



# **Nevada Legislature Oral History Project**

**ROBERT E. PRICE**  
Democrat

**Assembly, 1974 – 2002**

**APRIL 28, 2008**  
**SPARKS, 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.



**Robert E. Price**  
**April 28, 2008**

## **ROBERT E. "BOB" PRICE**

Robert E. Price, known to all as Bob, was elected to the Assembly in 1974 and served in that house until 2002, a legislative career comprising 14 Regular and five Special Sessions. During his tenure, he chaired the Assembly Committees on Constitutional Amendments; Economic Development, Tourism and Mining; Economic Development, Small Business and Tourism; and Transportation. The Clark County Democrat was best-known for his long tenure as Chairman of the Assembly Committee on Taxation and as a member of the Assembly Committee on Ways and Means. He represented portions of North Las Vegas.

Mr. Price was interviewed at his home in Sparks on April 28, 2008, at about 2 p.m. In this interview, Mr. Price answered a variety of questions about topics such as his campaigns for office, issues of importance to him and to Nevada, his personal perspectives about the people in the Nevada legislative process, and the relationship between his legislative service and personal life. In particular, he reminisces about his close relationships with the staff of the Legislative Counsel Bureau and his success in securing extra pay for their hard work. Assemblyman Price speaks fondly of many of the people with whom he served, especially Assemblyman (later Senator) Lawrence Jacobsen (R-Douglas), Assemblyman Marvin Sedway (D-Clark), Assemblyman Joe Dini (D-Lyon), and Governor Richard Bryan (D).

A labor union member and employee of the Nevada Test Site, Mr. Price offers his perspective on the close-knit political network of his day. Mr. Price notes his interest in specialty legislation, such as the designation of the Extraterrestrial Highway, as well as critical issues of the day such as the Equal Rights Amendment, sales and use taxes, and gaming regulation. He enjoyed introducing members of the Legislature and the media to the world of Nevada's brothels and explaining how these businesses are regulated for the benefit of the taxpayers. His tours of the Mustang Ranch near Reno became the stuff of legislative legend.

Known for his guitar playing in the final days of legislative sessions, Mr. Price tells of his love for music and his appearances on Las Vegas television. He also describes the heart attack he suffered while traveling on legislative business and his dedication to national organizations such as the National Conference of State Legislatures. The Assemblyman believes that national organizations and the network they provide contributed greatly to his career.

Born in 1936 in DeLand, Florida, Mr. Price received education as an electrician through the I.B.E.W. Apprenticeship Program. Additional education included Santa Monica Community College, Community College of Southern Nevada, Western Nevada Community College, and the Real Estate Careers Institute. He was long active in the National Conference of State Legislatures and attended several National Democratic Conventions. His honors include various recognitions for his work in support of libraries, labor, ethics reform, and consumer protection. A constitutional history buff, the Assemblyman served on a number of state board and commissions, including Governor Robert List's Family Policy

Committee, the State Health Coordinating Council, Nevada's 125-Year Celebration Committee, and the Nevada Committee on the Bicentennial of the United States Constitution.

Mr. Price recalls his years of legislative service with great fondness, and credits his wife, Nancy Bogan Price, for her support of his political career as well as her own dedication to serving the people of Nevada in a variety of elected and appointed positions. The couple retired to Sparks after Mr. Price was defeated in a re-election bid in 2002. Together, the Prices have six children.

Dale Erquiaga  
March 2009

**Dale Erquiaga:** Good afternoon, Mr. Price.

**Bob Price:** Oh, good afternoon, Dale.

**Erquiaga:** I want to take you back in time a little bit. Think back to January 20, 1975, the day you were first sworn in at the Legislature. According to the newspaper, it was a warm day, and it was so nice that they did many of the opening-session activities outside. Do you remember that?

**Price:** Yes, as a matter of fact.

**Erquiaga:** What was that like to show up for that session?

**Price:** It was really great. Naturally, there were a lot of people who showed up, and we started learning some things about the history of the Legislature, the Legislative Building, and so forth. Now, this was actually before the current Legislative Building was finished yet; they were working on it. So I started out in the original legislative building, which was really, really neat. I consider that a nice part of history that we had in those days, and very special. I served there for the first term of my legislative sessions, and then by the time the next term came around, why, we were able to move into the new building, so that was very special.

