



# **Nevada Legislature Oral History Project**

**VIRGIL M. GETTO**  
**Republican**

**Assembly, 1966 – 1976; 1978 – 1980; 1982 - 1988**  
**Senate, 1980 – 1982; 1988-1992**

**FEBRUARY 25, 2008**  
**FALLON, NEVADA**

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**THE GETTO HOME**

**FALLON, 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.



**Virgil M. Getto**  
**February 25, 2008**

## **VIRGIL M. GETTO**

Virgil M. Getto has the distinction of having been a legislative freshman three times in the Assembly and twice in the Senate. He was first elected to the Assembly in 1966 and served for ten years. After a two-year hiatus, he returned to the Assembly. His first session as a Senate freshman came in 1981 when he was appointed to replace Carl Dodge (R-Churchill) who had resigned before the start of the session. He completed Senator Dodge's term and then was elected to the Assembly in 1982 where he served until he was elected to the Senate in 1988 for one term. In total, the Republican served for 24 years; he was an Assemblyman during nine Regular and three Special Sessions and a Senator during three Regular Sessions and one Special. Mr. Getto chaired the Assembly Committee on Agriculture in 1969 and 1971; the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources, Agriculture, and Mining in 1985; and the Senate Committee on Natural Resources in 1989. He also served as Assembly Minority Leader in 1975. A life-long dairy farmer, Mr. Getto reminisces during his interview about the special challenges and pleasures of being a rural legislator in Nevada, especially as the state was becoming more urbanized.

Born in 1924 in Fallon, Nevada, Mr. Getto attended Churchill County public schools before taking up the family business of dairy farming; he also benefitted from leadership training through the National Future Farmers of America organization. Mr. Getto has long been active with Rotary, Elks, Eagles, Optimists, and the National Rifleman's Association. He served as a member of the Churchill County Board of School Trustees before his election to the Legislature and was active with a number of agriculture and conservation causes.

Throughout this interview, which was conducted at his home in Fallon on February 25, 2008, Mr. Getto answered a variety of questions about many topics, including the reasons that he became politically active, important issues of the time, his perspectives on key political figures, and the impact of legislative service on family life. He recalled that his school board service led to his running for the Assembly in 1966 and his defeat of the long-serving Democratic incumbent. Mr. Getto also discusses the people with whom he served. Most, he remembers fondly; a few, less so. He expresses a special bond with his long-time colleagues Assemblyman Joe Dini (D-Lyon) and Assemblyman (later Senator) Lawrence Jacobson (R-Douglas). Mr. Getto's interview is sprinkled with anecdotes about a number of the legislators and lobbyists who have been part of Nevada's legislative process over the years. In one story, he explains the origin of a phrase still utilized in floor debates today – "It's a gooda bill!" – and credits Assemblyman Joe Viani (D-Mineral) with inserting it into the Nevada legislative lexicon.

Although much of his legislative service was spent in the minority, Mr. Getto successfully championed several bills. In this interview, he talks about legislation of which he was most proud, such as the bond measure for parks and natural resources and the removal of statutes that were discriminatory towards women. Additional details about his legislation may be found in the transcript of an oral history conducted under the direction of the Churchill County Museum in 1997, which Mr. Getto donated to the Legislature's Research Library.

In this interview, Mr. Getto recalls the details of the last sessions conducted in the Capitol Building and talks about the transition to the new building. He describes Melody Lane, a popular after-hours gathering place for legislators, and explains that the current Legislative Building stands on its site. Many of his memories are fond ones—some are quite funny—but he also discusses the difficulties his legislative service brought to his family. He details the reasons that led to his decision to retire and muses about the changes he witnessed in the Legislature. Mr. Getto was added to the Assembly Wall of Distinction in 2007.

After the formal interview was complete, Mr. Getto and his wife Pat discussed several photographs from his legislative service, which were filmed and included on the DVD that accompanies this transcript.

Dale Erquiaga  
March 2009

**Dana Bennett:** Good afternoon, Senator Getto.

**Virgil Getto:** Good afternoon.

**Bennett:** Let's think back to the opening day of your first session. It is January 16, 1967. It's kind of a nice day for January in Nevada, and you are headed into the Assembly Chambers on the second floor of the Old Capitol Building. What were your impressions as a new person in the Legislature?

**Getto:** I was just a farm boy. I didn't have much of an education as far as the Assembly goes, and it was all green to me. I had served on the school board, and that's about all the political work that I had done. Lo and behold, I got elected to the Assembly, so here I was going to compete with attorneys, businessmen, and all these people. I had sort of an inferiority complex, and I thought, "Oh, boy, am I going to be able to do this?" But when I got into the Assembly, Assemblyman Bill Swackhamer and the Assemblyman from Hawthorne kind of took me under their wings, and I learned real fast. I was very competitive. I could debate with Assemblyman Richard Bryan and had fun doing those things. But when I went in the first time, I thought, "Boy, what am I getting into?" It was totally new to me. I had only been to the Legislature one time.

**Bennett:** Why did you run for the Legislature?

*Born in Italy, G. Joe Viani (D) was the Assemblyman from Hawthorne from 1958 to 1964 and 1965 to 1969.*



**Getto:** I was very active in high school. I had an agriculture teacher who I give a lot of credit for what I have done. I was a pretty bashful little kid when I went into high school, and he took me under his wing and gave me a lot of confidence. He taught me public speaking and all the different procedures. I was elected Chapter President of the Future Farmers, and I was elected State President of Future Farmers. Then later on, I was elected a national officer, and it was all because of Mr. Schank and my parents. I was also elected Student Body President.

So then I got out, and I had a scholarship to go to Montana State. My father was 45 years older than I was, so he was in his late sixties, and he said that he would help me go to college, if I wanted to go, but he would have to sell the ranch. I liked farming so well, and I thought it over for a long time and decided not to give up farming, so I stayed on the farm.

Then I got married at 24, and I worked so hard. I bought three other farms, and I gave up all my political life and just buried myself in work. Then I realized that something was missing. In fact, I got depressed. I got to thinking about it. I love people; I like to talk to people. I realized that I had to get back into public life, so I ran for the school board and was elected, and I served four years on the school board.

First of all, I got involved in PTA, and I

*Leroy C. Schank (D-Churchill) served in the Assembly from 1958 to 1960. In 1981, Getto introduced S.C.R. 40, which mourned the loss of Schank, noting that he was "one of Nevada's finest citizens" as well as a "legislator, farmer and master teacher."*

became president of the local PTA. Then came the school board. In my last year on the school board, some of my friends said, “Why don’t you run for the Legislature?” I said, “I can’t run for the Legislature. I’m just a farm boy.”

Eric Palludan, who I respected very highly, was a prominent businessman. He had been Assemblyman for two or three terms. I said, “I can’t beat Eric Palludan.” They said they would support me, so they finally talked me into it. Eric Palludan thought I wasn’t much opposition so he went to Denmark. He went to visit Europe. He was gone while I was campaigning. I gave it all I had. I went door-to-door. I knocked on doors and talked to people, and during the election, I beat him. I was so surprised, and there I was! I was going to be in the Legislature. I was really not that well-prepared. I had really zeroed in on just campaigning, but it was a wonderful education. So many nice things happened in my life because of my being in the Legislature.

