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This is November 3, 2008, and this is an interview with Mary Helen Roberts. It is being conducted by Sherry Boswell at Representative Roberts' office in Lynnwood, Washington. So, thank you.

Roberts: You're welcome.

Boswell: I wanted to get started by just asking you about your personal background and where you grew up and a little bit about your family.

Roberts: Well, my family are Oregonians. I was born in Portland and spent my early childhood in Portland and Corvallis. And then, when I was in the first grade, we moved to Southern California because my father had been on the faculty at Oregon State and was earning hardly any money and at that point had four children. So a friend said, "Come south. There're lots of jobs in aerospace." So I grew up and went to almost all of my schooling in Southern California. I did one year at Oregon State University and then transferred back to the Los Angeles area and attended and graduated from UCLA.

Boswell: In your secondary and high school, were you interested in politics then? What kinds of activities were you primarily interested in?

Roberts: I was very focused on academics. I was not the world's best athlete, or any of those kinds of things. I was interested in student government. I didn't in high school get involved in politics at all, other than at high school. But I'd had friends that did, and I was sort of curious about it. I was always aware of elections, knew who my parents were supporting, and that sort of thing.

I think one of the other things that is important about my background is that there was such a strong value for education. I think it's somewhat unusual, but all of my immediate family and all four of my grandparents had college educations. And it goes back even further to a great-great-grandfather who brought the Roberts family to the Northwest through the Pacific by virtue of being a missionary. He had to have an educated wife before they would send him on a mission. I don't think either of them had much formal education because that was in the mid 1800s. But I know that Myra was able to teach mathematics. This great-great-grandfather had been an indentured servant, and he was indentured to a family that valued education. Without knowing any details, they educated him. So I think that's an interesting family history.

My grandmothers were both part of a feminist burst right after World War One. Although both of them, other than work during World War Two, were pretty much at home and were people that did volunteer work and things like that, one grandmother, in particular, had several women friends that were doctors. I can remember being at a family picnic and meeting not only the doctor that I had known all my childhood, but also this

other woman doctor. They were swapping stories, and one of the stories that they were telling about was the early days of birth control. Both of these women had been involved in the early birth-control movement. So I think that all planted some seeds in my mind.

But in my four years of college, the only women that I ever had as professors were those in foreign language. I never had a woman professor in any of my other academic courses. I started out majoring in mathematics in Oregon State, and then when I was at UCLA, I moved to political science. So I took a lot of political science and history, and then I was required to take a language course, and I took an art course. And, oh, I did take a music class. That was a woman who taught that, but all my professors were men.

So I didn't think about women's issues until I moved after graduation to Washington, DC. It was supposed to be just a summer job, and at the end of summer, I thought, "Well, why not stay." I was with a sub-agency at the Department of Commerce. It was called the Economic Development Administration, and I was part of a program—I don't know that they have it anymore—but I was a Management Intern. It was a mix of women and men that were in the intern class. In the agency, it was before anybody talked about the glass ceiling, but there obviously was one. You know, there were so many titles, like deputy-assistant secretaries and things of that nature, but none of them were women. It didn't take me very long to realize that most of the women were secretaries or elevator operators. Then those women who had moved up the ranks often were just really very tough, and it made me wonder, "Is that what you had to be like in order to even move up that far and stick it out?" So there was a lot of learning in that experience.

Boswell: So in both, in college and in the math department, in particular, but then even in the internship, were there other women with you? I mean, were there a number of women who were students with you? You noticed it in the faculty and then in the women in the agency, but what about women with you in school?

Roberts: When I was majoring in mathematics, it was very dominated by men. I was sort of stunned by the way people reacted because part of the conversation when you meet people is, "What are you majoring in?" I got a lot of, "Ooh, mathematics!" And it made me feel like there was something wrong with me, or something kind of weird about the whole thing. So there was that part of it that left me somewhat uncomfortable. Then there was the academic part of it that as mathematics became more theoretical, I found it both more challenging and less interesting. So I had used mathematics more as a toy than as a thought process, or something like that.

But I very much reacted to the somewhat segregated atmosphere of that field of study. Although all my professors in the history and political science courses that I took were men, the classroom was much more integrated. And you know, I don't even have a recollection of percentages, but it was never that feeling of looking around and saying, "Oh, I'm only one of the two or the three."

At that time, women's issues were not being talked about. It was first, very strongly civil rights stuff. That had been an issue all through, even as early as junior high school and high school, because of things happening in the South. California had a fair housing initiative that was very controversial. That was just an education in and of itself. Then eventually the antiwar activities came on. But again, I think those were both areas where women started to look around and say, "How come all of the leadership of this is

men?” And it was when I was in Washington, DC, both in my working environment, but also there were things in the newspaper that talked about the women’s liberation movement. Eventually there were things about NOW. Then I joined NOW, and that was the first women’s organization that I was aware of. I stayed in Washington, DC, for five years. Later during my tenure there, the Women’s Political Caucus was born. A lot of those things happened on the East Coast; at least, that was where they were formed. So I was involved in Women’s Political Caucus activities very early on.

Then to cap it all off, at some point I was working in the Civil Rights Office in the Economic Development Administration. As part of the Nixon Southern strategy, we pretty much quit enforcing the civil rights laws. I couldn’t stand that anymore, so I quit and went and worked for George McGovern’s presidential campaign. When that campaign was over, I ended up with a position with the national legislative office of Planned Parenthood. And, of course, that definitely brought even further into my consciousness issues that were related to women.

Boswell: Just stepping back a minute, what was it about Washington, DC, and what you could do there that intrigued you? I mean, you went for an internship, but you ended up deciding to stay. Was it the experience of the agency or some of these other groups that you joined, or what?

Roberts: Well, it was quite a mix of a lot of things. To begin with, I was intending to just stay for the summer and then go into the Peace Corps. But by then, there was more and more antiwar activity going on. I just was absorbing the broader political consciousness that being in Washington, DC, offered, and there were just a lot of exciting things going on—joining these organizations, and working with these women, and getting to know some of the women that were involved in other kinds of things. The women at the State Department were one of the first groups to organize within an agency, so reading about that, and getting to meet some of those people.

Boswell: Tell me a little bit more about how that evolved? I mean, what was it about their situation that caused them to be in the forefront of that kind of organization?

Roberts: Well, it was the same as what I saw at the Department of Commerce. You just looked around at where the men were and where the women were. The women weren’t moving up. They weren’t getting the foreign assignments that the men were. Somewhere during that same time period, I know I was working, or at least I was involved in, NOW at the time. But the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission filed a suit against—all I can think of is the telephone company, but that was before deregulation—but it was the largest suit of its kind that had ever been done. Eventually they won, and in the process of winning, there was just all of this data that came forward about the difference in pay and the difference in job assignments. Different agencies or outside groups were looking at agencies. The Civil Rights Commission itself was more active in publishing reports. But I remember, I think it was in banking, that somebody studied where the women were, and figured that the whole institution of banking would be fully integrated, men and women, in some far-off year like 2053, or something like that, because women were advancing,

but at such an incredibly slow pace. I think it was just all of those kinds of things happening at once, that it was just very easy to get sucked into all of what was going on.