**Erquiaga:** You had been in Las Vegas for a long time, but you're not from Nevada originally. Where did you come from?



**Price:** I was born in Deland, Florida, which is a nice little town, in Velusha County, and my mom was born not too far from there. She was actually a Cherokee Indian, and she was born on the Cherokee Reservation there. That's kind of a nice little thing, you know, that I appreciate with the history and so forth. My father was a construction electrician, as I ended up being, and he was working in the area at the time. I'm not sure how they met, but they eventually got married, and so that's where I started out from. I get back there every once in a while. As a matter of fact, we have a time-share about 15 miles from there, so we go down every year or so to Florida and visit, stay for a couple of weeks, and see friends. Of course we have many friends there now.

**Erquiaga:** So how does an electrician end up running for the Legislature? Why did you run for public office?

**Price:** It was kind of interesting, I think. It turned out that at that point in time for many years, I lived in a very political area called Granada Circle. It's an old-time street that, as its name indicates, is a circle in the North Las Vegas area, and it was the political street of North Las Vegas. Over a period of time we had, I believe, four Assemblymen, a Senator, the mayor, a city councilman, and various people that were involved in politics living on that particular

street, and that kind of got me started. My former wife, Brenda, was, in fact, in politics before I was. She was a city councilman there, and she was also a member of the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, which was a big deal. She was very involved in politics and so forth, so that kind of helped me get a feel for things and get involved and enjoy it also. So that was kind of how I started. I was there, and had many friends who were involved in politics.

*Brenda Price was a member of the North Las Vegas City Council in the 1960s.*

**Erquiaga:** What was your first campaign like?

**Price:** It was very nice. My opponent was a very nice lady—Ruby Duncan, who was involved in politics. She was a very nice lady. Tom Collins, as you know, is a county commissioner and a former state legislator, and his wife was my opponent in a race. She and Nancy, my current wife (although she wasn't at this time), were very good friends, so she called Nancy one day and asked her if she would do some research for her. She wanted Nancy to contact various Republicans and talk to them about me and find out what my problems were, so she could use them in the race. Well, as Nancy likes to indicate, she talked to many Republican friends, and the answer that she often got was, "I disagree with his politics on this item and that item and so forth, but he seems like a very nice guy." She said she decided that she

*In 1972, community activist Ruby Duncan founded Operation Life, a nonprofit development corporation focused on reform for West Las Vegas.*

*Clarence W. (Tom) Collins, Jr., (D-Clark) served in the Assembly (1992-1994 and 1996-2004) and has been a Clark County Commissioner since 2005. He has been married to Kathy for over 40 years.*

thought it was more important to find a nice guy to get married to than to worry about the politics. So she made sure that we met, and we started dating, and we ended up getting married. It worked out very nicely, as a matter of fact. We've been married for 25 years now—no, 27.

**Erquiaga:** Nevada was smaller in those days.

**Price:** Yes, it was. It definitely was.

**Erquiaga:** That was a pretty small political circle.

**Price:** That was a small political circle in those days. Nancy had lived here in the Reno area and had had two sons and a grandson here, but at that point in time, I had never lived up here and had only visited once or twice, so it was kind of new to me. But it worked out quite nicely. I had many friends, and so when I ran and got elected, fortunately, and we came up here, why it was quite an experience because I had not spent too much time in the state capital. But it really is a small world. For example, the young man that lived next door to me when he was growing up there on Granada Circle eventually went on and ran for office, and I always figured maybe it was from the influence that I gave him. He became elected to the state legislature, to the Senate, and we've been good friends over the years for that reason.

**Erquiaga:** Who was that, Bob? Do you remember his name?

**Price:** Yes, I do. Warren Hardy.

**Erquiaga:** So when you got to Carson City, Keith Ashworth was the Speaker, right?

**Price:** Yes, yes.

**Erquiaga:** What was Keith like?

**Price:** Very nice, very good. I got along very well with Keith. He was good. They were quite good with freshmen legislators and trying to do everything they could to get you oriented. So I was very fortunate that way. The Legislature was, and I believe it still is, very good about having orientation sessions to teach the new people the procedures and everything for coming in, and so that worked out real good for me, too.

**Erquiaga:** You worked with the NCSL [National Conference of State Legislatures] a lot while you were a legislator. Was that helpful for new members?

