



Nevada Legislature Oral History Project

BYRON L. BILYEU
Republican

Assembly, 1982 – 1986

NOVEMBER 6, 2008
RENO, NEVADA

Nevada Legislature Oral History Project

BYRON L. BILYEU
Republican
Assembly, 1982 – 1986

NOVEMBER 6, 2008
BYRON L. BILYEU LAW OFFICES
RENO, NEVADA

Interview conducted by
Dana R. Bennett

Filmed by
Gwendolyn B. Clancy

Transcribed and indexed by
Jean Stoess

Get Consensus, LLC
Under contract to the Nevada Legislative Counsel Bureau

SUGGESTED CITATION:

Byron L. Bilyeu. An oral history by Dana R. Bennett. Carson City, Nevada:
Legislative Counsel Bureau, 2009.

The record copy of the interview transcript is printed on archival quality paper and on file with the Research Library of the Legislative Counsel Bureau in Carson City, Nevada.

PROJECT INTRODUCTION

The 2007 Nevada Legislature approved an appropriation for a project of conducting oral histories with former state legislators, and in the summer following the conclusion of the session, the Research Division of the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) conducted a competitive bid process to identify and obtain a contractor to carry out the project. A committee consisting of LCB and other state personnel with expertise in Nevada history and politics evaluated and ranked the proposals received. In January 2008, a contract was signed between LCB and Get Consensus, LLC, for an 18-month program.

Administered by Donald O. Williams, Research Director, and coordinated by Amber Joiner, Senior Research Analyst, the Nevada Legislature Oral History Project consists of video- and audio-taped interviews, which have been transcribed, edited for readability, and indexed. An initial list of suggested interview subjects had been presented to the Senate Committee on Finance when it considered Senate Bill 373, which proposed an appropriation for the creation of an oral history of the Nevada Legislature. Using that as the starting point, LCB staff considered several factors—such as age, length of legislative tenure, contributions to the State of Nevada, and whether a formal oral history of the individual had been published or was underway—when identifying the former legislators who would be interviewed. The final list provided to the contractor revealed a careful balance of legislative house, political party, and geographic distribution among the interviewees.

After LCB staff acquired the written permission of each subject, the contractor would proceed with scheduling the interview at a time and place convenient for the former legislator. Each interview was simultaneously filmed and audiotaped. The audio recording was transcribed verbatim and then edited by the contractor for readability. Each interviewed legislator was provided the opportunity to review his or her edited document, and any misstatements or errors in the videotape were corrected in the text. The contractor produced three copies of each final product, which includes the text and a DVD of the interview film. Copies were presented to LCB's Research Library and the State Library in Carson City; the subject legislator also received a copy of his or her interview. The repository of record for all digital film and audio files is LCB's Research Library.

Together, these interviews make a significant contribution to the annals of Nevada politics and provide incomparable context to the state's legislative history. The official legislative record outlines the chronology for actions taken by Nevada's lawmaking body; these oral histories vividly portray the background and circumstances in which such actions occurred. Invaluable for understanding Nevada's politics in the latter half of the twentieth century, these interviews present interesting explanations, entertaining stories, and thoughtful observations that might otherwise have been lost.



Byron L. Bilyeu
November 6, 2008

BYRON BILYEU

Byron Lee “Bill” Bilyeu was first elected to the Nevada Assembly in 1982. In his second session, he served as Speaker when Republicans were catapulted into the majority for the first time since 1971 by the Reagan presidential landslide. The Republican Assemblyman represented Elko County and part of Eureka County from 1982 through 1986, attending two Regular and one Special Session during his tenure.

Mr. Bilyeu was interviewed in the conference room of his law office in Reno, Nevada. In this interview, Mr. Bilyeu explains his choice of Elko as his residence and his entry into local and state politics. By the time he ran for the Nevada Legislature, he had chaired several state Republican Party conventions. He describes how he was able to be effective as a freshman legislator in the minority party and how he rose to Speaker in only his second term. Also in this interview, Mr. Bilyeu recalls the family strains brought on by legislative service and explains the importance of his partnership with his wife Nancy, which included a joint decision to leave politics in 1986. He did not return to the legislative process as a lobbyist, believing that a cooling-off period was appropriate.

As the last Republican Speaker (other than the split session of 1995), Mr. Bilyeu remembers the surprise of winning the majority by such a large margin in 1984. He recalls the changes he brought to the process, such as removing lobbyists from the floor and delaying the end-of-session rule suspensions. He is particularly proud that, under his leadership, the Assembly approved a bill that would have created the Martin Luther King holiday earlier than Nevada ultimately adopted that state holiday. He also reminisces about his Assembly leadership team – Lou Bergevin of Gardnerville, Steve Francis of Las Vegas, Charlie Joerg of Carson City, and John Marvel of Battle Mountain – and describes the relationship between the Assembly and the Senate.

Mr. Bilyeu explains his philosophy of limited government, which contributed in part to his decision to introduce almost no individual legislation. He points with pride to the funding of South Fork Dam and the impact it had on Elko County. An attorney, he served on the Judiciary Committee, as well as Health and Welfare, Natural Resources, Environment and Agriculture, and Legislative Functions.

Mr. Bilyeu was born in Missouri and came to Nevada as a member of the United States Marine Corps on a tour of duty that took him to Hawthorne. He graduated from the University of Nevada in Reno with a degree in political science and obtained his juris doctorate at the University of Southern California. He served as a deputy district attorney in Elko and Eureka Counties before entering into private practice. Mr. Bilyeu married Nancy Boudwin in 1978; they currently make their home in Reno where they moved after he retired from the Assembly.

Dale Erquiaga
March 2009

Dana Bennett: Good afternoon, Mr. Bilyeu.

Bill Bilyeu: Good afternoon.

Bennett: Tell me about how you came to Nevada. You made a deliberate choice to stay in Nevada.

Bilyeu: Yes, I came to Nevada originally in 1963 as a First Lieutenant in the United States Marine Corps. I had just finished a Westpac Tour, and I got assigned to Marine Barracks in Hawthorne as a guard officer. While I was there, I made the decision to get out of the Marine Corps. At that point, I was a Captain with a high-school education. I'd worked my way up from Private to Captain and didn't see much future in the military at that time. I think I was making \$800 a month. So I decided to get out and go to college. I resigned my commission and went to UNR [University of Nevada, Reno]. Then I went to law school.

Bennett: You came back here after law school?

Bilyeu: Well, I came to Elko, Nevada. My then-sister-in-law was a high school teacher in Elko, and I'd visited Elko many times and liked it. So I decided to move to Elko.

Bennett: I was wondering how, of all the places that you could have picked, you chose Elko, Nevada.

Bilyeu: Bill Beko, who was then the District Attorney down in Nye County, had invited me to come down and practice law in Tonopah, and I didn't

William Beko (D-Nye) served in the Assembly from 1950 to 1952 before becoming Nye County's D.A., a position he held for 20 years.

want to do that, particularly. I loved hunting and fishing. Loved the people in Elko. It was a very small community then, before the gold boom hit. I'd had several offers in California and saw people working their tails off to get enough money to get a place at Big Bear or something like that to avoid the crowds [chuckles], so I decided to move to Elko. That's the whole story.

Bennett: Tell me how you got involved in that community, and particularly how you got involved politically.

Bilyeu: During my years in the Marine Corps, I was Hatch-Acted all that time. I've always been very interested in politics, in how government runs, and in good government, at least according to *my* view of what good government should be. When I first got up there, I was just a young attorney—well, not so young—but compared to a lot of others. So I got involved in Republican politics up there, and before I knew it, I was County Chairman of the Republican Party, probably by default more than anything else. And so I just got involved.

Bennett: Was there a particular reason you picked the Republican Party?