I was one of the people that helped organize a group in the Department of Commerce called the Commerce Committee for Women. We had to go through the Secretary, who was Maurice Stans. I mean, this was all Nixon era. A lot of the players of what was going on at the national level were those that ultimately had their downfall in Watergate. But we had to petition the Secretary to be acknowledged as an organization and circulate information about meetings. We had speakers come in, and we got to know some of the women that were higher up that were appointees. There was a woman who was the chief counsel, or one of the Secretaries' attorneys.

It just was a combination of the growing awareness of the world that one goes through, I think, during your twenties once you move from academia to the world of work. And then all of these issues were overlaid in the whole thing.

Boswell: You mentioned that some of the women who had moved up in the hierarchy within the department, for example, were fairly tough. Were they interested in an organization like this? Were they interested in the whole women's liberation movement at that time?

Roberts: Some were, yes. Some of them came to meetings. I don't think they were quite so active, but I didn't feel like any of them were putting us down or getting in the way. I felt that we either had their direct support or we had their moral support.

Boswell: Now tell me about NOW. You mentioned that that was one of the first of the women's organizations that you joined. Tell me a little bit more about NOW, what appealed to you, and how it was organized at that time.

Roberts: Well, it was just such a new and different kind of thing—talking about new and different things and having research. NOW was part of a coalition, and I know the United Church of Christ and some other groups were part of it. They were monitoring what was happening in the news media. I know that we had a meeting with some people at the *Washington Post* one time and talked about how little of what was happening in women's lives was being covered in the newspaper. They did an extensive monitoring of one of the local television stations and actually did all that was necessary to file a Petition to Deny License. That was just stunning; I mean, this was the network news station, or one of them, in Washington, DC. Here these women were saying, "You don't hire enough women. We don't see women on air. We don't see issues of interest to women being covered." You just think of what you see on the evening news tonight, and that was just not happening.

There were two women at one of the stations. I can't remember if they were one of those that the action was being taken against. But once they'd been around long enough and were starting to move up the pay scale, they were laid off. There were some very odd things going on. You know, women were up against an awful lot. I think that's one of the things that we all worry about young women today. I have women peers who couldn't go to the school of their choice because they wanted to major in engineering. Women weren't allowed to major in engineering. And even when I was at Oregon State,

the female students had a curfew and the guys didn't. Women had a dress code on campus, and the guys just wore whatever they felt like. So there were lots of things going on that I think all of us, if we were paying attention, experienced a difference of treatment.

Boswell: You also mentioned the National Women's Political Caucus and being involved really early in that. Can you tell me a little about that organization and how it differed from NOW or some of the other broader women's groups?

Roberts: Well, very much. NOW had been focused on issues, and NOW had been focused on the role that women play, employment opportunities, the earning gap and that sort of thing. The Women's Political Caucus came in saying, "And if we're going to make these kinds of changes, it's going to take more than street action and more than other kinds of things. We need women elected officials." I think Gloria Steinem was one of the founders.

Also, in the time that I was in Washington, DC, some of the early strong feminists were elected to Congress. That's when Bella Abzug was elected to Congress, and that's when Shirley Chisholm was in the Congress. Barbara Jordan was elected in 1972, and there was a very strong woman from New York in addition to Bella. But there were like a half a dozen of them, and there wasn't a single woman in the Senate. Oh, yes, there was. There was the woman from Maine, Margaret Chase Smith, but she had more or less inherited the seat from her husband. She did end up being a very strong voice for women and on women's issues.

But it was just a very strong feeling that we need a lot more change, and that women will bring the voice about the issues that women are talking about. They are some of the same issues that women talk about today. Particularly childcare was talked about a lot, and employment opportunities, which aren't talked about as much today. But still the wage gap is on the scene, though we've made progress. But we're still behind.

Boswell: Now tell me about, in those organizations at that particular time, what about the movement toward ERA, toward an equal rights amendment? When did you first become aware of that particular movement?

Roberts: Well, I remember being aware of it in DC. I can't remember if it was an issue at all in college or not. That may say something about what we were talking about in political science classes—that it didn't come up. But the first deadline for ratification, do you remember what year that was? That was definitely on my awareness. Well, I was in DC when the Congress voted to send the Equal Rights Amendment out to the states.

Boswell: And that was what, October of 1971?

Roberts: Okay. Okay. Yes. But it was either through NOW or through the Women's Political Caucus that there was a lot of discussion of the ERA. I can still remember meeting Alice Paul, because she was still living at the time.

Boswell: Tell me about her.

Roberts: Well, she was just a feisty old lady then. She was in a wheelchair. You just kind of felt like you were meeting history when you met her, because of her suffrage ties and her Roosevelt ties. It was neat to make her acquaintance. And then even some of the women reporters, I can remember—what’s her name who’s still active now?

Boswell: Oh, Helen Thomas?

Roberts: Yes, Helen Thomas came to some meetings. There was a woman sociologist that came to NOW meetings from time to time that was writing things about women. And there was a woman who wrote a book called *I’m Running Away from Home, But I’m Not Allowed to Cross the Street*. That was one of the first kind of feminist statements about what was happening in women’s lives. So all of that just felt like being a part of history. I’d say the ERA and abortion rights were the two themes that ran through it continuously. Even when I was in college, I know the abortion issue was talked about. But then I was in DC when *Roe v. Wade* came down, and so that was a significant issue.

Boswell: You mentioned that you went on to work in Planned Parenthood. Can you tell me a little bit about that, how that came about, and what your job was?

Roberts: When the McGovern campaign was over, I really wanted to get a job up on Capitol Hill. There was such an overwhelming shift in members of Congress that there were lots of new members. That was before I learned that most new members hire their staff from their own district. Since I didn’t have a district, I never got a job there, but one of the women that I had got to know through the Women’s Political Caucus worked for Planned Parenthood. When they had a vacancy, she told me about it. It was a position that was to focus on what was happening politically in response to *Roe v. Wade*. There was immediate action in the Congress to make sure that no federal funds were spent for abortions. There were almost immediate proposals to amend the Constitution.

So my main task was to monitor all of this, but to also pull together a coalition. So I was working with all of these different groups. NOW was part of it, and the caucus was. And NARAL had been around already, but it was originally called the National Association of Reproductive something or other. It was really focusing on the limitation of birth control, and then it expanded. There was a religious coalition for abortion rights. I think at that point in time Catholics for Abortion Rights was around. So all of those kinds of rights-for-women activities and people were part of my working life.

