boat; it wasn’t a big boat, but they all crowded into the boat, and he held onto that masthead for the next several hours with the older couple and his wife and their daughter and the newborn all in this boat. He said at one point he looked at his wife, and she had this horrible look on her face, and he was wondering what the look was, and she would turn from his face to look at his hands. Finally he looked down at his hands, and they were bloody; he had been holding and gripping, and maybe it was rough—I don’t know—but his hands were bleeding, but he just kept holding on. And eventually the
water went down, and the wind subsided, and everybody was fine. But that I thought was one of the more incredible stories I heard.

**Klapwyk:** Wow, that takes a lot of guts to jump out a window in a storm.

**Baria:** It does, and there are lots of stories with that kind of courage, I think.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm. How long did you help distribute supplies and stuff to people? How long did that last?

**Baria:** I think it was about ten days of doing it every day. My wife was in Jackson with our children. One of our good friends had a house that had a good setup so that there was a room in the back, a guest room, and they let us have the guest room, and it had a bathroom. So they were there when my wife called me and told me that my son was sick and was more than just a little sick, or she wouldn’t have called me and asked me to come home. But she said, “I think you need to get up here.” And so I did, and I didn’t come back down for a long time after that because my son ended up being hospitalized, and he spent about ten days in a coma, and then he died, and that was, I think it was a month to the day, maybe; maybe it was the thirtieth of September. No, I think it was the twenty-ninth. So it was a month, to the day, from the storm. So I only did what I described for about ten days, and then after we got—go ahead.

**Klapwyk:** Oh, sorry, I was just going to say, if you don’t mind talking about it, what happened to your son?

**Baria:** Well, we didn’t know at the time what was wrong. We thought that he had, we thought he’d contracted some sort of encephalitic disease or meningococcal, meningococcal—it was something to do with his brain, and he had a horrible fever. It wasn’t just a typical infection. He didn’t have a real high white [blood cell] count or anything like that, and they didn’t know. Ultimately we learned, after blood tests came back after his death, that he had rabies. And he was the only person in the United States of America that died from rabies in 2005. And so, you know, when you hear something like that, you immediately start going, “Well, how in the world has that happened? You have to be bitten by a rabid animal.” And my son, he was eleven-and-a-half years old—no, I’m sorry, he was ten-and-a-half years old at the time, and he would’ve told us if he had been bitten by something, and he had known it. The only thing that we could figure that might’ve happened is that he was bitten by a bat in his sleep. We lived in this old house, and we had found a dead bat in his room earlier that year. We don’t know exactly when, but probably in May of that year, we found a dead bat. And I had seen a bat outside under an umbrella that we kept out. It was a big sun umbrella kind of thing, and one day I opened it up, and there was a little bat up there. And of course, we saw them at night all the time. Bats are good things, you know. They eat mosquitoes and gnats and those kinds of things, so we liked to have them around. But we just put two and two together, and nobody knows for sure, but we figured that that must be what happened, that the bat bit him while he was asleep. He didn’t know anything about it, so he didn’t complain about it, and we
didn’t know any better when we found a dead bat in his room then, to think immediately that he might’ve been bitten. I learned later that there was a Discovery [Channel] program on, about that very sort of thing happening, in Third World countries, primarily, but I never saw it. And so by the time he started demonstrating symptoms, even if we had known then he had been bitten by a bat, once you start having symptoms of rabies, you can’t stop the progression. So there’s nothing that could’ve been done had we known the day that he went in the hospital. Had we known the day he got bitten, we could’ve done something about it.

**Klapwyk:** How long was he in the hospital?

**Baria:** About ten days. I think he went in—I don’t remember, to tell you the truth. It’s not something I kept track of. We spent, it may have been two weeks, may have been fifteen days. We spent a lot of nights at the hospital; every night from the time he went in there. I didn’t leave other than to take a shower and get some change of clothes and come back. It’s all a blur; it all seemed like one day, one day that wouldn’t end.

