



Nevada Legislature Oral History Project

JOSEPH E. DINI, JR.
Democrat

Assembly, 1966 – 2002

JUNE 25, 2009
YERINGTON, NEVADA

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THE DINI HOME

YERINGTON, NEVADA

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

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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.



Joseph E. Dini, Jr.
June 25, 2009

JOSEPH E. DINI, JR.

Joseph (Joe) E. Dini, Jr. was elected to the Nevada Assembly in 1966 and served until his retirement in 2002. Mr. Dini served in six Special and 18 Regular sessions, the longest Assembly service in Nevada history. The Democrat who was once registered as a Republican served as Speaker an unprecedented eight times, including one session (1995) as Co-Speaker. He held numerous other legislative leadership posts, including Speaker pro Tempore (1973), Majority Floor Leader (1975), and Minority Floor Leader (1985). In 2001, his legislative colleagues honored his long and distinguished leadership by bestowing on him the singular honorary title "Speaker Emeritus." Mr. Dini chaired the powerful Government Affairs Committee during much of his legislative tenure and was also a member of the Legislative Commission, Interim Finance Committee, and the Water Policy Committee of the Western Legislative Conference. He served on numerous regular and interim committees.

Born in Yerington in 1929, Mr. Dini attended Lyon County Schools and obtained a Bachelor's Degree in Business Administration from the University of Nevada, Reno. His family owned and operated Dini's Lucky Club in Yerington, where he worked prior to and during his legislative career. He married Jeanne Demuth in 1949, and together, they raised four sons, Jay, George, David, and Mike. Jeanne Dini, an active member of her community in her own right, passed away in 1994.

Throughout this interview, which was conducted at his home in Yerington on June 25, 2009, Mr. Dini discussed his lengthy service and recalled many of the key figures from his more than three decades of work in the Assembly. Of particular importance were Carl Dodge (R-Fallon), Bill Swackhamer (D-Lander), Paul May (D-Clark), Bob Sader (R-Washoe), and Lou Bergevin (R-Douglas). Mr. Dini also reminisces about many of the Assemblywomen with whom he served, including Myrna Williams (D-Clark) and Jan Evans (D-Washoe) who were each named Speaker pro Tempore during his tenure as Speaker. He fondly remembers the split session of 1995, praising the partnership he had with Co-Speaker Lynn Hettrick (R-Douglas). Mr. Dini is also complimentary of Richard Perkins (D-Clark) and Barbara Buckley (D-Clark), young legislators who succeeded him as Speaker as the demands of the job increased.

Remembering service in the Capitol Building, Mr. Dini speaks about committee meetings and the interaction between senators and assemblymen, regardless of party. He notes that this cordial relationship continued in the new Legislative Building until the decision was made to assign senators and assemblymen to offices on different floors. He remarks that lobbyist reform legislation has actually served as a deterrent to legislators working together and with lobbyists, and notes that the process is more partisan today than it was in 1967. Mr. Dini explains that he and other Democratic leaders created the Assembly Democratic Caucus after losing control of the Assembly to the Republicans in the 1985 Session.

Mr. Dini worked on the Tahoe Regional Planning Agency compact with California, as well as a number of water-related bills and studies. Early in his career he chaired the

Assembly Committee on Agriculture and, although himself a casino operator, managed to forge good relationships with the farmers in his district. He discusses state and federal water policies and wonders if current efforts will ultimately undermine agriculture in the state. Long an advocate of mental health funding and legislation, Mr. Dini discusses the needs of rural Nevada in this arena as well.

In this interview, Mr. Dini recalls experiences on the floor of the Assembly, particularly in bringing sessions to a close, and laments the 120-day limit now in place for regular legislative sessions. He tells humorous stories about recognizing members to speak, use of the lights and computer console on the Speaker's rostrum, and once throwing his gavel at a fellow legislator (without effect) in the waning hours of a particularly difficult session. He also recounts how he took advantage of an instance in which the 1985 Republican majority offended the state teachers' union, leaving a rift that has impacted state politics for many years.

In 1995, following the death of his first wife, Mr. Dini married the Chief Clerk of the Assembly, Mouryne B. Landing. Since his retirement, Mr. Dini has been active with the Mason Valley Chamber of Commerce, South Lyon Medical Center Foundation, Yerington Theater for the Arts, and the Mason Valley Environmental Committee. In 2005 he was named an inaugural member of the Assembly's Wall of Distinction.

After the formal interview, Mr. Dini provided additional information that expands on various parts of the conversation. Some of his later comments have been woven into this transcript and are identified as having been offered after the conclusion of the interview.

Dale Erquiaga
September 2009

Dana Bennett: Good morning, Mr. Dini.

Joe Dini: Good morning.

Bennett: Let's think back to the first day of your first session. It's January 16, 1967. It's a cool and fair day. The Senate was in a bit of chaos, but the Assembly got started smoothly under Mel Close's Speakership. Tell me about your first day. What did you find when you got to Carson City?

J. Dini: I was pretty green. I hadn't been around much. I made friends with Virgil Getto immediately. We decided to room together. He was a Republican and I was a Democrat, but we got along perfect as roommates. We stayed at the City Center Motel, and they would provide us another room when our wives came over for events. It was 25 bucks a week—apiece! [chuckles]

Geraldine Tyson grabbed me and took me over by the window and talked to me. They seated me next to Bill Swackhamer who was the Majority Leader, so I got to watch him in action. He had a ritual. Every morning he came in and he read the stock market in the newspaper, and he fumbled around with his papers, and then Slattery would come down from the Senate, give him a half a dozen cigars. He didn't smoke, so he gave them to me because I smoked cigars. So we had our little

Melvin D. Close, Jr., (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1964 to 1970 and in the Senate from 1970 to 1982..

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

The City Center Motel is located at 800 N. Carson Street.

Geraldine B. (Gerry) Tyson (D-Clark) was appointed to the Assembly to fill her husband's seat after his death in 1963. She was subsequently elected to the office and served in the Assembly until 1970.

William D. Swackhamer (D-Lander) was in the Assembly from 1946 to 1972.

James M. (Slats) Slattery (R-Virginia City) served in the Senate from 1954 to 1970.

ritual going on there. But everybody was real cordial in those days, and we got along really well. I used to go out with seven Republicans, and I was the only Democrat. One time, I made a mistake. I said to Roy Young, “Here I am, a rose with all you thorns,” and he pulled me along and said, “If you ever bring up any partisan stuff again, we’ll exclude you from our group.”

Roy Young (R-Elko) served in the Assembly from 1956 to 1976.

We used to shoot pool and have a few high-balls across the street close to where Jack’s Bar is now. We got real cordial, and we had a nice group of people who just worked together. Bode Howard was from Winnemucca—an excellent legislator. He was on Ways and Means. Roy Young was an excellent man from Elko. So we formed a nice little organization there among ourselves. It was not a caucus, but we talked about the issues and worked out the differences.

Jack’s Bar, now closed, is located on the northwest corner of Carson and Fifth Streets.

Melvin “Bode” Howard (R-Humboldt) served in the Assembly from 1960 until his death in 1977.

I was Chairman of the Agriculture Committee my first session. Grover Swallow was a member of that committee, and at the end of the session, he read the *Legislative Manual* and saw that I was a casino operator. He said that he thought I was a farmer because of the way I stuck up for the farmers and the way I represented the farm people. So, like I say, we had a wonderful relationship.

Grover Swallow (R-Lincoln/White Pine) served in the Assembly from 1968 to 1972.

Bennett: You were in the old Capitol Building at that time in the old Assembly Chambers.

J. Dini: Yes, the old Capitol.

Bennett: Did you smoke those cigars that you were handed on the floor?

J. Dini: I never smoked on the floor. I only smoked when I was going out after work. I never smoked in my own home or anything.

Bennett: How did you become a chairman your first session?

J. Dini: I don't know. Mel Close appointed me [chuckles], even though I was pretty green. I knew a lot about agriculture because I came from an agricultural area, but I didn't really know the nitty-gritty issues, like Virgil Getto did who was a farmer. He knew the issues for the dairymen and stuff like that. We didn't have a lot of bills—I think we had fourteen or fifteen bills during the whole session [chuckles]—not like today.