Boswell: So your duties involved what?

Roberts: Well, it was very much monitoring all of the things that were going on in the Congress, and trying to work with this coalition and various organizations. In various congressional districts, members were hearing from people that said, “We support *Roe v. Wade*.” And it was the beginning of where we are today, of “Will this be overturned by the Supreme Court?” At that time, it was really a much greater concern about a constitutional amendment because that was the big push at that time. In the process, I occasionally wrote testimony for members of Congress, or we would occasionally be

contacted—Planned Parenthood would be contacted—about hearings that were being held on abortion rights, and would we like to find someone who would testify. So just being involved in that general flow of information that helped create public policy.

Then at the same time, Planned Parenthood was continuing its primary mission of supporting family planning services and trying to see that they were not threatened in any of these anti-choice activities. It's interesting because today some of the family planning and abortion issues seem to be merging. There're more and more attacks that birth control really is abortion. Of course, if you know the science of different forms of birth control, some are and most aren't.

Then they were pretty much two separate worlds. There were some very conservative groups that seemed to be pulling family planning into that. That was treated as sort of shocking and surprising because that was the beginning of the world population issue, and Zero Population Growth was one of the organizations that we worked with. So the whole movement for smaller families was just one of those things of much broader awareness in conversation than it is today. I'm really quite surprised at how much we have lost the momentum on that. I think it's certainly unfortunate. In the long run it means that the people that are fighting abortion rights have had a negative impact, because more women don't have access to birth control and ultimately end up seeking abortion.

Also, *Ms.* magazine published for the very first time in this era. It raised issues and had commentary going. Of course, I mentioned that in college, abortion rights were discussed. That's because any student that wanted an abortion had to go to Mexico to get it. So there was a controversy about both doing that, and the danger of it, and then coming back and going to the student health center to make sure that you were okay. There was just a much greater awareness of the extent of illegal abortions and the extent of the cause of death or illness to women as a result of those.

Boswell: Did Planned Parenthood also make any overt effort to support something like ratification of the ERA in the various states? I mean, there were obviously some common strands.

Roberts: I think there was an overlap, to some extent, in people and what they were working on, but I don't recall there being a formal statement. To some extent, groups like NOW, in particular, were considered much more radical than Planned Parenthood. Remember, all this family planning stuff really started back in the 1910s and 1920s. I mean, that's when Margaret Sanger started things going. Also, Margaret Sanger and the women that supported her, including my grandmother and her friends, were Republicans. It was Republican women that were some of the strongest supporters of both family planning and of the ERA, so some of the shift in the political parties has come more recently.

Boswell: Yes. I think from today's vantage point, it gets a little skewed. People have a tendency to think that it was, in fact, monolithic when it wasn't and the parties have really changed quite a bit. I think that was even true in Washington with support for the state ERA amendment first, or state equal rights amendment. Actually, there were quite a few Republican supporters of that measure.

Roberts: Very definitely.

Boswell: It wasn't as partisan as we look at it today.

Roberts: Well, Dan Evans was governor during that. A lot of people don't remember Dan Evans Republicans, but they were very progressive. There were members of Congress that were Republicans in both the House and the Senate that were of that same political persuasion. They tended to be more conservative economically and about the size of government, but they were socially much more progressive than you find people today, being supportive of women's rights and the environment and things like that.

Boswell: Now tell me about how you ultimately got to Washington State, and in particular, received the appointment to the Women's Council.

Roberts: Well, I had been in DC for about five years. I can practically remember when it occurred to me that it was time to go. I never learned to cope with Washington, DC summers—the heat and the humidity. I'd grown up in Southern California where it was hot, but it was dry heat. In the part of Los Angeles where we lived in the later years that we were there, you know, practically everybody had a swimming pool. If you didn't, I think it was like a half hour or 45 minute drive over the mountains to the beach. So it just was a different world. It was a hot, humid day. If it was humid enough, the air pollution was awful. It was sort of chunk style, not just chemicals, like in Los Angeles. I just practically stopped dead in my tracks on the street and said, "I don't want to live here anymore." I shared it with this group of women. We had a consciousness-raising group that was part of what women's organizations were helping form. And I told friends, "You know, I think I'm ready to move back to the West Coast."

One of my friends worked for the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission. They had a bulletin board someplace where all sorts of job notices were posted, and she called me up one day and said, "I think I found you a job." It was the position for the Women's Council.

I really do think it was meant to be because, for one thing, at the point at which I saw it, the deadline was coming up very soon. I had also already planned a vacation to both Portland, where my grandparents were, and aunts and uncles, and Los Angeles, where my parents were. But the most amazing thing was that the secretary that sent out this notice—and she'd done it on all that were circulated—had mistyped the deadline date. She had made it a week or two later than it was supposed to be, so that was what got me in under the wire. I got my application in just in time. Then in my cover letter I was able to say, "I'll be in the area if I'm selected for an interview." It just all worked out.

Boswell: So now when they were advertising the position, did they describe the duties to you? What were you expecting when you went in, in terms of what you would be doing?

Roberts: Well, it was fairly clear in some ways what was involved. The Women's Council was created by executive order. It was not a statutory agency, so in the executive order, it provides for a public membership group that is the Women's Council. Then the

position that I was applying for was the executive director. The job of the council was to advise the governor, the legislature and state agencies on issues of concern to women and their families, or some language to that nature.

The specifics of it, or the extent to which I was aware of them— oh, and while I was in Portland, I took the bus up to Seattle and met with a woman who I had met through NOW at a national conference. Maybe I hadn't met her. Maybe she was a friend of a friend of mine that was on the national board. I don't know. But anyway, I met with this person that knew about what the Women's Council was working on. So I really did my homework. I talked to a couple of people. The work that I had done with the Congress was so close to mirroring what was expected with regard to the legislature. I had worked with the press, and I know that that was one of the questions in the interview. This whole business about working with a diversity of women in a coalition was part of what came up, so I think I was fairly aware.

Then, to some extent, there was already an agenda on the table that I was expected to help try and move forward.

Boswell: It was, at that point, a gubernatorially appointed commission, so did you meet Dan Evans? What was your perspective on him from the interview process?

Roberts: I didn't meet him in the interview process. There was a woman that was on his staff that was responsible for a variety of advisory committees. I may have met her. I know I talked to her on the phone at some point. You know, I heard about him a little bit, that he was moderate. A couple of the things that pulled me through, I think: first, to be offered the job, the council made that decision. Then, I believe, they had to take it to the governor for his approval before I was offered the position.