**Klapwyk:** Um-hm. And so then after that, how did you guys move on from that?

**Baria:** I don’t know that we have, really. Well, yeah, I mean I guess—

**Klapwyk:** I mean, how did you, you know, like pick up your life and get to where you are today?

**Baria:** Well, with a lot of support from a lot of friends and family, and you know, just, I guess, believing that there’s things that need to be done on this earth and in our community, you know. My wife and I, we reacted to it the same, but the way we dealt with our grief was completely different. I mean, she was just overwhelmed by it and had to stay in bed most of the time. I, on the other hand, I had to get out and do something to take my mind off of it. And so I sunk my teeth into a new business. I started a new business, and actually my friends and neighbors started it and let me tag along, and then eventually I became involved in it, and that business is still around. But that’s how I dealt with it, primarily, but—and you know when you have children, and you have other children, you’ve got to be a parent. You don’t have a choice. I mean the only [other] option would be to just give up, and you can’t. I couldn’t do that to my children. They needed me to be their daddy. I mean, they had just gone through a horrible disaster, not including the death of their brother; they lost everything, too. They lost their stable home and their community and—

**Klapwyk:** So did you move back to Bay St. Louis?

**Baria:** We wanted to get back down here as quickly as possible. We really fell in love with this place and there were people who thought, “Well, they’re going to move back to Jackson. Aren’t y’all going to move back to Jackson?” Because that was the easy thing for us to do; we still owned a house in Jackson. But we didn’t want to do
that. We wanted to be back down here. We wanted to be a part of this recovery, and we couldn’t wait to get back down here. So as soon as we could, you know, physically and mentally, we moved back this way. I took the trailer that I had mentioned earlier, brought it over and put it on our lot on the beach so we could be back there. And it was clear that we couldn’t live there, if we had a choice. Now, a lot of people lived in those things, and still do, and I don’t know how they’ve done it. But I had a choice, thankfully, and we didn’t want to live in that FEMA trailer. So we bought a place up in Diamondhead, and in January of [20]06, we moved everybody down to Diamondhead. And we started over, you know, new furniture, new beds, new dishes, new everything, and anyway.

Klapwyk: Yeah. What was your experience with—did you have any experience with FEMA? Or like how did you get a house? Was that something that—

Baria: FEMA provided us with a, I believe, two thousand dollars initially, and then they provided another eight thousand dollars. So we got a ten-thousand-dollar-FEMA-living grant, I guess. I think it was mostly for food, clothing, shelter. We apparently didn’t qualify for a FEMA trailer, but at that point I had a trailer, so I wouldn’t have taken one even if I had [qualified]. And that’s all I got from FEMA and was thankful I didn’t have to deal with them anymore, really, except through our business, I dealt with them some. I know a lot of people had a lot of problems with FEMA. I don’t think that the recovery effort was run as well as it could’ve been. Of course, in how many countries can you expect a two-thousand-dollar check from your government within days after a catastrophe? You know? So there are—I see good points about FEMA, and I see some bad points about FEMA. I definitely think it could’ve been done better, but I’m thankful that they were there to stand in the gap at some level.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. What would you say helped with the bulk of the recovery? Would you say it was the government or like churches or volunteer groups?

Baria: Well, I think initially volunteer groups. We could not have gotten by as well as we have at this point without volunteer groups. Our recovery would not be near where it is today without the help of, primarily church volunteer groups from all over the world. We were just blessed to have had an outpouring of that kind of support. Now, long-term recovery, I think it’s going to be more governmental because things like the Go Zone and the tax incentives you get from that and the CDBG [Community Development Block Grant] grant money that is coming in through the Mississippi Development Authority, you know, in terms of grants to people to help them get rebuilt and grants to businesses, and there’s money available to redo the Gulfport Port over there, and those kinds of big-ticket items the government is going to have to handle. And long-term I think they’re going to be more helpful than volunteers, though we still have volunteers. But the immediate, the immediate needs, food, clothing, shelter, those are provided primarily by volunteer groups.
Klapwyk: Um-hm. In an ideal world, how would you like to see this community rebuilt?

Baria: I would like to see our community retain about 98 percent of the attributes that it had pre-Katrina. I think that it would be foolish of us to try to rebuild the same style or method, using the method of construction that we used before, all over the velocity zone areas. I’m a big believer that we need stronger, better-built, better-constructed homes in the velocity zone, which there’s probably a real definition for that, but my definition is within about a thousand to fifteen hundred feet of water. So the railroad tracks is a big marker down here. Anything on the eastern, or southeast side of the railroad tracks in the Bay St. Louis-Waveland area really ought to be something other than stick-built construction, which means wood-frame construction. And you do that through building codes, and you do that through incentives; you incentivize somebody to use a masonry product as opposed to a wood-framed house. So those things I would change. I think that we have an opportunity to— you know, one of the things about Bay St. Louis and Waveland is you can have a really nice house sitting next to, you know, a trailer, or we didn’t have— zoning was done piecemeal over the years. And you had a lot of irregular shapes and sizes of structures, and I think we have an opportunity to straighten some of that out, too. But if you didn’t see Bay St. Louis before Katrina, it was a pretty charming place, and I hope that we go back with something very similar to that. People are entitled to develop their properties in the way that they see fit, as long as it’s within a certain framework. And if they want to build a condo tower somewhere in Hancock County, I’m fine with that, but that really wouldn’t fit with the scheme of downtown Bay St. Louis, for instance. So in the best of all worlds, I’d like to see downtown Bay St. Louis come back just like it was.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. How close do you think it’s possible to get?