**Price:** It was very helpful because, as you know, most people coming in, they know how to get elected and they know the politics, but they haven't necessarily learned all of the procedures that you need to know about doing business, like *Robert's Rules of Order* and those types of things. Our people, I have to say, were and still

*Warren B. Hardy II (R-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1990 to 1992 and has been in the Senate since 2002.*

*Keith Ashworth (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 1976 and in the Senate from 1976 to 1984. He passed away in 1996.*

are very hard workers. They put in many, many hours. In those days, most of the time, they didn't get anything for all the extra hours they worked over the years. So finally one year I put in a bill and it passed, and people are still very appreciative talking about it. What it does is gives staff an extra week, like a vacation, after the session. They were kind enough to generally refer to it as "Price Days."

*In 1981, Price introduced A.C.R. 61, which provided administrative leave to LCB employees after the session. During the remainder of his tenure, he sponsored similar resolutions.*

**Erquiaga:** Do you remember some of the people that you worked with in staff? You were there a long time.

**Price:** Genie Ohrenschall's husband, Frank Daykin, was there when I started, and he is just probably one of the most knowledgeable people that you'll ever run into on the operation of legislatures and procedure and everything. He's just incredible. And our state historian, Guy Rocha. Guy was there, and he was just a very knowledgeable and helpful person, too, that helped me over the years with everything.

*Genie Ohrenschall (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1994 to 2006. In 2003, she married Frank Daykin who was the Legislature's Legal Counsel from 1977 to 1985.*

**Erquiaga:** John Crossley was the head of LCB for a while with you. Do you remember him?

*Guy Louis Rocha was Nevada's State Archivist for 28 years until his retirement in 2009.*

**Price:** Yes. John was there, yes. I sure do. We were always lucky we had such good people working for us, and I guess to get to that position they had to be people who were interested and wanted to help and make things better.

*LCB Director from 1990 to 1993, John R. Crossley began with LCB's Audit Division in 1970.*

**Erquiaga:** Let me ask you about the Governors. You served with Governor O’Callaghan, Governor List, [**Price:** Yes.] Governor Bryan, Governor Miller, [**Price:** Yes.] and Governor Guinn.

**Price:** They were all very good.

**Erquiaga:** Who was your favorite?

**Price:** You know, I hesitate to talk about a favorite. They all were excellent Governors and good friends, as it turned out. But I would say this: When Dick Bryan was Governor, he did do me a big favor. Two days before our wedding, Dick announced in the newspapers that he was calling a special session of the Legislature for the same day as our wedding day, so I got on the phone and called him. He knew Nancy, of course, because we’d been dating for a long time and were friends. I said, “Dick, Nancy and I are getting married that day. You can’t have a special session of the Legislature.” He said, “Oh, no problem.” So he set the special session back two days, and then he and Bonnie came to the wedding when Nancy and I got married. We got married, and then the next day, we went to a special session of the Legislature for our honeymoon.

**Erquiaga:** Now was that the special session that dealt with banking?

**Price:** Yes. It only went on for two or three days as I recall, and then after it was over, we said,

*Governor from 1983 to 1989, Richard H. Bryan (D) called one Special Session during his tenure. It took place March 29 through 30, 1984.*

“Well, why don’t we do something else,” so we went to San Francisco and spent a few days in the San Francisco area enjoying our honeymoon.

**Erquiaga:** You became a committee chair fairly quickly in your career. You chaired Taxation for a long time. Tell me about that.

**Price:** Taxation had, of course, many interesting bills. We took the tax off of food. I was really happy about that. I was Chairman when we did away with that.

*The sale of food was exempted from the Sales and Tax Use Act in 1979.*

**Erquiaga:** So tell me about the tax shift. Why the move from property tax to sales tax, while exempting food, right?

*In 1981, the Legislature shifted the State from a reliance on property taxes to sales taxes.*

**Price:** Well, yes. The idea of property tax was fairly controversial. Now there were actions in various states across the country dealing with property tax, and property tax, while it’s certainly income that you know is going to be there, is not a popular tax with the citizenry. So that was one reason that we were trying to look for other options that we might be able to use in lieu of the property tax to the extent that we could. That was how that kind of came about during that period of time.

**Erquiaga:** How is it different being a committee chairman from being just a member of the body?

**Price:** As a chairman, you end up being involved in more meetings and information coming in, and with people who are interested. Lobbyists, for example, and citizens' groups, and so forth will contact the chairman on all kinds of things. As a matter of fact, I would ask people not to call after 11 o'clock at night because you get calls at all hours of the day looking for ideas and wanting to lobby or influence you or so forth. Taxation, as a committee, had a lot of interesting subject matters. I remember one that kind of stood out for a long time: We had a legislator, and I do not remember his name, who got elected from the Las Vegas area. He was very religious, a very nice person, and I think it might have been his first bill that he introduced was to eliminate brothels in Nevada. So the bill was referred to Taxation, my committee.