There was at least one, and maybe two, men on the commission. Maybe it was just one, but his name was Norm Schut, and he was a lobbyist, I think, for retired public employees—or maybe public employees, and later on, retired. But I think there was some reluctance on the part of the governor and the governor's office to bring someone in from out of state. Dan Evans is a native Washingtonian and had some biases in that direction. What I was told was that Norm was the one that went to the governor because he had regular interaction due to his professional position. He lobbied for me, and so that's partly why I was given the offer.

Then, when I was given the offer, I sort of panicked. I thought, "Oh, my heavens, this means I'm really doing what I said I wanted to do, and I have to pack up and move three thousand miles." At that point, I connected with one of the members of the commission who lived in Olympia. I think she was the chair at that time. She and I talked, and I told her about some of my cold feet. She said, "Well, would it help if we met and you saw a little bit of Olympia and learned a little more about it?" She's still a good friend.

So I did that. Again, I was doing Greyhound in those days because I was staying with my grandmother in Portland. I took the Greyhound up to Olympia, and Anne Winchester met me and gave me a tour of Olympia and talked about things that were going on. There was one Taco Bell or something in Olympia. You know, for me to give up all the Southern California Mexican food, which had been nowhere in DC, and I was missing it. Oh, and there were blackberries here! So I was sort of talking myself into it. I

had quite a talk with my father about it, about when you're offered a job, do you take it? He talked about the kinds of questions he thought I ought to ask in that process.

I went through a week with my friends once I got back to DC. I just spewed forth all of my anxiety, so that by the end of the week, they thought I was not going to take the job. By the end of the week, I had gotten it all out of me, and then I was ready to take the job. I think, oh, maybe I had almost a full month—or somewhere between a month and three weeks—to get out here. But it meant I worked on a Friday and did all sorts of errands, got on an airplane Saturday morning and started work at eight o'clock on Monday morning.

Boswell: Oh, my goodness.

Roberts: Yes.

Boswell: And you started when, in—

Roberts: The fall of 1974.

Boswell: The fall of 1974. In terms of this process of trying to decide whether to come out, were there any hesitations because the council had been in somewhat precarious position because of funding? And also remaining a viable commission? I know there was the whole issue of whether or not it would be established by statute, and have a long-term future. So was that a part of this process? Did they talk to you about that at all?

Roberts: I think they must have, but I think I was stricken with that youthful ignorance and arrogance about what I'd be up against. It was like, "Oh, this is a problem, and I'll just go fix it." I didn't know about some of the senators that would do things like put the bill in their pocket and walk out of the hearing room, and some of the things like that.

So I was pretty comfortable with the process that we were undergoing. As long as Evans was there, and his chief of staff was Jim Dolliver, I felt very strongly supported. There were still women in the governor's office who were—Jennifer Belcher is one that became a good friend. I don't think I did have that sense that this was going to fall apart underneath me.

Boswell: Tell me a little bit about when you first got here, then. You literally had come across country and started work. What did you find? What was the situation when you got there in terms of both your duties and the future of the organization? What were your first impressions, when you were really there, of the council and what you needed to do?

Roberts: Well, I felt in many ways very excited and very supported. I also thought I was a bigger cheese than I really was. I thought everybody knew what the Women's Council was. Some of the things were very much a learning process, but I just really pitched right into it. I found out that I was called upon to do a lot of public speaking, and I enjoyed that, up to a point. I can't remember when it happened, but at some point I decided I would only do evening events twice a week just because I was working so hard. I had the

fall and through the election season to meet people and learn about what was going on before the legislature came into session.

There were a few women lobbyists. Pat Thibaudeau, who was later a legislator and a senator, was lobbying for a couple of groups. She took me to lunch to meet a couple of other people. Someone from the League of Women Voters invited me over and asked me about what was going on.

Then there was a fledgling NOW group in, or maybe it was, maybe there was—yes, there was both NOW and the Women’s Political Caucus in Olympia. So a lot of that just felt very welcoming and very positive. I don’t think it was until the legislative session actually convened that I felt that I was up against some barriers. But there was also legislation that I was working on that went well and that was very positive. So a lot of that felt very good. I’m trying to think what the issue was. At some point, I cried all over some senator. [laughs] It was very embarrassing. Something wasn’t going well. I thought he was going to be very supportive, and he wasn’t.

There was an effort to do a state equal rights for women and girls in K-12 education that was basically led by the WEA, and I got very involved in that, and would talk to groups about that. Then there was also an effort to change the state rape law.

Boswell: I was going to say, the rape law.

Roberts: That was both a positive experience, and that’s where I also ran into my first political trouble because I stepped on some toes. There were some things about the bill that was moving through that I thought we ought to change. The people that wrote the bill that way said, “What do you think you’re doing here?” I had to really do some fast explanations and fence mending. But the head of the judiciary committee on the House side was an older gentleman. I don’t remember his name, but he was very pleasant and easy to work with. Then Pete Francis, who was a very progressive Seattle Democrat, was on the Senate side. He was easy to work with on those issues. The legislature was controlled by Democrats, but the issues were ones that were supported by the governor.

Radical Women was still very strong in Seattle, and there was a member of Radical Women on the Women’s Council. At one time, she sent me a very angry letter and told me that I was placating the white male power structure. Of course, you know, I was just trying to make sure that what we were doing could fly in the political arena. I think I have a compromise gene, or a “What do we need to say in this bill that you’ll find it acceptable?” There were some controversies in a couple of areas, but things got passé—often not in the most liberal of versions, but they got passed.

Boswell: Before you, the Women’s Council had just had one executive director. Gisela Taber was fairly outspoken, out front. Did you find that she was helpful to you? Did you find that that affected how you were perceived at the same? Was it difficult to establish your own identity and role within the Women’s Council?

Roberts: I don’t think so. Gisela was very supportive. She had moved to Longview, but I think she came to Olympia that first day and took me to various people to meet. So she was very cordial. I think I inherited some of her social connections—some of the people and organizations that she had been active in. Other than those times when I kind of

stepped into things unknowingly or stepped on people's toes, things really felt very positive.

Boswell: Now, before you had come, the state had passed its own state equal rights amendment, and I think had already ratified, in the legislature, the federal ERA.

Roberts: Yes. And the state had by initiative adopted an abortion rights bill. This effort to bring lots of other laws in compliance with the ERA, I think, had been completed. What the Women's Council had just tiptoed—well I shouldn't say tiptoed into—but they were fairly well into promoting this concept of comparable worth. So I was expected to pick that up and carry it forward, and so did. I did as much as I could and there was support from the governor's office.