We had one major bill. It was to change the butterfat content of ice cream. It used to be sixteen percent, and the ice cream industry wanted to cut it to twelve percent. Of course, Virgil was opposed to that because the pay for milk was based on butterfat. So we put up a wonderful fight, and we thought we had the bill dead in committee. One of our colleagues was

Len Harris, who was on the committee, and we made a trade with Len over the med school. We said we'd vote for a med school, and he was supposed to vote against the butterfat bill. The time came for the bill to come up, and Len Harris was nowhere in the building or in town. So we learned our first lesson about getting commitments from our colleagues. We lost the bill. Probably it's better health-wise for people for ice cream to have less butterfat, but it wasn't for the dairy industry.

Leonard H. Harris (R-Washoe) was Mayor of Reno, 1955-1959; Assemblyman, 1962-1968; and Senator 1968-1972.

Bennett: Where did your committee meet?

J. Dini: Wherever we could find a room.

Bennett: In the Capitol Building?

J. Dini: Yeah. There were only two rooms that were good for a committee meeting. One was where Judiciary met; it had a long table. Government Affairs met by the men's restroom. [chuckles] If you took a right, you went to the restroom; left, you went into the committee room. It was a small room, and we'd get big hearings. It just ran over us. We couldn't accommodate the public. The Ag Committee would meet wherever there was an open place.

Bennett: Did you meet at a specific time?

J. Dini: Yes, twice a week.

Bennett: Did you have meetings if you didn't have bills to hear?

J. Dini: No, no. Everybody was too busy. Now they have meetings where they get information for the members, but we weren't as sophisticated then. We didn't have the staff. We had Russ McDonald as a bill drafter with Ann Rollins, and maybe one other person he could pick up for a session. Research only had a couple of people, so we didn't have the staff. We didn't have the demand, either, from the public for information, so it was a lot different than in later years.

A Reno native, Russell McDonald was a Rhodes Scholar from Nevada, 1939-40, and graduated from Stanford Law in 1947. He was the Revisor of Statutes from 1953 to 1963 and Legal Counsel and Director of the Legislative Counsel Bureau from 1963 to 1971. He later became Washoe County Manager.

Bennett: Why did you run for the Assembly in the first place?

Also a Reno native, Ann Ferris Rollins was at the Legislative Counsel Bureau (LCB) from 1953 to 1971. She was Deputy Director of Administration when she resigned. She later became Washoe County Registrar of Voters.

J. Dini: I was involved a little bit in politics. I was on the swimming pool board and Chamber of Commerce, and we organized a committee in the Chamber to go to see Governor Sawyer about getting the road improved from Fernley through Yerington over to Hawthorne. That kind of got me started. I got a taste of politics.

Grant Sawyer (D) was Governor from 1959 to 1967.

The incumbent, John Giomi who had represented this district for twelve years, announced he was going to retire. He wasn't going to continue. So I went and talked to him. I said, "If you're serious about that, I'm going to look at it." He said he was not going back. He said that was it. His last session was a reapportionment year. Lyon County had had two Assemblymen at the time; they cut it to

John Frank Giomi (D-Lyon) served in the Assembly from 1954 to 1966.

one. Then they combined the Senate. We lost our Senator when they combined Lyon and Churchill, and Carl Dodge became the Senator. Walter Whitacre retired. So it was a different thing. Giomi recognized that, so he didn't want to go back. I announced that I was going to run, and then at five minutes to five on the last day for filing, Frank McGowan, who was the mayor of Yerington, went down and filed. So we had a full-scale election. Well, I didn't know anybody, and so I just decided to go out in my old green pickup and visit every farm and every home in the whole county. There were only 6,000 people in the whole county at the time, so it was easy. I just went out and worked four or five hours a day, and I got to see everybody. I knew *everybody* before I was done. That was the best part of it. It was a campaign, but a very easy campaign. McGowan didn't do anything until the last two weeks; by then I had made so many contacts that the various groups were supporting me.

Bennett: Did you spend a lot of money on your campaign?

J. Dini: Fifteen-hundred bucks. All of my own.

Bennett: You didn't get any contributions?

J. Dini: No. I didn't know anything about that contribution stuff. I got smarter as I went along.

Carl F. Dodge (R-Churchill) served in the Senate from 1958 to 1980.

In 1966, Walter R. Whitacre (R-Lyon) retired from the Senate where he had served since 1952. He was Senate Majority Leader in 1959 and 1961.

Frank McGowan (R) was Yerington Mayor from 1963 to 1973 when he became City Manager, a position he held until 1988.

Bennett: Why did you run as a member of the Democratic Party?

J. Dini: I was originally a Republican when I registered to vote for the first time, which was when Eisenhower was running for President. I was working for my dad down at the club, and the Chairman of the Republican Party came in and asked for money for the party. Well, I didn't have any money. I was just working for wages—just starting out with a young family. He said, "Well, you know, all the wheels are Republicans, and all the peons are Democrats." That didn't set well with me because I looked down at my bar, and all I had were working guys from the Anaconda Mine sitting at the bar drinking 20-cent draft beer. I didn't think that was right. So I took my apron off—in those days the bartenders would wear aprons—and I handed it to my bookkeeper, Jim O'Connor, who was just sitting at the bar having a cup of coffee. I said, "Jim, you watch the bar for five minutes. I want to run to the courthouse and change registration." So I did. I never regretted it.

Bennett: When you were growing up here in Yerington, did you know any of the legislators? Were you aware of the Legislature?"

J. Dini: You know, I didn't pay much attention to it. We had two Assemblymen from Lyon County,

Dwight D. Eisenhower served two terms as President of the United States from 1953 to 1961.

Giuseppe (Joe) Dini, Sr. opened the Wooden Shoe Club in Yerington in 1933. Five years later, it moved and became known as Joe Dini's Lucky Club. Joe Jr. bought the club in 1960; his sons currently own and operate the family business.

and at one time they both came from Smith Valley. Herb Rowntree and John Giomi were both from Smith Valley. One was a Republican, and one was a Democrat. I knew Senator Walter Whitacre who was a neighbor of my folks. But they just went down and they served, and then they came home and went back to work. It's not like today when you have to stay on top of the issues day and night, year-around. So it was a different era.

Herbert E. Rowntree (R-Lyon) served in the Assembly from 1950 to 1954 and again from 1958 to 1962.

Before becoming a Senator, Whitacre served in the Assembly from 1926 to 1928 and again from 1946 to 1952.

Bennett: When do you think that changed?

J. Dini: I think it changed probably in the late seventies, early eighties. The issues became greater, and we had tremendous pressure. The session would go 160 days, and the press was all over us, and the people were all over us. They thought we went on just sitting over there doing nothing. Well, that wasn't the case. We were working every day. It just was slow getting a consensus.

I think that one of the disadvantages of a 120-day session is that people don't have time to really study the bills and think about them and get back to their constituents about how they feel about them because it's now all these deadlines—boom! boom! boom!—and if you miss one, it throws it all out of kilter. So I think the 120-day session has got some drawbacks. I think maybe 140 days would have been

more realistic. You could do it in 140 days and do a decent job.

But during my last session, I was just so worn out and tired. I chaired Commerce and was on Ways and Means and was going to work at seven in the morning and getting out of there at seven at night. At my age, it was just a killer. And I think it does take its toll. I know a lot of good people who are not able to serve because of that stress.

Bennett: What was a regular day like during the session in the late sixties or early seventies?

J. Dini: It was pretty much an eight-to-five thing. I went to work at eight, and by five, I was usually out of the building. Sometimes in the afternoon, the Chambers would be empty, and so eight or ten guys would sit down there reading bills and talking about the bills. You can't do that today. In those days, we could just sit there and kind of debate the bill the day before it was on the board. We got a lot of good, constructive ideas out of it. It was a much a more relaxed and much more cordial atmosphere.

Bennett: Tell me about the move from the old Capitol Building into the new Legislative Building.

