Maria McLeod: Today is December 8, 2008, and this is the second interview with former Representative for the House, Nancy Rust. We’re in her home in Shoreline, Washington. Nancy, during your first interview, we talked about your first campaign and your election to the House of Representatives for the State of Washington in 1980 when you were 52 years old, which was, coincidentally, the same year Mount St. Helens erupted.

Nancy Rust: Right.

MM: You were elected to position 1, 44th district, to serve from 1981 to 1982. You had many endorsements. Most significantly, these three powerful organizations: the Washington Education Association; the Washington Federation of State Employees, AFL-CIO; and the King County Women’s Political Caucus. You’d won a three-way primary September 16, 1980, and defeated Jim Lyon, Republican, by 2,000 votes in the general election on November 4th. So, I wanted to ask you questions related to that, and then we’ll talk about your first term.

NR: OK.

MM: Once you were elected you had to shift from campaigning to preparing for your first 105-day session. What were the first things you did after you were elected?

NR: The very first thing we did was to go on a little vacation to the Lake Quinault Lodge where I ended up meeting one of the Democratic staff people who was part of our caucus. She was partisan staff, so that was nice. But, as you know, I had been part of the League of Women Voters lobby team. So, the legislative process wasn’t new to me. The Caucus had us down there for an orientation, but it was more of a walk-through of the
buildings. It wasn’t much about the process at all. In later years they gave an orientation put on by Battelle, and it was for both parties, and it was very good. I also remember going on a field trip to McNeil Island before the session. But that was about the only thing I remember except for going down to Olympia for a weekend – it was a regular weekend – they met in December. I did go to different committee meetings, and they took pictures of me. That was about it. [laughs]

MM: What was on McNeil Island?

NR: A prison.

MM: And why did they want you to take a field trip there?

NR: Well, it was a field trip that was open to all the members. So, I went on it.

MM: I was reading, and I may be getting my years confused, but I wonder if that wasn’t the time that they were proposing to build more prisons, but that could have been in 1983.

NR: No, I remember it was after I was elected, but before the session started.

MM: Yours was a really small freshmen class, wasn’t it?

NR: Of Democrats.

MM: There was you, Art Wang, Lorraine Hine and Joe King at the time?

NR: Yes.

MM: So, you knew you were going to be a minority member, at least for that term. The Republicans had the majority. So, how do you strategize, or work with your caucus? What became your goals, knowing that you would be a minority member?
NR: Well, as a freshman, it was a really good opportunity to learn the ropes. I didn’t have much anticipation of passing any bills. As a member of the Revenue Committee, Nita Rinehart was the ranking minority person. We had a lot of meetings with just the small group of us. The Revenue Committee was quite small. This was before that office building was remodeled. We sat in a room where we sat in a “u.” Spectators were crammed into a few seats and the staff person was able to sit right behind us. I remember when they had a bill that was going to phase out the motel/hotel tax that I might have voted for. A staff person named Len McColm leaned forward. He said, Don’t vote for this, or you’ll never get the Convention Center. I didn’t know about the Convention Center, but I followed his advice, and I voted “no.” I remember Irv Greengo, the committee chair, looking at us because voting it down was not going to phase out that tax. That must have been it. Irv Greengo was really a very nice man. He looked over at Nita and me with this real question on his face. Because he thought we were for good taxation, he assumed that we would vote for the bill, and we didn’t. But that was because of what Len McColm had told us to do.
**MM:** What did he mean you wouldn’t get the Convention Center, for what purpose, the State Democratic Convention?

**NR:** No, the State Convention Center, downtown. You know they use the hotel/motel tax for that. So, if we voted to phase it out, we never would have gotten it.

**MM:** Oh, I see.

**NR:** But, of course, at that point I didn’t know we were planning on building a State Convention Center. Anyhow, that little committee was really very friendly. Irv Greengo was a Republican, but there was one bill Speaker Polk had given him that really didn’t have anything to do with revenue, and he had given it to Irv because he thought Irv could pass it. Irv brought it up, and he said there were to be no amendments and no comments; the clerk will call the roll. And we were furious. Absolutely furious. We marched out. There were only four of us. We marched out and went over to the Speaker’s office right then and there to complain. I remember asking Bill Polk about the importance of the process. He said, well, the process isn’t important, we just had to pass that bill, and he just shut us up.

**MM:** Polk was Speaker of the House at the time?

**NR:** Polk was Speaker, and we thought of him as a kind of dictator.

**MM:** That’s an example of dictatorship, what had just happened in that committee, in a way.

**NR:** Yes, because there’s no opportunity for an amendment or a comment, no speeches. Usually we had some discussion. That committee was pretty collegial, and we did have some nice discussions. There was one particular instance when one of the Governor’s appointees spoke in favor of an income tax when we were having a nice collegial discussion about having an income tax, and he spoke in favor of it, but then he lost his job.

**MM:** Oh, the tax issue was that tough? Well, at that time that you came in, there were some economic pressures, if I remember, which we can talk
about later. But you don’t happen to remember what that bill was, do you?

NR: It didn’t so much have to do with revenue. No, but it was in the paper, and it said something about “The Democrats Roar.” We made a big fuss.

MM: This happened in your first term?

NR: Yes, that was my first term. But, of course, in the second term we had the majority.

MM: Tell me, when the House was in session, where did you sit on the floor?

NR: We sat in the back. The four of us sat right in the back.

MM: So, you sat next to another freshman?

NR: I sat next to Art Wang. Art had been a staff member, so he was very helpful. I remember we had a little way of telling each other who we were voting with, when there was a doubt. Because we voted electronically, you could look and see who else is voting. He told me to vote with Representative James Salatino, who was his seatmate. I voted wrong for Art once because I voted with Sal. He called him Sal. After that, he said you just vote the way you want to. He realized I was voting the way he would want to vote, although we did mostly always vote the same way. The other thing about how we sat, we had exchanged seats, was because he smoked. He had a pipe. No, it was a cigar, something worse. Joe King had a pipe. Once, Dan Grimm walked back and looked at me, with all this smoke coming my way, and he said, Oh, Nancy, how can you stand it? Well, then Art would like to slip off and just stand in the back. We finally changed our seats. Our seats weren’t changed as far as the electronic works, but we voted right in the middle between our seats. So, we crisscrossed, or we voted for each other.

MM: So, you were sitting in the seat next to Art and there’s these electronic buttons in front of you?
NR: The buttons were right in the middle, between our seats.

MM: Was there a certain order you were supposed to vote? You don’t use the same buttons, do you?

NR: No, but they were right in the middle, so it wasn’t a big deal because I’d vote over there and he’d vote over here [indicating left and right]. But sometimes we’d just vote for each other because we were going to vote the same way.

MM: What about your friend Audrey Gruger? She remained in the first district when you were in the 44th. Did you remain close with her, or did you consult with her?

NR: Oh, yes, we were roommates that first year, and we talked a lot about issues. The other person who gave me a lot of help when I was a freshman was Wayne Ehlers, and also Helen Sommers. But I lived in the same house with Audrey and Georgette Valle. The three of us had the same house together.

MM: What do you mean you lived in the same house; you had the same office?

NR: We lived in the same house, slept in the same house.
MM: Oh, you mean you had a place together in Olympia?

NR: Yes, a house.

MM: Oh, I didn’t know that. So, when you were in session, you roomed in this house with some other reps? I don’t know why I thought you’d be commuting from Shoreline.

NR: No, I didn’t commute. I rarely came home during the week. The first year of my second term, after Audrey had gone to the County Council and Georgette had lost, I had a little apartment by myself. After that, I roomed with Helen Sommers, and we always had a house. Retired state employees go south for the winter and rent their houses.

MM: Oh, how perfect.

NR: Yes.

MM: So, you had this place with Audrey and Georgette Valle, and where is she from? What district does she represent?

NR: Georgette was from southwest Seattle.

MM: So, that’s like going back to college, you being with these other women. Was it like that, and did you talk politics all that time?

NR: Well, of course. We gossiped and we talked about bills, particularly when I was rooming with Helen. We talked a lot about the bills.

MM: So, you had this educational experience that existed beyond the Capitol. You’d go home, and you’d talk with these women, and you’d learn more and more.

NR: Yes, at night.

MM: And did you have a particular staff person assigned to you, or how did that work?
NR: Later, I know that they had someone particularly. I remember there was a woman who helped me with speeches. But I think there was staff who were more focused on the issues, like this Len McColm was on revenue, and he sat behind us, otherwise the staff – when we had to sit up in the front – weren’t anywhere near where they could be of assistance. But in that one committee, he sat right behind us, and it was cramped. You know, there was hardly room for him. He just leaned forward that one time. I’ve never forgotten that. Nita had a lot of bills that she wanted to be introduced whether anything happened to them or not, and I got the boat bill – putting property taxes on boats. Audrey was really mad at Nita for giving me that bill because it wasn’t a good bill for me in my district.