Baria: Well, I think anything’s possible, and I think that if the citizen involvement stays at the level it is and has been since Katrina, then we will get a community just like we want. If we start to, as citizens, start to stop paying attention, then we’re going to get what the people with the power and the money would like for us to get. And so I’ve been amazed, first of all, at the resiliency of the people of Hancock County and the Gulf Coast, but also at their involvement in every step of this process. I mean there are people who, I’m guessing, that were never involved in community activities and political life and that sort of stuff, who are engaged, and still two and a half years past the storm, are very engaged in their community government. And I think that is critical, and I think that is fantastic.

Klapwyk: Hmm. What is your role in the community? Are you—

Baria: Well, I’m a State senator.

Klapwyk: State senator, OK. What does that mean?
Baria: Well, you know we have a federal legislature in Washington that has—we have [the US] Congress, the [US] House of Representatives, and then we have the [US] Senate. Well, in Mississippi we also—that’s a bicameral legislature. In Mississippi we also have bicameral legislature; we have a house and a senate [in Mississippi]. The State is divided up into fifty-two senate districts, and they’re based on population. My senate district is forty-six, number forty-six; it includes all of Hancock County and a little bit of Harrison County to get the requisite amount of population. We’ll redistrict soon, and that may change because we’ve lost population here. In other words, my geographical district may enlarge.

Klapwyk: It might expand, OK.

Baria: Yes, but right now it includes all of Hancock and a little bit of Harrison County. And in that same area that I cover, there are probably four or five representatives because they have smaller geographical areas, and they represent a smaller population. And we go to Jackson, and we have a capitol there, and we work on laws that govern virtually everything that goes on in the State of Mississippi that’s not governed specifically by federal law or by a municipal law. Like we don’t get into zoning regulations. We just talked about that; we don’t do that. But if it’s a criminal law, then it came from the legislature.

Klapwyk: How long have you held this position?

Baria: I ran for and was elected to this position in November of 2007. So I’ve served one year of a four-year term now. I’m a freshman.

Klapwyk: So if someone starts in first year, they do it for four years, or do you have to be reelected every year?

Baria: No, it’s a four-year term; you’re reelected every four years.

Klapwyk: So does this give you a big say into what’s going on in the community, and like how does the politics work in that?

Baria: Well, it doesn’t give me a big say into what’s going on in the community, necessarily, but because I’m the senator, I’m kept in the loop about what’s going on. And so I’m supposed to, as part of my job, know what’s going on in this community as well as the communities I represent over in Pass Christian and DeLisle and other places in Harrison County. I’m also supposed to know what’s going on up in the county in Hancock County, even though they are unincorporated areas. So I go to meetings like the Bay St. Louis City Council and the Waveland City Council, and I go to the board of supervisors meeting, and I go to the utility district meetings, more or less just to stay apprised of what’s going on. If they need something from me at the State level, then they’ll ask me, and then I’ll go to my body that I’m a member of and try to get something passed that will do what my folks back here feel like they need to have done. And I represent these good folks, and I could not be prouder. I don’t think
there’s a district—I know there’s not a district in this state that I would be more proud
to represent than this district right here, having gone through everything that we’ve
gone through and bounced back as well as we have.

Klapwyk: Why did you run initially, was this something that you always thought you
would do, or was it—

Baria: I can’t say that I ever thought that I would run for the Mississippi Legislature
before Katrina, but after Katrina there were all these meetings. Gene Taylor, our
congressman, held a lot of meetings, and there were other folks that held citizen
meetings, and it was a group of people who were concerned about what was going to
happen with this community in the way it’s rebuilt, but also concerned about why their
insurance claims weren’t being paid and just every issue you could think of. And I
went to almost every one of these meetings because when my wife and I decided we
were not going to leave after the storm, we were going to stay here, we wanted to be a
part of rebuilding this community. And I don’t mean just being here, we really wanted
to take part in it.