J. Dini: We thought that was a wonderful thing! We finally had committee rooms. We didn't get individual offices right off the bat, but we did some time later—little cubby-hole offices,

Designed by Reno architectural firms Ferris & Erskine, Vhay & Ferrari, and Raymond Hellman, the new Legislative Building opened with a public ceremony on Tuesday, June 9, 1970. The first session in the new building was 1971.

which were so small that you couldn't get anybody in, except maybe one person. If anybody came to visit, you'd have to see them one at a time. But it was a lot better than what we had, and the committee rooms were very nice compared to what we had in the old building. We could accommodate the public. I think it got the public coming more to participate because they had a decent place to go.

Bennett: Did you hear much from your constituents during a session?

J. Dini: In the old days, I was in a small district, and everybody knew everybody. I'd come home Friday night, and I'd go to work for the weekend. I'd have people in line to talk to me about issues. During the course of the weekend, anybody who wanted to get ahold of me could get ahold of me, and we'd talk about it. That was the most common way of communicating with the public.

Bennett: When you first showed up as a legislator, what surprised you the most?

J. Dini: I don't know. I can't remember that. I know that I was awed by the responsibility that I had and not knowing the procedures and stuff. The staff worked with us to teach us the procedures. You could go up and ask the staff how to make a motion, and the Chief Clerk would always help you make the proper motion. But you just

learned as you worked at it. Now they have pre-session orientations, and the people are much more prepared when they hit the deck.

Bennett: What were some of the issues that you hoped to work on early in your career?

J. Dini: Coming from an ag community, agriculture was very important, and so were water rights. Protecting water rights for farmers was a very important issue and probably my number-one issue when I first started. I progressed into environmental issues, and I got involved with TRPA [Tahoe Regional Planning Agency] in rewriting the compact with Spike Wilson. Then I broadened my scope as I became Speaker and became a statewide representative. I looked at all the issues in the state.

Thomas R.C. (Spike) Wilson II served in the Senate from 1970 to 1986.

Bennett: Tell me about your first election as Speaker. That was in 1977, I think.

J. Dini: 1977, yes. That was one that was put together by lobbyists in those days. I had picked two people to be my Speaker Pro Tem and my Majority Leader, but I had a struggle that first session as Speaker because my crew didn't always follow orders and had an "every man for himself attitude." [chuckles] At the end of the session, I decided that if I was going to be Speaker again, I was going to dump those two guys. So I irritated some lobbyists, and they dumped me. That's the whole plain facts.

In 1977, the Speaker Pro Tempore was Harley L. Harmon (D-Clark), and the Majority Leader was Daniel J. Demers (D-Clark).

Bennett: The lobbyists were involved in choosing the Speaker?

J. Dini: Well, they kind of got you the votes. They had influence with certain guys, and they could get them to vote for you.

Bennett: Who were some of the lobbyists who were involved in that?

J. Dini: Charlie Bell was the most notorious of the lot, and he was a very strong supporter of the two on my team. He never did own up to it, but, you know, two and two is four, and I figured it out. I thought I did a fairly good job considering it was my first term, but it just didn't work out.

Charlie Bell of Las Vegas had been the Chief of Staff and campaign manager for Congressman Walter Baring (D-Nevada, 1949-1953 and 1957 to 1973) and was an influential lobbyist in the 1970s.

Bennett: Traditionally, the Nevada Speakership had been a contested race and had changed every session. That changed in the 1980s. How did that change come about?

J. Dini: We were doing pretty good—the Democrats did well. But in 1985, the Republicans took over. We went from 23 in 1983 to 17 in 1985. Marvin Sedway, Jack Jeffrey, and Moose Arberry were in the 1985 session, and they didn't like being in the minority, so we sat down and talked about it. We decided that we were going to come back next time and going to be in the majority. They said, "You're going to be Speaker." I said, "Well, look, whatever happens happens," because I never expected to

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

John E. (Jack) Jeffrey (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1974 to 1990.

Morse Arberry, Jr., (D-Clark) has served in the Assembly since 1984. He has chaired Ways and Means since 1993.

ever be Speaker again. So we turned it around in the 1986 election and took ground again. And they elected me Speaker. It was with the support of Sedway and Jeffrey, both of whom were very strong leaders and were able to bring the votes with me. So it was quite a recovery.

Of course, we liked success, so we started the Assembly Democratic Caucus. We hired Gary Gray to be our Executive Director, and they started getting in the campaign mode from day one, continuously. The months between sessions were always gung-ho for campaigns. We started a new era. I think we were the first ones to do that. That's how we established our loyalties.

It was very difficult being Speaker and making the committee assignments. That's the toughest job there is about being Speaker because you might make the wrong assignment to somebody. I was always trying to improve the system. I tried to give everybody a morning committee, but I immediately got in trouble because the committees got too big. The chairmen hated me. [chuckles] But a couple of guys really revolted when they didn't get a morning committee. There were three morning committees, and we split it up so that everyone had a morning committee. So that brought a lot of peace and harmony with the general membership. We started taking care of our

Gary Gray was Executive Director for 10 years. Since 1987, Gary Gray has been married to Christina Giunchigliani (D-Clark), Assemblywoman from 1990 to 2006 when she was elected to the Clark County Commission.

members. We had the Executive Director that could help someone write a press release and communicate with the press, so I think that's when we made the switch.

Bennett: Were the morning committees considered the more prestigious or influential committees? Is that why everyone wanted mornings?

J. Dini: Yes. Ways and Means, Government Affairs, and Judiciary handle the bulk of the bills. Of course, Ways and Means was always the top committee because it's the money committee. Everybody, in my opinion, should serve on Ways and Means once because you get to learn the inner workings of every agency in state government. If you pay attention, you see what happens in those agencies. But a lot of people don't want to serve on Ways and Means because it's too much work, and they're not interested in crunching numbers. Some people like Judiciary better.

I served on Government Affairs as Chairman for ten years, I think—five sessions. I enjoyed that very much, dealing with local governments and state government. It was an exciting time because Mike O'Callaghan tried to reorganize state government, but he wasn't able to. We got a couple of bills out for him on reorganization, but it didn't really work well.

Democrat Donal N. (Mike) O'Callaghan was Governor from 1971 to 1979.

Bennett: Why is that?

J. Dini: The interest groups didn't like changing the structure, and when he sent me the package, I had stacks of bills this high. [gestures] I said, "Mike, I don't think this is going to work." The first hearing, we saw the suspects coming up immediately to testify against it, and I figured out that this is going to be a *tough* go. And it was. The final package was only about this big. [smaller gesture] Governor Mike never forgave me, but I couldn't get the votes. I guess he could have twisted some arms, but I don't think he did that at that particular session.

Bennett: What was it like working with all the various Governors you worked with over the years?

J. Dini: I had nice relationships. The first governor was Paul Laxalt. Of course, he was a Carsonite, and he married a Yerington girl. He related well to the rural areas. I didn't vote with him all the time, but we had a very cordial relationship. Then O'Callaghan came along, and I became very close to Mike O'Callaghan. He trusted me with his bills to the point where when we were trying to close down, he'd tell the Speaker to shut down the other committees and leave mine open so I could handle all the bills. For the last couple of days, I'd handle *all* the bills, except Ways and Means. I had a real close relationship with Mike O'Callaghan. Then when Bob List was in his first two years, he and I got along wonderfully. We did the TRPA thing, and we

Republican Paul Laxalt was Governor from 1967 to 1971. He married Jackalyn Ross, daughter of Margaret Burns and U.S. District Court Judge John Rolly Ross. A former Yerington City Attorney, Ross had also been Governor Vail Pittman's Legislative Counsel.

Robert F. List (R) was Governor from 1979 to 1983.

worked together on everything, and then the last two years, he just kind of gave up, and we didn't work together. Then Dick Bryan came along; of course, he and I were like brothers. He was very nice to work with, very accommodating, and he and I were very confidential friends. He sought my advice once in a while, and I had some input with him. And then—let's see, who was after that?

Bennett: Bob Miller.

J. Dini: Bob Miller came along, and we got along very well. Bob and I had one argument: it was about closing the low-level repository in Beatty. He wanted to close it, but the fees from that were supporting the State Fire Marshal's Office. I was a big fan of the State Fire Marshal's Office; I helped create it and fought like heck to keep it open. We got so that we didn't speak for two weeks. I wasn't moving any of his bills; everything was at a standstill. [chuckles] So several lobbyists and some of my leadership team, such as the Majority Leader, had a meeting in the Governor's Office. Bob and I agreed to disagree on that one issue, and then we went back to work. He was a very close friend.