Bilyeu: Particularly at that time, philosophically, it was more attuned to my view of what the world should be: conservative fiscally, fairly conser-

Passed by Congress in 1939, the Hatch Act prohibits federal employees from engaging in certain political activities.

vative socially, not terribly reactionary. Besides —and this is why most of us belong to the political parties that we do—I came from a long line of Republicans. I still recall my grandfather sitting in the town square in Ozark, Missouri, at the age of 78 years old and getting in a fistfight over politics.

Bennett: Do you remember what the argument was?

Bilyeu: No. I'm sure he didn't, either. [laughter] It could have been something like he used to say, "Well, you know, when the Democrats were in office, the corn crop was no good." It didn't matter if you got 10,000 bushels to an acre. He was just a rabid partisan.

Bennett: So your family was Republican?

Bilyeu: Long-time Republicans, yes, although they had not been politically active.

Bennett: You were the first in your family to run?

Bilyeu: Yes. I think I was the first one in my family to go four years to college, too.

Bennett: Did you consider running for any other offices in Elko or in Nevada?

Bilyeu: At one point after I had become Speaker, they tried to get me to run for Governor. I gave them the number of my trust account and told them how much money I wanted deposited in there before I would do it; they said they would; they

didn't; and I didn't. So I decided to retire from politics at that point. [chuckles]

Bennett: You were also very active in the state convention, as I recall.

Bilyeu: Yeah. I can't remember how many state conventions I chaired—maybe five state conventions. The first one I did was in 1976. That was the big Ford-Reagan year. Jean Ford was originally scheduled to Chair the state convention—she was an Assemblywoman—but she was not acceptable to the Reagan people. I was kind of a blank slate. I'd not committed for Reagan or Ford—either one. So I chaired the Elko County Convention. Jerry Dondero, who was Paul Laxalt's man, came up to me after the convention and said, "Would you consider chairing the state convention?" I said, "Sure." He cleared it with Paul Laxalt and Frank Fahrenkopf, so that's how I wound up chairing the state convention in 1976. A lot of fun.

Bennett: What's involved with chairing a state convention?

Bilyeu: Oh, it's helpful if you have a good range of vision, which I don't have anymore. It's helpful if you have good hearing. It's also helpful if you have a good parliamentarian who's going to rule in your favor. [chuckles] It's good if you know how to count the house. It's good if you

Jean E. Ford (Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1976 as a Republican and in the Senate from 1978 to 1982 as a Democrat. She passed away in 1998.

Republican Paul Laxalt was Governor from 1967 to 1971 and U.S. Senator from 1974 to 1987.

A UNR graduate, Frank Fahrenkopf was the 20th century's longest-serving Chairman of the Republican National Committee.

know the rules. But it's a lot of stress. You're on your feet, and sometimes, the crowd isn't too friendly. If you've been to recent conventions, either Democrat or Republican, they can be kind of nasty. Anyway, it was great. I went on and chaired, I think, three or four or five. I can't even remember how many I've chaired.

Bennett: I think before you ran for the Assembly, you had chaired four or five.

Bilyeu: Something like that, yeah. I was also counsel to the chairman of the Republican Party, too, for a while. That was a lot of great fun because I got to travel a lot and got to meet all sorts of people. It was a lot of fun.

Bennett: Why did you decide to run for the Assembly in 1982?

Bilyeu: Dean Rhoads was the Assemblyman there, and he had decided to run for Congress. I was the County Chairman at the time. I looked around for somebody who would be a good replacement for him, but I couldn't find anybody I particularly liked, so I decided to do it. I told my wife, Nancy, that I wanted to do it, and she asked me exactly that same question. I said, you know, motherhood, apple pie, the flag, patriotism, good government, all this kind of stuff. And she said, "B.S.," as she's wont to do, and said, "You just want to see if you can get elected," because I'd been through a bad

Dean A. Rhoads (R-Tuscarora) served in the Assembly from 1976 to 1982. He lost the 1982 Congressional primary to Barbara Vucanovich (R-Reno) and has served in the State Senate since 1984.

divorce just prior to that [chuckles] in a small town. Anyway, I ran and got elected by some overwhelming margin of 50 or 60 votes, I can't remember now. I did it because I couldn't find anybody else to run who I thought would do the right thing.

Bennett: Did you have a primary?

Bilyeu: No.

Bennett: You went straight to the general?

Bilyeu: I went straight to the general, yes.

Bennett: Elko County, as it is now, was mostly Republican?

Bilyeu: Yes. My district was Elko and Eureka County. I was the Deputy District Attorney in Eureka County at the time, which was a part-time job that paid me absolutely zero. But I was Deputy District Attorney down there, and I had been Deputy District Attorney in Elko County as well. I ran against *the* District Attorney, Tom Stringfield who later became a judge and has since passed away.

Bennett: How did you operate your campaign? What was it like to run in two counties?

Bilyeu: You travel a lot, obviously, and you attend a lot of non-political events, like the rodeo and things like that. Just a lot of contact with people more than anything else. I can't recall, but I think we spent a grand total of—this is going to

shock you—a grand total of \$8,000 or something like that in that campaign. That was mostly my money and friends' money. I didn't do any fundraisers or anything like that. And now, today—my goodness gracious—it's outrageous. The statewide costs are obscene.

Bennett: That has changed quite a bit.

Bilyeu: Oh, horribly, horribly.

Bennett: So you got elected to the Assembly, and you show up in Carson City. [**Bilyeu:** Yes!] Let's imagine it's opening day in 1983. What did you find when you walked into the Legislative Building for the first time?

Bilyeu: Organized chaos. At that time, Jack Vergiels was the Speaker, and the Republican Party was in the minority. I just had a great time. I think we were 19 Republicans, and it was a great time. It was probably the most fun I've ever had in my legislative experience because we were in the minority, and nobody paid that much attention to me. I could just walk around and create havoc every place. Just a lot of fun. [chuckles]

Bennett: Tell me about some of the havoc you created.

Bilyeu: Let's see. Do you remember Courtenay Swain? [**Bennett:** Yes.] Courtenay had given a speech on the floor that was basically insulting to everybody—Democrats and Republicans

*John M. (Jack)
Vergiels (D-Clark)
served in the Assembly
from 1972 to 1984 and
was Speaker in 1983.
He served in the Senate
from 1984 to 1990.*

*Courtenay Swain (D-
Washoe) served in the
Assembly from 1982 to
1990.*

alike—and particularly to Jack Jeffrey out of Henderson. It concerned his bill, and it was an offensive speech. Courtenay tried to be very political and what have you. I had nothing to do with the bill, but the speech angered me in the tone and temper; she basically accused all the rest of us of being crooks. I took great offense at that. So I went to Jack Jeffrey and told him that Courtenay had a bill—a child-restraint bill or something like that—that was her pet bill. It was coming up, and I told him that he ought to put that bill on the Chief Clerk’s desk, which means it goes into limbo. He said, “I can’t do it. Can you get one of the Republicans to do it?” and I said, “Sure.” And so I walked up to one of my Republicans [chuckles] and said, “Would you move that bill to the Chief Clerk’s desk?” He said, “Sure. I don’t like it anyway.” So he did, and Courtenay was not even paying attention to know what went on. I don’t know if she ever figured out who did it, but she always blamed Jack Jeffrey for it. Lou Bergevin was the Republican who did it, so that went on the Chief Clerk’s desk. Oh, we pulled it back off later, but just to teach her an object lesson. It was kind of fun.

John E. (Jack) Jeffrey (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1974 to 1990. He was Assembly Majority Leader in 1983, 1987, and 1989.

Louis W. Bergevin (R-Douglas) served in the Assembly from 1978 to 1992.

Bennett: What surprised you the most about being in the Assembly?