*Born in Denmark, Eric Palludan (D-Churchill) was a three-time freshman in the Assembly, serving from 1952 to 1954, 1956 to 1958, and again from 1960 to 1966.*

**Bennett:** You had one of the largest districts in the country. How did you campaign in such a large district?

**Getto:** That’s another story. My daughter came home to stay with me for two or three months, and so we went out door-to-door. Ely was in my district. I’ll tell you how I campaigned in Ely

because Ely was predominantly Democrat. The first time I ran in Ely, I didn't have an opponent because they enlarged my district to include Ely. So I didn't go door-to-door. Then after the election, I went to Ely, and I went door-to-door. The people were so surprised. I said, "I represent this district. I have to get to know you people." So the next time I won the election, I won in the Democrat area, even though I was a Republican.

Then when I was appointed to Senator Carl Dodge's district, that was not quite so bad. It was Yerington and this area. But then when I ran for the Senate, they had just reapportioned, and my district took in half of the state—Ely, Austin, Lander, Lincoln County, Hawthorne, Tonopah, Pahrump, and Goldfield—and I went door-to-door in most of those places. It took me three months. And I still dairied. [chuckles] It was just a lot of determination. I loved to talk to people and would meet them door-to-door, so they'd get to know me. That was a great experience.

*Sen. Carl Dodge (R-Churchill, 1958-1980) is considered the father of the Nevada Plan for School Finance.*

**Bennett:** During your first session, the Legislature was still in the old Capitol Building. How did the Assembly work? Where was your office? How did committees meet?

**Getto:** We didn't have an office. I was the Chairman of the Agriculture Committee the second term,

not the first term. I think Joe Dini was. But the second term, that office wasn't as big as this family room. [gestures] The committee members would sit at the table, but anybody who was there would have to stand up. It still worked, but it was so encumbered. Voting was by voice. You've heard the story about Hafen jumping out the window?

*Joseph E. Dini, Jr., (D-Yerington) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 2002. In 1967, he chaired the Committee on Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock.*

**Bennett:** Tell the story.

**Getto:** Okay. We were voting voice vote, which means that the Clerk would call your name, and you'd say "yes" or "no" loud enough so it could be recorded. Of course, the Assembly is very quiet during that time, but it was in June, and the window was wide open. There was a fire escape there. We were voting on a very critical issue—something to do with taxes—and very quiet. It came to Hafen; there was a clatter and a bang; and when they called his name, there was nobody there. He had jumped out the window. He thought it was funny to do that. Well, the Assembly has a rule that if they have a call of the house, all the legislators have to stay there until they bring the other member back, even if he went to Europe. [chuckles] But the police brought him back. He did it as a joke, but it defeated him. He was from a small town, and his local newspaper ran this headline: "Mesquite Mosquito Jumps Out the Window to

*Assemblyman Bryan K. Hafen (R-Clark) reportedly jumped out the window during the 1969 Session.*

Avoid Tax Issue.” And he never came back.  
[chuckles] It was so funny.

But it was a good experience in one way because you were sitting right next to another Assemblyman. The desks were very close together. They were movable desks and so on. You could talk. There was a lot of discussion that went on between the legislators, whispering and so forth, and so you became very friendly with the legislators. It was a wonderful experience.

**Bennett:** Could you choose where you sat, or were the seats assigned?

**Getto:** No, no. I always remember that Swackhamer sat up to the front. I was very fortunate: I got to sit between Bode Howard and Lawrence Jacobsen who were both Republicans and both had a lot of experience. So I was very lucky. They were great legislators. Bode was a doer. He lived life to the utmost. They named the National Guard building in Carson City after him because he was so prominent in the National Guard. Anyway, Bode would go out at night and party and so forth, and he was always the first one in the Assembly in the morning—6:30, he’d be there. So he slept very little. It was after I was out of the Legislature that he had a heart attack. Rather than going home and relaxing, which he couldn’t do, he stayed at his

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

*Lawrence E. (Jake) Jacobsen (R-Douglas) served 15 years in the Assembly and 24 years in the Senate.*

apartment, but he still kept up with the Legislature. They told him he should go to California, where they could do heart surgery, but he died. So we missed him.

Lawrence Jacobsen has the record for the longest service of any legislator in the history of Nevada, and he was a very close friend. He was from Gardnerville; he was very conservative; and he and I just really hit it off. I have a funny story to tell about Senator Jacobsen. We were both at a conference in New Orleans, and being conservative, I said to Jake that there wasn't any sense in my getting a room and him getting a room. Let's just stay together. I came in a day after he was there—came in late at night—and the person at the hotel desk said, “You're not staying with him. There's only one bed there.” I said, “What? He was supposed to fix it up for me.” So they wouldn't call him, and I said that I've got to have a place to stay. They were sold out. Housekeeping was closed. They said, “We can bring a cot in there, and we'll open the door and you can stay in his room.” So we did that. And we got along good.

But then I had to leave before he did, so I got up at 4 o'clock in the morning, and there was a pair of really nice gray pants hanging on the hanger, just exactly like mine. So I folded up these pants very neatly, put them in my

suitcase, and went out very quietly. Well, Jake gets up in the morning. He had a history of traveling very light—one pair of nice pants, a clean shirt and a tie for every day, and one nice jacket. So he only had one pair of pants, and I took them! This was Sunday morning, and Jake was so mad. [chuckles] All the places were closed, and I guess he bribed somebody—probably one of the bellhops or somebody—to get him a pair of pants. [chuckles] But that wasn't the end! Then I came home—Pat would always get my clothes ready for Monday morning—so she took these pants out, pressed them, and hung them on a hanger. So Monday morning, I put on these pants that were six inches too big! [laughter] They were exactly like mine, but, oh, we laughed about that so many times. Yeah, we had a wonderful time, Jake and I. We did a lot of meetings and went to Taiwan together, and then I went to China. I had a wonderful experience when I was in the Legislature.

**Bennett:** What's some of the advice that you remember that the veteran legislators gave you when you first started?

**Getto:** I have a story to tell about that one, too. Assemblyman Joe Viani was from Hawthorne, and had a bar. He was born in Italy, and he hardly ever spoke on a bill. He had a reputation for getting the votes on his bill early every

morning. When he knew he had 21 solid votes, and it came time to talk on the bill, he'd stand up and he'd say, "It's a gooda bill." And he had the votes! He had a very fine reputation—honest and so forth. He told me, "You know, there's one thing you have to remember: keep your word. Keep your word."

Right off the bat, there was a stupid bill that was introduced in the Legislature by a couple of dairymen and some fellows, and it was a very bad bill, which would have helped the ice cream business in Nevada to keep any ice cream from coming from outside, and I thought that was terrible. I asked Joe how I could beat this, and he said, "I tell you what. You find four good, solid votes on the Agriculture Committee, and we'll kill it there." So I got four votes, and he was one of them.

I came in one morning early, and there was an Assemblyman named Marv White. He was an insurance man. He called me over and said, "You know, Virgil, you'd better call off your opposition to that bill." I said, "What are you talking about?" He said, "Well, you're in the dairy business, and the dairy companies can wipe you out." So I took it as a threat. I said, "Marv, you're threatening me." I was kind of mad. During the hearing, I was sitting at a table, and these guys were all around, and somebody says, "I heard you were threatened."

*Marvin L. White (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1968 and in the Senate from 1968 to 1970.*



I said, “Yes, I was.” Then I said, “Assemblyman White”—which was a stupid thing to do—“he threatened me.” He got up, “You’re a liar.” I squared off and he squared off, [chuckles] and Joe Viani said, “I move the bill without recommendation.” I thought, “Oh, my god, he promised me he was going to vote for me. He told me to keep your word, and so forth.” So afterward I said, “Joe, I don’t understand. Why did you do that?” He said, “Could you picture the newspaper headlines tomorrow: ‘Dairyman Gets in a Fistfight Over Ice Cream Bill?’” [chuckles] He said, “I did you a favor.” So I learned real quick about that, too. Joe Viani was a great legislator.