Then Kenny Guinn came along, and I had an excellent relationship with Kenny. Of course, by then I was kind of drifting off and getting old and wasn't able to stay with the

Richard H. Bryan (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1968 to 1972 and in the Senate from 1972 to 1978. He was Governor from 1983 to 1989.

When Bryan was elected to the U.S. Senate, Lt. Governor Robert J. (Bob) Miller (D) became Governor in 1989. He served until 1999.

Republican Kenny C. Guinn was Governor from 1999 to 2007.

young guys, so I turned things over to Richard Perkins. He was more or less the lead guy with the Governor. I always had a cordial relationship with the Governor.

Richard D. Perkins (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1992 to 2006. He was the Democratic Floor Leader from 1995 to 1999 and Speaker from 2001 to 2005.

Bennett: Tell me about the relationship between the Speaker and the floor leaders.

J. Dini: The Majority Floor Leader, of course, is key to your success as Speaker because it's his job to get out there and rally the troops behind the Speaker and what you're pushing. I was very fortunate in always having a strong Majority Leader. Jack Jeffrey, who was just a wonderful man to work with, and Richard Perkins were two top Majority Leaders. When we had the tie in 1995, Richard was the floor leader for the Democrats, and he and Pete Ernaut became great friends. I think that, because of their cordiality and their ability to work together, we had that smooth session that we had in 1995 when we had the tie.

Jeffrey was Assembly Majority Leader in 1983, 1987, and 1989.

Peter G. (Pete) Ernaut (R-Washoe) was Republican Floor Leader in 1995 and 1997.

Bennett: Tell me about that decision to split everything. How did that come about in 1995?

J. Dini: We had two contested Democrats. Jan Evans and Chris Giunchigliani were contested by the Republicans, so they contended that they had the majority. At that time, contested seats were blocked out, and they didn't have any privileges on the floor. They just sat there. Of course, the Chief Clerk was kind of taking their

Jan Evans (D-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1986 until her death in 2000.

Mouryne B. Landing was Chief Clerk from 1973 to 1995.

side—that the Republicans actually had the votes. But we held out and held out, and actually, I turned it over to Barbara Buckley. She was a smart, young attorney who was just coming in her first session, and I said, “Barbara, it’s up to you to win this battle.” Well, you know how tenacious Barbara is. She ground on those guys and ground on those guys, and at eight o’clock the night before the session was going to start, they finally agreed that we’d split it 50-50.

I think it was the best decision we ever made for the State of Nevada because everybody worked together. Lynn Hettrick was an excellent Co-Speaker. We never had any arguments. Once in a while, we’d sit down at the desk and talk about an issue or something, but basically, we left it up to our floor leaders. Pete Ernaut was on one side, and Perkins was on the other, but they had a nice relationship going, and we really avoided a lot of battles. Everybody knew they couldn’t go any place without somebody else’s support. So it worked out wonderfully. It was a smooth session. We got done in a pretty reasonable time, and I think we did a lot of good things, even with the split.

Bennett: It must have been hard, though, to appoint committee chairs.

Neither contest was ultimately successful.

Barbara E. Buckley (D-Clark) has served in the Assembly since 1994. In 2007, she became the first female Speaker in Nevada.

Lynn C. Hettrick (R-Douglas) served in the Assembly from 1992 to 2006. He was Co-Speaker in 1995.

J. Dini: No, they appointed their committee chairs, and I appointed mine. So one day, one would chair and the next day, the other guy would chair, and they alternated. It worked out well. I'm sure there were some guys who didn't like it. One of the Republicans came to me and said he didn't like his co-chair of his committee. I was not going to change that because it was pretty delicate. [chuckles] They just learned how to work together, and I don't think we lost anything major because of the split. I think it came out good. Ways and Means worked well—John Marvel and Moose Arberry worked well together. We just took care of the problems.

John W. Marvel (R-Battle Mountain) served in the Assembly from 1978 to 2008. He and Arberry co-chaired the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means in 1995.

Bennett: What is the relationship between the Speaker and the Minority Floor Leader?

J. Dini: Sometimes, you have an adversarial relationship. Basically, when Lynn Hettrick was the Minority Leader, we had no problems because we had built up that great relationship in 1995.

Hettrick was Assembly Minority Leader from 1997 through 2005.

In 1985, when we were in the minority and Bill Bilyeu was the Speaker, I was Minority Leader. I had a great opportunity to rally my Democratic troops and to make an impact because the Republicans made a big mistake that session. When they sent the salary bill from the Senate down to the Assembly, it

Byron (Bill) Bilyeu (R-Elko) served in the Assembly from 1982 to 1986.

had salary increases for the university, for state employees, and for teachers. The Assembly Republicans deleted the teachers from the salary bill. Well. That created just an ideal situation for us Democrats [chuckles], which we took advantage of. There was tremendous pressure on the Republicans. The National Committeeman, Frank Fahrenkopf, called and told them they were crazy. All the Republicans knew that they had committed harakiri by doing that to the teachers because they made enemies forever with the teachers. Jim Gibson was the Majority Leader in the Senate, and he said, “Just don’t worry about it. They’ll come around sooner or later.” He just sat on it, sat on it, sat on it, and they got so much pressure from the national scene and everybody that they finally had to put them back in the bill. Since then, except for 1995, the Democrats have controlled the Assembly. It’s because of the teachers’ support and the animosity that was created when the Republicans took them out of the salary bill.

Bennett: What’s the relationship between the Assembly and the Senate?

J. Dini: The Senate is a different organization. [chuckles] I’ve always gotten along good with the Senate. My Senators were Carl Dodge for a long time and Jake Jacobsen for many years. I always got along good with my particular

James I. Gibson (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1966 and in the Senate from 1966 until his death in 1988. He was Senate Majority Leader from 1977 to 1985.

Lawrence E. (Jake) Jacobsen (R-Douglas) served 15 years in the Assembly and 24 years in the Senate. The longest-serving legislator in Nevada history passed away in 2006.

Senator. We always got along on the issues and took care of each other's district. It worked out good, but the Senate operates a little differently than the Assembly. I think it's more controlled, and I don't think, at least during my time there, that they were as open as the Assembly was. Our deliberations were mostly done in the committee structure. It brought out the issues, and everybody was free to debate them, and you worked it out. I think the Senate is more structured and has a different attitude.

Bennett: Was it that way throughout your career, or did you see a change from the 1960s to the 1990s?

J. Dini: I think so. It has been a little different, you know. They had the Floyd Lambs [chuckles] and those guys. Mahlon Brown was an excellent Majority Leader in the Senate when I first started. Mahlon would come down and talk to me about some issue. But it got a little more structured. I think Bill Raggio is more of a control guy who is able to control his caucus. He had big majorities in the Senate at times, and he more or less dictated what the Senate was going to do.

B. Mahlon Brown (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1950 to 1976. He was Majority Leader from 1965 to 1975.

A Senator since 1972, William J. Raggio (R-Reno) has been the Senate Majority Leader every session since 1987, except in 1991 and 2009.

Bennett: So it sounds like there wasn't really a lot of interaction between the two houses. They seemed to operate independently.

J. Dini: Yes, until it came down to making the deals at the end.

Bennett: How did lobbyists' participation in the process change between the time that you started and into the 1990s?

J. Dini: One of the first lobbyists I knew was Wallie Warren who represented gaming and banks and stuff. He was a high-class lobbyist. He'd take you to lunch maybe once during the whole session. It was a ritual. You had a martini and a prime-rib sandwich or something at Enrico's. He'd talk about the issues, but he never pressured you. He'd just say, "If you can help me, good; if you can't, then it's all right."

Then it evolved into those like Charlie Bell. He was strong—either you'd do it, or you're down the road. Now it's even gotten worse than that because they're yelling at each other in the hallways. I think the lobbyist influence there is stronger now than it ever has been, and they're a lot rougher to deal with. They never were rough with me as Speaker. They always knew my position, and I wasn't wishy-washy around the issues: this is what we're going to do, and this is why I feel that way. If they wanted to try to talk me out of it, they could go ahead and talk. But it's a different ball game today.