Bilyeu: The wide range of people who get elected to office. We had a representative Assembly in

the sense that there was a little bit of everything there. There were several of the legislators who did not know how to read a bill well into the session. To be anecdotal about it, at one point—I will not identify the legislators involved, but I was on Judiciary Committee, so if you ever got a seating chart of the Judiciary Committee, you could check that out—this legislator says of the bill, “What does this language in the funny kind of type mean?” I said, “That’s italics. That’s language that’s going into the bill.” He said, “Oh, I knew that. What does it mean when it’s got the brackets?” I said, “That’s language we’re taking out.” He said, “Well, I knew that, too. I knew that, too.” We were two weeks into the session and [laughter] still didn’t know what we were doing. Still didn’t know what we were doing.

It was great fun being on Judiciary because Shelley Berkley was on there and a few others. It was great.

Shelley L. Berkley (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1982 to 1984. She has been a Congresswoman since 1999.

Bennett: What were some of the issues that the Judiciary Committee dealt with?

Bilyeu: Of course, they did a lot of the gaming stuff. And the insurance bills and things like that. I can’t remember anything horribly controversial at the time. I know I killed a few.

Bennett: Do you remember which ones those were?

Bilyeu: Yeah, but I’m not going to tell you which ones.

Bennett: Ah, darn. [laughter]

Bilyeu: It was kind of interesting because I had a coalition on that committee even though I was not a chairman. I had a coalition of a couple of Democrats that I could pull my way along with the Republicans on the committee. So I actually had a great deal more influence than I merited on that committee.

Bennett: How were you able to do that? That's sort of a rare thing for a freshman.

Bilyeu: Oh, I tried to never lie. I tried never to go back on my word. I tried to tell people what was straight. Just developed trust more than anything else.

Bennett: Which committee did you like the least to serve on?

Bilyeu: Probably Health and Human Resources. There were a lot of nurses' bills and things like that. It was like reading an insurance policy. [laughter] It was not a lot of fun. Important! But not a lot of fun. So that probably was my least favorite.

Bennett: When you arrived at the Legislature as a freshman, were there senior legislators who helped you understand the process or find the bathroom or any other part of the experience?

Bilyeu: Yes. Johnny Marvel and Lou Bergevin are two who come into my head, particularly Johnny

*John W. Marvel (R-Battle Mountain)
served in the Assembly
from 1978 to 2008.*

Marvel. He was helpful. But I'm a fairly quick study—at least, I used to be.

Bennett: Who are some of the legislators that you thought were the most effective?

Bilyeu: Well, in terms of both sessions, my old friend Roger Bremner, who, in my first term, chaired Ways and Means. He was very effective in running that committee. He and I were great friends. It is a strange thing: so many of my drinking friends were Democrats. [laughter] Anyway, Roger Bremner was effective.

Douglas Roger Bremner (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1984. He chaired Ways and Means in 1981 and 1983.

Of course, when I became Speaker, most of my chairmen were very effective. Lou Bergevin, who had Government Affairs; John Marvel, who was Chairman of Ways and Means; and Charlie Joerg, who was Chairman of Taxation, were three I depended heavily upon. And Virgil Getto on Natural Resources. Those were very effective legislators. Good legislators.

Charlie W. Joerg (R-Carson City) served in the Assembly from 1982 to 1986.

In terms of the 1983 session, I had a great deal of respect for Jim Gibson. At that time, he was, I think, the Majority Leader of the Senate. Jim had a sense of the entire state, which we have grown away from. We've grown more regional, more partisan, which is sad. He had a great sense of the state; he really did.

James I. Gibson (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1966 until his demise in 1988. He was Senate Majority Leader from 1977 to 1985.

Bennett: Who were the most colorful legislators?

Bilyeu: Oh, there were all sorts of colorful ones. Bob Fay, who was a limousine driver from Las Vegas, once spoke against the bill that would have made it a misdemeanor to take a shopping cart away from the store because, as he explained it, that would make criminals out of the majority of his constituents in his district.

Robert W. (Bob) Fay (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1982 to 1984 and 1986 to 1990.

Gene Collins was a black legislator from southern Nevada I liked a great deal and was a good guy. There were *so* many people I liked down there. There were a few I didn't like, and I *won't* tell you those names. I might tell you one, but for the most part, it was a different climate than what I see down there now. We would fight. In fact, there was even a fistfight in my office one time between two legislators—one Democrat and one Republican—that I had to break up. We would fight like hell but go have a drink afterwards and be friends. There was not the acrimony; there was not the name-calling; there was not the viciousness that I see now.

Eugene (Gene) Collins (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1982 to 1986. He changed his party affiliation to Republican in August 1985.

Bennett: What do you think the difference is? Why wasn't there that acrimony then?

Bilyeu: Well, for the most part, the legislators that we got were people who had been members of a community for a long time and had some standing in the community. They perceived being in the Legislature as power, yes, but also

as service. In those days, we did not have so many single-issue candidates. The climate has changed in terms of people who run for office today, and the dialogue's changed.

The press hasn't changed much. I do recall one thing that was always galling to me was that whenever we Republicans did something it was called "partisanship" and whenever the Democrats did something it was called "leadership." That's why that picture's hanging on the wall in my office. [laughter]

Bennett: Was there a particular newspaper that took that approach?

Bilyeu: No, actually, there were individual reporters that I didn't trust. That's the other thing that's changed over the years as well. When I first got into politics, we had reporters who had some background, who had some knowledge, who had some world experience—Cy Ryan and guys like that. Many of today's reporters don't have any history or any real knowledge of what's going on. But that's an observation. It might not be accurate.

Bennett: What was your interaction with the press like?

Bilyeu: I was known as the "legislative vigilante" because when I perceived that the press was wrong, I told them they were wrong *publicly*.

Bilyeu is referring to a framed copy of an editorial cartoon in which he's labeled the "Legislative Vigilante" and depicted as having shot a member of the press.

I did make a mistake one time. I got mad at Dennis Myers, and I was wrong in doing it. I went and apologized to him. You know Dennis. I detest those kinds of questions that basically begin with, you know, “When did you stop beating your wife?” Those kind of gotcha questions, which a lot of press does engage in. That’s good, I guess, but it’s also irritating.

One of the things I’ve always tried to do is have fun in whatever I do. Otherwise, I don’t like doing it. Don’t want to do it.

Bennett: What was a regular day like when you were there?

Bilyeu: Oh my god, a regular day began at five o’clock in the morning. We stayed up at Lake Tahoe during the session. Nancy worked in Paul Laxalt’s office and later in Barbara Vucanovich’s office. So we would get up at five o’clock in the morning, and we would drive down to Carson City. She would drop me off, then she would commute to Reno. Whenever she got off work, she would come back to Carson City, and there was always some function we had to go to. Most nights, we did not get home until midnight or so. So then it was climb in the steam shower, roll into bed, and start all over again at five o’clock. In

Vucanovich represented northern Nevada in Congress from 1982 to 1996. She was Nevada’s first female congressional representative.

between that time, the phone was ringing all the time.

Bennett: Were you hearing from your constituents a lot?

Bilyeu: Not so much. I heard from other legislators a lot—“what about this; what about that” kind of stuff. I’d hear from constituents, too. I tried to stay in touch with the constituents. I had a little radio program that was aired in Elko, and I tried to call people occasionally.

Bennett: You mentioned that you like to have fun doing what you’re doing. What were some of the fun things that you did while you were a legislator?

Bilyeu: Not fun; it’s to do things with a sense of humor. That’s the other thing we’ve lost. Nobody has a sense of humor anymore. Nobody laughs at themselves or the process. Certainly, you’d better not say anything about anybody on the other side because, oh, my god, we’re so politically correct today.

Bennett: Was Third House still operating at that time?

Bilyeu: Yeah. They had fun with me at Third House.

Bennett: Do you remember any of those skits?