One of the things that I remember was going to a meeting of lots of the governor's staff. The governor was taking the state budget and a variety of issues to meetings around the state. It was sort of new at the time, of a greater level of citizen participation. They asked questions and brought up issues. A lot of that was a real learning experience for me because I realized that the questions that were asked set the agenda. There had not been a question asked about childcare, and that was at a time when it was really emerging as a significant issue. The focus at that time was really to get employers to provide onsite childcare, and so there were efforts to reach out in that. I had joined some kind of a childcare coalition that lots of people were involved in.

So I really did feel that my role was needed and welcomed—not by everybody. But it was certainly at a time when there were derogatory comments made about those “women's libbers,” and one very conservative senator made some comment to me about “Well, I liked my parents.” I never quite knew what that meant. [laughter] I think all I said was, “Well, I did, too.” Anyway, that was the environment that it was happening in.

And again, I want to go back to the political environment because Seattle elected quite a few Republicans, and they were all very progressive. Eastern Washington elected a lot of very conservative Democrats, so it was not the party lines that we experienced today.

The greatest problem in getting the bill passed that would create a statutory Women's Council was the Democratic senator from Tacoma, who was quite conservative, and didn't like boards and commissions, and certainly didn't like this one. But it was also at a time where there were new women senators and legislators, so that made a difference.

Boswell: So was that Senator Rasmussen? Was that who was the primary opponent?

Roberts: Yes, yes.

Boswell: I also noticed that there was at least one woman—I'm not sure if she was in the House or the Senate by that point, but I imagine in the Senate—Jeannette Hayner, who didn't support the Women's Council, either, for essentially the same reason.

Roberts: Yes. There were a couple of conservative Republican senators and then there were four; I don't think Jeannette Hayner was there. I think there were just the four when

they convened in 1974. The one Democrat was Ruthe Ridder. Lois North, from King County. Sue Gould, from Edmonds. And another woman—

Boswell: Nancy Buffington, right?

Roberts: Yes.

Boswell: From West Seattle because she beat Bob Grieve, I think.

Roberts: Was she West Seattle? I guess I thought she was Bellevue or something.

Boswell: I believe she beat Bob Grieve to take that spot.

Roberts: Okay. So she was somewhat reluctant, but the others were strong supporters. I feel like it's sort of a name-dropping process to talk about these women who were there at the time because so many of them have done so much since. A number of them are now retired. But Mary Kay Becker was a new legislator, and a strong supporter of women's issues. I think she is still a judge up in Whatcom County. So there were some divisions, but there was also an awful lot of support.

Boswell: I've been reading, though, about the Women's Council, and the whole discussion about whether the Women's Council should continue, and whether it should be a statutory agency. Often, at least in what I've read, it was tied to the ERA. In fact, there was a newspaper headline that said, "Women's Council: Has ERA Killed it?" So I was curious about the effect of the ERA on the Women's Council, and why the perception existed that it wasn't needed because we had an ERA.

Roberts: Well, a couple of things happened. I guess I'll not do this chronologically, but after the referendum that said we will repeal the law that makes the Women's Council statutory, there was a little bit of money left over from the campaign, and maybe even from the International Women's Year stuff. I can't remember which money was spent where, but we actually had a poll done because we were very concerned that this was an anti-ERA vote. It ended up that it wasn't. It was an anti-government vote, and it was at a time when there was more of this "Do we need so much government?" All of these things are making higher taxes. I can't remember how much the tax issue was brought into it, but it was definitely a "We don't need this." But the argument, I don't think, was used so much of "We don't need this because we have a state ERA."

The International Women's Year Conference in Washington State, more than anything else, was the motivator to abolish the Women's Commission because the conservative forces came in with an anti-ERA agenda. They voted against everything, but they were not able to defeat everything. They were not able to defeat the ERA, and it passed—the resolution to support the ERA passed—just by a smidgeon. You've, I'm sure, read the history, but it even went into the courts. We had to impound the ballots. I was the treasurer for International Women's Year. I was writing checks to the Brinks people because they're the ones that came and took all the ballot boxes. I think the steering committee chose to do that, so it wouldn't be in question.

But these women who wanted to defeat the ERA, and wanted to do all this anti-women's rights stuff at the conference, had failed. The Women's Commission was their opportunity for payback, to get even. They had to do the signature-gathering sort of thing. And the stories that were being passed about, "Here, sign this," and the reasons that were being given, were ludicrous. I mean, they were all part of the stuff that was flurrying around the ERA. "We're all going to end up in the same restroom." There was stuff about the military, and accusations that the Women's Council had opposed veterans' rights or benefits, or something like that. Lots of false information was out there.

The momentum was with the anti group. They'd done all that publicity through the petition gathering. I don't think any of us had the political acumen to get a pro campaign started. We just waited until we saw how the petitioning process came out, and that certainly was a mistake. Then, just the effort of defeating it was an uphill battle, and then, of course, we ended up losing.

I don't know how elections came out that fall. What would that have been? The 1970-

Boswell: Let's see. It would have been...

Roberts: The leftovers of 1976? I don't know. I kept-

Boswell: I'm sorry, go ahead.

Roberts: I don't remember what other issues were on the ballot, or what the timing was of the vote, but certainly that's when I learned the saying that "The voters, when in doubt, vote no." And that was part of the other thing that hurt us. That's when I learned about how ballot titles are written makes a difference and that we had to get people to vote yes. It wasn't "Yes, we want to repeal the Women's Council;" it was "Yes, there shall be a continuing of the Women's Council in this form." The name was changed to a Women's Commission.

Boswell: Now stepping back for a minute, I remember reading in the minutes of the meetings of the Women's Council—maybe even the first one that you attended, which would have been November of 1974—that representatives of the anti-ERA, possibly anti-Women's Council, were there at the meetings. We talked about Dr. Kathleen Skrinar, who, I noticed on the minutes, was attending. Can you tell me a little bit about people who were opposed, how they interacted with the council, and what their goals were as early as the fall of 1974, in terms of the council?

Roberts: Well, that's a long time ago. I don't remember in any great detail. I don't remember other people being there besides Dr. Skrinar, and she was pretty quiet. She didn't speak up very much, but was a formidable presence in the room. She was a stocky, serious woman. I certainly had been warned about her and had talked to people, and I can just remember being very uncomfortable, but that the majority of the group wanted to continue to step forward. I think we talked about both continuing to support the ERA, and I know we talked about continuing to support family planning and abortion rights. Radical Women brought forth this issue of protective work orders, which were still

something that were in state law in a number of places. I can't remember, but I think they must have been here in Washington. That was an issue being pushed from the left, that we should basically change everything rather than just repeal the things that treated women in the workplace differently than how men were treated in the workplace.