Bennett: You mentioned Enrico's. That's the first time I've heard of that particular restaurant. Where was that?

The clock above the main elevator in the Legislative Building honors public relations executive and longtime lobbyist Wallace D. (Wallie) Warren.

Enrico's Restaurant was located at 1901 N. Carson Street.

J. Dini: A foot doctor is there now, Dr. Bean.

Bennett: On Carson Street? Just north of the Capitol?

J. Dini: Yes, but it's a way down the street.

Bennett: What were some of the other hangouts in the 1970s?

J. Dini: Melody Lane was the first place. It was where the Legislative Building is now. I can't remember the name of the guy who had that, but you could get the greatest picon punches in the world there. It was a real nice place. They served hors d'oeuvres, and they catered to the Legislature. Then we moved over to the Greeno Hotel in the 1970s and the Fireside Inn or whatever they called it. It was the Greeno Hotel and then the Fireside. We used to have dinner there, and one time, we had a snowstorm. We got in at 5 o'clock, and at 10 o'clock, we couldn't get our cars away from the curb, so we all rented rooms at the Greeno and ordered pizza. [chuckles] It was one of those rare occasions that we lasted all night.

Then we moved around. Bodine's was an in-and-out place where you could have a nice dinner that was not too expensive and talk business or something. Every year, we kind of switched around to different places.

Bennett: Did everybody go out?

Sierra Podiatry Center (H. Kim Bean, DPM and Jeffrey K. Bean, DPM) is located at 1801 N. Carson Street.

Operated by Glenn and Mae Stoddard from 1949 until about 1970, Melody Lane was located south of the Capitol Building at 309 S. Carson Street. It was demolished to make way for the new Legislative Building.

The Greeno Hotel, later called the Fireside Inn, was one block north of the Capitol Building at 108 E. Proctor. In 1998, the Nevada Commission on Economic Development moved into the old Fireside Inn.

Before becoming a casino, Bodine's was a restaurant and bar at 5650 S. Carson Street.

J. Dini: In the old days, just about everybody went out. That's one of the things that happened in 1985: the Republicans made an edict that their members could not go around to the bars. I think that's when the cordiality broke down between parties because they don't mix any more. So many guys refused to go to any cocktail parties or anything. They didn't want to have any lobbyist expense charged to them. I think they've given up a lot in being able to work together. You know, you could sit down at Jack's Bar with a couple of guys, and you could take a napkin—I remember writing down an amendment for a bill on a napkin and going down in the morning and turning it in to Kim Morgan, and it passed because we got the right language. They don't do that anymore. They're polarized. I think they need to get back to working together and socializing together. The disadvantage of this lobbyist disclosure thing is that so many guys say they won't go to any parties or anything because they didn't want to be beholden to a lobbyist. Will they be beholden to a lobbyist for buying them a \$3.00 drink? Come on. If you're going to be beholden for that, you'd be beholden for a piece of bubblegum. I think they need to get back to being cordial with each other. I think that's the biggest thing I see nowadays is that there's no cordiality.

Kimberly Ann Morgan was hired by LCB's Legal Division in 1980 and soon became the Assembly Bill Drafting Advisor and then Chief Deputy Legislative Counsel, a role she held until her retirement in 2002. In 2009, she was added to the Assembly Wall of Distinction and ordained to the transitional diaconate at St. Teresa's Episcopal Church in Carson City.

[After the interview, Mr. Dini elaborated on this point, adding: Originally, each floor of the building was divided in half with Senate offices on the north end and Assembly offices on the south end. Then the building was remodeled, and the Senate took all of the second floor and the Assembly, all of the third floor. After that, the Senators and the Assemblymen lost a lot of the camaraderie they had before.]

Bennett: In the 1960s, more women were serving in the Legislature than had served before. Did that make a difference that you could tell in your experience?

J. Dini: I think they brought some different views to the Legislature, and most of them were pretty strong-minded. Jean Ford, Mary Gojack, Eileen Brookman, Mary Frazzini, Jan Evans, and Myrna Williams were all excellent legislators. They did a good job.

Bennett: Your Speakers Pro Tem were often women—Jan Evans and Myrna Williams.

J. Dini: Yup. They did an excellent job for me, too. They were loyal. Myrna and I didn't always agree on some things, but when she had a job as Speaker Pro Tem, she stayed loyal with me. She didn't ever cross me.

Bennett: What is the responsibility of a Speaker Pro Tem?

Jean E. Ford (R-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1976.

Mary L. Gojack (D-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1974. Both Ford and Gojack subsequently served in the Senate.

Eileen B. Brookman (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1978 and again from 1986 to 1990.

Mary Frazzini (R-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1964 to 1972.

Myrna Williams (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1984 to 1994.

J. Dini: Not much—just to preside when the Speaker isn't there, such as when I'd go see somebody or do something without calling a recess. Jan was excellent at it. Both of them were good. They did a good job for me. I didn't have to worry about it. When I left for a minute, they took care of business.

Myrna Williams was Speaker Pro Tempore from 1989 through 1993 and was followed by Jan Evans who was Speaker Pro Tempore through 1999.

Bennett: In the late 1970s, early 1980s, some standardization came to the Legislature in terms of committee meetings and so forth. Did that change the floor sessions?

J. Dini: When I first started, they used to have floor sessions in the morning and floor sessions in the afternoon.

Bennett: Through the entire session?

J. Dini: Yeah. But that wasn't always the best thing because the guys would have a big lunch and come back in the afternoon, and you could catch them half asleep. Virgil Getto and I were good at that. There would be some kind of bill that we wanted to kill, so we'd bring it up and kill it. A lot of guys were dozing off and kind of not paying attention, we'd give them a zapper. We'd bring up a bill, and before you knew it, it was dead. We kind of had fun doing that.

In those days, the Wildlife Commission did not have good rapport with the Legislature, so if you killed a wildlife bill, you were a hero.

Most of the sportsmen hated them, so we just waited our turn, and we got them, every session. Old Papa Joe Viani from Hawthorne was one of my mentors. One day, he was mad at Frank Groves, the Director of Wildlife, so he gave a speech and he held his bills up—they had not had a committee meeting the whole session and never passed a bill out or nothing—and he said, [imitates voice] “I’m a take-a these bills to Walker Lake and feed ‘em to da fish.” And that’s what he did. [chuckles] He was a very colorful guy. He was a good legislator. He actually got me started on the right foot. He said, “If you don’t have the votes, why, shut up and keep your mouth shut until you do have the votes.”

He also told me that these guys from the South were going to have control pretty soon. When I first started, it was after the first reapportionment when Clark County first got a majority of the votes in the house. He said, “You’d better get close to those guys because they’re going to control everything.” So I made friends with Keith Ashworth. I became very loyal to Keith, and Keith was very good to me. He made me his Pro Tem one year and Majority Leader the second year. Then I followed him in the Speakership.

It’s true: they have control, so you cannot do anything unless you have some votes

Born in Chiesa, Italy, G. Joe Viani (D-Mineral) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1964 and again from October 1965 until his death in 1969. He chaired the Assembly Committee on Fish and Game in 1963 and 1967.

Frank W. Groves was the second director of the then-named State Fish and Game Commission, serving from 1949 to 1973. In 1969, the name was changed to the Nevada Department of Fish and Game and in 1979, to the Department of Wildlife.

Assemblyman Keith Ashworth (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1976. He was Speaker in 1971 and 1975.

down there. I don't know if they'll ever elect a Speaker from the North again. I don't think they can go home if they elect a northern Speaker again. When I was there, the press was all over them: "When are you going to elect a Speaker from the South?" I got to the point where I'd had it eight terms, and Perkins and Buckley wanted to move up. I said, "Well, okay, just take care of my area and give me a break." So I turned it over to Perkins, and I thought he did well. I think Buckley has done very well.

Perkins became the third Speaker to serve three sessions; Buckley was Speaker for two sessions.

Bennett: Who would you name as some of the most effective legislators you've worked with over that time?