MM: Well, look where you are, here in Shoreline!

NR: But anyhow, I did introduce it, and it would have put a property tax on boats. Irv Greengo held a hearing on it, and it didn’t pass. Later we did pass a bill to have a property tax on boats. There was one constituent, particularly, I remember. She said, I’ll never forget you. You voted to put

After hours. From left to right: Nancy, June Leonard, Busse Nutley, and Margaret Raeburn
the property tax on boats. [laughs]

**MM:** Well, how does that work? That’s interesting. I’m wondering about people who might read this someday who don’t know exactly how it works in committee? I guess I had thought that you work in your caucus and you decide what bills you’re going to introduce. But if you work in a committee and there is a Republican chair, they can hand you a bill?

**NR:** No, no, they don’t. You don’t decide in the caucus what you’re going to do. You do that yourself, or a lobbyist asks you to. Then you drop it in, and it’s read on first reading. You don’t decide in caucus. When I was the committee chair, I used to steer easy bills to the freshmen. You are supposed to do that. But, otherwise, you decide what you want to do. If you have something you really want to do, you ask the staff to prepare a bill, and the committee staff, which is nonpartisan, really worked for the chair. So, if I wanted a bill on a particular issue, I gave it to the staff to write up the bill. But lobbyists would come to you, and they’d have their bills all ready, and they’d asked you to sponsor one.

**MM:** But this boat bill, to put property taxes on boats, you said Nita gave it to you?

**NR:** Nita had it, and she was a Democrat.

**MM:** Oh, she was the ranking minority person, and Irv Greengo was chair.

**NR:** That’s right, and Nita had some bills she had prepared. Then she was giving them out to the rest of us. There were only four of us. It was a small committee. I don’t remember who the others were. Nita’s big thing was to count a tax exemption as an expenditure, because it really is. If you give someone an exemption, it’s an expenditure. That was her big issue that she wanted to work on. She did have a bill on that. I remember the hearings.

**MM:** Was it controversial?

**NR:** It was very controversial.
MM: And what was the opposition to it?

NR: All those who had tax exemptions were afraid they would lose them. But that should really be part of the budget. She wanted that to be part of the budget so people could see what was happening to the budget. I got a real reputation over the years of voting against tax exemptions. Sometimes there'd only be two or three of us voting against them.

MM: Did you find that people try to get tax exemptions for all kinds of reasons?

NR: There are tax exemptions to get all kinds of businesses to come to Washington, and I hated those. I voted against them almost all the time. And the farming community has so many. They were one of the biggest ones against getting rid of exemptions. And then there was Boeing. I fought the timber people and their tax exemptions, too.

MM: Because if businesses aren’t supporting infrastructure through taxation, where will the money come from? You know, you’ve given me an idea, from what you just said, of the day in the life of a legislator.

NR: Yes, it’s almost like going to school because you had the caucus at a certain hour, and then you had the floor, and then you had committee meetings. You went from one to the other. It’s like the bell would ring and then you would move from one to the other. [laughs] The whole day was really very busy. But it was much busier in the majority. Much busier. The lobbyists, for one, really wanted to talk to you.

MM: Because you had the power to make things happen?

NR: Right. And you had responsibility. Responsibility is heavy. Actually, it was good to come in as the minority. Well, it wasn’t really good to be in the minority, but it was a good way to learn what was going on when we didn’t have the responsibility for it. And when they had to vote for tax increases, the senior Democrat members were coming up and down the aisle because I think they were afraid I might vote for this because they needed it so badly, and they said, “Don’t vote for this,” because that wasn’t our job.
That was their job.

**MM:** The inner workings of Olympia are still somewhat vague in my mind. Who administers your schedule? Is there a certain time lobbyists come and talk to you?

**NR:** Only if you have a free period, and they come to you then. Or they take you to lunch. Sometimes lunch is the only time you have in the day, or they see you afterwards. But sometimes the day is so busy you don’t have any time. Or they would send notes to you onto the floor. But I didn’t like going out. I liked staying in my seat.

**MM:** So, they expected you to come out and talk to them?

**NR:** Yes, more when I was in the majority. If it was somebody who was really involved in the committee work I was doing, I would go because they really needed to talk to me. But otherwise, I wouldn’t go.

**MM:** Because why?

**NR:** I liked to be in my seat. I didn’t want to miss anything.

**MM:** Is there anything else you can tell me about your day?

**NR:** Well, in the caucus we never voted. A lot of people think that’s what we do. The bills were explained. It was a time when people could let their hair down and speak up and say something that you wouldn’t want to say on the floor. So, sometimes they were very lively. I think the Republicans were more apt to lock up and all vote the same way, but we didn’t. It was more left to persuasion. If it was important that we all vote for the budget when we were in the majority, we sat around and many people went in to the Speaker’s office, and I don’t know what happened, but we wasted a lot of time sitting around until they finally called us to order and then the budget would be brought up and we would vote for it. And we almost always had 50 votes for it before we actually voted for it.

**MM:** Because you count the votes before you officially vote?
NR: Yes, on something that important.

MM: How often did you have caucus meetings?

NR: Almost every day, especially when we were on the floor. Of course, in the beginning you’re not on the floor as much, because the work is all in the committees. So, I’m not sure whether we had caucus every day, but we always caucused on a bill before we voted. Sometimes the lobbyist wanted to know if we were going to vote on something that day. If it was something that was in my committee, I would say, “No, we’re not, because we haven’t caucused.” That was all that I could say.

MM: So, getting back to when you joined the Legislature, I was trying to ground myself while doing the research, what the era was like, what was happening in that era because that affects politics.

NR: Well, of course they had the same kind of terrible budget shortfall that they had this year, and they voted to put the sales tax back on food, which was very unpopular. We had redistricting, which was done in a partisan way. Oh, and somewhere you had said that the Senate was tied, but it wasn’t. Pete Von Reichbauer had changed his party, so the Senate was Republican, too. So, the redistricting was done by the Republicans, which made the Democrats furious. That’s how Kiskaddon’s Pimple happened.

MM: Yes, let’s go back to that for a second because we should describe it to people who will have no idea. So, a census is taken every 10 years, and after the census, that’s when redistricting occurs. In this case, there had been a census taken in 1980. The Republicans are in the majority in the Senate and in the House, so they get to draw the lines, in terms of redistricting, is that true?

NR: They did.

MM: They get to draw the lines. And there’s this senator.

NR: Bill Kiskaddon.
MM: He was in the 44th district, or was he in the 1st district?

NR: He was in the 1st district.

MM: Then something happens when they draw the district lines. They include him in the 1st district, but in order to do so, they have to draw a kind of bump in the Snohomish-King County line, obviously to include Kiskaddon.

NR: Well, the 44th district was a long, narrow district along the Sound in King County. The first district was partly in King County and partly in Snohomish County. And he was the senator. But he lived just north of this county line. He had represented both Snohomish County and King County because that's the way the 1st district had been. So, he wanted to represent the Shoreline area because he was active in the Richmond Beach Congregational Church, which is right down here. His wife was the secretary. So, that was the district he wanted to represent. You could see where the whiteout was where they had changed it. Originally the district boundaries had followed the county line, but then they were changed. And that is what was called Kiskaddon's Pimple.

MM: Because it's a bump on the county line.

NR: Yes. We had one precinct in Snohomish County. So, we were also considered Snohomish County Representatives there.

MM: Oh, I see.

NR: Well, that was what pushed Donn Charnley out because he had run against Bruce Bradburn who had been appointed when Lois North ran for County Council. So, Bradburn had to run for election the next time. So, Charnley beat him, but he only had a two-year term. Then, when our district number changed, Kiskaddon was still going to be our senator for two more years. Charnley was up for election, but not in a district he was now in, so it pushed Charnley out. I had run for Charnley's seat because he was running for the Senate. I was in the House and he was in the Senate. So, there we were. It was Steve Tupper and me and Charnley in the old 44th
District, and Audrey Gruger and Rick Bender were the two representatives in the 1st, and Kiskaddon, you see, wasn’t up for election. So, what are we going to do? Well, Rick Bender moved. Steve Tupper took a federal job. Audrey ran for County Council. It was a long shot because she had barely won and there had to be a recount. She had lost in the King County part. But she did it because she felt she didn’t have anything to lose. She won the election, and that left room for me.