Bilyeu: Oh, yeah. My wife is a very beautiful and smart lady who’s the counsel I really listen to. The perception was that she was telling me what to do. That’s not true, but they had one skit where someone represented her leading someone representing me with a dog collar around his

Purported to have been started by Mark Twain when he was a reporter covering Nevada’s Territorial Legislature, Third House has typically been a series of skits written and performed by members of the press near the end of the regular legislative session to poke fun at the people and issues of that session.

neck by a leash. I don't quite remember the skit. Joe Midmore was the guy who'd written the skit, so I said, "That was kind of rough, Joe." He said, "Oh, it was meant in good humor." I said, "But you missed the best line. You should have had Nancy tell me, 'Zip up your pants, or they'll think you're Bob List.'" [laughter]

Bennett: How did Joe respond to that?

Bilyeu: He thought it was pretty funny. [laughter] Joe was a good guy.

Bennett: Joe was a lobbyist, wasn't he? [**Bilyeu:** Yeah.] So it wasn't just the press who wrote Third House?

Bilyeu: Yeah, he had been press. A good guy.

Bennett: Who were some of the other lobbyists who were prominent during that time?

Bilyeu: Jim Joyce was very prominent. Jim Joyce was the dean of the lobbyists at that time. I liked Jim very much and had a great deal of respect for him. Again, Jim had a sense of the state. He and his wife, Nedra, both graduated from UNR about the same time as that great class with Frank Fahrenkopf, Dick Bryan, and Jim Santini. I liked him—very bright, very capable guy. From everything I saw, his clients could trust him, which you can't say about some of the lobbyists today.

Jim Joyce of Las Vegas was a fixture in Nevada politics and the hallways of the Legislature from 1973 until his sudden death in 1993.

Congressman James Santini (D) served from 1975 to 1983.

Bennett: What was your interaction like with the lobbying corps?

Bilyeu: I threw the lobbyists off the floor.

Bennett: Tell me about that.

Bilyeu: The lobbyists would come onto the floor of the Legislature, and I did not like that.

Bennett: While you were in session?

Bilyeu: Oh, yeah. I had one legislator who had to look to a lobbyist every time he voted. Again, I'm not naming names. And so I threw them off the floor. It caused a great stir.

Bennett: How did you do that?

Bilyeu: Said they couldn't come on the floor.

Bennett: Did it require a rule change?

Bilyeu: No. *My* rule. Any ruling I made had to be supported by a majority of the people there. But it got ridiculous. In order to conduct business, we had to clear the lobbyists off the floor giving their last-minute instructions. It was fun.

Bennett: When you became Speaker in 1985, you were the first Republican Speaker in, what, 14 years?

Bilyeu: Yeah. I was the last since then, too. We had a Republican co-Speaker, but I was the last solo Republican Speaker. Maybe that's why we haven't had one. [laughter]

Bennett: What other sorts of changes did you make?

Bilyeu: I opened up the process and basically said that we weren't going to have a closed-door process. We weren't going to lock the committees up or anything like that. The public was invited.

Bennett: Tell me a little bit more about that and about locking the committees up.

Bilyeu: The majority leader framed it in a not-so-popular way with some of the legislators. In other words, we're not going to be legislating over at Jack's Bar. We're going to do it all here.

So we tried to open it up. I wouldn't let legislators hold bills—just sit on them and sit on them. When I was a freshman, I recall a legislator from Clark County who got sick, so somebody looked in his desk. He was the Chairman of a committee, and he had been holding something like 36 bills—just had them in his desk and wouldn't let them come to the committee. We tried to do away with that.

Bennett: It's fairly unusual to become Speaker right after a freshman term. How did that happen? What did you do during that interim?

Bilyeu: It was interesting. The first time I ran, we didn't try to raise any money, and nobody sent me any money. But I guess there was a perception out there that I might be in some leadership position during my second term because I was

unopposed for election my second term. People began sending me money. [chuckles] I had all this money, and I wasn't going to spend it. In those days, I could have kept it because there weren't the rules, but I wasn't going to do that. So I sent a lot of it to legislators throughout the state who needed it, particularly in Clark County.

And I went down to Clark County quite a bit to visit with people. I was determined I was not going to be part of the leadership team that I'd had as a freshman. I was thoroughly prepared, going into the 1985 session, to organize the entire Legislature with 19 Republicans that I thought would be elected and three Democrats. I had three Democrats as well. I was counting on 19 Republicans, but I woke up the day after the election, and it was something like 26. That was the Reagan landslide, where Reagan's coattails brought a whole bunch of people into office. So I had 26 Republicans, which was more than I really wanted. [laughter]

Bennett: But then you had the majority.

Bilyeu. Oh, yeah. I also had more headaches, too. [laughter]

Bennett: So you were as surprised as anybody else with winning the Assembly that time?

Bilyeu: Oh, yeah, and by that margin. As the election drew nearer, it became clear that we might be able to come out with the majority. Going into the election process, we weren't sure at all, but the Reagan coattails swept a lot of people into office.

Bennett: You ended up with quite a majority with the Assembly at 42. What was the most difficult part about being Speaker?

Bilyeu: Herding all those cats. [chuckles] Trying to keep them from going off on tangents. Trying to prevent leaks. People love to leak to the press. The hours were really brutal. Nancy and I were not getting a lot of sleep every night. You have so many functions and things you had to go to. And just herding those cats. It was a lot of fun, too.

Bennett: What were some of the techniques you used to herd the cats?

Bilyeu: Oh, let's see. I'm giving away secrets now. Well, I had somebody who was leaking to the press. I narrowed it down to two legislators, so I went to one legislator and told him one thing, and I went to the other legislator and told him something slightly different. Then when the newspaper came out the next day, I knew who my leak was. After that, I behaved accordingly in what I told him. So that was one thing.

We had one legislator I called “Lazy Susan”—it was a male—but the reason was you would go to him and get his commitment, then somebody would come up to him after you did, and he’d turn like a Lazy Susan and change his opinion. You were never sure of where he would be unless you caught him going onto the floor. [chuckles]

The way to become Speaker and the way to run it successfully is learning how to count. With a majority of the votes, you can do anything.

Bennett: Did you have a leadership team who helped you with that?

Bilyeu: Yes. The backbone was Lou Bergevin and Charlie Joerg. Charlie was more political than Lou was; Lou wasn’t terribly political. Johnny Marvel wasn’t particularly political either. Steve Francis was my Majority Leader. He was a young legislator from Clark County; and he was part of that, too. It was just basically *the* leadership.

Bennett: Were the sectional issues as divided then as they can be now?

Bilyeu: Not as divided as they are today, but the divisions were there. I know the first time I went down to Clark County, several legislators looked at me like “What the hell are *you* doing here? You’re not from here.” As far as I knew,

*Steven C. Francis
(R-Clark) served in
the Assembly from
1982 to 1986.*

I lived in the same state. I always abhorred regionalism. Yeah, you represent your district and represent those interests and things like that, but try to take a bigger view of the state as a whole. I got some of that from a few legislators on the Democrat side, and I had one or two from Clark County, as well, who were kind of pains.

Bennett: How was your interaction with the Democrats when they were suddenly and unexpectedly in the minority?

Bilyeu: For the most part, it was really good. I have a great deal of respect for Joe Dini. Joe and I used to fight like hell on issues and things like that, but philosophically, we saw eye-to-eye on a lot of things. I considered Joe a good friend. Still do. I had a few politically ambitious legislators who tried to make more of the regionalism to pander to their perceived constituency back home. They were kind of a pain, but they weren't too bad.

Bennett: What was the interaction like with the Senate?

Bilyeu: [chuckles] Ah ha. The Senate had their own agenda—always has and always will. They are always competing with the Assembly, so it was guarded. Members of my own party over there would hold up some of my bills in order to exert leverage over me. It was always guarded. As I told Don Mello, I said, “When you got

Joseph E. Dini, Jr., (D-Yerington) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 2002. He was Speaker a record eight regular sessions and named Speaker Emeritus in 2001.