J. Dini: Don Mello's name hasn't been mentioned. Don was a really ferocious chairman of Ways and Means. But he was a good mechanic. I call him a mechanic because he could take a bill and work it over and recreate it. When he lost favor with Bob Barengo and was demoted from Ways and Means Chairman, they put him on my Government Affairs Committee. [chuckles] So I had a wildcat on my hands, but I gave him the Consumer Advocate bill, which had been given to my committee to work up because it was an initiative, I guess. We had to do the mechanics of it. Don took that job from scratch and developed that bill. It took him a whole session. He was very deliberate about it; but he

Donald R. Mello (D-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1963 to 1982 and in the Senate from 1982 to 1989. Mello chaired the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means from 1973 through 1979.

Robert R. Barengo (D-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1982. He was Speaker in 1981.

The bill crafted in 1981 was placed on the 1982 General Ballot. The voters chose it over a competing initiative petition, and the Office of Consumer Advocate was created to assist utility customers.

really proved that he was a mechanic who could take a bill and work it over and make it a really good bill. It has not been amended, I don't think, other than minor amendments, since it was put into effect. He was very good, and he was very good at legislating.

There's been a whole ton of guys who were very good. Paul May was an excellent legislator, an expert on taxation. We could use him today. If he were there now, he'd be creative and figure out something to solve these problems. He did an excellent job. Jean Ford was a good legislator. Mary Gojack was very good.

Jan Evans was a peach. She worked hard, worked night and day, and was very effective. When I first met her, she was a lobbyist for women and children, and she used to come and talk to me in my office, and I wasn't even handling her bills. She'd just come and talk to me. I think I kind of shored her up after she had a bruising day in Ways and Means or something. We became friends then, before she ever served.

Eileen Brookman was good in her own way. She'd scream and yell. She'd get up on her stool and say, [imitates voice] "Mr. Speaker, look this way once in a while." She was short, and I'd look over her, you know. I

Paul W. May, Jr. (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1984 and 1986 to 1988. He chaired the Assembly Committee on Taxation during six sessions: 1973-77, 1981-83, and 1987.

couldn't really see her, and sometimes I didn't want to see her because I knew what she was going to say, but she was good. She got a lot of things passed. Very effective.

Virgil Getto was a very excellent legislator—a Republican, but we were great friends. Virgil and I worked on dozens of projects together and were very successful in getting them passed. It was bipartisan. He'd bring his votes and I'd bring mine, and we'd get enough to pass something. We see each other once in a while. We talk about old times. We had a lot of good times together, but we worked hard. He was a really hard worker. He took his job seriously. He kept going from the Assembly to the Senate and from the Senate back to the Assembly more times than anybody in the history of the state. As far as a quality legislator, he was excellent.

Carl Dodge was another super guy. He was a level above everybody else. He was a classy guy. He and I served together, and he was my Senator for all those years. We just got along perfectly. He'd say, "You take care of those problems in the outlying county, and I'll take care of them over at Churchill. When you need me to help you in the problems over there, come over and see me, and we'll work them out." We never had an argument all the years, and he was kind of a counsel to Virgil and me.

Whenever there was a major issue coming up, he'd take Virgil and me out to dinner, and he'd tell us exactly what was going on and why we needed to pass the bill. He was just a good guy, just a good guy—honest as the day is long. When we lost that man, we lost a great leader.

Mahlon Brown was a very good Senator. Mahlon was very fair to the rural counties at a time when it wasn't popular to be, but he was always very cordial with me, and he always tried to keep me out of trouble. He'd come down and talk to me about issues. He was a good leader.

Floyd Lamb was kind of boisterous. He used to run over people, but he was a good legislator. He knew how to put a bill together, too. He walked around with that bill in his hand, and he'd come down and say, "Why don't we do this or why don't we do that?" Could never get any contributions out of him, but other than that, he was okay.

[Later, Mr. Dini reminisced about two other leaders not mentioned during the interview, saying: Lou Bergevin, another Republican, was an excellent Minority Leader. We got along fine. Once in a while, we would have a group meeting to work out the issues.

Bob Sader was excellent. He was my right-hand man for five terms. He planned our

Floyd R. Lamb (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1956 to 1983. He chaired the Senate Committee on Finance from 1965 to 1983. He was convicted as a result of Operation YOBO, the 1981-1982 FBI undercover investigation into political corruption.

Louis W. Bergevin (R-Douglas) served in the Assembly from 1978 to 1992 and was Assembly Minority Leader in 1987 and 1989.

strategies and had much to do with policy. When he retired, it as a great loss.]

I talked about Swackhamer. He was a smart man, and he knew the process, left and right. I served with him at the tail end of his legislative career. Mel Close was good, as a Speaker, at my first session there. It was his first session as Speaker, and he was good. He'd try to keep it all together, but occasionally he'd get mad at us. That's when we used to call those sessions at night after dinner. The Chief Clerk would get mad because everybody wanted to give a speech and get it in the record, and they'd have to transcribe all those great speeches we made after we'd had a few cocktails at Enrico's or somewhere. [chuckles] She used to get mad at me. They don't do that anymore. I don't think they'd try to have any evening sessions anymore unless towards the end. Everybody'd get a break, and they'd run across the street to Hunter's Lodge and have a couple of drinks. As the night went on, the speeches got longer and greater, and the Chief Clerk would get angry.

I've got to tell the story about when I got mad at my friend Virgil Getto. We had a bill on high-level nuclear waste, and the leadership agreed that the bill would die on the Chief Clerk's desk. Because Virgil had a lot of credibility, another legislator talked Virgil into

Robert M. Sader (D-Washoe) served in the Assembly from 1980 to 1993. He was Majority Whip from 1983 to 1993.

Five Chief Clerks served during Dini's tenure. Nathan Hurst was Chief Clerk from 1959 through 1967; Theresa Loy, from 1969 through 1971; Mouryne Landing, from 1973 through 1995; Linda B. Alden from 1995 to 1998; and Jacqueline Sneddon, from 1999 through 2003.

Hunter's Lodge was located at 402 S. Carson Street.

making the motion to take that bill off the desk and put it on the board. It was about 3 o'clock in the morning; we're trying to adjourn; and we've got to get two more bills done and get out of there. It was time to go home. We'd been there long enough, and everybody was mad at us for being there a long time. So he made the motion. I called for a recess, and I threw the gavel at Virgil, right over the Chief Clerk's head. Look at that! If I had hit her with that gavel and then wanted to marry her in 1995, look what kind of trouble I could have gotten into. I might have missed my bride. Or I might have hit my Chief Clerk and then missed my bride!

The gavel-throwing incident took place in 1987. Joe Dini and Mouryne Landing married on October 21, 1995.

That was a funny thing. Virgil didn't know what happened. I said, "Virgil, why did you do that?" He said, "Well, you know, so-and-so asked me to do it." I said, "Look, the deal was made to kill the bill on the desk." "Oh, nobody said that." I said, "Sometimes, you have to read between the lines." Anyway, we have a wonderful friendship still today. I missed the Chief Clerk, and everything is hunky-dory.

Bennett: The gavel didn't hit anything or anybody?

J. Dini: No, no. Just aimlessly, out on the floor. I didn't get mad very often, but I was really mad that

morning. I was tired, and I wanted to get out of there.

Bennett: What sorts of things did you have to do to bring those long sessions to a close?

J. Dini: We tried to make deals with the Senate in conference committees, mostly. We did improve our conference committee operation over the years. They got pretty good towards the end. In the old days, we had three conference committees. The first one, you just went down and said hello and came back and filled out the form. The second one, they started talking about what the issues were. Maybe the third one, they might have made a deal. But I think that's been cut back now to two conference committees. They don't waste that first one anymore. I think that was time-consuming. It was just tradition.

Bennett: How did you know a session was coming to an end?

J. Dini: You make a list. You have a short list of bills you have to pass, and you carry that in your pocket. When one passes, you reach down and scratch it off. Then you get down to eight or ten bills, and you put your best people to work on those. Your Majority Leader goes down and checks in to see if he can make a deal or if there's no deal. The Speaker goes down, if he has to, and asks what we can do to get this

passed. There's a lot of pressure at that particular point. You don't like to leave some important legislation just sitting there to die, but sometimes it does. Of course, there are always one or two items in the budget. Everybody has pet projects that they want, and you have to satisfy everybody. But, actually, it closes itself pretty nicely towards the end.