And so, that year, Donn ran for House and we were both in the House together. So, he wasn’t out, he just couldn’t run for the Senate.

**MM:** He was bumped down from the Senate, so now he’s your seatmate.

**NR:** Yes, and Grace Cole ran for a one-year period when Audrey went to the County Council. She was in for one year, but she had to promise not to run in ’82 because the big problem had been that there were too many of us. So, she was kind of unhappy about that, but she had promised. Then Donn ran for the House and we were in the House together. Then in ’84 he ran against Kiskaddon and lost. Well, I think he made too much of the
fact of the “pimple,” and I don’t think that many people cared. Grace Cole, you see, ran for his seat. So, she was elected in her own right in ’84. She had been appointed before. So, at that time Grace and I just did everything together. We were very close.

MM: Was she in with you for the duration?

NR: Right, and she was in for the next two years after I didn’t run.

MM: Had you known Grace before?

NR: I had known her, but not well. We carpooled together, and we talked about our kids, and we talked about the bills on the way to Olympia and on the way back. She took care of education and I took care of environment and the district was very happy with both of us.

MM: You sound like very good partners. The first year you served, Steve Tupper, a Republican, was your seatmate. I always wonder how that works
when there’s a Republican and a Democrat serving the same district.

**NR:** He was a very liberal Republican, and his caucus didn’t do anything to help him. The redistricting was hard on him. He lost a large part that had been voting for him, and he was thrown in with me. Everybody thought I was going to have to run against him, until he took the federal job. I had heard the rumor, but he hadn’t said anything about it. Finally he came over and told me that he had taken this job, and I smiled and said, “Oh, I’m so happy for you.” He said, I bet you are. [laughs] So, anyhow, he was out of the way, but he was a nice guy, and actually we’d go to meetings together in the district, and he was very cordial and we got along fine. He was a pro-choice Republican, and the education lobby had supported him. So, you can see why the others didn’t really care about him that much.

**MM:** It sounds like with Steve Tupper you could have talked over the issues and concerns of your constituency, yes?

**NR:** Yes, it was the same with Kiskaddon. He was our Senator for four more years until Patty Murray ran against him. We’d go to meetings. Local meetings. You always had to go to a lot of meetings in the district when we were out of session. And it was the same way with Kiskaddon. People didn’t know we were in a different party, and he was always a gentleman about it, and it worked out. I mean, sometimes there would be some differences, but, again, Kiskaddon was not a bad man.

**MM:** When you read the press, it does make it seem like he was not such a great guy; that he had connived his seat.

**NR:** Well, we were angry with him, of course, over the redistricting. You see, but what happened with the redistricting is that it was done in such a partisan way, and then they lost the next time, even after they had redistricted the way that wanted it.

Also, they threw me into a much better district because I was much more well-known ahead of time in the Shoreline area. I had name familiarity in the new district because my husband’s patients were mostly in the Shoreline area. The old district didn’t even go all the way over to Aurora. The district went way down there in Ballard. But the Republicans didn’t
know they had put me in familiar territory. Anyhow, it was much better for me. Because they lost, we were able to pass a constitutional amendment in 1983 for the redistricting commission. So, since then, it has been done by the redistricting commission. It’s bi-partisan. Its members vote for the chair. The chair is somebody they all have to agree on. It has worked very well. Actually, I have seen that it favors incumbents, but on both sides.

**MM:** I guess redistricting becomes an issue when you’re serving, even though it didn’t go into effect until ’82, because it’s taking place in 1981, while you’re serving.

**NR:** Well, it was a big issue because it was happening during the session. Now, it’s not done during the session. It’s done by the commission.

**MM:** It must have been distracting to have redistricting occurring during the session on top of everything else you have to do.

**NR:** Well, in a way, it had to happen then because they had to get it done so that we would be running in our new districts, and you don’t have all the reports right away.

**MM:** I don’t know if we need to go back to this, but I found an article about taxes and program cuts, “Last Resorts for Candidates.” People were asking you about budget matters in 1980 when you were running. We talked earlier, a little bit, about the economy, and you mentioned that it was very similar to today. At that point in time there was a 9 percent unemployment rate in Washington, maybe a little higher in Seattle itself, but it rose to a rate of 12 percent by 1982. Then prime interest rates, nationwide, reached 21.5 percent, which was the highest since the Civil War.

**NR:** I know.

**MM:** Then Ronald Reagan defeated Jimmy Carter. You were running at the time of the Iran hostage crisis. They were released on Jan. 20, 1981. That’s an historical side note. The country is in the midst of this energy crisis and this recession, and people are really concerned about taxes. Yet, it looks as though you were in favor of at least a 1 percent income tax.
NR: Oh, I was always in favor of an income tax. I still am. There was
something you put in here, in your questions, about our overdependence on
the sales tax. That’s what I’m saying today. The problem in our state is the
overdependence on the sales tax because people stop buying, and it’s the
right thing for them to do. We stopped buying.

People do the right thing. But if you’ve been planning to buy
a new car, you don’t. And the car sales are down. Anyhow, during an
economic downturn, people don’t buy. They wait. We’ve gone to Europe
almost every year. Well, we’re not going this year. Of course, that doesn’t
include any sales tax anyhow. But our children had already decided not to
give presents to each other. It’s not because of the economy, but they were
doing it because they have too much stuff. There’s too much consumer
stuff and everything. But, now, it’s kind of part of the economy.

MM: But what you’re saying is, if people stop buying goods when there’s a
recession, we lose that funding source, those taxes. It’s a very simple thing.
Yet people get upset when you mention the word “tax” during a recession
because that means they’ll be paying more money. I see.

You also ran on issues of energy, which we talked about some last
time, because we were then in the midst of an energy crisis.

NR: My stuff sounds like today. More wind power. We talked about low-
head hydro and wind power. We didn’t talk as much about solar.

MM: But you didn’t have a chance to vote on any of those things during
your first term?

NR: Oh, no. And I wasn’t on the committee. You put down your choices.
And leadership decides what committee you’re going to be on, and maybe
you get your choices and maybe you don’t.

MM: What did you put down as your choices for committee work?

NR: I don’t remember, but I certainly didn’t put down State Govern-
ment. But it was interesting to be on that committee, even though I hadn’t
chosen it. I think I had chosen K-12, and instead I got Higher Ed. I chose
Revenue because that was one of my issues. So, I got that. The Higher
Ed committee was also quite collegial. The woman who ran it was also a Republican woman who was another pro-choice Republican. She was not vindictive, or anything like that. She was inclusive. The men on the committee, however, didn’t see any reason for going to college unless you were going into engineering, which was always bothersome. I think I spoke a lot in committee.

**MM:** Did a lot of the men have law degrees?

**NR:** In that committee they were engineers, as I remember it. They seem to think that’s what you needed to have when you graduated from college – a degree in engineering – but maybe that was just the opinion of those men who were on the committee.

**MM:** Hadn’t you just come from serving as a trustee for Shoreline schools?

**NR:** Shoreline Community College. Well, I came from a family where my father was an educator, and the same with my husband. My husband’s father was a schoolteacher. So education was something really important. Actually, we bought our first house in Shoreline because of the school district. The year that we bought the house, our children were all little; they weren’t in school yet. Seattle had lost a kindergarten levy, and so had Edmonds, which is to the north. I didn’t want to live in a place where they didn’t have a kindergarten, so we settled in Shoreline for that reason. It worked out well.

**MM:** Did you continue with education?

**NR:** I got onto the K-12 Education Committee after that. Grace and I were both on that together. Then they divided up the Ways and Means Committee to have a separate committee for Appropriations and Revenue. I knew the leadership wanted me to be on Revenue because I would hold out against tax loopholes. So they wanted me to be on Revenue, and, in order to be on Appropriations, I gave up Education. Actually, I found the Education Committee to be pretty boring because you always had the same players. It really bothered me. You had the administration and the teachers and they were always against each other. But it was the same players. In
the Environment Committee, we had so many different bills on different things that we had different players all the time. It was more interesting. Of course, maybe it was more interesting to me. But I liked being on the Education Committee, because it was important in my district.