**Bennett:** Do you remember what happened with the bill ultimately?

**Getto:** Oh, it passed. They had it greased. Another thing that happened was that this Marv White—some people are not the best in the Legislature—became a Senator. When Paul Laxalt was Governor, Marv White was in the Senate, and he had sponsored what I called the “sick chicken bill.” I don’t know what there was about the bill, but it was a no-go bill. Assemblyman Keith Ashworth from Las Vegas—he was on my committee—came to me, and said that there was a bill coming over from the Senate, a real bad bill. It’s a bill that’s personal, and it should be killed. So I said, “Okay, I’ll

*Keith Ashworth (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1976 and in the Senate from 1976 to 1984.*

take it.” I was Chairman of the committee. Then I get a call from the Governor who said that he needed some help. I said, “What do you mean you need some help?” “Well,” he said, “you’ve got to help pass that bill for Marv White.” I said, “What? He’s a Democrat. What are you talking about?” The Governor said that he had a personal bill that he wanted to get passed. It was a controversial one, and Marv White was the vote that got him through. The Governor said that he had promised Marv White that he would help with the bill. I said, “Well, Governor, I’m not going to let that bill pass.” And I said, “You have fulfilled your promise to him. You did what you could—talked to me to help—but it’s not going to pass.” And it didn’t. But the Governor tried to help him. Anyway, Marv White ended up moving out of the state. He resigned from the Senate and moved out with this special bill. He became some big wheel in a company. So I felt good about that. [chuckles]

**Bennett:** In those early years, particularly when you were still in the Old Capitol Building, what was the interaction with lobbyists like? Were there a lot of lobbyists around?

**Getto:** The lobbyists were mostly in the hall. You had to kind of walk [chuckles] through a bunch of guys who wouldn’t let you hardly get through. You had a lot of lobbyists. There was another

very strange and funny issue. This Assemblyman was the former mayor of Reno, and he liked to party. But he also would commit to both sides of a very tough issue and wouldn't take a stand. Then when the bill came up to a vote, he goes like he was getting a telephone call.

*Leonard H. Harris (R-Washoe) was Mayor of Reno from 1955 to 1959, an Assemblyman from 1962 to 1968, and a Senator from 1968 to 1972.*

There was one bill—the Reno-Sparks merger bill—that would merge the two cities and, boy, neither one, Reno or Sparks, wanted it, but some group had sponsored it, and it was a hot bill. So he committed to both sides of this bill, and everybody knew he had committed. He'd been out the night before, and he was tired and had his head down on the desk. I guess he was kind of snoozing. We all knew it, so we poked him. They weren't voting on that bill, but we poked him and said, "Hey, Len, they're voting on the Reno-Sparks merger bill." He jumped up. There were two white wooden posts and a chain between them, and the Sergeant-at-Arms had to open the chain to let you out. He tried to get out of there because he didn't want to vote on the bill, and he got tangled up in the chain and pulled both posts over on top of him, and he was laying on the floor. That was really funny. [laughter] Oh, boy!

It was a lot worse for lobbyists because they nailed you in the hall. They were all

standing in the hall. I really didn't have a problem with lobbyists because I was my own man in the Legislature, thank goodness.

I'll tell you another story. My wife was a schoolteacher and belonged to the NEA. In 24 years in the Legislature, the NEA never endorsed me. Some of their lobbyists came to me and said they'd like to take me to lunch. So they talked to me and said they had never endorsed me before. I said, "I'm not going to say yes to everything you want before the Legislature. I won't." They said, "Well, wait a minute. You'd better think about it. We will help you get elected, if you will be with us. If you don't, we're going to work against you." I said, "Have at it. I've beat you guys for 22 years." This was close to my last session. I said, "I don't need your support, thank you." That made me feel real good. I was like that all the way through.

*The Nevada State Education Association is often abbreviated as the "NEA" to distinguish it from the NSEA, which is the Nevada State Employees' Association.*

I had another friend who represented Harrah's, and he was a personal friend of my sister's. They had gone to college together. So we got to be friends. He never talked to me about issues very much, and I didn't realize what he was doing. So there was a bill that would have legalized dog racing in Henderson along with horse racing because Henderson at one time was just a poor city alongside of Las Vegas. One of the legislators got called off—

whether legitimate or not—and that left eight members on the committee, which was tied, four and four. The hearing went on, and the lobbyists were just squirming all over. [chuckles] I thought about it for a long time and thought, “I want to vote for it because I want to help Henderson. It’s a little town.” So I did, and the bill passed out. This fellow came to me and said, “Don’t you know that gaming and Harrah’s Club is against that bill?” And I said, “John, I want you to remember one thing: I’m the legislator—you’re not. You’re not going to tell me how to vote.” That was a policy I carried all the way through, and that’s what I feel real good about.

**Bennett:** In 1971, when the Legislature moved into the new building, there was all that space and room for offices. How did that change how the Legislature worked?

**Getto:** I think it changed in the fact that you weren’t so intimate with your fellow legislators because we used to sit right close to each other. Then there was quite a bit of space between us in the big building. Voice vote was gone. So it was quite a change. But I really think about being in the old building and what an experience it was. Really was wonderful. Especially with that fellow jumping out the window! [laughter]

**Bennett:** A great story! What about staff at that time? There wasn't the large staff that the Legislature has now.

**Getto:** No. Maybe two committees would have staff. It was very conservative, very conservative. I didn't have a personal secretary. You could go to the Legislature and get somebody to come out and write a letter for you, and so forth. But you didn't have a personal one.

**Bennett:** There was a secretarial pool, wasn't there?

**Getto:** Right. A secretarial pool.

**Bennett:** Was that also the case when you were in the Capitol Building?

**Getto:** I don't really remember. Eventually, each one of us, especially the chairmen of committees, had a secretary.

**Bennett:** How about bill drafting? How did you handle getting your bills produced?

**Getto:** There were two ways. You could do it before the session. You could call or send the bill over, or go over personally and get it done. At that time, there was no limit. We used to go 160 days in the Legislature, and we could introduce as many bills as we wanted. That has changed now. They've got a limit on time and a limit on the number of bills you can introduce. They had to change because they shortened it

to 120 days. I don't see how they get all their work done.

**Bennett:** What were some of the issues that you particularly liked working on?

**Getto:** Of course, my background is agriculture, so when I was Chairman of Agriculture, I worked on a lot of water bills. Most of the water bills were passed at that time. Joe Dini and I were there, even though he's a Democrat, and I'm a Republican. An interesting story about that is when we first got elected, we shared a room so we didn't each have to spend for it. We were both conservative. We did that for three sessions. The last session we were together, he was Majority Leader, and I was the Minority Leader. We didn't have the infighting that they have now. [laughter] We got along great. I really enjoyed him. He's a great guy.

*In 1975, Dini was the Assembly Majority Leader and Getto was the Minority Leader.*

**Bennett:** What were the kinds of duties that you had as Minority Leader?

**Getto:** Heading up the legislation that the party was pushing, assigning people, staying behind it, and so forth. I'd appoint the conference committees. I was the leader of the Republicans in the Assembly. It was a good experience.

**Bennett:** There were a few sessions when you were in the minority. Did that make a difference in terms of how you did things?

**Getto:** Oh, yes, but not so much because, again, I was very close to Joe Dini. I don't think I can remember any situation where we became bitter at each other. He was a Democrat and was pushing Democrat legislation, but we never got bitter at it or ever got nasty about it. So I didn't have any hard feelings about it at all. It worked real good.