Anyhow, I started getting as much information as I could with research on taxation. On the first day that we had the hearing, there were quite a few people who showed up for it. This gentleman came in to testify, and he was kind of noticeable right away because he came in and sat down with the audience, and he had two beautiful young ladies, one on each arm. He sat there waiting for his turn to testify. It turned out that his name was Joe Conforte, and he owned the Mustang Ranch about 30



miles out of town, so he testified in opposition to the bill. One of the things that he thought might be helpful would be for the legislators to learn a little more first-hand about the ranch. So he invited all of the legislators to come out to the Mustang and spend a weekend, and he would show them and teach them everything that he could about the ranch, and they would be able to see it live and know about it. So he put the word out. It turned out that Senator Bill Raggio, who was by far one of our most influential Senators, even back in those days, was a former district attorney and had had a major battle with Joe Conforte. He put the word out that he didn't want anyone to go on the trip. So as it turned out most of the legislators decided that they didn't want to go even though Joe was furnishing a bus and taking people out. I felt that we should go, and we shouldn't let a fight from past years obstruct our true knowledge or learning what we could about any type of operation. I don't remember how many we had then, but now we actually have about 30 brothels in Nevada.

When we got ready to go out, there were just a handful—seven, eight, or nine—of us who ended up taking the bus and going out to the Mustang Ranch. By the time that came down, I knew there were going to be very few people, so I started inviting other political

*A Senator since 1972, William J. Raggio (R-Washoe) was Washoe County District Attorney from 1958 to 1970.*

people who might be interested, like members of political groups, both male and female. So when we went, there were just a few of us legislators plus some other people. I might add that my wife [laughter] made sure she was with me, and we went out and spent an evening. It turned out to be quite interesting, as a matter of fact. Through the brothel tax, Mustang Ranch provided one-third of Storey County's budget. Just from that one business, one-third of the county's budget! That was really surprising to everybody. So anyhow, we had the hearings, and Shirley Colletti came. She was a County Commissioner in Storey County at that point in time, but she also was manager of the brothels and was extremely interesting.

But the next day, the *Nevada Appeal*, the Carson City newspaper, came out with the story that said all of the legislators had been invited to go on the trip, but only seven or nine of us went, so it was obvious that all the rest of them knew everything there was to know about the Mustang Ranch. [laughter] It was really cute. I loved it. When I found out that the legislators weren't going, I started inviting other political people and groups, and it turned out that the mother of the reporter who did the story was one of the ladies who went with us. She called him and chewed him out and said, "Hey, did you know that I was on the trip,

too?” It was really quite interesting and kind of a fun thing to do.

**Erquiaga:** If I recall, you sponsored that tour for several sessions after Joe Conforte was gone.

**Price:** Yes.

**Erquiaga:** Do you remember when it ended?

**Price:** The last time I was at the new Mustang Ranch was in February a couple of years ago. Jessi Winchester, who’s a very long-time friend, has written several books and was at one time a working-girl herself. Her husband Mike, by the way, was—just a small world we have in Nevada—my apprentice electrician in Las Vegas when he was a kid. [laughter] She’s a very good friend, and they had a birthday party for me out at the new Mustang. I was able to invite friends to come in, including from out of state, and they put on a birthday party for me. It was really nice and a lot of fun. I got to meet a very nice lady, and I can’t think of her name now, who was the madam that runs it. It really was quite interesting. But I don’t think I could afford their business. There were some customers that spent up to \$10,000—and maybe more—to come out and spend a few days there and take advantage of all the business that they have. They have a really nice restaurant and everything; it’s a great place.

*Jessi Winchester came in second in the 1996 Democratic primary for U.S. House District No. 2 and third in the 1998 Republican primary for Lt. Governor.*

Interestingly enough, a few years ago, they had come into the old Mustang Ranch with helicopters and taken all of the old buildings and everything, and moved them out to this location. They're like a historical type of situation now, and I went in and looked, and I'd say, "Oh, I remember that bed and I remember that table and this and that and the other." It's kind of neat. You'll notice that a lot of our cabs here in the Reno area advertise The Mustang Ranch with the things on the top of the cars. When we were out there, I noticed there were all kinds of cabs there all the time, and I thought, "Holy mackerel, I wonder how much it costs to come out here." I came to find out, interesting enough, that there naturally are citizens who take a cab and go out there, but the main business for the cabs is for the girls coming to work every day. They take the girls out there. I don't know what they charge them, but they take the girls out, and they will stay there for the other girls that are getting off shift and what have you. They'll bring them back home. It's one of those interesting things.