But going back to my first year, I had my one first victory, which was on the State Government Committee. Doc Hastings, who is now in Congress, had a really bad, racist bill that said you had to have a driver’s license in order to register to vote. Of course, he was aiming at the Hispanics. I kept saying, the right to vote comes first; you shouldn’t need a driver’s license. Well, then I spotted something. You know you have the current law in front of you. And depending on the title of the bill you can amend another section if it fits with the title. I saw something there that I really wanted to pass. I passed an amendment that made it worse for the chair. This time, this chair was awful. I must have gotten a Republican to vote for my amendment. That killed the bill. I didn’t know – you see I was still stupid – I didn’t know that it was going to kill the bill. After the amendment passed, he said, let’s just put this aside for now. I don’t remember what the amendment was. But I remember the bill, and that I was against it.
Of course, the requirements they have in Washington are not like a poll tax – like having to show your driver’s license would be. You have to show that you live there, and you can use a rent receipt or something like that. The whole reason for voting at the polls is that you recognize your neighbors. You shouldn’t have to have identification to vote. Now most people don’t vote at the polls – we mail in our ballots – and there is no identification required. There is much more room for fraud in mail voting. Well, anyway, that was my victory. None of my bills made it that year. I know Irv Greengo had a hearing on the boat tax because I asked him if he would, and he did. He was nice. I mean that one time I think he felt really badly about it because he was a nice man. Then he lost. A lot of them lost.

They had voted for the sales tax on food, and they had to have five votes from the Democrats and they chose people who weren’t running for re-election, or people in Clark County. For some reason it wasn’t that hard on them. But they were very careful to have only certain people, who could be sacrificed, vote for the bill. I remember Mary Kay Becker from Bellingham. She had decided she wouldn’t run again because she was pregnant. She cried when she told us she wasn’t going to run. I really admired her when she ran for the Supreme Court. I doorbelled for her in my district. But, she was one of the people who was sacrificed because she wasn’t going to run. It was tough, but they didn’t have the votes; they couldn’t get the votes. Then, as a result, they lost. Along with having it be redistricted and everything. They lost by so much. As a result, we had a huge freshmen class the next year. So, that’s how I got to be committee chair in my second term, because everybody who had been there got something, because there were so many new ones.

**MM:** So, you had to move up the ranks kind of quickly I take it?

**NR:** The fruit basket turned over.

**MM:** There is a question I wanted to ask you because you served on the State Government Committee, but I don’t know if this event is at all related. You can tell me. In 1980, something else happened that made the papers. It was when the two prominent legislative leaders—

**NR:** Oh, Bagnariol and Walgren. That really didn’t affect me. It wasn’t
brought up during the campaign. It might have if I had been an incumbent. Maybe the people in the district didn’t care that much about it. If I had been an incumbent I might have had some hit pieces about it.

**MM:** All right, I’ll just say what the issue was for the recording. John Bagnariol and Gordon Walgren were charged with racketeering, conspiracy, and extortion as related to gambling. And the larger problem was that one was co-speaker of the House.

**NR:** Yes, Bagnariol.

**MM:** And Walgren was Senate majority leader. So, these were men who were quite high up?

**NR:** Very. The highest. The House had been tied the year before; you can’t get any higher. It was a sting, I’m sure. (Governor) Dixy Lee Ray did it. And, I think, in a way, Bagnariol might have been guilty, because he never came back in any way. But Walgren came back as a lobbyist and was really respected. He lobbied for some solid waste issues. I talked to him a lot, and nobody ever held it against him.

**MM:** You mentioned that it may have been a sting. Dixy Lee Ray, the governor, was not getting along with the Democrats in the Legislature, from what I read.

**NR:** You know, she was defeated in the primary by Jim McDermott, and then John Spellman beat McDermott.

**MM:** She was a strange governor, for a woman Democrat, wasn’t she?

**NR:** You know, the women’s movement was upset with her, too, because she was not at all helpful in any way. She had made her own way in what she was and she expected everybody else to, too. She pulled herself up by her bootstraps, so to speak, and she didn’t have any sympathy for other women.

**MM:** I want to go back to one thing. In your campaign, you campaigned
against Northern Tier Pipeline, supertankers in Puget Sound, increased nuclear power, and the use of Washington state as the dumping ground for radioactive waste. So, I wondered if there were specific problems—

**NR:** Well, we were right in the middle of the “Whoops fiasco.”

**MM:** And what was the Whoops fiasco?

**NR:** All the nuclear power plants. People had invested their money thinking they had the full faith and the credit of the state government behind them. A big lawsuit showed that they didn’t. When they lost, the people who invested their money – putting a lot of their money in – lost a lot, so it was a big issue. It really showed that, particularly in Seattle, when there was an energy crunch and the rates went up, people really saved. I remember the remark by John Miller, at that time a Seattle City Council member. Seattle had gotten into the first phase of Whoops, but Seattle didn’t get in the second phase. You see this was to build all these nuclear plants. They were going to build, like, five plants, and then the second phase came up. I remember watching John Miller on television. That was when I was busy in the League (of Women Voters) on some of those issues, too. He said, it’s too expensive, and we don’t need it. So, it turned out we didn’t need it because people did say, as they will in times like that, electricity has always been so cheap here compared to other places. So, then the decision was made to not build the nuclear plants, and then people had lost their money. You know, people who don’t diversify with their investments.

**MM:** I think this was before Chernobyl blew up as well, right?

**NR:** Oh, Chernobyl was later. We were in Italy when it happened, but there had been another explosion in the Caucasus Mountains in Eurasia that I had known about, but there was not much publicity about it. Chernobyl had happened later. But Three Mile Island had also happened.

**MM:** So then you could use that as an example. So, this Northern Tier Pipeline was also happening?

**NR:** That was another one, and then John Spellman voted against it.
MM: Yes, because the Northern Tier Pipeline was a plan to dig a pipeline under Puget Sound and into Washington state to get Alaskan oil to the northern states – the lower 48 I should say. And Spellman says no.

NR: Spellman vetoed it.

MM: And then the radioactive waste – dumping ground issue?

NR: Well, it has been a dumping ground; it still is.

MM: Were you referring to Hanford Nuclear Reservation when you said that?

NR: Well, Hanford has been a dumping ground for low-level waste and then it was a candidate for high-level waste. But that was later. Because I was on the Nuclear Waste Board, I was involved with the issue. I worked at that time with the Oregon legislators because it seemed as if the Oregon legislators were more concerned about it than we were. Dick Nelson and I went to a lot of meetings for that. And, also, we had a chance to go to Europe on that, but that was later.

MM: Well, I was interested because those issues appeared in your campaign materials, so I wondered to what you were referring. Because Hanford didn't become a more public issue, at least in terms of the Department of Ecology and the EPA, until the later '80s.

NR: Because they had all those underground tanks.

MM: So, you were already worried about that, and you knew about that. If we were to keep going linearly, we could talk more about taxes. I thought it was interesting that you had done that study in 1979 in your Shoreline neighborhood on home tax assessment.

NR: That was when I was working on Hank McGuire's campaign for King County assessor, and he had done a lot of them himself. So, I went to the assessor's office where all these files are available for the general public. I went up to the office, and it just shows that the more modest houses were
paying at a higher rate than the more expensive ones, which of course was not something that was a good thing for me to do, because of where I live (Shoreline’s Innis Arden neighborhood). [laughs] But, anyhow, many people didn’t like it, but maybe they didn’t remember it.

MM: It is interesting because in one article you said there is no conflict of interest because, as you said, “it doesn’t really benefit me because my home is one that if it were reassessed at the more fair rate, I could end up paying more taxes.”

NR: Right. I would. We would.

MM: It was interesting to find that these homes that cost less were being assessed at 85 percent tax, and the homes that cost more are only being assessed at 65 percent. But you were an advocate of — I don’t know how you want to say it — representative taxation, or fair taxation?

NR: Yes, right. It wasn’t fair. I did a lot of things that probably weren’t good for me because they weren’t fair. Like there was one thing where they were really against the high assessment values, and they wanted to freeze them so they couldn’t go up any more. Well, it just seems to me that since the taxes are limited, if you’re going to freeze the high levels, then the lower people in our district, living on either side of the freeway are going to pay more, and those of us living here are going to pay less. So, it was another argument that was against my own personal interest. Well, I did that a lot of times.

MM: Were you able to talk about that during the first two years you were on the Revenue Committee?

NR: No, not then. It was when home values were really increasing. The assessment values were really increasing, especially in King County. Well, I fought against the freeze of assessments. I fought it on the floor. They passed it. They took it to court, and the court agreed with me because it’s not equal when you freeze it on some and not on others. If everything went up exactly the same all the time then it would really be fair. But, at that time, the assessments were really going up higher on the higher val-
ued houses to maybe make it more fair, but they wanted to freeze it, and you can’t because it’s supposed to be on the value. So, the Supreme Court rejected the bill. But I remember talking about that a lot. I talked about it in the caucus, and I talked about it on the floor.