**Bennett:** When you think back about some of the legislation that you worked on, is there anything in particular that you are the most proud of?

**Getto:** That's all in my history there [gestures]; it'll tell you all about it. There were so many. Somebody sponsored a resolution to have a feasibility study for a medical school in the state of Nevada. The resolution was introduced in the Senate, and the Senate killed it. Joe Dini, Marvin Sedway, and I felt very strong about it, so we really lobbied and talked to the legislators in the Assembly, and we got the bill—the feasibility study—passed in the Assembly. Then we had to go over and twist the Senators' arms, and we *really worked*, and we finally got them to go for it. So we passed a feasibility study for a medical school, but of course, with no money. Governor Laxalt and Howard Hughes got together, and Howard paid for the feasibility study. The next session, we came back and started a two-year medical school.

*In 1997, Getto was interviewed for the Churchill County Oral History Project. He donated a copy of the interview transcript to the LCB Research Library.*

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



I became quite close to the president of the medical school, and I remember another thing that was said. He came to me later on—after they went to a four-year school—and they were having trouble getting animals—dogs and cats—for experiments. They were *really* having trouble; they were buying stolen dogs and so on and so forth. So he came to me and asked me to sponsor a bill that would allow the school to get 500 dogs and cats from the dog pound. I said I would. Well, that became a hornet’s nest. The papers slaughtered me. I had 27 co-sponsors in the Assembly on that bill, which everybody thought was great until the pressure got on them. So I ended up being the only name on the bill. [chuckles]

*Assembly Bill 356 was introduced in 1985 and died in the Assembly Committee on Natural Resources, Agriculture and Mining, which Getto chaired.*

The dean came to me and suggested that we amend the bill so they have to have written permission from the owner to use the dog or the cat. I was sure I could get that passed. Well, I didn’t. There was so much opposition, I never even got that passed at all. I couldn’t believe it. [chuckles] But the papers and the animal rights people just slaughtered me. I was Chairman of the committee and had a hearing on the bill. Pretty quick, there’s quite a group of people in the back with a big banner opposed to the bill. I stopped the meeting, and I said, “You people get out of here, or I’ll have you thrown out.” I was so bitter that day. I had them thrown out,

but I never got the bill passed. [laughter] I don't know how they've gotten around it now. That's been many years ago. It was a long time ago. That was one of the issues that I was quite proud of.

I was the author of the bill that was passed that raised \$75 million of tax money for water and for Lahontan Dam, parks, and so forth. When I first sponsored that, I designated certain places, and they were all in rural counties. I couldn't get it passed, so then I got some Las Vegas legislators to help me, and we included Las Vegas. It passed. Went to the vote of the people, and they passed it. So that's one I'm quite proud of. There're a lot of bills I sponsored.

**Bennett:** If you had to do it over again, are there any bills you might not have introduced?

**Getto:** No, I think I still would be supporting most of those bills. Like I said, quite a few of them did not pass.

I was a strong proponent of women's rights, and when I was in the Assembly, I sponsored the bill that did a two-year study of all the statutes, and wherever there was discrimination against women, that was to come to the next Legislature to be corrected. Jean Ford, Sue Wagner, Mary Gojack, and a lady from Las Vegas were my co-sponsors. I

*In 1971, Assemblyman Getto and many of his female colleagues introduced A.B. 445, which would have allowed women to sell liquor. It died in the Senate. In 1975, he and Assemblywomen Ford and Wagner introduced A.C.R. 8, which required the Legislative Commission to study sexual discrimination in Nevada laws. The measure resulted in LCB Bulletin No. 77-16.*

felt strongly about that, and it passed. I think that was a good thing. I worked well with the lady legislators. They were good.

**Bennett:** What do you think the toughest issues were that the Legislature dealt with during your tenure?

**Getto:** Oh, I'd have to think about that. The tax issues were always tough. If you raised taxes, they were tough issues. Of course, when Jim Gibbons got the resolution passed statewide, it solved that: You had to have a two-thirds vote. But taxations were always tough.

The prison issues were tough, and I was very active in that. I was on the study committee for four years studying the need for prisons in the state of Nevada. We went to several states to look at prisons and see how we could save money and so forth. I remember we went to New Mexico, I think it was, and they had a private prison. Owned by a private company, they were so efficient that I really was impressed. I came back and, of course, we had to fight the State Employees Association, and we never got the bill passed. But they designed those prisons with thinking of cutting the number of people who had to work there. They were very secure, but they were not fancy. They didn't have ceilings—the water pipes and everything showed—but they were all painted, and they looked okay. The halls

*In 1994, then-Assemblyman Jim Gibbons (R-Washoe) sponsored an initiative that amended the Nevada Constitution to require the approval of two-thirds of the legislators to pass any tax measure.*

were real long—they'd have a guard at one end and one at the other—and didn't have a lot of corners. It was a very efficient prison.

Out of that committee, I sponsored the Ely maximum prison, and again, I can give Senator Jacobsen the credit. There were seven members on the committee—he was one of them—and I had to have four votes to have a majority for the listing the Ely prison because I represented Ely. The economy had gone so bad, and I thought it would employ 500 people eventually. So the day before the hearing, I was trying to get ahold of Jake. I had three votes, counting myself, but I needed one more. I called him the night before, and he wasn't home. He had been out—he had run a hearing or something—and had come back after midnight, and I called him at 6 o'clock in the morning. He said, "What are you doing? You know, I was up practically all night." I said, "I'm sorry, Jake, but I've got to talk to you. I need your vote real bad. How are you going to vote on the listing the prisons?" We had to pick first, second, and third, and he said, "I think I'll vote for Lincoln County." I said, "Jake, I've never asked you for a thing, and I've helped you on a lot of issues. Now I'm putting a bee on you: I need your vote on that committee." He said, "Okay, you got it." [chuckles] And we

*Assemblyman Getto served on the Interim Finance Committee's Prison Oversight Subcommittee from 1987 to 1989.*

got the prison. He was a great guy. That was one of the issues I feel really good about.

*The Ely State Prison opened in 1989.*

**Bennett:** Your district was affected by reapportionment?

**Getto:** Right. Reapportionment was really bad in a way because the rurals lost so much representation. When I first went to the Legislature, we were almost equally represented, so the rural counties had a lot of strength. But towards my last session, every time they reapportioned, the district got bigger, and we lost legislators to Clark County. That was very, very detrimental to the rural counties. Now, if term limits hold, the rural counties will really be wiped out because the legislators representing rural counties are all senior legislators, and they have strength. But if you change that, then Clark County will have most of the votes. For instance, it's going to hurt Reno because Senator Bill Raggio is probably the most effective legislator, and it'll wipe him out. I'm sure there's going to be a suit to try to throw that out, but whether it will be effective or not, I don't know.

*William J. Raggio (R-Washoe) was first elected to the Senate in 1972. The current legal limitation on the number of terms a legislator can serve will prohibit him from running for the Senate again in 2012.*

**Bennett:** From your experience, what are the qualities that make an effective legislator? Why are some more effective than others?

**Getto:** I think that, first of all, it's integrity. Honesty. Work ethics. Personality is very important, but not as important as honesty, your word. When I

first was elected, Senator Dodge told me one thing that's really important. He said, "You may dislike a legislator, but remember you're voting on issues and not people. Even though you dislike that person, just think of the issue, not the person." I tried to remember that for 24 years, except at the end. That's when I decided to retire, when Dina Titus and I got into it. I lost my temper, and I said, "It's time for me to quit."