But I guess I felt that. I do know that when I first came, the turnout of who served on the council itself. I can't remember the first couple of meetings, but later on, the level of participation dropped off significantly. I don't remember what the timing was, but there was an agreement. I can't even remember who was involved in all the discussions, but I know the governor's office was involved, and maybe the Women's Council as a whole, or maybe just some of them. Governor Evans recommissioned or reestablished it, and it may have been after the 1975 legislative session, when the bill to make it statutory didn't go anywhere. It was a way that he sort of reaffirmed his support for the existence of this body, but it also was a time I think we both expanded the membership a little bit, and then asked everybody who was on the council did they want to continue to serve. So then that gave Governor Evans an opportunity to reappoint those who said they wanted to continue. It gave a gracious, well, "I've served long enough," because there were no terms. There was no turnover. So it gave some people an opportunity to leave, and then it brought some new fresh blood onto the council.

I do know that a couple of things were happening while I was there. One is that, again, there was just lots and lots of curiosity about it. What were these issues? I learned what the history of the women's status was nationally and in Washington State, and gave a speech about that. I talked about employment and laws and the status of women. But I had an intern one time, and that person's responsibility was to put together a brochure. We'd never had anything to pass out that said what the Women's Council does.

One of the new members that came on the council in that reformation was Margaret McKeown. She was just a top-notch attorney with one of the big Seattle firms. The council for a long time had been talking about doing a book about women's legal rights, and there had been a couple of chapters written, and it had just sort of languished. I think I didn't do a lot to move it forward in the early months, but once Margaret was there, she was ready to move on it. I don't know if other people helped her with it, or if she just did it herself, but we ultimately ended up with this book that we were able to take to a publisher. We chose not to have the state publish it because we wanted to make it pay for itself. I'm not sure if we did that or not; I can't remember all the details. But there was a small press that was willing to take it on, and we found somebody to design, or they maybe even designed the cover. So that was one of the products that the new council focused on, and one of the things that made us feel very positive about it.

Boswell: Now did there continue to be men on the council?

Roberts: Yes.

Boswell: And were they equally supportive?

Roberts: Mm hmm.

Boswell: Or did they come with different perspectives?

Roberts: After Norm left, I know that there was at least one male legislator, and he was reasonably supportive.

Boswell: And that was?

Roberts: I can't remember.

Boswell: I remember the name Larry Sanford as being on there.

Roberts: Yes.

Boswell: But he wasn't a legislator, was he?

Roberts: No. He was African American, I remember that. I can't remember if he continued. This guy, the new one, was from the candy company—Almond Roca. Ted Haley. He was later elected to the Senate.

But how to do the legislation to make the council survive became fairly controversial. That was the beginning of doing things related to displaced homemakers. I think it was that legislator that wanted to merge the displaced homemaker legislation with the legislation to continue the Women's Council, and I just didn't see how that would work. I just didn't see how it made sense. I don't know if I had to talk the council into that position, or if that was the position they were ready to take, anyway. I can remember that there were some stressful meetings, but then, ultimately, both separate pieces of legislation were passed, which seemed like the good side of it. But it meant we were hanging out there alone, and that was the bad side of it because that meant we were easier to pick off when the referendum idea emerged.

Boswell: I'm not sure if I remember correctly. At one point the Women's Council was to automatically become part of the Human Rights Commission, but did that actually happen or not?

Roberts: It didn't happen. And there may have been some sense that some of the duties were passed on, but I was no longer the executive director when that was going on. Because I was an appointee of the governor, when Evans chose not to run again and when Dixy was elected in the 1976 election, I submitted my resignation as any governor's appointee was asked to do. I was ready to leave at that time.

There had been enough communication during the election with Dixy about women's rights stuff. Dixy considered herself a self-made woman and didn't need any of this women's rights stuff, so I was not looking forward to attempting to work with her. It seemed like a time for me to move on anyway. When I resigned, I got a call from the new administration people and they said, "Are you interested in staying on?" I said, "No," so that's when I left.

So all of this after the vote, "What should we do?" meetings and angst, I was not very involved in. I mean, I was involved in the referendum campaign, but I wasn't involved in the meetings.

Boswell: But in the International Women's Year events, was the Women's Council central in helping to plan that?

Roberts: Well, not as a council, but Gisela Tabor was the federal staff person that was helping organize the state. I was on the advisory committee. I can't remember, and I'd have to look at the whole list of the advisory committee to know if any of them that were on it were not ERA supporters, or not. I'm sure there were, as I recall, a couple, but the group itself was pretty strongly pro-ERA. The person that was planning the workshops was somebody that had been very active in women's rights efforts.

Boswell: The other organization that I think got started in maybe late 1976 was the Washington State ERA Coalition. Yes, it was March of 1976, and it was essentially formed to help other states to get that final push to get the ERA through. I know that, at least in the minutes of the Women's Council, it was discussed, and people are apprised that it's happening. It sounded like it really was based initially in Seattle, although it was meant to be a statewide organization. I wondered if there was any other back and forth with that coalition and the Women's Council at that time, that you remember.

Roberts: I don't recall.

There were a lot of things that I participated in, sort of in my own time. I don't remember even being terribly active in that.

I was invited to a conference that was put together by some national people, and Dorothy Hollingsworth was also the other person from Washington State. If there was a third or more person, I don't know, but Dorothy and I at least roomed together. I don't know if we traveled together or not. I think we did. It was from women all over the country, and it was held in Wisconsin or something like that, but it was the national group that was paying our way and sponsoring the whole thing. You know, that was one of those things where we did a lot of strategizing and talking to women from states where things hadn't been ratified, and talking about the kinds of things that we did that worked and things that didn't work.

It, in my mind, was just a one-time deal. I don't know if there was a lot of follow-up or anything that came out of that.

Boswell: Do you remember what your perception was, during that period, in terms of the ratification of the ERA? Did you expect it to eventually be ratified by enough states, or not? I wondered what the feeling was among people who were active in women's issues in the state as to what they felt would happen with the ERA, the federal ERA.

Roberts: Well, I think the feeling in the beginning was very positive. There was kind of a rush of states to ratify. As it slowed down, I can remember always knowing what other states were doing. There was a fairly progressive state, and it may have been Michigan. It was one of those Michigan or Minnesota—one of those that gets really cold in the winter—that didn't ratify. It was partly because of the vote of some of the African American members of the legislature because they were feeling very taken for granted. There was some friction between civil rights and women's rights things going on

because, with some hindsight, I can see that there were some aspects of women's rights that were moving more easily than civil rights issues. I mean, it was never as dangerous, and more open, and getting lots of good press at that time.

Then other whole blocks of states were not moving. I think that's one reason why. We still held out hope after the International Women's Year meeting, and that was one of the things that a lot of us thought that might accomplish was pushing it over the edge. That's why we felt so strongly that our state needed to have a pro-ERA resolution. But once it took the congressional extension of the deadline, it's like every step that we had to achieve was harder and there was less optimism and less energy.