**MM:** So, that was one of your triumphs?

**NR:** I guess so, but that wasn’t during my freshman year. My only triumph was that little bill about voting. [laughs]

**MM:** Well, that’s good. That was a big deal.

**NR:** Yes, he was really mad at me for having done that. He lost the next time.

**MM:** Did that come out as a hit piece against Greengo?

**NR:** Well, I don’t know, but he did eventually lose. Maybe it wasn’t the next time.

**MM:** So, I was looking at some of the bills you supported in 1981. In 1981, you introduced HB 688, which would provide for improved and additional bike lanes.

**NR:** You know, I don’t really remember that.

**MM:** The Bicycle Manufacturers wrote you back, so that’s how I was clued into it. But you don’t recall that bill?

**NR:** I don’t remember, but they must have asked me to do it. I was still a freshman, and I was in the minority. They don’t usually ask people in the minority. But maybe I was the only bike rider that they knew. It wasn’t a bill that I thought up myself.

**MM:** They must have known you as a cycling advocate. At the time, did you belong to a bicycle association or something?
NR: I might have put it in my campaign material, or they might have known that I went on a bicycling trip. There might have been a lobbyist who knew that. We had biked on the Bicentennial in 1976. You know, people rode all the way across the country, or you could do stages. We just did one stage, and we did it with our twin daughters who were just 16. They went with us because you could bring kids over a certain age. We stayed in barns and gyms and places like that. We biked from Astoria to Prineville, Oregon. So we went over the Cascade Mountains. We figured if we had the time we could have gone all the way because we'd gone over the Cascades.

MM: If you can make it over the Cascades, you're not going to run over anything more difficult, I don't think.

NR: Yes, we did that. Probably people knew that we did that. I don't think we had joined the BAC yet, but we had done that. So, somebody knew that we had been on that.

MM: You said that the only success you had during your freshman year was that amendment you put to that bill requiring a driver's license in order to vote, killing that bill. So, you didn't have any other bills that made it into law during your freshmen year?

NR: No, and I don't remember doing many other bills besides doing the vote bill.
MM: Do you remember these family planning bills coming up in ’81? The SSB 3857, allowing family planning clinics to continue dispensing oral birth control?

NR: I always voted for the pro-choice side, but I don’t remember any of the bills. One big issue that they counted very carefully was paying for abortions for poor women, especially since Republican presidents opposed federal assistance. Medicaid, which was for poor people, would not pay for abortions – on most issues, the federal government pays for half, but they would not pay for abortions. So, it was all state money, and that was a line item in the budget. So, it was really important that they counted the vote. There were always enough Republican women who would vote for it.

MM: In 1982 there was a substitute House bill you voted for, SHB 756, which enabled low-income women to have the same access to abortion as women in higher income brackets. Is that the bill you just mentioned?

NR: That must have been it. But then, after that, it was a line item in the bill. We all thought it was really important they have that. It shouldn’t be just for people who could afford it.

MM: You had worked on the Equal Rights Amendment, hadn’t you?

NR: I did.

MM: Were you one of the people who went down to the Legislature and you were in the gallery—

NR: I remember going down to talk to Lois North about it, yes I did. I worked on it, and at one point she let me go up and use her office because Lois was pro-choice. She was one of my mentors actually because she had been President of the League of Women Voters. I knew her very well. She let me go up and use her office to call people in the district to get them to talk to Senator Ted Peterson about it – the Equal Rights Amendment. Lois had also been one of the sponsors of the abortion bill, which was a referendum. That was very controversial.

NR: Yes, that came before the Equal Rights Amendment.

MM: I want to say it was Initiative 120, but I can’t recall.

NR: Initiative 120 was later. That was when we were in. It was to have 
Roe vs. Wade – what the opinion was – be state law because our bill that 
legalized abortion didn’t do everything.

MM: That’s right; Initiative 120 was to strengthen the law.

NR: I remember, or I had always thought, that our original abortion bill 
was the first in the country.

MM: It was. It was the first that the people voted in.

NR: New York was maybe before that. Our statute wasn’t perfect, and 
it didn’t do everything that the opinion Roe vs. Wade did. So that was what 
Initiative 120 was about. It was during the Reagan years, because I wasn’t in 
the Legislature during Bush (George W. Bush). They were afraid that Roe vs. 
Wade would be overturned, so we wanted to keep it in our state. It was an 
initiative to the Legislature. I remember the bitter fight we had in our cau-
cus on that because those of us who were really pro-choice wanted to vote 
on it on the floor no matter what was going to happen in the Senate. Some 
of the people, they were mostly pro-choice Catholics, didn’t want to vote 
on it unless they knew it was going to pass the Senate. They didn’t want to 
be hung out on it if it wasn’t going to pass the Senate. So, it didn’t pass the 
House, but then it went to the people.

MM: A lot of people don’t know that Washington state passed its own 
Equal Rights Amendment.

NR: Yes, they don’t have it in the whole country.

MM: It was passed in ’72, but it didn’t get ratified nationally.
NR: The ones that never got the votes were the states. When you amend the Constitution it takes the votes of three-fourths of the states. It was never ratified – a sore point. You know when I went to vote for the first time, I was married, and Dick was in medical school. Because I was married when I was only 20, I went to register to vote in Iowa City, where we lived when Dick was in med school. They wouldn’t let me register unless I was registered in the same domicile as my husband. You see, he was registered where he had lived, where his parents were and where his home was. Well, it was the last day to register. They said I could go get my husband and they could change the registration. He was in medical school. I couldn’t go get him out of that. That was my experience.

My niece had a car that her grandfather gave her when she graduated from college. Because they moved to Maryland, she went to register her car in Maryland. They wouldn’t let her register unless her husband signed it. Those are things people don’t even know. Maybe those have all changed now, but they don’t have an Equal Rights Amendment.

MM: Well, there were all those laws that were passed in the ’70s, equal credit for women—

NR: Right, all those bills. But every time they had a bill where the whole section was before us, they had to change all the “he’s” to “he or she” or “his or her.” I remember Bill Polk, although I thought he was a tyrant, he was very careful whenever a bill came up for a vote, Does anyone want to change his or her vote? He always said it that way, Does anyone want to change his or her vote?

MM: He learned not to use sexist language.

NR: He never used the word, “their.” That’s one of the things that bothered me, when they used the word “their,” and it should be singular.

MM: When it should be “his or her.” Right.

Well, that is interesting because before the ERA, in 1971, there were eight women in the House – seven women in the House in 1969. But by the time you get in, there are 26 women in the House. So, your numbers more than doubled.
NR: Right, at one time we had the most women in any Legislature. New Hampshire always had had the most before that because it is more like a town-hall set-up, so there are so many from every little village. It’s very part-time. So, they always had the most women because the men couldn’t take the time. At one time we were the Legislature with the most, but I don’t think we are any more.

MM: I guess the reason why we scoped out and talked about the ’70s is because I wanted to come back and ask you if any of the attitudes about issues such as informed consent procedures, abortion, or any other issues related to women’s rights had changed by the time that you got to the Legislature in the early ’80s.

NR: Well, they had, and they’ve even changed since then. During the time when I was there we couldn’t get a civil rights bill passed that gave gay people the right to hold a job – no discrimination in housing and holding a job, very basic things. It would fail. It failed in the House, and it never came up in the Senate. Then, after I was gone, they got it through the House, but it didn’t pass the Senate for a while. Then because Bill Finkbeiner changed his vote, it finally passed both houses. But that was really very basic anti-discrimination. Since then, both houses have passed the basic things gay people have wanted the most, which is visitation in the hospital, pension benefits – those basic, basic rights. The last time they passed a whole lot more small things. Those things have changed since I was there. So, you see a lot of progress in a lot of areas like that.

I went to an ACLU meeting before the Legislature had passed a lot of the basic things, and there had been a lot of discussions about, “Why can’t they be happy with a civil union?” The reason is that in our state it would take passing about 400 different bills because there are so many little hidden places. Because, he said, he was a gay person, he would be very happy if they had all the same rights, but they don’t because there are so many references to marriage in the statute. It would take so many changes. That’s the big thing.

MM: When you think of civil rights, it’s an evolution. You can see it. You can see what happened in the ’60s for African-Americans. And you can see what happened for women in the ’70s—
NR: Now we have an African-American president. I was really worried that people would vote against him in the privacy of the polling booth. People don’t want to admit that they are racist, and then they are. But there have been a lot of changes.