Donald R. Mello (D-Sparks) served in the Assembly from 1963 to 1982 and in the Senate from 1982 to 1989.

elected to the Senate, you raised the IQ of both houses 30 points by getting elected to the Senate.” [chuckles] We worked well, but guarded.

Bennett: There doesn't seem to have been a lot of real close interaction between the two houses.

Bilyeu: Historically, there hasn't been, in my recollection. I've never seen close interaction between the two houses. Not at all.

Bennett: What about the relationship with the Governor?

Bilyeu: Dick Bryan was the Governor at the time, and I've known Dick for a thousand years. We are friendly adversaries, in a way. Marlene Lockard was his Chief of Staff at the time; she was affectionately known as “the dragon lady.” I think Bill Bible was his Budget Director. Those were the two strongest people he had.

*Richard H. Bryan (D)
was Governor from
1983 to 1989.*

The Governor didn't come to the Legislature very much. Occasionally, he'd have us over there to his office. But as the session draws on, the Governor probably gets more distant from the Legislature because the issues begin to narrow, and the tensions begin to rise. Dick Bryan was a friendly adversary, and of course, Marlene, Roger Bremner, Bill Bible, and I used to go to Louie's Basque Corner all the time and have lunch. It was fun.

Bennett: Tell me a little bit more about life outside of the Legislative Building. You've mentioned Jack's and Louie's. Were there other places other than Jack's, or was that the place where people met?

Bilyeu: Jack's was right across the street from the Legislative Building, so that was the most proximate place. That was really *the* watering hole in Carson City for most of the legislators. But the Democrats and I used to go to Louie's Basque Corner up in Reno for lunch.

Bennett: During the session? That's a long lunch.

Bilyeu: Oh yeah. Well, sometimes, we didn't have things to do in the afternoon. [chuckles] We usually made it on Friday.

Bennett: What were some of the toughest issues that you worked on when you were Speaker?

Bilyeu: Toughest probably was getting South Fork Dam through. That was touch-and-go when I was a freshman. Then when I was Speaker, my South Fork Bill was obviously the *pièce de resistance* for hostage-taking, and it sat over in the Senate a long time, a long time. That was pretty tough.

The one good thing, I got the Martin Luther King Day bill through, which you never read about in the press, by the way. This is why I have this thing about the press sometimes. We

A.B. 207 (1983) would have authorized the issuance of bonds to finance the construction of a dam and park on the South Fork of the Humboldt River in Elko County. Although it died in the Assembly, S.B. 153, introduced by Senator Norman D. Glaser (D-Elko), passed and authorized the initial bond issue. Bilyeu's A.B. 22 authorized the issuance of additional bonds for the South Fork dam in 1985.

passed the Martin Luther King holiday bill out of the Assembly in 1985. There wasn't anything in the press about that—not one thing. Why? Because it was Republican-controlled. So they're not going to say that. It got killed over in the Senate, but we passed it out in the Assembly. When I came down from the Speaker's rostrum, and I took the floor to speak on the bill's behalf, I remember walking by Johnny Marvel's desk, and Johnny Marvel said, "Damn you. Now I've got to vote for it." [laughter]

Bennett: Why did you do that?

Bilyeu: Because I believed in it. I recall that I said, "I do not know whether Martin Luther King was a good man. I do not know whether Martin Luther King was a bad man. All I know is that Martin Luther King was a great man." I said a few more things and sat down. The things he did in terms of leadership of the civil rights movement, for blacks in particular, and for the South were historic. I believed that and made that statement, but that's not in character for Republicans. We're not supposed to do that sort of thing.

Bennett: What other sorts of things out of character did you do?

Bilyeu: I supported Marvin Sedway's bid to have Aid to Dependent Children apply to men as well. I

Marvin M. Sedway (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1982 until his death in 1990.

testified on behalf of including substance abuse treatment as a requirement for health-insurance policies. That kind of thing.

You know, I detest labels—I really do—because they’re never truly accurate. But if I had to frame one for myself, I would say that I was fairly fiscally conservative and fairly socially moderate. I was not—in my view, anyway—not the raging right-winger that I was supposed to be, coming from Elko County.

Bennett: When you were Speaker, was there an issue that blew up that totally caught you by surprise?

Bilyeu: If there was, I’ve blotted it out of my memory.
[laughter]

Oh! Oh, yeah. I’ll tell you about a couple of bills. One was the two-person wiretap. The then-Attorney General wanted to get that passed. I remember that Brooke Nielson came to my office because she had to lobby me for it. Brooke is my daughter-in-law’s sister. She wasn’t at the time, but I remember her coming to my office, and I said, “There’s no way I’m going to allow one-party consent. No way I’m going to let that through.”

Oh, another bill that’s memorable was one where the Medical School, through Virgil Getto, introduced a bill where they could acquire dogs from the dog pound for medical

Virgil M. Getto (R-Churchill) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1976, from 1978 to 1980, and again from 1982 to 1988.

research. I have never seen as many protesters and as much heat on one bill in my life. Under the bill, the Medical School would have paid the Humane Society, or whoever was in charge of the animals, money for these animals for medical experimentation. I finally had to get Bob Daugherty, who was then the head of the Medical School, in my office and say, “Withdraw this bill.” We had protesters everywhere. If we’d changed it, you know, to orphan children, we would have had less protest. The animal rights people were out every place.

The helmet law was another one where we had a lot of protesters. Also Little Davis-Bacon—Davis-Bacon says that you have to pay prevailing wages on federal government contracts; Little Davis-Bacon says you have to do that in the state, and those wages have always equaled the union wages with benefits. It’s great for the workers, but if you didn’t have it, you could do 25 percent more roads or building or what have you because it does raise the cost about 25 percent on most government projects. There were massive protests on that.

I went down to Las Vegas for a meeting down there, and Blackie Evans, who was head of the AFL-CIO at the time, offered to pick me up at the airport. He said, “I’ll take you to the rally. Via Lake Mead.” [chuckles] There was a *big* protest down there.

Claude “Blackie” Evans headed the Nevada AFL-CIO from 1978 until his retirement in 1999.

And the teachers! Dick Bryan had promised the teachers a five percent retroactive pay raise, and most of the Republicans didn't like that because it was paying off a political promise he'd made to them before. So we opposed it. The teachers got well-organized, and I can remember looking up one night and there are 300 irate teachers in the gallery. But what the hell.

Bennett: What were some of the more fun issues you worked on as Speaker?

Bilyeu: Actually, most of them were fun. What's really hard to do is to make sure you read and understand the bills. So many of the legislators didn't even read the bills, let alone really understand them. In order to do that, you have to really do a lot of reading—you *really* do—because what you think you might have read has changed since the last time you read it. That was tough, doing all that reading.

Bennett: Tell me about the interaction with staff. What was LCB [Legislative Counsel Bureau] like at the time?

Bilyeu: No problem. I had no problem with LCB. They were most cooperative, for the most part. I had to have one of the LCB budget analysts explain to one of my members of Ways and Means—this was about halfway through the session—how to read a budget.

- Bennett:** How did that instructional lesson go?
- Bilyeu:** It was very gingerly approached, and it was very discretely handled by the staff member.
- Bennett:** Were there any particular staff that you worked with perhaps more closely than others?
- Bilyeu:** Of course, you interact mostly with the Chief Clerk, and that was Mouryne Landing; she subsequently got married to Joe Dini. Nice lady. I enjoyed her very much.
- Bennett:** As a freshman, you had only one bill for which you were the primary sponsor. Why did you decide to sponsor only one bill?
- Bilyeu:** Because we have too damn many laws. We have too damn many laws that are passed to make people feel good but aren't ever enforced or are largely ignored. A good example would be voter fraud. Tell me how many people are going to be prosecuted for voter fraud even though we all know it occurred. How many are going to be prosecuted?
- Bennett:** Probably none.
- Bilyeu:** Yeah, that's it. There were all sorts of things like that, you know.
- Bennett:** In your memory, has anybody ever been prosecuted for voter fraud in Nevada?
- Bilyeu:** Not in my memory. Prosecutors don't like to do it, and they don't do it until after the election.