Klapwyk: Instrumentally.

Baria: If we could be.

Klapwyk: Um-hm.

Baria: So we went to all these meetings, and I began to look around and see who was
there in terms of our leadership, and I just never saw the guy who was our State
senator, and it just began to make me mad that—my feeling was that if he was—he
had been representing us for twelve years, at that point, that he needed to be there, and
he needed to hear what problems people were having and what their concerns were so
that he could adequately represent us in Jackson. And I started asking people, because
I didn’t see him, I said, “What kind of a senator has he been?” I don’t want to make
this political, but the response I got led me to believe that I could do a better job, and
so I decided to run. And I spent about nine months campaigning, and I won, by the
slimmest of margins, but I’m very happy to say that I won.

Klapwyk: You were running against the previous state senator?

Baria: A twelve-year incumbent. His last name was Cuevas, and in Hancock County,
that’s a pretty big family.

Klapwyk: Yeah, right.

Baria: So not many people gave me a chance.

Klapwyk: Um-hm, but enough did.
Baria: Enough did, and I think I surprised some people by how hard I was willing to work for the job, and I think that they felt like that would translate into a senator who would work hard. At least that’s what I hope they would think, and I hope that’s true.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. So how has it been in the first year of being State senator?

Baria: Well, it’s been a positive experience, on the whole. I wish I would’ve been more effective in my first year. I really wanted to pass some insurance reforms and to do some things with housing construction to incentivize people to build better houses and to be greener in terms of our technology and use photovoltaic and geothermal and some of those. Anyway, I wasn’t able to get those things done in my first year. I’ll try again next year. But it’s been a positive experience, and to have people that I really don’t even know come up to me and say, “I know you’re fighting for us up there, and we appreciate that,” has just been very affirming.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. You mentioned to be greener. Is there a lot of ways in which the community is rebuilding in a more green way, or is it just they’re just trying to rebuild as fast as possible?

Baria: Unfortunately, I think they’re just trying to rebuild as fast as possible, and I certainly can understand that motivation. And my concern is that you really can’t mandate, you can’t force people to use green building components, but you can incentivize them to do it. And that’s why I think we have a very unique opportunity, not just here, but all along the Mississippi Gulf Coast with all the homes that were destroyed or damaged very badly. And everybody’s doing work to get rebuilt. We have this great opportunity to be greener.

Klapwyk: Um-hm, to do it right the second time.

Baria: Absolutely, and to incorporate some alternative energy sources and use materials that don’t off-gas and to use masonry products that are recyclable and all those things that we can and should be considering, at least.

Klapwyk: Yeah, that was one of my initial questions when I came down, and I never knew kind of what was being done or if anything was being done, but that’s good to know that someone’s thinking about it. (laughter)

Baria: Oh, we’re thinking about it; I promise you. But for a lot of folks, just having a shelter was the most important thing, and they’d think about the other later, which I hope you can understand.

Klapwyk: Yeah.

Baria: I’m going to have to go get my daughter in about five minutes. I just want to let you know.
Klapwyk: Yeah. So yeah, we can just finish up. Maybe if there’s any last things you wanted to talk about or last stories that you may want to share.

Baria: I don’t guess I have any other stories, and I don’t know what else I could share that I haven’t already shared. I just, I guess in conclusion I could say that this is a really special place, and that’s what drew my wife and I to this community. I mean we literally looked at four or five different towns up and down the Coast, and having grown up down here on the Mississippi Gulf Coast, I knew a lot about the Gulf Coast. But I didn’t know—and I’ve been to Bay St. Louis many, many times, but I didn’t know about the, I guess the special nature of this community. And it really is a different sort of place. It’s a place apart. That’s the term that we use to describe our city, and it’s perfect. I didn’t come up with it, but somebody knew what I’m talking about to come up with that. And while we have our factions, and we fight about things like, “Do we want casinos, more casinos? Do we want condos, or do we want green building? And how do we do that? This town really pulls together when the chips are down, and this is going to be rebuilt. This city’s going to be rebuilt. It’s going to be as nice or nicer than it was before, and it’s just a special place that everybody needs to come and visit every now and then and realize what we went through one time back in 2005.

Klapwyk: Um-hm. OK. Well, thank you so much.

(end of interview)