I think about the abortion issue, too. There was a very outspoken older woman in our legislative district who went to candidates’ meetings, and she’d pick on Republicans, particularly, because she was a Democrat. She would say, “Are you in favor of legalized abortions?” If he said, “No,” than she would say, “Oh, then you must be in favor of illegal ones.” I’ve always liked to remember that. Because, of course, before it was legal, they were illegal, but that didn’t mean it didn’t happen.

MM: Right, that’s a good thing to say, that’s a good comeback.

There are some other bills you voted for, or voted against. But even before you joined the Environmental Committee as chair, you voted on issues that had to do with the environment. I don’t have the bill in front of me, but it was a Senate bill that would have weakened the Shoreline Management Act, which was in place before the Growth Management Act existed. I was going to ask you if you remember the bill, but even if you don’t remember the bill, do you remember the ways in which there was an attempt to chip away at the Shoreline Management Act?

NR: Yes, there were, and that’s something I fought every time, the whole time I was chair of the committee: changing the Shoreline Management Act. I remember saying it was voted on by the people, and they did change it after I was no longer there.

MM: So, the Shoreline Management Act, that’s an act that came along in the ’70s, with Governor Evans?

NR: Yes, that’s when our environmental laws were originally passed.

MM: Yes, and it didn’t come through the first time, when they established the Department of Ecology.

NR: It was an initiative.
**MM:** It was an initiative. It was pushed back out for people to vote on, and people voted it in, passed it in 1971, but that’s a land use act.

**NR:** It was land use, right, and it was for shorelines.

**MM:** Because people were contributing to the degradation of the shoreline, or ruining the ecology, whatever you want to say, by building directly on the shoreline, and believing they owned out into the waters. Estuaries and deltas and all these areas were being negatively impacted.

**NR:** Yes. There were a lot of bills that came up where there was something in them that amended the Shoreline Management Act, and I held firm to that.

**MM:** Who were you fighting against, what industries?

**NR:** Oh, I don’t remember any particular industry, but if anything had anything to do with the shorelines, I always made clear that it had a very tight title.

**MM:** What do you mean a “tight title”?

**NR:** Well, you could have an act relating to clean air, which you could do most anything with, but if you wanted to narrow it, you’d take something very specific, and you put it into the title. In our Legislature, the bill had to relate to the title. You couldn’t have the bill be bigger than the title. So there was one shoreline bill I let pass because it had to do with utilities or something, and it wouldn’t have ever come out of my committee unless the lobbyist who wanted it changed the title, which meant they had to reintroduce another bill with a tight title, otherwise someone would have grasped on to it. There was always somebody who wanted to change it so you could build docks or something, easier.

**MM:** I want to go back and ask you about 1983 when Wayne Ehlers became the Speaker of the House and he asked you to chair the House Committee on Environmental Affairs. Can you explain what happened?
NR: Well, the Republicans had done away with the committee.

MM: Oh, really?

NR: Oh, yes. They had done away with the committee, and the Democrats had a committee called the “Ecology Committee.” Georgette Valle was the chair. Anyhow, Georgette lost in ’82. She was in during my freshmen year. She came back later, but she lost that year, or it would have gone to Georgette because she had chaired it when we had the majority. So, Wayne Ehlers called me up and asked me if I wanted to chair it. Of course I said, “yes.” I had no real role model for doing so. Delores Teutsch in Higher Ed had been really nice and so had Irv Greengo, except for that one case. Bruce Addison, who had chaired the State Government, was dreadful. So, I hadn’t had a lot of real role-model experiences because I hadn’t been in the majority.

An interim committee had recommended major changes to SEPA, the State Environmental Policy Act. Ken Jacobsen, for some reason I don’t understand, had agreed to vote for it. The leadership wouldn’t let us amend
it or do anything else with it. Wayne had asked me about it in the begin-
ning, and my early reaction was that if it had the votes, it would pass. So, it
came over from the Senate and Ken had said he would vote for it. Joanne
Brekke and I met with some environmental leaders over the weekend, and
they had talked me into trying to stop it. So, the only way we knew was to
talk too long until the meeting time was over.

**MM:** Like a kind of filibuster?

**NR:** Yes, kind of. You know, if I had more experience I would have said
I wasn’t going to pass it in the beginning, but then the speaker would have
put it in another committee. That’s one of the things that I learned. If you
didn’t want it, you were not going to vote for a bill that the leaders wanted.
They just wouldn’t send a bill to your committee anyhow. So, anyhow, we
thought we had done it because it was the last committee meeting, and
we ran out of time. Well, someone found more time, and we had another
meeting, and Ken voted for it, and the rest of us Democrats on the com-
mittee voted “no,” but it passed.
Is that bill ESSB 3006, the 1983 attempt to review, streamline and simplify SEPA, which requires formal review of all major actions that significantly affect the quality of the environment, the review resulting in an environmental impact statement (EIS)?

Yes, and the ESSB, the Engrossed Substitute Senate Bill, means it was amended in committee, and the “E” is for the engrossed. That meant it was amended on the floor. Well, they were able to amend it, but we weren’t allowed to amend it in committee, even to take out some things that were inaccurate.

So, this was something real estate agents, miners, loggers, and most others in the goods-producing sector, wanted because it made it easier for them to do what they wanted to do?

Yes, they all wanted it. It was particularly bad for what it did with the forest. I can’t remember all the details, but it wasn’t really supposed to include it. It was more intended for building houses and that kind of thing.

There had been an earlier bill in 1981, which would have weakened the Shoreline Management Act. You voted against it. It’s funny how these bills just keep coming around.

Earlier, you asked me about acid rain. You know one of my sons, Steve, who is a hardcore environmentalist, gave me a book about it. So, I had become interested in it, and I introduced a bill. Then it turned out that Spellman had a bill, too. And since he was governor, I put my bill into his.

Oh, that’s interesting. I was wondering because as I was researching, I thought, “this is weird because it looks like this bill comes from Nancy, and then concurrently Governor Spellman wanted something.” I’m glad you said that because that was a mystery to me. So, in 1984 you were prime sponsor of a bill which provided for a study of acid rain.

Well, because I was committee chair, even though he was a Republican, he’d have to go to the committee chair. That’s the courtesy thing. You go to the committee chair. Because I’d already had my bill written, it
seemed like the better thing to do would be to put my bill into his bill.

**MM:** Did you tell him that?

**NR:** No, I don’t remember talking to him about it, but it turned out OK. The bill passed.

**MM:** What did you learn about acid rain from this book your son gave you?

**NR:** Of course, it’s caused by the industrial pollutants, and it hurts the forest. It’s worse in the East where they had more pollution from coal fired plants and so forth.

**MM:** Acid rain seemed to be an emerging issue at that time. There was a lot written about it at the time that you were working on it.

Also, while researching, I found some bills here that surprised me, in terms of the history. I didn’t even realize that it wasn’t until the ’80s that there was a bill to create a law that would warn employees working with hazardous substances – industrial safety, the workers’ right to know. You were prime sponsor of this bill.

**NR:** Well, I was prime sponsor of the House bill, but it was the Senate bill that passed. That was Phil Talmadge’s bill that passed. You know, sometimes you had to let your bill go by, and then the Senate bill came. I worked really hard to pass that, unfortunately a lot of Democrats voted with Republicans on a lot of amendments. I remember going over and talking to Phil about it, saying, “There is nothing I can do. These amendments are passing.” But, I remember talking about it on the floor. In the olden days you knew that your job was hazardous. You know, if you went to sea or you worked in a coal mine, you knew it was hazardous. But now you don’t necessarily know.

**MM:** Because the chemicals are invisible to you or you don’t know the effects of them?

**NR:** Yes, because the chemicals are invisible to you. And so, it did pass,
and I remember going on a tour of the Boeing Company and seeing their list of chemicals. They were all posted.

**MM:** That really shocked me that it wasn’t until 1983 that that passed.

**NR:** One of the really successful bills that I had was about hazardous materials. The original bill was much stronger than anything that passed. I was getting really discouraged, but the staff person was so good about trying different things. The industries were so important, even some of the guys who were really friendly to me said they couldn’t have anything that dealt with trade secrets – they just couldn’t deal with it. This was for reducing hazardous materials. Not warning. It was hazardous materials. The effect was to reduce them, and we wanted to report what they were doing, and they couldn’t do that, or they wouldn’t. I remember one guy who was a friend – I mean he was a Democrat – talking to me, saying he would like to pass it personally, but he just couldn’t do it. So, it ended up that they had to do the study, but they didn’t have to report to anybody. They had to do the

**Governor Spellman signing Acid Rain Bill, 1984**
study. And you know what happened?

**MM:** What?

**NR:** They did the study, and they found out all the places they could save. In the interim we had hearings on the effect of the bill, and they all came and they said it was just a good bill because they were able to save so much money. They found out when they were doing their study that the hazardous materials that they were using could be substituted with something else.