Mouryne B. Landing was the Assembly Chief Clerk from 1973 to 1995. In 1995, Nevada's longest-serving Chief Clerk married Nevada's longest-serving Speaker.

Bennett: And then it doesn't matter so much.

Bilyeu: It doesn't matter so much, yeah.

Bennett: How did you decide that the South Fork Dam bill was going to be the one with your name on it?

Bilyeu: It was the most important bill for my district, so that was the one where I wanted to put my primary emphasis.

Oh, there was another bill, too. The engineering school in Clark County was another one for which I was co-sponsor with my Majority Leader.

Bennett: How did you decide which bills you would sign on as a co-sponsor?

Bilyeu: I'd read them and see whether or not I philosophically agreed with them. If I did, then I was a co-sponsor.

Bennett: During the next session, when you were Speaker, you still had only one bill for which you were the primary sponsor.

Bilyeu: Yeah. I did the same thing. I'd sign on to bills that I approved of.

Bennett: Looking back, are there bills that you wish you had introduced while you were there?

Bilyeu: I can't think of anything, offhand. If I had a few moments, I could probably think of 20 or 30 I might want to repeal. We pass laws, and

then it makes us feel good. Then we don't enforce them. Some of them are *dumb* to begin with. So why pass the laws?

Let's see, what bill can I recall that's a good example? Sure, the purpose sounds good and all that stuff. Law enforcement in Clark County wanted to regulate the tinting on car windows. Okay, their purpose—and I can understand the purpose—was that they would approach a vehicle and didn't know whether they were going to get met with a hail of gunfire. I can understand it, but then again, here we were going to pass a separate law for the state of Nevada as opposed to other states. It's interstate commerce, so I don't think I supported that bill; I may have, but I don't think I did.

One bill that in retrospect I probably should not have opposed was making it a crime to bring a gun on the schoolground. Again, that was a product of my experience. We'd not had any problems with it. This was before the days of random shootings and what have you. It was pretty much tradition in Elko County that everybody, school kids included, had a rifle hanging on the rack in the back of their pickup. After school, they'd go hunting birds or deer hunting or something like that, so I opposed that bill, as I recall. In retrospect, I probably shouldn't have. I should have had more of a

world view in terms of the problems they were having in Clark County.

Bennett: When you look back on your legislative tenure, what were the things you worked on that were you most proud of?

Bilyeu: Of course, I was very proud of getting South Fork bill through. Martin Luther King Day was one, although it didn't pass the Senate. We repealed the usury law, as I recall. There's any number of things, other than those I mentioned, that really stand out in my mind.

Bennett: Is there anything that you worked on that perhaps you wish you hadn't done?

Bilyeu: Offhand, the only one I can think of is the one about the guns in school. In retrospect, I should not have done that. I'm sure if I went back and looked at some of them I voted on, I'm sure I could add to that list.

I did try to open up the session a lot more. Again, this goes back to my love-hate relationship with the press. I refused to suspend the rules until it absolutely became necessary. I think I waited two weeks after the Senate had suspended their rules to suspend the rules in the Assembly. That was in the interest of making sure everybody knew what the hell was going on because as you know, you've been in the process, some strange things happen once the rules are suspended. Strange, strange things. I

recall that I drew an editorial from the *Reno Gazette-Journal* chastising me for not suspending the rules. But I don't believe in it. I don't believe in passing laws in the dark. I just don't believe in it. Should be out in the open.

Bennett: Was the 1985 session longer than some of the others?

Bilyeu: Yes. It lasted until—what?—the first or second week in July or something like that. But historically I don't think it was one of the longest.

Bennett: No, it wasn't.

Bilyeu: I will say this in terms of what we did in that session. In my view, the Legislature did quite a bit of good, and we didn't do a hell of a lot of harm. That's equally important. I don't think we raised taxes. We came up with a budget. We funded the University System magnificently. Teachers got their raises. I think state workers did, too, but I'm not sure whether that fell through the cracks at the last minute or not. But we did some good, and we didn't do too much harm. That's what I want put on my tombstone: "On balance, he did more good than he did harm." [chuckles]

Bennett: How did your legislative service affect your family?

Bilyeu: Terribly. Terribly. Of course, the kids were in school in Elko, and I had little time to spend

with them. I've done all the cooking in the family for the 30 years we've been married. I've done it all for 30 years because I'm a better cook. [chuckles]

Here's a true story. We had to go to Elko for some function, and Bob Cashell was going to fly his plane up, so I caught a ride with him on the plane. At that time, Nancy was staying up in Elko with the kids, so they met the plane at the airport. When we landed, our youngest daughter came running across the tarmac saying, "Mommy! Mommy! Daddy's home! We're going to have a good meal at last!" [laughter]

That was one of the other reasons why we both decided that we'd had enough politics. To me, politics has always been an avocation, not a vocation. So that's one reason we got out. There was no time for family. There was no time. There was no time personally, either. I was from a pretty safe seat; I probably could have stayed there any number of years. After I decided not to run again for another term, I recall Bob Sader calling me up and asking, "You're going to miss it, Bill?" I said, "Only when you guys screw up." Then I said, "But right now, I'm planning on pheasant hunting in Idaho and quail hunting in Texas, so you have fun running and serving." I *loved* serving, by

*Robert A. Cashell (D)
was Lt. Governor
from 1983 to 1987.*

*Robert M. (Bob)
Sader (D-Washoe)
served in the
Assembly from 1980
to 1993.*

the way; it was a lot of fun. I think it's an obligation more people ought to undertake.

Bennett: So in 1986, you simply chose not to run again?

Bilyeu: Yes. I decided to change my life and move to Reno. I'm admitted in California, and I was doing a lot of legal work in Texas and Oklahoma for the oil patch. I got tired of being a public person—making sure that I was shaved when I went to the corner grocery and things like that. Going out to dinner and not having any privacy. Celebrity is pretty heady stuff, but it's also pretty invasive. We just got tired of the public persona, and we decided we would just hang it up.

Bennett: Did you get pressure from anyone to change your mind?

Bilyeu: From a few people, yes. But I learned how to become beloved in your district: don't run again and move. [chuckles] Then you become beloved. Not while you're there serving, because there are certain things that anybody can do better than the people who are doing it. One is being a coach of anything. The second is being in any political office. Everybody else can do it a lot better than the people who are doing it.

Bennett: Did you have any involvement in finding someone to run for your seat?

Bilyeu: John Carpenter said he wanted to run. So I'm happy with that.

John C. Carpenter (R-Elko) has served in the Assembly since 1986.

Bennett: What do you think that most Nevadans believe about their Legislature that just isn't true?

Bilyeu: I really don't know the answer to that question. I can only speak from the frame of reference of my tenure there and the people I served with. For the most part, the majority of the people that I served with were good people, honest people. There were only one and a half crooks that I knew about. Most were hard-working. They really were committed people and did a pretty good job, on balance, in a difficult situation. I think it's a healthy thing to mistrust people who hold political office. But this blind dislike, I think, is irrational.

Now, I'm not so sure about today's Legislature. What has grown exponentially in the years since I've left is the influence of the lobbyists. You have the lobbyists who raise money for the candidates and then turn right around and are lobbying them for their various constituencies. Well, the result is guess what?

When I ran the first time, I expressly told everybody that I would not serve more than three terms. I term-limited myself. I decided that, since I had become Speaker in my second term, I might as well term-limit myself in two terms and then resume a normal life.

I've got mixed emotions about term limits, but I term-limited myself. You sit there forever, and you get to thinking that something is your due. That's not what governance should be about. It should be responsive to the people, but responsible as well as responsive.