**Bennett:** What issue did you get into with Senator Titus?

**Getto:** When I was on the prison committee, we had picked White Pine as the first site for the maximum prison. The committee had decided that, when the prison was built and there were 500 inmates in there, White Pine should have another district judge because Carson City had two district judges when they were that size. The prisoners just clutter the courts with their suits, so we had to have another district judge there. That was agreed by my committee, and even the money committee agreed with it. So the prison was built, and I sponsored a bill to give another judge to the district, which is White Pine and a couple of counties. I didn't think anything of it. I just sponsored it and sent it to Dina Titus who was Chairman of Judiciary. Well, it never came out. We were getting toward the end of the session, and I couldn't figure out what was happening. So

*Alice Costandina (Dina) Titus (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1988 to 2008. The first female Senate Minority Leader, she held that post for 14 years.*

*Senate Bill 413 (1991) increases the number of district judges for the Seventh Judicial District.*

finally I talked to Dina and asked why she hadn't had a hearing on that bill. She asked how I was going to vote on the Governor's hazardous waste bill or something. Of course, the Governor was a Democrat, and I said, "Dina, I didn't come in here to trade votes. This is not a political issue. You're holding it against me to get my vote. No way," and I walked out. The bill had to get out, so I talked to Ernie Adler. He was a Democrat and a good friend of mine, and I said to Ernie, "When she holds the next hearing, just move the bill out. I've got the votes." And he did. Of course, it came out over her head, so she didn't like that.

*Ernest J. Adler (D-Carson City) served in the Senate from 1990 to 1998.*

So then the bill passed the Senate, and again my friend Senator Jacobsen said, "I'm going to raise heck about that bill unless you have it that the judge not be appointed but be elected." In other words, the new judge would have to go in when they had an election. I said, "Oh, that's okay, but time's short. Let the Assembly do it, and all we have to do is ratify the amendment." So it passed and went to the Assembly, and—oh, gee, what was his name? He was a good friend. In fact, he was married to a girl from Fallon, and he was Chairman of the Judiciary Committee in the Assembly. I can't remember the name. Anyway, I went over to him, and I told him everything that happened. The bill was amended in the

*Robert M. Sader (D-Washoe) chaired the Assembly Committee on Judiciary from 1987 to 1993.*

Assembly to suit Jake, and it came back to the Senate the last day of the session. But I couldn't find the bill. I searched Finance, but Raggio didn't have it. I finally went to the Secretary—I knew her real well—and she said, “Dina Titus got it.” She was the chairman of the Judiciary Committee, so I went to her and asked what she was going to do with that bill. She said, “I was opposed to it at the beginning. It's not going to pass.” I was so mad that I turned around and walked away, and I said, “That bitch.” A lobbyist heard me and told her, and of course, that did kill the bill. That's when I decided to run over to the Assembly to the chairman of Judiciary. I told him to just take that amendment off, and it won't have to come back to the Senate. He did that, and it passed over her head. But I decided I'd lost my temper, and that was not good.

*Janice L. Thomas was Secretary of the Senate in 1991.*

**Bennett:** That was the first and last time you lost your temper?

**Getto:** There was one other time I lost my temper. My wife, Pat, was there beside me. We had a Republican Speaker, and I never thought of covering for him. Anyway, there was a bill that I had sponsored, and it passed. Then it came back, and this Republican, supposedly a friend of mine, put on an amendment that changed the bill, and I didn't catch it. Boy, I was almost furious. [chuckles] It was a good thing my wife

*There were three Republican Speakers during Getto's tenure: Howard McKissick, Jr., in 1969; Lawrence Jacobsen in 1971; and Byron (Bill) Bilyeu in 1985.*



was there: she calmed me down. That was a dirty trick. My fellow Republican didn't tell me or anything. If he'd said, "I'm going to do this"— Do you remember what it was like? Were you there when they had the long sessions? **[Bennett: Yes.]** Do you remember the last day of the session? There were so many amendments coming over. No way could the legislators read every amendment, and that's what it was. It was so hectic right at the end of the session, and I didn't catch the amendment, and the bill got amended and passed.

**Bennett:** Why do you think things were so hectic at the end of every session?

**Getto:** I think that maybe now it's better because then there was no time limit on the session and there was no limit on the number of bills, so everybody was relaxed towards the beginning of the session. We didn't really work hard, and then came the end of the session and here were all these bills coming. We had so many more because there was no limit to the number of bills and so many more amendments. It was really hectic. It was not a good policy—not good.

**Bennett:** How did your experience change—or did it change—when you moved from the Assembly to the Senate?

**Getto:** I'll tell you another story. I almost tied the record in Nevada legislative history, being a freshman five times. Of course, I had all this experience in the Assembly, and then I go to the Senate and I'm a freshman. The person who really I had a lot of respect for and helped me a great deal was Senator Jim Gibson. He was a very honest, wonderful man, and I worked with him. He helped me with all the issues. He was a great guy. I was sorry that he died. His wife was a diabetic, and she had lost part of her foot, so that session he brought her with him to Carson so he could watch her and take care of her. He was having a prostate problem, and he ignored it because he was taking care of his wife. When he got home from the Legislature to take care of it, it had metastasized, and six months later, I went to his funeral. I couldn't believe it—six months later! He was in good health, a strong man, and to die like that—sad.

**Bennett:** You worked with some extraordinary people, and you've mentioned a lot of different people who you worked with at the Legislature. Who would you say was the most colorful?

**Getto:** Well, Joe Dini was a very colorful legislator. He has and had the ability to bring people to cooperate. It's not like we have such partisanship now. He was very colorful. And Joe Viani, being an Italian, was a colorful guy. [laughter] "It's a gooda bill!" Oh, I used to laugh at him. I

*After eight years in the Assembly, Jim Gibson (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1966 until he died in 1988. He chaired the Senate Committee on Government Affairs, 1975-1981, and was Majority Leader, 1977-1985.*

can't remember a single bill that he sponsored that got defeated. He was that successful. Then another thing I remember—it's changed a lot, thank goodness—but in my first sessions, there was a lot of drinking. If you didn't go to the bar, you were left out. A lot of discussions were held at the bar. Jack's Corner?

**Bennett:** Jack's Bar.

**Getto:** Jack's Bar. Before that was the Melody Lane.

**Bennett:** Where was that?

**Getto:** Right where the Legislature sits now. It was a little bar, and it was owned by a husband and wife. He was the bartender, and she fixed the most wonderful hors d'oeuvres for the legislators. They all came in there every night after the session. You had to go to Melody Lane to find out what was going on. It became sort of a problem because the press got to writing a lot about the legislators drinking too much and going to the bar. When the Republicans got the majority in the Assembly, the Speaker told the Republicans, "The bars are out. No more bars." It changed the complexion of the Legislature completely. In my first session, we went to a bar right close to the Legislature. Somebody from Fallon used to own it. Even Carl Dodge used to go in there. You go in there and discuss all these issues. It was a good thing in one way because you were

relaxed. You didn't have all the lobbyists around, and you could discuss issues and get the feelings of other legislators. It was a good thing one way, but the fact was that it was a bar and the press grabbed it, and it hurt us.

**Bennett:** Did everybody go to the bar? For instance, you mentioned some of the women legislators you worked with, would they also go to the bar?