Boswell: I was curious about the opposition that was building in Washington. The women who opposed the ERA and many of the resolutions at the International Women's Year conference in Ellensburg, and then who ultimately voted to bring down the Women's Council, was there a sense that the issues that they expressed represented some of the issues on the national level that people were beginning to express about the ERA? Or do you think they were narrower or had their own agenda, which maybe didn't reflect more national sentiment?

Roberts: You mean those that were bringing resolutions forward?

Boswell: Yes. I mean in Washington. I'm just trying to see whether they represented what was really a national trend in opposition to ERA or whether they just had their own agenda in Washington State.

Roberts: A lot of the agenda was a no agenda. We were—"we" meaning the advisory committee—were defined as the enemy, and what we wanted to accomplish was perceived to be a threat. This was really the beginning of some of the more conservative, and eventually what some call the radical right. The ERA was a very big issue, but one of the other things that happened in Washington was that we set the date for our conference later than a lot of states. So a lot of these organizations that were watching what was happening, including some specific churches, saw all of these states passing pro-ERA resolutions. That's partly how this negative opposition was mobilized and brought to the conference in Washington State.

But the other thing that happened was that there was a certain amount of control within that group of people about how they should vote. The workshops had no fixed agenda, other than more or less the topics. There may have been proposed position statements, but I don't recall that.

For instance, there was an education workshop. Everybody in the room, including those that were very suspicious of the ERA and those of us that were supporting it, worked on coming up with resolutions so they were able to agree. But when those resolutions got to the floor, the block of the Christian or conservative coalition, was voting no. I can still remember some woman from that workshop standing up and saying, "Wait a minute, what is going on here? The vote in the committee, or the workshop, was unanimous. We found common ground. So why are you now voting no?"

That brought a reversal on some votes, on some committee things, but they were fairly mainstream issues. There was education and employment and the ERA resolution

and some other kinds of things, but I don't even think we were so bold as to take on anything related to gay rights. There were rumors running rampant that this sash that we designed for the steering committee to identify ourselves meant that we were lesbians. The rumors were everywhere, so that some of the true issues in the whole thing were lost.

You know, Jeanette Williams died this last week. Jeanette was a very strong voice at the conference because some of us were so frustrated by how it was going, and what we felt like was the manipulation of the votes, or the demand for marching in line. Some of us said, "Maybe we should just walk out."

Jeanette was the voice that said, "Oh, no. Don't do that. Then you've just given it over. You've given up."

It was the vote on the ERA resolution, where people sat in very segregated units. but some of these women who had been encouraged to come by their conservative political base, or by their religious base, they voted yes. At that time, there were a couple of religious groups that were identified opposing the ERA. Some of these women stood and voted yes in fear, or in anxiety, because they, you had to stand to vote, and you were so visible. Some of them had tears running down their faces. Either that was the tears of fear, or the tears of "I'm fighting for what I believe in." We could tell that it was a very emotional decision that they had made.

So I just don't feel that we were out of what we perceived as the mainstream. We weren't out of the mainstream of where women in American society were moving, more into the workforce. That, of course, became more an economic issue than it was a political issue, but there were some strong messages that "you women shouldn't be pushing all these kinds of things." "You should be having a family and staying home and taking care of your children."

Of course, people like me ended up doing that. [laughs] You know, I was pretty much an at-home mom for most of the time, but that was why we fought for childcare, and for other things that did support working families because that had just become the reality of our society.

Boswell: At the end of the Evans administration, when you decided, then, to submit your resignation, was there some frustration that the agenda that you had worked so hard on during your years on Women's Council was being undermined? Or were you fairly pleased with the level of progress that had been made, especially in legislation?

Roberts: Well, I felt pleased with what we had accomplished. I think that the cards were on the table, and that it was not going to be easy in the future. That's why we just didn't spend much time being discouraged before we launched into "Okay, what do we do next to make sure we don't lose ground, to keep supporting these issues, to keep moving forward?" That's where Washington Women United emerged. It was people who were part of the conference, who first met in Anne Winchester's living room, and then went to bigger and bigger meetings. Then eventually we called for a bigger meeting, and we held it in Ellensburg. It was out of all of that that eventually Washington Women United was created.

Boswell: Yes. Tell me a little bit more about the creation of that organization, the people involved, and your role in it.

Roberts: Well, a lot of what we were trying to do was to make sure that some of the levels of organization on issues, and the voice on those issues, was not lost in Olympia. The Women's Council had been sort of a communication hub, where people came to exchange stories. Different organizations talked about what we were all working on this session, and so the organizing committee created a board. I thought we did a great job with bylaws of creating organizational memberships and then members at large, so that we pushed for both an organizational and a geographic spread. We pushed very early on to have enough money, to raise enough money to at least maintain a part-time staff person, and then a lobbyist who was representing our issues. I really think that made a big difference for a number of years and helped on a couple of issues that either were under fire or had not been totally resolved, or protected.

I mean, for one thing, in my first session, we passed a major revision in the state rape law, but what had been too controversial in that was allowing a married woman to accuse her husband of rape, because consent was so much a part of the law. I don't know how many years after what was initially passed, that it was included fairly easily. Again, it was a coordinated effort that a lot of people decided, "Okay, let's go back and try to get this in the law." And, you know, other areas were also moving forward.

Then at some point in all of that, I became a mom, and I started realizing how little support there was for women with small children. My personal mission somewhat shifted. I also learned an awful lot that I hadn't been aware of, and part of it came out of this book that Washington Women United wrote about issues. There had been things that were talking about battered women, and over time, our awareness of a broader issue came forward. That's why both in this book and in other organizations, we moved toward a broader issue that is now called domestic violence. It is often what happens between spouses or between a woman and a significant other, and even some men have been victims of it, but it also involves children. It involves the whole— wow, it's getting late. We should probably wrap up.

Boswell: I didn't realize that the time had gone by. Sorry.

Roberts: It involves the whole environment in the home. Now, on the children's end of this, with all of this early brain research, we're seeing that being witness to or in the environment of violence causes small children harm. It impacts their sense of well being. It impacts their brain development. So I think a lot of those issues now merge or move forward somewhat simultaneously.

Boswell: Really quickly, was the book that you mentioned a publication called *A Woman's Guide to Legislative Action*? Just tell me a little bit about the genesis of that publication. I know you were one of the editors. Was that a project that you had encouraged? And what were your goals?

Roberts: Well, I wish I could claim higher goals, but I think our number one goal was to raise some money. It was a fundraiser. We thought if we had a more professional looking publication, putting all the issues together and how to address the issues, that we could both raise money and move forward the issues that we wanted to see women working on.

I think it was my idea to do these women's yellow pages, so not only were we able to sell the book in numerous places, but several of us went out knocking on doors to organizations and businesses, trying to get them to buy a page or put their business card in the women's yellow pages. It was a multidimensional project.