Bennett: Have you thought about running for office since you left the Assembly?

Bilyeu: The only time I ever got a twinge was when the idiots passed that grotesque legislative retirement bill. It's the only time I really got a twinge and said I'd love to go back because I don't think that would have happened if I was there. That was the only time.

Any time I get the itch, I will go to a Board of Regents Meeting, or a city council meeting, and sit there through the whole thing. Then I lose any appetite that I would ever think of.

Bennett: Did you ever think about state office?

Bilyeu: I did. That one time, I did seriously think about running for Governor. I'd been encouraged. I'd had lunch at the White House; I had lunch in the bowels of the Senate; I was being wooed from Washington to run, but I knew I would be a sacrificial lamb because that was when Dick Bryan and Chic Hecht were running against each other. I toyed with it for a little bit, and then I decided that I was going to lose all

A.B. 820 (1989) revised the formula for legislative retirement benefits. Gov. Bob Miller's veto was overridden near the end of the regular session. In November 1989, at a short special session, the legislation was repealed.

In 1988, Bryan defeated incumbent M.J. (Chic) Hecht (R) for the U.S. Senate. Republicans sought to challenge Bryan in 1986 to avoid that Senate race.

privacy. I just decided I didn't want to do it. Public service is, to a certain extent, a sacrifice, and I'm not a real public persona to begin with. I like my friends, and I don't like to have to remember all those names. [laughter] That's just too hard. It's just too hard.

Bennett: What are some of the fondest memories that you have of the time when you were in the Assembly?

Bilyeu: Some of the friendships I made have lasted all through the years. That more than anything else. The sense of accomplishment that you get when you do a good piece of work. I enjoyed public service. I really did. I hate campaigning. I liked meeting people and all that kind of stuff, but, oh, what a drudge it is. Giving speeches.

Bennett: Did your campaign change from the first one? There really wasn't much to do in your second campaign.

Bilyeu: There was no opposition, so I put out a few signs. Of course, I went to different meetings and spoke and what have you, but it was pro forma. A lot of that campaign time when I would have been working my district, I spent working for other legislators. As I said before, I had it organized with 19 Republicans and three Democrats. I had the Speakership locked up. When I woke up with 26 Republicans, many of whom from Clark County, one of the people

who had stepped aside decided he wanted to take me on and run for Speaker, so I had to do that.

Bennett: So was there a contest for Speaker that session?

Bilyeu: Well, he tried.

Bennett: Did it get as far as the first day of the session, or was it pretty much wrapped up before then?

Bilyeu: No. I wrapped it up before then. I had some good lieutenants. Charlie Joerg, Lou Bergevin, Johnny Marvel, and Steve Francis were good lieutenants. So I made it in. We had to put down a little rebellion, but we put it down.

Bennett: Any rebellions pop up during the session?

Bilyeu: Yeah, one or two. But nothing that was untoward. One of my committee chairmen was kind of a problem—a minor committee, though.

I loved the process, but it's not something you want to do all the time. At least, I didn't want to do it all the time. It's like playing golf. I love to play golf; I just wouldn't want to do it all the time. I don't want to have to be concentrating all the time, and that's what you have to do in any leadership position, such as Speaker. You have to be thinking right at the moment, but you also have to be thinking out ahead, too. It's just a lot of work.

Bennett: Many legislators come back as lobbyists. Did you consider doing that?

Bilyeu: Not for an instant. I turned down a couple offers. If I'd wanted to stay in the Legislature during session, I would have stayed in Elko and run for office again. I considered it untoward. I don't want to castigate any of my fellow legislators I have respect for who did it, but I really do believe in a cooling-off period for legislators and for people in the executive branch of government as well. I believe in a cooling-off period before you go back and begin to lobby again. It's just unseemly to me to do that.

That's a terrible word, "unseemly," isn't it? Kind of sounds old-maidish. [laughter].

Bennett: When you look back from your first day as a freshman to wrapping up *sine die* as Speaker, how had the process changed during that time period?

Bilyeu: The dynamic significantly changes when you're in the majority. When I was a freshman, we got presented with a budget. We voted on the state budget for the entire State of Nevada without ever seeing the budget. It was passed by the majority party, and we had not seen the budget.

Bennett: So you just had the budget bill?

Bilyeu: We didn't even have the bill in front of us.

Bennett: You didn't even have a paper bill?

Bilyeu: We didn't have the printed version in front of us. No. That was it. Nothing. Boom. We might have an outline—just the first page—but that was it. That's all we had. It got rammed down our throats. It may be effective politics, but it's not good government.

The dynamic's different. As I said, it was more fun, in some respects, to be in the minority. You have all that fun creating havoc and no responsibility. But when you're responsible for that many people, it is a different dynamic entirely. Fun, though!

I couldn't have stayed down there for thirty years. I just couldn't have done it like some people did. I just couldn't do it.

Bennett: You weren't tempted by one more term as Speaker?

Bilyeu: No. No. Nope.

Bennett: At that point, it was rather unusual for somebody to be Speaker two sessions in a row. It happened, but it was unusual.

Bilyeu: Yes. It just held no real attraction to me. Again, I wanted to lead a more normal life, to have some measure of privacy, and belatedly get to know my kids a little bit better. One was gone, but the other three were still around. I ignored

them enough when I wasn't in politics.

[chuckles]

Bennett: We're about ready to wrap up here. Are there any final thoughts about your tenure?

Bilyeu: I guess if I were to do it over again, there would be some things I would do differently, but for the most part, probably not. It's one of those experiences in life that I'm glad we went through, but I wouldn't care to go through it again.

I have a great deal of faith in our government. We usually do the right thing—sometimes for the wrong reasons—but the American public is generally pretty astute. I just wish more people would become involved, not because they are single-issue or one-issue candidates, but because they really do care about governance and the quality of governance. One observation I have about the process is that it's kind of like punching on a pillow. You punch on it, and you make a dent, then it pops out someplace else. But it's been fun. And I really enjoyed this interview.

Bennett: Thank you very much. I'm glad you took the time, and I have enjoyed this conversation as well.

INDEX

- A.B. 207 (1983). *See* South Fork Dam.
- A.B. 22 (1985). *See* South Fork Dam, issuance of additional bonds for
- A.B. 820 (1989). *See* legislative retirement benefits
- Aid to Dependent Children, 25
- ambiance in Assembly, 11, 12, 15, 21
- Assembly Chief Clerk, 29
- Assembly Committee Chairs, 11, 18, 39
- Assembly Committees
 - Government Affairs, 11
 - Health and Human Resources, 10
 - Judiciary Committee, 9-10
 - Natural Resources, 11
 - Taxation, 11
 - Ways and Means, 11, 28
- Assembly, Speaker of, 3, 7, 11, 17, 18, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26, 28, 30, 36, 37, 38-39, 41
- Assembly, suspending the rules in, 32-33

- Beko, William (Assembly), 1
- Bergevin, Louis W. (Assembly), 8, 10, 11, 21, 39
- Berkley, Shelley L. (Assembly, U.S. House of Representatives), 9
- Bible, Bill, 23
- Big Bear, California, 2
- Bilyeu, Nancy, 5-6, 14-16, 20
- Board of Regents meeting, 37
- Bremner, Douglas Roger (Assembly), 11, 23
- Bryan, Richard Hudson (Assembly, Senate, Attorney General, Governor, U.S. Senate), 16, 23, 28, 37
- budget, voting on as freshman, 40-41