The only one that was really tough was in the session that Jim Gibson was Majority Leader in the Senate, and he had a bill that abolished the State Fire Marshal's Office. That was one of my pet projects as I was a volunteer fireman here in Yerington, and I was always involved in volunteer firemen things. The State Fire Marshal is really important for the rural counties because they don't have the manpower or money to really do that job. So it went until 6 o'clock in the morning, and I wore him down. I wore Jim down. I'd put Lloyd Mann in charge of saving the State Fire Marshal's Office. We saved it for the rural counties—counties less than 100,000 population—and he would have jurisdiction there. The Fire Marshal wouldn't have jurisdiction in Washoe or Clark. Lloyd was down there every five minutes, grinding on Jim, and finally, I think Jim surrendered. It was the only time I ever saw him surrender. He said, "Okay, Joe, you win." So we signed the

*Lloyd W. Mann (D-Clark)
served in the Assembly
from 1974 to 1980.*

conference committee report, and we adjourned at quarter to 6. Man, everybody was worn out.

Bennett: Were there often sessions that would go that late?

J. Dini: Not that late. Usually 2 to 3 o'clock. Sometimes, I think they stalled beyond midnight so they'd get another day's per diem. But it wasn't worth it. It was pretty hectic at the end.

Bennett: When you mentioned Eileen Brookman standing on her stool to get the Speaker's attention, it reminded me that the technology that they have now was not there for most of your tenure.

J. Dini: No. We didn't have anything. When I first started, I don't even know if they recorded minutes—I guess they recorded the minutes. But now it's real sophisticated equipment, and they have staff. My Government Affairs Committee only had two secretaries, and we met five days a week. It was a lot of work for those secretaries to transcribe all those minutes. We had a lot of bills in Government Affairs—300 bills. Everybody wanted me to hear their bills. The committee's jurisdiction was so broad that it could almost hear anything.

When Mello was Ways and Means Chairman, he'd let me hear some Ways and Means bills just to develop a policy, and then I'd refer them back to Ways and Means for the

money. So I had plenty of work; it was a very demanding committee. I still think everybody ought to serve on Ways and Means once to get the feel of how the state agencies work.

Bennett: Now, at the Speaker's rostrum, there are buttons and lights that you can see who wants to speak and so forth. Before that equipment was put into place, how did you run the Chambers?

J. Dini: Guys had to stand up, and you'd take your turn calling on them. But sometimes you'd get too much debate, so then you'd give the sign to the Majority Leader to stand up and cut the debate off because they got too long and repetitious, and maybe they were getting too hot. Some people can debate cordially, and some people can debate *uncordially*. [chuckles] They'd get pretty nasty. So you want to avoid that because those people sometimes say things that they really don't want to say. But the buttons work a lot better, and you can keep track of them a lot better. Now they've got the buttons to push and the computer up there—that pretty near got me. I'm not into technology. [chuckles]

The thing is that when you're Speaker and you want to run things smoothly, you expect the Majority Leader to get up whenever your committee chairman gets in trouble and talk and get that committee chairman out of

trouble. I think that's what I excelled in when Keith Ashworth let me be Majority Leader because I used to read every bill, and I understood it. If the chairman got in trouble, I'd step up and bail him out. I always told my Majority Leaders that they had to be able to do that. You have to listen and pay attention. I don't see how they pay attention anymore. They're on their laptops, and there are too many things going on. If I had stayed there as Speaker, I would have abolished the laptops from the floor. I think they're distracting. I don't think the people pay attention. Not that they're playing games or anything; it's that they're sending e-mails to somebody or reading e-mails, and they're not paying attention to the debate. I think it distracts from the quality of the way guys do things.

Bennett: What are some of the debates that stand out in your mind?

J. Dini: Oh, one of the best ones I ever had was when we debated the teachers' salary thing. We had 350 teachers up in the gallery, and I got to give the crushing blow to the majority party. That was a good debate.

I think the hardest work I ever did was on the TRPA Compact. We negotiated it with California, and we passed the bill in the 1979 Session. California rejected it, so it came back

to the 1980 Special Session. Spike Wilson and I made one final stab to work it out with California. John Garamendi and Vic Calvo were the negotiators from California. We faxed back and forth furiously and finally got the right language included that they would buy in and that we could buy in, and we passed it.

At the time, John Garamendi (D) was in the California Senate and Victor Calvo (D) was in the California Assembly.

Posterity will show whether we were right or wrong, but if we saved the Lake, I guess we were right. In the meantime, the property owners have been mad ever since because of the restrictions that were placed on their properties. But that was a good debate, and the lines were drawn. There were only a couple of votes against it. I think Jake was probably the only person who voted against it because he represented Douglas County and that was who it affected, mostly. But it was the right thing to do at the time rather than have further federal intervention.

Ever since President Clinton's time, they've been able to get federal money to go ahead with their projects, and they've done a good job. The clarity has improved. So I think that we did what we started out to do, which was to avoid federal intervention and, secondly, to improve the clarity of the Lake.

In 1997, President William J. Clinton (D) focused national attention on Lake Tahoe issues.

Bennett: Did a lot of those negotiations take place during the interim between sessions?

J. Dini: Yes.

Bennett: What other sorts of activities did you do between sessions?

J. Dini: Between sessions, I served on a lot of interim committees. I was on Interim Finance the last ten or twelve years, and I was on the Legislative Commission. I served on a lot of interim committees. The deregulation of utilities was one on which, as it turned out, I was on the wrong side of the issue, [chuckles] but I thought it was the right thing to do at the time. I can't specifically name the committees that I was on. Oh, I did three different water studies. They were all important and tried to protect the agricultural interests because we could see that water shortage was going to happen and that the cities would be wanting their water. We did everything possible to have proper hearings and consider their side of the story, too.

Bennett: Did the amount of legislative work that you did between sessions change over your tenure?

J. Dini: Yeah, it got heavier. I usually had a chairmanship, and they also wanted me to be on every committee, I guess, because I was balanced and could work with everybody. I'd be overloaded with committees, including Interim Finance and all the other committees. I was overworked.

Bennett: How did your legislative service affect your family?

J. Dini: It was pretty rough on the family. I gave up a lot with my youngest son when I wasn't here in his tender years. My wife had to step in and help me in the business. My oldest son came back and worked for me. They carried the load because I was gone so much. So it had its toll.

Jeanne Demuth Dini was a community and political force in her own right and an active participant in her husband's political life until she passed away in 1994.

Bennett: Were any of your children interested in politics?

J. Dini: My second son, George, has been a City Councilman in Yerington for 12 years. He ran for the Assembly against Tom Grady when I retired, but Tom beat him. So he hasn't tried that again. He enjoys being a City Councilman, but I think he terms out this time.

George Dini was first elected to the Yerington City Council in 1995.

Bennett: What are some of your fondest memories of being in the Legislature?

Since 2002, former Yerington Mayor, Thomas J. (Tom) Grady (R-Lyon) has held the Assembly seat formerly held by Joe Dini.

J. Dini: My fondest memories? I think it would be when I got re-elected Speaker in 1987. The warmth and friendship that I had garnered from my colleagues was really one of the heights of my career and then to retain it another six sessions after that was nice.

Then in the 1990s when they had the appreciation dinner for me over here, the Taiwan government gave me the friendship medal from Taiwan. That was really nice

because I had developed a real warm friendship with the Taiwan government. I was over there twice as a guest of theirs, and they were very fine people. I really appreciated being awarded that medal.

I don't know what else now. I guess being able to marry my Chief Clerk in 1995 was really nice. We had known each other all those years and had hardly ever had a drink together, let alone strike up a conversation. It was all business. That was really nice. Just the warmth, the friendship I had from people like Jack Jeffrey, Marvin Sedway, and Eileen meant a lot to me. Just a kid from Yerington who made good! [chuckles] It made me feel good to be treated that way by my fellow colleagues.

Bennett: What are some of the funny things that you remember? Third House was a biennial tradition.

J. Dini: Yes, they always treated me fairly decently in the Third House, and I never got roughed up too bad. There were some incidents that are not worth repeating, but Third House was really a good tradition. They used to really work hard. Bryn Armstrong and those guys really put on a good show.