**Erquiaga:** I'm going to ask you to change gears a little bit here and tell me about your friend here on this sign [gestures], this picture of an alien. This is one of the things that you're probably most well-known for during your time at the Legislature.

**Price:** When I was at the Legislature, aliens had been an interest of mine just on the side. I spent a lot of years working at the Nevada Test Site. I never worked back in the tunnel, but some of my electrician friends who did said that there were aliens back there. As you know, the first ones that allegedly landed were in Roswell, New Mexico. The story was that some of them had been brought to Nevada to at the Nevada Test Site in the flats and were kept in a tunnel back under the mountain. I honestly don't know whether they were or not, but I had electricians who were working in the area tell me that they were there, and others said, "Naw, they were just saying that." I really don't know. But anyhow, I was working there, so I'd always had a little bit of an interest in the subject matter of the aliens. So one year, and I can't quite remember what year it was, someone mentioned that we ought to consider naming the highway for the extraterrestrials. I said, "Oh, boy, that really sounds good," so I got the bill, and we did, in fact, do that. We named the highway. The main little town on the highway is Rachel, Nevada, which, in the old days when I worked at the Nevada Test Site, was considered kind of the back door to the Test Site because there're quite a few people who live in Rachel. They could go into one side of the

Nevada Test Site, and particularly if they were working there.

So we held hearings, and we did end up naming it the Extraterrestrial Highway. They were making a movie at the time—*Independence Day*—and on the day that we dedicated the highway out at Rachel, our little activity there got to be a part of the movie. It turned out, according to the folks at the Little A’Le’Inn, which is the restaurant and motel there, that their business greatly increased after we named the highway because people started coming out. I was told that business went up almost three times as much as before from people driving the highway. Now when you look at a lot of Nevada maps, Highway 375 actually has written along it, “Extraterrestrial Highway.” It has been recognized all over, and it’s really kind of a special little thing.

*Measures designating the Extraterrestrial Highway were usually bottled up in Senate Transportation. Governor Bob Miller bypassed the Legislature and designated State Highway 375 as the Extraterrestrial Highway in 1996. At the ceremony, Twentieth Century Fox announced the upcoming release of **Independence Day**.*

**Erquiaga:** Didn’t it take a couple sessions to pass that bill?

**Price:** Yes, right, yes.

**Erquiaga:** It was always held up in Senate Transportation.

**Price:** Yeah, yeah.

**Erquiaga:** Do you remember how it finally got loose?

**Price:** My first guess would be that the people didn’t think it was worth spending the time and the effort on it. Actually, the Lieutenant Governor

was helpful at that time because he had brought the subject up.

**Erquiaga:** Lonnie Hammergren?

**Price:** Lonnie Hammergren. He was very helpful in getting it going, too. I just think it was a matter of people thinking, “Why, who wants to spend the time and the effort to print up the bill?” But it’s interesting that individual companies, private companies, started putting up signs. Of course, a lot of them had been stolen. People put up great signs—green signs with an alien on it that said, “Extraterrestrial Highway.” People actually stole them and, I guess, took them off somewhere for whatever reason. It was really quite interesting.

**Erquiaga:** There was a very colorful and kind gentleman named Merlin who was at the Legislature a lot. I know you were always very gracious to him on this issue. Do you want to talk about him?

**Price:** Merlin was a very special young man. And I hate to say it, but I can’t immediately think of his real name.

**Erquiaga:** I don’t know if I ever heard it.

**Price:** But he did, in fact, go by “Merlin.” He was very interested in extraterrestrials, and he lived out towards Pahrump. For some reason, he ended up being killed.

*Republican Lonnie Hammergren was Lt. Governor from 1995 to 1999.*

*Ambassador Merlyn Merlin II was a registered lobbyist in the 1990s. His otherworldly clients included the Planet Venus. Merlin, whose legal name was David V. Solomom, died in 2001.*

I let him share my office because he had quite a bit of stuff. He was a very nice and well-liked young man—just a little bit of a character. In those days, I had the largest office in the new Legislative Building; I had three separate rooms. From the main room, where I kept my desk and all my stuff, I could look out over the front of the building and so forth. I used to keep all of his personal stuff and everything in there, and anyhow, it was just one of those unfortunate things that happens from time to time.