**Getto:** Some of them, yeah. They would. It wasn't getting drunk or anything. It was just a big social thing. You talked and had a drink and hors d'oeuvres—just a nice social function that exposed a lot of the legislation, and it was great. But they don't do that any more. [chuckles]

**Bennett:** Where did you stay when you were in Carson City?

**Getto:** My first session, I drove back and forth. I had a dairy, so I had to supervise the dairy, make sure my men were there and everything. The second session, I stayed with Joe Dini at the Carson City Inn. It was a nice motel. Then in the later sessions, I stayed in another motel—I can't remember the name of it—and stayed next to Assemblyman John Carpenter. He and I were good friends. But I got into a lot more activity and so forth, and I had to spend more time at the Legislature.

*John C. Carpenter (R-Elko)  
was first elected to the  
Assembly in 1986.*

**Bennett:** What was a regular day like at the Legislature?

**Getto:** It was very tiring. Sometimes, it was disappointing, especially if you were sponsoring a piece of legislation or you felt really strong about a piece of legislation, and then it got killed, so you felt really down about it. It was tiring because it was stressful. You knew that you wanted to get this bill passed or how you felt about this issue and so forth, and maybe it didn't go your way. Then, of course, there were a lot of discussions. There had to be a lot of communicating with legislators, with lobbyists, getting their ideas and so forth. So we were very active.

**Bennett:** Did you hear much from your constituents while you were in Carson City?

**Getto:** Yes, some. I especially stayed in contact with the papers. There was something I did that I don't think was ever done again. From 1970 to 1978, every weeknight I contacted the radio station in Fallon, and I interviewed legislators or I talked about issues. I did that every night for half an hour for five or six years. That was a tremendous way to communicate. Then I'd get telephone calls, and people would write to me. They liked to hear about what was going on. So that was one of the things that I was very proud of, and I didn't understand why Mike McGinness didn't follow up with that. He's one of the owners of the radio station, but he didn't do that. So I think that was one of my biggest

*Joseph M. (Mike) McGinness (R-Churchill) was elected to the Assembly to fill Getto's seat when he was elected to the Senate. When Getto retired, McGinness was elected to his Senate seat.*

assets—communicating with the people over the radio. They'd get it in Austin, Fernley, and Fallon, and it was really great. For instance, if somebody sponsored a piece of legislation that was controversial or had a lot of support, I'd get the sponsor and ask them questions.

I remember one night—gosh, what was his name? The names are sort of hard for me to remember. He was an Assemblyman from Las Vegas, and he was on the radio. That was his business. So this one night, I had contacted him to have him on the radio. In the meantime, I had prepared something for the radio, and I had an intern from Reno—she was a university girl—and I asked her to go to my office and get that piece of paper. In the meantime, I had this fellow on the radio. She didn't come back with it so I ran after her, trying to find where she was, and finally ran her down and got the piece of paper. I opened the door, and John says, "And here's Virgil Getto," and I didn't know what to say! [laughter]

**Bennett:** You have another story you'd like to tell?

**Getto:** Yes. Joe Dini has told this story, too. I think it was the 1987 session, and Pat came over with me for the last day of the session. There's always a lot of people coming; they have to notify the Governor; a lot of protocol has to be followed. I didn't know that Joe Dini had just

found out that he was a diabetic. He was tired, and he wasn't feeling good. It was just about midnight, and we were debating an issue about Yucca Mountain. There was a lot of floor debate, and finally, one of the Democrats got up and moved that the resolution be put on the Chief Clerk's desk until the next session. I don't know what got into me, and I poked Assemblyman Jim Banner and said, "Do you want to see some action? Get up and move that the motion be reconsidered to set it on the desk. Reconsider it." Joe Dini saw me do it. I was sitting in the front row, and he was up on the podium, and Mouryne Landing, now his wife, was the Clerk. He got so mad at me, he threw the gavel at me. Can you imagine?! [chuckles] It almost hit her in the head. Then he came rushing down from the podium, and I got up from my desk and met him half-way. Then I said, "Joe, what are we doing here?" But could you imagine that, throwing the gavel at me? [chuckles] And the place was packed with people. Aw, I felt so bad about that. That was not a funny thing to do, but it was just a spur-of-the-moment thought, and I thought we'd get into some more discussion.

*James J. Banner (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1989.*

*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:** Oh boy! You also worked with five different governors—three Democrats and two Republicans. What was that like?

**Getto:** I worked very well with O’Callaghan. He was a close friend of mine. Actually, in 1976, I had plans to enlarge my dairy business and move it forward, and I couldn’t do it when I was in the Legislature. I thought I’d just retire, and that would be it. So in 1976, I retired, and I worked on the farm, and I got the improvements I wanted to make pretty well finished. We had a man from Fallon who was elected Assemblyman, and I was visiting Governor O’Callaghan.

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

We had two foreign-exchange students who had come from Australia here at the house, and I asked them if they had met the Governor, and they said they hadn’t. So I called his office, and the secretary said, “Sorry, he’s booked up.” I felt really bad for the students, but a few minutes later the phone rings, and it’s Mike O’Callaghan. He said, “Virgil, if you bring those kids over at six o’clock, I’ll talk with them.” He spent an hour with them. It was wonderful.

*John Serpa (D-Churchill) won Getto’s Assembly seat when he decided not to run in 1976.*

I had not considered running for the Legislature at all any more, and Mike said, “Virgil, we need you back here.” He said, “I can work with you,” and he really encouraged me. I realized he would be in the background supporting me—he couldn’t come out—and I thought maybe I’d have a chance to get elected again. [chuckles] So I ran again and got elected. Governor O’Callaghan and I were



good friends. I got along with all the Governors. They were good people. Laxalt, of course, was my favorite. [**Bennett:** Why is that?] But he was only one term.

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

Because he was from an immigrant family. I'm from an immigrant family, so we had similar backgrounds. He was a conservative, but he was progressive as far as legislation. He was a great Governor. He went on to become the Senator, and he could have been Senator for years and years and years because he was that popular, but he had never really made a lot of money. In fact, the family owned the Ormsby House, and it went broke several times. I think he decided that he wanted to make some money, so he retired and became a lobbyist in Washington, DC. But I got along with him real good.

**Bennett:** What was the toughest campaign that you had?

**Getto:** Probably the hardest one was when I ran for the Senate. I had to campaign in Pahrump and Tonopah and Goldfield, and I didn't know those people at all, so that was the campaign that I was not sure I could win. But I won it. I was running against the County Commissioner from Pahrump, so in Pahrump and Tonopah and that area, she had their support. Of course, I had Fallon and White Pine County, and I don't know but Hawthorne was probably split.

But that was the one that scared me the most. It was my last one. [laughter]

**Bennett:** Why was that your last one?

**Getto:** There were two things. I told you that I decided because I had committed that I would never lose my temper and be objective and then came this thing with Dina Titus. The other one reason was because I was crushed under a truck years ago. Crushed my back and dislocated my hip. The doctor told me that if I stayed real active, my back will always hurt, but I probably wouldn't need surgery. My last session—with sitting all day long—I couldn't hardly walk. So I decided I can't do this. The doctor wanted to do surgery on me then, and I didn't want to do surgery, so I decided I'd retire. That plus Dina Titus helped me. [laughter]

**Bennett:** How did your legislative service affect your family?

**Getto:** Well, that caused the divorce with my first wife. I worked so hard when I was young, farming, that I was not home very often. I used to work 'til 10 or 11 o'clock at night, irrigating and farming and milking cows. So I wasn't with my family very much. The only regret I have is that I wasn't with my children. I was a conservative and a hard worker, and my wife was a good mother. She was a good mother to the children, but she was much more liberal

*Getto's first wife was Barbara Mason of Hazen, Nevada. They had four children: Michael, Andrea, David, and Marlea.*

than I was. She got into role-playing, and she eventually ended up at Scientology. There was nothing left between us, so we just went in our separate directions. We didn't have common interests any more, but I do commend her that she was a good mother. It's hard to live with somebody that you don't have common interests with and you don't respect any more and the love is gone, so there was a divorce, and it was kind of a bitter one. I don't see why I wasn't defeated at that time—with all of that bad publicity I had—but I won the election anyway. So that did affect my family.