- California, 2, 35
- campaigns, 3-4, 5, 6-7, 18-19, 37-39
- Carpenter, John C. (Assembly), 36
- Carson City, Nevada, 7, 14-15
- Cashell, Bob (Lt. Governor), 34
- Chief Clerk's desk, 8
- city council meeting, 37
- civil rights movement, 25
- Clark County law enforcement, 31-32
- Clark County, 18, 19, 21-22, 31-32, 38-39
- coalition on Judiciary Committee, 10
- Collins, Eugene "Gene" (Assembly), 12
- constituents, 15

co-sponsoring bills, 30-31

daily legislative schedule, 14-15

Daugherty, Bob, Dr., 27

Davis-Bacon Act, 27

Democratic conventions, 5

Democratic Majority Leader, 11, 18

Democrats, 3, 7-8, 10, 11, 12, 13, 19, 22, 24, 38-39

Deputy District Attorney, Elko County, 6

Deputy District Attorney, Eureka County, 6

Dini, Joseph E., Jr., "Joe" (Assembly, Speaker of Assembly, Speaker Emeritus), 22

Dini, Mouryne B. Landing, 29

Dondero, Jerry, 4

"Dragon Lady." *See* Lockard, Marlene

effect of service in Assembly on family, 33-34

Elko, 1, 2, 3, 15, 33-34, 40

Elko County, 6, 31

Elko County Convention, 4

Elko Republican Party, 2

Elko Republican Party, Chair, 2, 4, 5

engineering school for Clark County, 30

Eureka County, 6

Evans, Claude "Blackie," 27

Fahrenkopf, Frank, 4, 16

Fay, Robert W. "Bob" (Assembly), 12

first day of first session, 7

fistfight in the office, 12

Ford, Jean E. (Assembly, Senate), 4

Francis, Steven C. (Assembly), 21, 39

freshman, 10, 18, 40

gaming issues, 9

Getto, Virgil M. (Assembly, Senate), 11, 26-27

Gibson, James I. (Assembly, Senate), 11

Glaser, Norman D. (Assembly, Speaker of Assembly; Senate), 24

good government, interest in, 2

Governor, 3, 23, 37

Governor's Office, 23

guns, bill making it a crime to bring guns on schoolground, 31-32

Hatch Act, 2

Hawthorne, Marine Barracks in, 1

Hecht, M. Jacob "Chic" (Senate, U.S. Senate), 37

Henderson, Nevada, 8
Humane Society, 27

insurance issues, 9
issues, toughest, while serving as Speaker
 helmet law, 27
 Little Davis-Bacon, 27-28
 Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, 24
 Medical School's request to acquire dogs for experimentation, 26
 South Fork Dam, 24
 teachers' funding, 28, 33
 two-person wiretap, 26

Jack's Bar, 18, 24
Jeffrey, John E. "Jack" (Assembly), 8, 24
Joerg, Charles W. (Assembly, Senate), 11, 21, 39
Joyce, James A., 16
Joyce, Nedra, 16

Lake Mead, 27
Lake Tahoe, 14-15
Landing, Mouryne B. *See* Dini, Mouryne B. Landing
Las Vegas, Nevada, 12, 27
law school, 1
Laxalt, Paul (Governor, U.S. Senate), 4
Laxalt, Paul, Reno Office of, 14
"Lazy Susan," legislator, 21
LCB. *See* Legislative Counsel Bureau
Legislative Building, 7, 24
Legislative Counsel Bureau Budget Analysts, 28
legislative process, interested in, 2
legislative retirement benefits, 37
"Legislative Vigilante," 13
legislators, 20, 40
lobbyists, 16-17, 36, 40
Lockard, Marlene, 23
Louie's Basque Corner, 23, 24

majority, 11, 12, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21, 40-41
Majority Leader, 21, 22-23, 30
Martin Luther King, Jr., Day, 24-25, 32
Marvel, John W. (Assembly), 10-11, 21, 25, 39
Medical School's request to acquire dogs for experimentation, 26-27
Mello, Donald R. (Assembly, Senate), 22-23
Midmore, Joe, 16

Miller, Robert J. "Bob" (Lt. Governor, Governor), 37
minority, in, 7, 22, 40-41
Myers, Dennis, 14

Nevada, 1, 3, 29
Nevada AFL-CIO, 27
Nevada Attorney General, 26
Nielson, Brooke, 26
Nye County, 1

Oklahoma, legal work in, 35
open-door legislative process, 18
Ozark, Missouri, 3

parliamentarian, 4
pheasant hunting in Idaho, 34
political philosophy, 2-3, 26
politics, as avocation, 34
politics, always interested in, 2
politics, retired from because, 4
 having to maintain public persona, 35
 loss of privacy, 35, 38, 41
 public service a sacrifice of time and income, 38
 too much time away from home and family, 35
press, 13-14, 20-21, 24-25, 32
protesters against bills, large numbers of, 26-28

quail hunting in Texas, 34

radio program airing in Elko, 15
reading, to prepare for meetings, 28
Reagan landslide, 19, 20
regionalism in Legislature, 11, 21-22
Reno, Nevada, 14-15, 24, 35
Reno Gazette-Journal, 33
reporters, 13-14
Republican conventions, 5
Republican Majority Leader, 21
Republican majority, 20
Republican minority, 7
Republican Party, 2, 7
Republican Party, Chair, 5
Republican Speaker of Assembly, 17
Republican State Convention, chair of, 4
Republican-controlled Assembly, 25

Republicans, 2, 3, 6, 7-8, 10, 12, 13, 19, 25, 28, 38-39
resigned commission as Captain in U.S. Marine Corps., 1
Rhoads, Dean A. (Assembly, Senate), 5
Ryan, Cy, 13

S.B. 153 (1983). *See* South Fork Dam bond issue
Sader, Robert M. (Assembly), 34
Santini, James (U.S. Congress), 16
sectional issues, 11, 21
Sedway, Marvin M. (Assembly), 25
Senate, 22-23, 24, 25, 32
Senate Majority Leader, 11
sense of the state as a whole, 11
single-issue candidates, 13
South Fork Dam, issuance of bonds, 24, 30, 32
sponsorship of bills, 29-31
substance-abuse treatment, requirement in health-insurance policies, 26
state office, 37
Stringfield, Tom, 6
Swain, Courtenay C. (Assembly), 7-8

teachers, 28, 33
term limits, 36-37
Texas, legal work in, 35
Third House, 15
tinting on car windows, 31
Tonopah, Nevada, 1
Twain, Mark, 15
two-person wiretap, 26

UNR. *See* University of Nevada, Reno
University of Nevada, Reno, 1
University of Nevada System, 33
usury law, repeal of, 32
U.S. Congress, 5
U.S. Marine Corps, 1, 2
U.S. Senate, 37

Vucanovich, Barbara (U.S. Congress), 5, 14
Vucanovich, Barbara, Reno Office of, 14
Vergiels, John M. "Jack" (Assembly, Speaker of Assembly; Senate), 7
voter fraud, 29-30

Washington, D.C., 37
White House, lunch at, 37



**Get
Consensus**

GROUP FACILITATION
COMMUNICATIONS PLANNING
ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

ABOUT THE PROJECT TEAM

Get Consensus, LLC, is owned by Dale Erquiaga who serves as the project's manager and conducted some of the interviews. Dale is a native Nevadan with an extensive background in Nevada politics, having served as Director of the Nevada Department of Cultural Affairs and Chief Deputy Secretary of State. With both Nevada and Arizona clients, Get Consensus is based in Phoenix.

Dana Bennett is the project's leader and has conducted most of the interviews. Currently a PhD candidate in public history at Arizona State University with a particular interest in the women who served in the Nevada Legislature between 1919 and 1960, she has also conducted oral histories with former Arizona legislators. Prior to returning to school, she was part of the Nevada legislative process for many years.

Gwen Clancy is the project's award-winning videographer. Based in Reno, she hosts and produces the documentary series, "Exploring Nevada," which is seen on local TV throughout the state.

Jean Stoess transcribed and indexed the interviews. A long-time Reno resident, Jean is familiar with Nevada politics in both elected and appointed capacities and has indexed several Nevada history works.