Then, of course, they didn’t have to pay as much for hazardous waste clean-up. It just worked out great, but it was much less than what I had really started to do in the first place.

**MM:** That’s great. That just goes to show you businesses are changing. There used to be this reaction when you approached businesses and they hear they have to “green up or clean up,” they would think, “this is going to break me.”

**NR:** This one saved them money. Well, they had to do the study, but there was no enforcement, but they did have to do the study, and I think they all did. They came back and found out that they didn’t need to use hazardous substances, and they found substitutes. Oh, that was the other thing, the hazardous waste disposal thing, too, and the superfund and all that. All those bills came in my committee, and we worked so hard because we had huge bills that were controversial.

**MM:** Just to go back to those hazardous substances, you were talking about the Senate Bill that passed. I have referenced here a bill that establishes a program for the disclosure of information regarding hazardous substances in the workplace.

**NR:** Yes, it must have been the same bill.

**MM:** Yes, it must have been their version. Then there’s the other bill on acid rain that comes up later – mitigation of acid rain. So that must have been a response to the report that was ordered.
NR: Yes.

MM: And it looks like there is a House bill and then a Substitute House Bill 1174.

NR: Almost all bills come out as a substitute bill. “Engrossed” means that it was amended on the floor.

MM: So when it’s a substitute bill, you can amend it or, instead, you rewrite it.

NR: You rewrite it, and it makes it easier on the floor if you just have a substitute bill. There are some bills I didn’t do that with because I wanted people to vote on the amendments on the floor. But usually you roll them all in — all the amendments in the committee.

MM: And if the amendments don’t pass on a bill?

NR: Then the bill can still pass. It depends on the bill, like when we had the toxics bill, which had to do with hazardous waste disposal. Joe King had said that the bill was going to be dead if there were any more amendments. There had been a lot. This was the last. This was the way it was going to go, and if there were any more amendments the bill is dead. That’s the power of the Speaker. So they passed an amendment, and he said, Passed to rules. You can have some bad amendments that you fought against, but your bill will still pass. But in that case it didn’t. Up until then people really didn’t believe that he would do it. In the beginning people thought of him more as one of those business Democrats, but he turned out to be great. He always backed me. You know the committee chairs were like the captains out in the field. And he was very supportive of the committee chairs, all of us.

MM: Tell me how you ran your committee, the Environmental Affairs Committee.

NR: Well, I killed a lot of bills, and, in a way, I was more successful in keeping bad things from happening. I saved out one of my reports from the
Legislature, and I talked about that. I didn’t have many of these; these were
different from campaign materials. “Powers of the chair.”

**MM:** This material is from ’89.

**NR:** “I killed a couple bills. Senate Bill 5917 would have limited the au-
thority of the Puget Sound Water Quality Authority. Everyone wanted to
clean up Puget Sound, but now that we are getting down to doing it, some
were not so sure. The bill had a lot of support from big business interest,
and it’s hard to describe the pressure that was put on committee members
to pass this bill. The other bill, Senate Bill 5855, supported by develop-
ners, would have limited citizens groups’ ability to appeal during the SEPA
process. And both of these bills had passed the Senate and probably would
have passed the House if I hadn’t held them in committee. There’s been
a lot of criticism of committee chairs that have held their bills in commit-
tee. Do you think I made the right decision?” I asked that. “I think that
people really care about the environment, but the Legislature is all too often
controlled by effective special interest lobbies.” So, I was really known as
somebody who held bills in committee. Well, those weren’t the only ones. I
held a lot of bills in committee. I didn’t even have hearings on them.

**MM:** But you just ran out of calendar time. That’s what would happen.
You’d have the bills that you wanted to hear. I mean if you run out of
calendar time—

**NR:** We always had plenty of bills. Some committee chairs were a little
more democratic and met with their ranking minority people. I didn’t. Ac-
tually, Jim Horn was very cooperative, and we worked together to get bills
passed, but I never included him in setting the calendar. I’d sit down with
the committee staff, and they’d tell me what the bills were about. I’d put
them on the calendar if I liked them.

But when Jim Horn was the ranking minority person, I sometimes
treated him as if he were my vice chair. We went on a lot of field trips.
The staff would ask me what dates were good for me, and I’d tell them to
ask Jim next what was good for him, and he almost always came. We were
working on the oil spill bill and Larry Philips wanted to be involved, and
so did Jim. We had a lot of extra meetings, which we fit in if we had free
time. Well, the first time I had a time that Larry could come, but not Jim. Well, Jim talked to me and said he really wanted to be involved. He said he didn’t go to the other committee because he wanted to be at this if I could please schedule it for a time when he could come. So we met after session. We met in the evening a lot. I felt sorry for the poor staff person who was commuting from Seattle. I always included Jim in those meetings.

Of course, that was the year we had the air bill and the Growth Management Bill, and so we were all just loaded with extra meetings, but it really worked. I remember there was one bill that, when it came on the floor, I wasn’t sure how Jim was going to vote, but his voice boomed out: “In favor of the bill.” Well, what happened is that he would not bring very many Republicans along with him. You know, he was representing Mercer Island, so it wasn’t going to hurt him to be good on the environment. Anyhow, so Jim would be for it, and so all the Democrats who wouldn’t necessarily follow my lead, they’d think, “Well, Jim’s for it. I guess I’m for it, too.” So, I’d get all the Democrats, and he’d maybe get five or six Republicans. But, before then, I couldn’t count on all my Democrats voting. You know, he really helped me. We worked together.

**MM:** That’s a great partnership. I was amazed, when I was reading through, about all the bills that went through your committee, like this one about notifying schools about pesticides, HB 885.

**NR:** Yes, we had a lot to do with pesticides.

**MM:** Sometimes I find myself being like a lot of other folks, without a sense of history. We think these laws have always existed, and we can’t imagine a time without them.

**NR:** We wanted that bill for all the different schools. I remember saying, “You know, it doesn’t hurt to have a few weeds.” They don’t need to have a perfect lawn.

**MM:** You’re risking the health of a child for the aesthetic beauty of the lawn of the school. So, put those two together, and what’s the answer?

**NR:** The Agriculture Committee was really made up of agricultural inter-
ests. Jennifer Belcher, in her first year, had a bill that would take pesticides out of the Department of Agriculture and put them in the Department of Ecology. [laughs]

**MM:** Oh, they probably had a cow when they heard that.

**NR:** They did. The bill didn’t go anywhere. Peter Goldmark was director of the Department of Agriculture in 1993.

**MM:** He’s Land Commissioner now, right?

**NR:** Right. He’s Land Commissioner now. We had a fundraiser for him. I worked pretty hard for him. Anyhow, I didn’t bring this up with him, but I remember telling him, like what Jennifer had said, I said something about having pesticides being in the Department of Agriculture was like putting the fox in the henhouse. I think I hurt his feelings. Also, I had been involved in the Farming and the Environment Organization, where I knew he had been co-chair, and that was the big thing. I knew he was somebody who could work with both sides.

**MM:** Did you deal with run-off issues, from farming with pesticides? I think apple orchards were a big deal.

**NR:** We dealt with pollution, we didn’t deal with water quantity in my committee; we dealt with issues of pollution.

**MM:** Water rights didn’t go through your committee?

**NR:** No, it didn’t. But we had a water caucus where we did a lot of study, and it was promised to me – that was one of the reasons I ran for the Legislature another time – it was promised to me that it was going to come to my committee the next time. There was always a lot of turf, too, about it. But the other committee chairs weren’t running for re-election, and, so, it wouldn’t offend anybody. It had been promised to me, but we lost the majority, and then nothing happened.

**MM:** You might remember other bills during this period of ’83-’84 that I
havent’t yet mentioned. You did regulate smoking in the workplace.

NR: That was Georgette Valle’s bill. She’s always been active on no smoking in the workplace.

MM: This is interesting because we forget about that era in which everyone smoked at will at their desk and had their ashtray. This is House Bill 1464, in 1984 when this bill goes up for a vote. But it says here that employers must attempt – it doesn’t even ban smoking – but says employers must attempt to reach a compromise between the preference of smoking and nonsmoking employees regarding the presence of smoke in the office.

NR: Well, later we passed no smoking.

MM: It looks like this was the precursor.

NR: That was the precursor. It must have been Georgette’s bill because she always did that sort of a thing. But, as I was saying earlier, how Art Wang was smoking. Of course, after we passed the bill about no smoking, then there was no smoking allowed in the Capitol or meeting rooms.