**Bennett:** Did your children participate in your campaigns?

**Getto:** Not very much, no. In fact, I think that it sort of alienated them about politics, as far as I'm concerned. I think they had the feeling that I was trying to be the big guy or something. Mike, my son, is totally the opposite I am. He's a redneck and not a politician at all. The girls are both in California, and I don't think they're very active in politics.

**Bennett:** Had your parents been politically involved?

**Getto:** No. My parents were immigrants from Italy. I'll tell you a story about my parents. My dad was an old bachelor. He and my uncle came here to Reno, and then they worked in Tonopah. They had grown up on a little farm

and had farming blood in them, so before the dam was built, they knew this irrigation project was coming from those advertisements to come and buy water rights. So they came and bought land. They were across the river and on this farm. Just a small amount of it was in cultivation. They worked with horses and horse equipment to level the land. My parents were real hard workers. The one thing they stressed was honesty and work ethics. That was ingrained in my head. I'm thankful to them because they gave me such a background. And then I told you about Mr. Schank. He's the one who got me started being in leadership in school and national FFA.

**Bennett:** What are some of your fondest memories of being a legislator outside of the legislative session?

**Getto:** Again, I was just a farm boy, so you can picture this. I had never been in Las Vegas in the big casinos and everything. Governor Laxalt had the Governor's Ball, and it was a big affair there. Here I was in a tuxedo [chuckles] and my wife in a fancy dress, and we came out on the stage. They announced your name and where you were from, and then you walked down the steps and out through all the people. Can you imagine? Here I was just a farm boy! That was something! [chuckles] Governor Laxalt was such a great guy. That was kind of a highlight.

Later on, it didn't bother me, but it was something that I had not expected that first time. We had the Governor's Ball both in Reno and Las Vegas. That's not such a big thing any more.

**Bennett:** What sorts of legislative activities did you do between sessions? There were interim committees and constituents.

**Getto:** Oh, I was on a lot of committees. One was a nuclear waste committee. I served on that for four years—got to travel all over the United States and see nuclear plants and so forth. It was a wonderful, tremendous experience. Then I traveled with the prison study committee to probably six or seven different states to see their prisons. Then I was selected to go to Israel to view their alternative energy. Israel has no oil, hardly any gas, and they use solar heat. Every house has to have a solar heater on it. They're very conservative, and yet they get along. From going back there, Ormat was the company that was going to dig some wells in this area. In fact, the one in Stillwater is the one they dug; they have one on the Lovelock Highway; and they're a big company now. I was so impressed with what they in Israel could do without water. They didn't have the water that we have, and they didn't have oil. They had to import all their oil, like we import a lot, but they had to rely for all of it on importation.

*Getto served on the Nevada Legislature's Committee on High-Level Radioactive Waste, 1989-1990 and 1991-1992.*

So when I came back, I was really fired up to achieve that because we are so natural to have solar. Just think of the sun we have in Nevada. We have lots of geothermal. It took a long time. I sponsored a bill that gave a tax break to companies that put in geothermal. That helped them get started here at Stillwater, and now it's very successful because they—the company; can't think of the name of it—they're from Italy. They're the second largest maker of alternative energy—geothermal, sun, wind power—and they're going to build several more plants here in Nevada. So it's really a great thing, and we need it! We need to develop it. We've got sunlight galore! In Israel, every house has got a solar heater on it. Here, it costs 200 to 300 dollars a month to heat your house, and there, you heat it with solar. All the hot water is solar-heated. What we could do with that here. It's just expensive to install them, but what it would do! There're a lot of things that can happen in this country. Let me give you an example.

We have probably 20 big dairies with piles of manure you can't believe. They don't even know what to do with it. If they had a huge plant to take the gas from that manure, they could furnish the energy for the whole town of Fallon and all this area. The manure's going to waste, but it's just going to take the

investment to build the plant and get all these dairymen together to have a truck to haul the manure in. Then you have the fertilizer after you're through. It's got to come. Someday it will happen, but it's going to take an investment to build the first plant. Up to this point, the electrical companies—Sierra Pacific and the Las Vegas firm—have not been the leaders to develop alternative energy. They didn't even like to buy it. They passed a federal bill that if there's geothermal, they have to buy it. So Sierra Pacific has to buy the energy from the plant out in Stillwater, and they wouldn't even have done that if it hadn't been for federal legislation. But that's providing alternative energy, and it's from a renewable source. It's going to take time, but it'll happen.

**Bennett:** When were you in Israel?

**Getto:** Oh, gee, I can't remember. Probably 1989. I was really impressed with what they did with so little. They don't have a lot of water. They garden and water their plants and everything with drip systems, and they conserve the water to the utmost. Then they have the solar heat, and they also have some type of a big plant to make fertilizer. They had kind of a big plant lake, not very deep, and the water from the sun would get real hot. They had pipes running through this water, and they used it as a generating plant. They had to heat it to the

maximum again, but they still gained so much energy. All they had to do was cap it off, and they could run their power plants. Israel makes these big components of generators that generate electricity, and so they can just bring in a component. Like in Reno, they have a steam plant, and I think there's 10 or 12 of those, they just bring them in in units and set them one after another according to how much steam they have. So it's been a great thing. It's something that's going to grow. Like now, they're pushing all the alternative energy. Of course, Senator Harry Reid is pushing it, too. So that's good.

**Bennett:** So you were a little bit ahead of all that.

**Getto:** Yes, I was, and it took so long to catch up. I thought, boy, when I come back and give them a tax break, we'll encourage them. Just think how much sun there is in Nevada, and especially in the Las Vegas area. But, again, you're bucking the oil companies and the electrical companies. They have their own way of making electricity, and so they're not jumping on the bandwagon. They weren't. I think they are now.

**Bennett:** Rewinding quite a ways, why did you decide to run as a Republican?

**Getto:** Because I'm conservative. I grew up in a very conservative family. Can you imagine? My



parents were so poor. They had nothing when they came to this country. I didn't tell you that story about my mother.

My dad was an old bachelor, and he had not dated or anything. He just farmed, and he lived with his brother and his brother's wife in their house. He went back to Italy in 1920, and they gave a party for him. They had sort of picked out a prospective bride for him. [chuckles] Well, she was related some way, and he said, "No way!" He went into the kitchen, and my mother was helping in the kitchen, so they got to talking and became a little bit friendly. Dad said, "Well, if you ever get to the United States, why don't you write me a letter?" Mom stuck by that, and she saved every nickel to come to the United States. Finally, she was \$500 short, so she borrowed \$500 from her sister who lived in Indiana and came to Indiana through New York City. She was so pleased with New York, especially the dressmaking because she was a seamstress. She loved New York and thought, "Oh my God, if I get married, I'm going to go to Nevada!" So she came to Indiana and wrote my dad a letter. She really had some mixed feelings. She couldn't decide which way to go. So she flipped a coin—and Nevada won. [chuckles] Then she wrote to my dad; he sent for her; and they got married. One year later, I was born.

She didn't speak English. She was learning, but she didn't learn very fast. She learned to read and everything, but she didn't speak it. So when I started school, I couldn't speak very much English at all. But I learned real fast! I spoke Italian when I went to school, and I still speak Italian. I speak a dialect.