But I made a goof the time I told the Buckwheat story, and it was an innocent story. A friend of mine who lives in Hawaii came

Third House was a send-up of the legislature performed by the Capitol Press Corps, believed to have begun with Mark Twain when he covered the Nevada Territorial Legislature.

*Journalist Bryn Armstrong joined the **Reno Evening Gazette** in 1948 and was Executive Editor of the **Las Vegas Sun** from 1963 to 1977. He passed away in 2007.*

over when we had a class reunion, and he told a story about Buckwheat. On Monday morning, under the Good of the Order, I told that story, and I offended one of my members really bad. I think it cost us about three days in the session because it was a reapportionment year, and he wouldn't vote for reapportionment. It was a close vote, and so we sat there for about three days and couldn't do anything until we finally got it all worked out.

Bennett: How did you get it worked out?

J. Dini: I had to make a public apology. Since then, I've been a little bit more careful about those kind of jokes. I thought it was just an innocent joke, but it wasn't. It meant something to somebody. I'm not a big story teller, as you can tell. [chuckles] But I don't know what else.

Bennett: What was your relationship like with the press?

J. Dini: The press and I got along pretty good. In the old days, there was Russ Nielsen, guys like that. Cy Ryan, of course, has been there forever. Brendan Riley was also very fair. I always got along good with them. There were a couple of guys I didn't get along with. Basically, I was always honest with them. They'd ask me something, and I tried to give them the best answer I could. Immediately, on the day we'd start the session, the first question they'd ask me was "When are you going to

Russell R. Nielsen moved to Nevada in 1958 where he was the Nevada Bureau Chief for United Press International. He passed away in 2008.

Cy Ryan continues to report on the Legislature as the Carson City Bureau Chief for the Las Vegas Sun.

Brendan Riley was an Associated Press reporter and the Capital Bureau Chief from 1972 until his retirement in 2009.

adjourn?" I'd say, "We'll adjourn pretty close to on time." What does that mean? [chuckles] Ninety days or 140? We never agreed on *that* very well. Of course, they always thought we were sloughing off. But I think there's only so much work you can do during the course of a day's time. I think that what's happening now is the guys are working 18-hour shifts for two weeks in a row, and the quality of the product goes down. They don't have time to think about the issue.

Bennett: When you think back over the 36 years you were in the Legislature, what were the major issues that faced the state during that time?

J. Dini: Always taxation. Education. Mental health. Rural mental health has been a big issue for me. When Mike O'Callaghan was Governor, we started to work on rural mental health, and we built it up. Then we'd have budget cuts, and the first thing they'd cut is rural mental health, and it's been a struggle to maintain the quality of care. I think they saved it in this last session, thanks to Buckley and the Democrats. They were able to save it. But it still takes you 30 days to see a psychiatrist in rural Nevada, so that program needs more funding.

We used to have some big fights about water, and I think we were able to be honest about it and try to give the cities and the

Assemblyman Dini's longtime commitment to mental health issues was recognized in 2001 when Nevada's new psychiatric hospital in Sparks was named after him and Senator Randolph Townsend (R-Washoe), another legislative advocate for mental health care.

counties the ability to gain the water from farmers, but they had to do it through a hearing process. I served about 18 years on the Western States Water Council with the 17 western states. I enjoyed that very much. I think Governor Dick Bryan appointed me to that in 1983. I'm still an alternate, but they don't send us anymore because of the budget crunch. I learned a lot about western water, and when I was on the Council of State Governments, Western Conference, I served about three times as Chairman of the Water Policy Committee. I enjoyed working with other states very much.

But water is a real problem for Nevada, and in an agricultural area like I live in, we're being bombarded by the feds. Senator Reid's got a project to save Walker Lake by buying up the water from the upstream users in Mason and Smith Valleys. But I don't think they're thinking out the problems about moving that water out of here, and what it's going to do to the economy here. We're very dependent on ag; it's the only industry we have left. Mining is gone here. If another mine came along, we'd be okay. But they're far and few between. So I don't know if he's going to be successful in that. If he's successful, why, you come back here ten years from now, and nothing will be growing in half the valley. It won't be pretty. But there's nothing that the State can do about

Harry M. Reid (D) has been the U.S. Senator from Nevada since 1987. He was elected to the Nevada Assembly in 1966 where he represented Clark County for one term.

that. I don't know what approach to take. We certainly couldn't pass a state law to supersede a federal law. So our hands are tied.

Bennett: When you think back on all the legislation that you've been involved with, either bills that you introduced or that you processed because of leadership, is there anything you wish you hadn't done?

J. Dini: Well, probably that deregulation of utilities that I voted for and ended up being a lost cause. But it wasn't because of the law; it was from Enron. We left ourselves exposed to that. That's probably the worst one.

Deregulation was passed in 1997 with Assembly Bill 366 and repealed in 2001 with Assembly Bill 369.

I was always for regulation and helping the consumer, the insurance code, and stuff like that. I was involved in that in the Commerce Committee. I always worked with the agencies well; I'm proud of that. No matter who it was, they could always come to me, and I would help them. Roland Westergard and Pete Morros in Conservation were two of my best allies and guys that I could work with in solving the water problems in the state.

Roland D. Westergard was State Engineer from 1967 to 1979 and Director of the Nevada Department of Conservation and Natural Resources from 1979 to 1990. Peter G. Morros succeeded him in those roles, serving as State Engineer from 1979 to 1990 and as Director from 1990 to 2000.

One of the disappointments, I guess, was when we didn't pass that Water Planning Act in that one session. A lot of work went into that, but I still think that Clark County is the one that killed that because they had plans to go outside their own county lines to get water for

the Vegas area. I think that they probably had the most to do with killing it, although they've never owned up to it. But I think we should have had a statewide water plan to help save some of the lifestyle that we're used to in Nevada. Now they're going out and buying up everything and moving it out. The way they're doing it is going to hurt the state as it is today.

Bennett: How did bill drafting change in the time that you were there? You had talked earlier about scratching out amendments and so forth. Were you writing your own bills and amendments in the early 1970s?

J. Dini: No. You'd just write yourself a memo and take it in. When I started there, the bill drafters were Russ McDonald and Ann Rollins. That was about it. Maybe they'd hire a part-timer. You didn't ask for many bills, either. Five or six or seven was a lot of bills. If you're one of the guys like me who wasn't introducing too many, and towards the end of the session when something came up in my district that I had to take care of, I'd go to Russ, and the next morning, the bill would be in my hands. He was really good at that.

But today there are so many problems and so many things to take care of, that bill drafting staff just gets worn out. They really work hard. *All* the divisions do. Research has

been wonderful to me. They wrote speeches for me and helped get research for my district. I don't see how they keep it up. [chuckles] Every division over there works hard and does a great job for the legislators and for the people in this state. We didn't have that staff when I started; we didn't have anything. We were lucky to get anything done. But we were very fortunate to be able to grow the staff the way they did. I hope they can maintain it because it means a lot. You can do a better job of legislating when you have a good staff for support, and you get the information you need to make the decisions. Or if you have a problem in your area, they can put the solution down in black and white. It's very helpful. The *staff's* been very helpful. The reason I was successful in my career as a legislator was the staff. I give them credit for it all—Legal, Research, all the way down. Excellent cooperation.

Bennett: We're getting close to wrapping up here. Thinking back from that first day in January of 1967 to the final *sine die* in 2001, how had the Assembly change over that time frame?

J. Dini: It's more sophisticated, but the biggest change is that there's no camaraderie between the members. Camaraderie between Republicans and Democrats is non-existent, and it's harder to go across the aisle to make a deal. In the old days, I'd get a bill to introduce, and I'd have

more Republicans on that bill than Democrats. Now it doesn't work that way. They don't reach out. It's as if they're afraid to be seen with the other party. I think we're all Nevadans; we're all Americans. We're here for the good of the people, and party shouldn't make any difference. The partisanship should cease the day you're elected. That's the way it was in the old days. Maybe I'm getting too conservative in my old age, but I just think they need to work together better. More cooperation.

Bennett: Thank you, Mr. Dini, for your time this afternoon. I enjoyed this.

J. Dini: Thank you.

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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.

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