Boswell: Looking back on it, it's really fascinating, actually, to look at the business cards in the yellow pages and to see the women lawyers and some of the groups who did subscribe to the publication. It's historically really interesting, too.

Roberts: Yes. Well, and it reflects those of us who were out selling ads. I knew a lot of these women lawyers because, remember, Washington Women Lawyers emerged at about—not Washington Women Lawyers, that was already around.—the Northwest Women's Law Center emerged at about the same time as Washington Women United. I had also been working for a bank, and I had been visiting all sorts of banks around Seattle and other parts of Washington State. I was meeting women who were starting to move up in banks. So I visited practically every bank where I had a foot in the door. You see a lot of bank ads in there because they had marketing money. It was a way to sell it because most of them, when I knocked on doors, said, "Well, we've done all of our contributions for this year." So it couldn't be considered a contribution to an organization, but it could be considered a business expense because it was advertising.

Boswell: Good idea. Just really quickly, then, was Washington Women United a volunteer position for you?

Roberts: Oh, yes. Everybody was a volunteer except the part-time staff person or the lobbyist. I was on the board for quite a while. You know, I took tiny babies to a board meeting. Patty Murray was the secretary. At some point, I left the board but continued to be as supportive as possible. Then when it met its demise, it was really with a board that had no roots in the early years of things. Some people thought it had achieved a lot of the goals, and it was time to go. Some of us also certainly felt sad about its demise and felt that those of us who had been around in the earlier years should have been contacted, should have been asked: "Can you re-engage, or can you at least write a check, or that sort of thing?" But it just kind of quietly went away.

Boswell: In terms of your own personal career and family life, too, can you tell me a little bit about how that evolved during this period after Women's Council and Washington Women United? Ultimately you became a member of the legislature, but quite a number of years later.

Roberts: Well, I'd have to get a chart to figure out when all these dates come together. But in 1983, I had been working for a major bank that had a regional office in San Francisco, but I was working out of a home office. Somewhere in there the bank decided to restructure where people worked, so I was facing either a transfer, which was what they were offering, or a fairly easy retirement or departure. Somewhere in that process was when I found out I was pregnant and that had one impact on my thinking about it.

Then, a little later on, I found out I was expecting twins, and that had a big impact on it—a feeling of being totally overwhelmed.

So I stayed with the agency, or the company, as long as I could in my pregnancy. They were willing to extend my healthcare benefits as long as they could, but at some point I said, “This is it. I just can’t do this anymore.” And so I left and pretty much was an at-home mom until my girls were about two. I had, besides working, been getting more and more active in Snohomish County politics and staying active in politics. So when the girls turned two, I can’t remember for sure, but I found a campaign. I was able to work out a deal where another woman and I did job sharing, so we each worked two-and-a-half days a week doing the office management. I became a seasonal worker. I just kept working in political campaigns, and then eventually went back to work part time. But by then, they were in school. I almost became a full-time worker, before they went off to college.

At some point I decided I didn’t want that job, but that job was a program that focused on young children. It was called PEPS, the Program for Early Parent Support. I was their fund development manager because I’d been doing fundraising through an awful lot of campaigns. Of course, these babies came from a marriage. I had met my husband in a political campaign, so it all made sense. I ran for the state senate in 1994, and that was a year in Snohomish County that every Democrat that ran was defeated. That was a very painful process; also, an awful lot of work. I worked very hard in that race, but I guess I spent a couple of years just sort of licking my wounds. I kept doing some political things and became more involved in the party.

Oh, I had been the chair of the Snohomish County Democratic Party in 1992 and worked very hard in that. I worked on and found out about coordinating a campaign.

But somewhere in that process of being very involved, and also in losing, somebody repeated to me something that I had heard before. That is that one of the most important things in politics is being at the right place at the right time. So in 2004 one of the incumbent members of the House in my legislative district decided to run for statewide office, and I knew there was a vacancy coming up. I just immediately put out the word to everybody that I could think of that I was interested in that seat. I think all of those years of political involvement paid off because six Democrats stepped forward and two Republicans. But I was able to stake my ground in that race, and I was the earliest voice. I think I was the strongest voice with the broadest base, and so by the time it came to filing, I was the only one that filed. I was able to run against just two—there was a last-minute Democrat who filed against me. Yes, there was, but it was somebody who had run as a Republican in the past. And then the Republican was a fairly weak candidate.

So tomorrow I will find out whether or not I am elected for a third term, but this district has changed a lot since 1994. The demographics have changed. Although no Democrats won in 1994, one of the candidates that lost in 1994 ran again in 1996 and was able to win. I think it was 1996, or maybe it was 1998, and now all three representatives of this district are Democrats.

Boswell: And did you have strong opposition?

Roberts: No, I had very weak opposition. Even with two Republicans running in the primary, I got 66 percent of the vote. So I am feeling that this is a fairly safe district unless I ride my horse naked down the street or something like that.

Boswell: I wanted to sum up with you about the role of ERA from your perspective. Did you see it having an impact on your career over time and, even now, in the legislature? Looking back, has it had some kind of impact on you?

Roberts: It certainly had an impact on me, and it certainly had an impact on Washington State, and I would say the impact is similar. It's really foundational. It's really in our bones. It doesn't mean that there aren't people who still pooh pooh it, or say we don't need it or we didn't need it, but I still think that it's something that I would like to see in the constitution for my daughters. I think there are a lot of other women who feel that way, too, particularly this last eight years, and our perspective of how important politics is and appointments to courts are to women's rights. I think we would like to be in the constitution.

But it also affects how issues are dealt with in the legislature. Some of them are very much "But, of course. But of course we need to do this." I think that that reflects both the state ERA, the campaign issues that this state has fought for years, and then the number of women in our legislature. We are no longer the state with the most women, but we are still one of the top three or four. We still have a very strong percentage.

Boswell: Well, thank you. I appreciate it so much.

Roberts: You're very welcome. We talked about a lot of things other than the ERA, but I think they're all sort of mixed together.

Boswell: Yes. Is there anything else that you want to say about it?

Roberts: Well, I'm returning to some issues about women. I mean, I've been working with children a lot, but one of the issues that I am starting to be very concerned about is the incarceration rate in this country. We now lock up more people than any other country. We lock up more women than ever before, and too many of those women have children that suffer when their parents are incarcerated. All of those issues kind of run together. When we're told we can't find the money to support all of the early learning efforts that we know would be important, one thing always comes to mind. That is, well, we seldom question whether or not we have enough money to incarcerate all these people. The issue on the broad scale and the issue with regard to women and children is very much there for me.

Boswell: Well, thank you again.

Roberts: You're very welcome.

[End Session.]