**Bennett:** Which dialect?

**Getto:** Piedmontese. It's in northern Italy next to France. I went to Italy two or three years ago. I'm a Rotarian, so I thought I'll go to the Rotary Club and bring them a flag and get their Rotary flag, and so I did that. They had a big celebration in the little town where my dad was born, and they have a queen of this big celebration. They had her as a guest, and then they had me as a guest. A lot of older people were Rotarians, so the President of the Rotary talked asked me to say a few words. So I got up and I spoke in Piedmontese—probably almost ten minutes. I told them about Fallon, about Nevada, about my being in the Legislature, and so forth. After the program, these older people came up and said how nice it was to hear me speak because they don't speak Piedmontese any more. One language is taught in Italy—no more dialects. So it is dying out, and just the older people can speak it. I can still talk Piedmontese fluently. It's been a great asset to me.

**Bennett:** Did it help you in the Legislature?

**Getto:** Oh, I don't know. I think it did. I would talk to Joe Dini. He can speak Italian. We would talk in Italian. I had visited the country several times, so I knew about Italy and Europe and that helped me, too. It gives you a broader background.

**Bennett:** What do you think Nevadans think of their Legislature?

**Getto:** I really don't know, but I don't think they think as highly of it now as when we were there because there's too much party fighting. Congress is the same way. I'm really disappointed in this party thing because they really don't do what's good for the people. It's like Bush— I don't support his program with the war right now, and I think our Legislature is similar. We have the Republicans and the Democrats. I understand the two-party system, but if they would think about what's good for the people, number one, and not what's good for the party. But that's the problem. There's such a discrepancy between the Republicans and the Democrats right now, and look what's happening.

**Bennett:** You don't think there was as much partisan bickering when you were there?

**Getto:** No. No. I told you that Joe Dini and I roomed together. He was the majority leader, and I was

*Republican George W. Bush was President of the United States from 2001 to 2009.*

the minority leader. Carl Dodge was a Republican, and Jim Gibson was a Democrat, and Mahlon Brown was a Democrat. They all got along, and they all worked for what was good for Nevada. They didn't have the bitter fighting at that time. I can't recall issues that dealt with parties, especially when Carl and Jim Gibson were the leaders. Carl was a great man. I have a lot of respect for him, and I do Jim Gibson, too. Bill Raggio is a very intelligent, strong legislator. He believes in what he believes in, and he's not going like this [holds index finger up] to see how the wind's blowing.

*B. Mahlon Brown (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1950 to 1976. He was Minority Leader for three regular sessions, President Pro Tempore for two, and Majority Leader for six.*

**Bennett:** You mentioned a lot of different legislators today and some different issues. Is there anything that we may have left out in talking about your time in the Legislature?

**Getto:** Oh, there were so many things. [laughter] There were just a lot of wonderful issues. Like I said, I feel so fortunate about my life because I gave to the community and served the state, but the experience I got from that! I've had a lot of tragedies and so forth, but I've had a wonderful life. I got to see so much of the world because I got *involved*. I went to Taiwan, to China, to Bangkok, to Singapore, and then Pat and I went to Australia and Italy. I've had such a wonderful experience, and I've tried to use that in my experience in the Legislature.

**Bennett:** We started out in the beginning talking about you being a farm boy walking into the Nevada Assembly in 1967. Thinking through all of your years in both the Assembly and the Senate, how had the Legislature changed in the period of time that you were there?

**Getto:** Well, as I said before, I think when we were in the old building, we were very close. It was close-knit, and it's become more formal. I don't think there's as much communication between the legislators, and that's why we have some of this party fighting. But when we were cooped up in that old building, you associated with everybody—the women and the men. We all became good friends. It was a workable unit. I think that the formality now and the partisanship is probably the biggest issue now. Other than that, I don't know.

**Bennett:** You have another story about Jake when he was Speaker?

**Getto:** Yes. He was my good friend and a great fellow legislator. I helped him get elected Speaker. In fact, he used to say—I don't know whether it was true or not—but he said, "Your one vote got me elected as Speaker." I was so proud of Jake. He was very conservative, you know, so his first day as Speaker he told the legislators that they must wear nice clothes. The men were to wear coats and ties, and the ladies would

wear nice dresses. The next morning, the women came wearing slacks, all of them. And he never could enforce it. They wore slacks! [laughter] He had to back down. It was so funny, though, because the next morning on the podium, he looks out at all them wearing slacks. Oh, gosh!

When I was appointed to the Senate, there were five Republicans—Jake, Raggio, Sue Wagner, Dean Rhoads, and myself. The Minority Leader had to get three votes to win—over half. Jake and Raggio were running for Minority Leader. Jake came to me, and I said, “Okay, Jake, you got me.” So I was the vote that got him to be Minority Leader of the Senate. He never forgot that, either. [laughter] I used to say, “Hey, do you remember—“ He was a kick.

**Bennett:** I do want to ask one follow-up question because you mentioned the women rebelling a little bit against the Speaker. You had mentioned that you were interested in women’s rights, which would be rather unusual for a Republican during that time period.

**Getto:** That’s right.

**Bennett:** Why was that?

**Getto:** I felt strongly about that. I felt that way not only about women’s rights but also equal rights. Did I tell you that I had never met a

*Jacobsen’s only session as Speaker was 1971 when he decreed that female legislators could not wear pantsuits or maxi-dresses in the Chambers. On the second day of session, the headline in one of the Reno newspapers read, “Stage Set for Women’s Fashion War in the Assembly.”*

*Sue Wagner (R-Reno) was in the Senate from 1980 to 1990. As Lt. Governor, she was the President of the Senate in 1991 and 1993.*

black? There was only one black in the Nevada Legislature when I was elected. I didn't know any black people. My first session in the Assembly, we had a black Assemblyman, Woodrow Wilson, and he was a great guy. I got to know him so well, and he totally educated me about the black people. And so now I'm not prejudiced to any of them. Being an Italian, I remember when—talk about a disparaging thing—when I was a little kid, they called me a wop. [laughter] It doesn't bother me now if they call me whatever. I don't care. I am who I am.

But Woodrow passed away. That's what really bothers me is so many of my fellow legislators and classmates have all passed away. I feel really lucky that I'm still here. [chuckles] Then John Marvel's not very well, either. Dean Rhoads could be in his last term, too, because if they don't get the term limits changed, that'll end him. I served all the time Dean Rhoads was there. We went to Washington, D.C., many times together, so I got to know him real well. He's kind of a redneck cowboy. [laughter] But he was very effective and is a good legislator. And Joe Dini. Oh, the Schofields were in the Assembly, and I don't have a very good impression of them.

**Bennett:** Why not?

*The first African-American elected to the Nevada Legislature, Woodrow Wilson (R-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1972. He passed away in 1999.*

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

*Dean A. Rhoads (R-Tuscarora) served in the Assembly from 1976 to 1982 and began serving in the Senate in 1984. The current legal limitation on the number of terms a legislator can serve will prohibit him from running for the Senate again in 2012.*

**Getto:** They were— I'd better not say it.

**Bennett:** Okay.

**Getto:** Jack's still around. He's a member of the Board of Regents. They're Mormons, but they didn't live their faith. That's what I want to say.

**Bennett:** Fair enough. Thank you.

**Getto:** Okay.

*Jack L. Schofield (D-Clark) was in the Assembly, 1970-1974, and the Senate, 1974-1978. He was elected to the University of Nevada Board of Regents in 2002. James W. Schofield (D-Clark) was in the Assembly, 1974-1978 and 1980-1990. He passed away in 1993.*



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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.

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.

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