MM: I think Representative Ruth Fisher, from Tacoma, still smoked in her office.

NR: She smoked in her office and in the ladies’ lounge along with another woman who was a Republican. They smoked over by the window, which bugged all of us, but we loved Ruth, and we didn’t pick on her for it. And Grace smoked. When they were still smoking, she always sat on the outside aisle because at that time, even when there was no smoking on the floor, they could go in the wings and smoke. Later they weren’t allowed to smoke in the whole building. But the lobbyists would stand right outside the door, and you had to hold your breath as you went through. I was always threatening to move the ashtray. In the middle of the night, I was going to go over and do that. It was one of those big, heavy things. But now you can’t even smoke near the doorways. That’s the initiative people voted for.

You know, I grew up in a house of smoke. My father smoked all the time. Of course, he wasn’t home during the day. Dick’s father
smoked a lot. But he was the same. He didn’t always smoke because he was a schoolteacher. I guess they went to the boiler room, or someplace, to smoke. His mother smoked all the time. Dick went to visit his parents once, and he had driven somewhere with his brother who smoked. He came home, and I said it was just like when the kids came home from camp. Some of the clothes they never wore but they were still dirty because they smelled of all the mold and everything. Everything he had smelled of smoke. I couldn’t believe it. He doesn’t smoke any more. He did at first.

**MM:** Is there anything else you remember from your second term, when you were first committee chair? What is that called, your second term?

**NR:** Your sophomore term. [laughs]

**MM:** Is there anything else you remember from your sophomore term that we should talk about?

**NR:** Well, that SEPA bill was a big thing. You know I don’t remember what came up when. I really enjoyed being committee chair because it’s the place to be. You set the agenda. It’s really up to you. If there’s something the speaker really wants passed, you really have to schedule it. In the case of that SEPA bill, we had to pass it. But we never really had a problem after that. It was up to me to decide what to hear and what I didn’t want to hear.

**MM:** Did it change your life outside of the Legislature, socially? Did people want to talk to you about environmental issues?

**NR:** Yes, but we had some really good friends – the husband was very opinionated and we really lost the friendship because he thought I was crazy to run for the Legislature, but otherwise, no. There were some other people who had always been Republican, but I think they must have changed because the husband was always so interested in what I was doing. It did change. People wanted to talk to me while I was in the grocery store. Sometimes it was hard to get out of there.

**MM:** I was thinking that might have happened to you. But I was wonder-
ing if you became seen as an environmental authority because you had to study the issues?

**NR:** I did. I had always cared about the environment, but I became much more of an expert on it. I really understood a lot of the solid-waste issues, a lot of the hazardous issues, some things that—well, you want clean air, but you don’t know what you have to do to get it.

**MM:** Air is complicated because bad air, polluted air, isn’t necessarily born in this state. It can come from elsewhere and move over us. Air, I find, of all the environmental issues can be the most complicated.

**NR:** Oh, you wanted to talk about how I got interested in environmental issues in the first place.

**MM:** Yes. I did. I’m so glad you mentioned it. Yes, I wanted to ask you how you developed your environmental consciousness.

**NR:** It’s something that I was just brought up with. My mother was a great gardener, and she would go and visit her friends and they would share plants with each other. She was really happy with her garden. We each had a little plot back in the back behind the swing. Probably didn’t show much. But we each had a little plot where we planted our own seeds. We lived in Hamden actually, which was a suburb of New Haven, Connecticut. At the end of our street was something like a dead end. You could turn. It wasn’t a complete dead end, but there was a spur, which was a dead end. There was a fence, and on the other side was the water company property where you weren’t supposed to go. Well, I wasn’t that much of a daredevil, but I had a classmate who was my same age who lived on my street, and we used to go down there and climb under that fence, or go over it. It was paradise. It was just beautiful. I can still remember it, with dog tooth violets, which they had in the East. Just the most beautiful place. We used to just go down there, just to be there. Of course, we weren’t supposed to be there because it was water company property, but that’s why it was so beautiful because it was not disturbed.

We did that, and we went to camp, Brownie camp and Girl Scout camp. Because my dad was a college professor, we had the summers off,
and we could go visit the grandparents. We had one set of grandparents in Iowa. My grandfather was a small businessman. He owned the lumber-yard with his brother-in-law. He had invested his money in the farms, and my father would help him with that. I remember my father talking about “contour plowing” and “strip plowing” and doing that kind of thing that would help with the run-off. He always wanted us to know about the farming. I remember particularly learning about things they’re still talking about on one particular farm, which was more hilly. Then, after we had done that, we went out to the Black Hills in South Dakota where my other grandmother had a summer cabin, which was a log cabin. Very nice, and it was in a little community, the summer cabins. We used to walk out to this place. It was called Tollgate, where we used to go swimming, which was in this narrow, confined area with rocks going up on either side. Then the creek came out. There was a natural little dam that made a pool behind there. My mother had taken botany in college, and she helped us earn a Girl Scout wildflower badge. I’ve always had a lifelong interest in wildflowers particularly. Then, when we came here, Dick had never done a lot of hiking in the woods. That’s the other thing. When we lived in Connecticut, we did a lot of hiking, just in the woods and there was a state park nearby, so we did that.

You know, Dick came from Iowa, and his father was a schoolteacher, and he ran a swimming pool in the summer. So that’s what they did in the summer. They started working at the pool when they were teenagers. So, he loved it, still does out here. We all do. We started hiking with the children when they were little, quite little. We did a lot of backpacking, every year. We went for a backpack, a family backpack, every year.

**MM:** Did you take tents? Did you go camping?

**NR:** Oh, yes. First we did car camping, and we always did a little hike, too, even if it was short. We hiked, and we backpacked in the Cascades a lot. I always carried my wildflower book with me. So, I really learned the wildflowers of Western Washington.

**MM:** You can identify them? You can walk through a yard or someone’s property and name the flowers?
NR: I can identify a tree when it doesn’t have any leaves. For example, that’s a dogwood (looking out onto her backyard).

MM: And that’s a madrona there, isn’t it? I love madronas.

NR: Those are madronas, yes. And this is a cedar, and this is a mountain ash.

MM: Oh, I thought it was a holly because it had those red berries, but hol-lies keep their leaves.

NR: And they’re invasive. They’re bad.

MM: Oh, I cut two down, and I’ve felt guilty.

NR: You shouldn’t. They’re invasive. They’re on the “bad” list. They’re not as bad as ivy, but they’re not good. In the other house we lived in, I thought it was so wonderful that we had some holly plants. I transplanted some.
So, when I was in the League of Women Voters, I chaired that committee one year.

**MM:** On Environmental Quality?

**NR:** Yes. That interest came out of a love of the out-of-doors.  
**MM:** And a desire to preserve it.

**NR:** Yes, and Dick was involved in the Boy Scouts, and I was involved in the Girl Scouts. The boys went on the hike every year, too, in addition to the one they had with the family, and Dick went on those.

**MM:** Was he a Boy Scout leader?

Off we go! Amy in the lead, followed by Lib, Mike, Steve, Martha, David, and Nancy
NR: He was an assistant leader. He had never been a Boy Scout. I was the Girl Scout. I was the one who knew how to build a fire and all those things.

MM: Well it’s good that somebody knows how to start a fire when you are backpacking in the mountains.

NR: Well, those first trips we did, I cooked all the food over the open fire, which I really didn’t like doing because my pants got all sooty, and I became all bleary-eyed. But then we got the small stoves. As the boys got older, they did a lot of the cooking, and also they carried a lot of the stuff. The first time we went, Dick and I had to carry an awful lot in big packs because, you know, the twins were quite small. They carried the first day’s lunch. We got them some little packs. They carried their own clothes and they carried the first day’s lunch. Mike had to carry a sleeping bag, but I don’t think he carried anything else but his own clothes. Then the three boys slept together, and the three girls slept together. So Amy and Lib didn’t have to carry a sleeping bag. I don’t think Mike had to carry any food. He had to carry his own clothes and his sleeping bag and that was all.
The older three all carried some of the food, and Dick and I carried very heavy packs.

**MM:** And how long were your hikes?
NR: Oh, like five days. The first one was from Chinook Pass to White Pass. We haven’t been on a backpack trip in a while. We started bicycling instead.

MM: It’s a different way to see that land, isn’t it?

NR: Yes, but backpacking is the only way you can get up into the high mountains where the wildflowers are.

MM: That’s really wonderful. Let’s stop for today, and pick up next time.