**Erquiaga:** I also remember you playing the guitar at the Legislature at the end of every session.

**Price:** Oh, yes, at the end of the session. As we got down to the final days, we would take an action, vote on something, and then we had to wait for it to get printed and come back because you needed to have the printed copy before taking the actual vote on things. We would end up having a lot of time when we were just sitting around waiting. For many years, I have been interested in country music and had my own country music show in Las Vegas for quite a few years.

**Erquiaga:** What was the name of the show?

**Price:** It was called “Price and the Gambling Ranch Hands,” and it was called “Western Jubilee.” I have to tell you just a little story right here. One



day here in Reno, Nancy and I got into an elevator—I don't remember just where we were going—and there was a young lady and a little older lady, her mother, I guess, in the elevator. The younger woman, who was maybe 25 or 30, said, "Aren't you Bob Price?" I said, "Oh, yes." I thought that she was going to ask me something about politics. And she said, "When I was a little girl, you had a show in Las Vegas called 'Western Jubilee,' and when I was a kid, my mother used to make me watch it every Saturday." [laughter] It was so cute, but I couldn't believe it. I'm not sure I would have even remembered the name of the show if she hadn't said it.

**Erquiaga:** So you played the guitar at the Legislature?

**Price:** Yes. I played the guitar. My father was a guitar-player, and in fact, I have a very historic and very expensive guitar that I have going back to my father's time. When World War II started, we were living in San Antonio, Texas, and my dad was not in the military. He was a construction electrician, and he was working at what is Brooks Field, which was a big military base at the time. On the very next day after the war started, they shipped him to where the Japanese attacked us, Pearl Harbor. He took his guitar with him. When he came home after the war, he had this guitar, and he had put these stickers of all kinds of dancing girls and

Hawaiian girls all over it. It's a Martin guitar, which is a very expensive one. In fact, I was once told at a dealership that it probably is worth several thousand dollars because they have the serial numbers, and they can tell how old they are and what kind of shape they're in. Of course, this one is special because it has all this stuff on it. I learned to play from my dad, and so that's kind of what got me started playing the guitar.

**Erquiaga:** You were obviously very interested in the people at the Legislature and its history. What was your favorite part of being in the Assembly?

**Price:** In addition to the mechanical work I was doing, learning about the bills and everything, I was fortunate that I was appointed to various national committees. At certain times, mostly when the Legislature was not in session, I was able to go to various meetings around the country. I belonged to the National Conference of State Legislatures for many years. I was on the Council of State Governments and chaired a committee. So I was able to go to meetings and meet with other legislators and learn how they did various types of business in their legislatures. It was something that I really enjoyed. It was really educational.

**Erquiaga:** I remember that you had an interest in ballot questions, and you chaired the Assembly Committee on Constitutional Amendments. How did an electrician learn about constitutional law and that part of the Legislature's work?

**Price:** Part of that came from the fact that I was business manager for the Electrician's Union in Las Vegas for a number of years—the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers, Local 357. It was very involved in politics. I believe we had five electricians over a period of time who were legislators in Nevada, and I always thought that was real good. At any rate, as the business manager, which is the main person that runs the thing, I learned procedures. We had one or two meetings a month, and I had to know how to make motions to do this, that, or the other. Within any organization, whether it's a union or what have you, people have their differences of opinions, and so it gives you a chance to learn the procedural thing. That's how I became interested.

**Erquiaga:** That's quite a change. This might be a good time to tell me the story about your parking space.

**Price:** This is one of the cute little incidents I remember from the old days. I don't know if they are doing the same thing now or not, but we had our parking spaces assigned to us.

Generally, the person with the most seniority would have his choice and so forth. So I had seniority, if I remember right, just ahead of Marvin, one of our legislators who was very nice, very successful. I forget exactly what business he was in, but his name was Marvin Sedway, and Marvin drove about the most expensive automobile that you could get at the time. It was really nice. And I was driving my wonderful—I loved it and wish I still had it—beat-up, old 1955 yellow Ford, and its engine was bad. It made all kinds of noise, but even with whatever was wrong with it, I used to drive it back and forth from Vegas to the Legislature. One of the newspapers—or maybe it was on television; I don't remember—but one way or the other, somebody did a story about this really weird thing because Marvin Sedway had this very expensive car that he had to park at one location and Price had his 1955 beat-up, noisy old Ford that he was allowed to park in a better spot. [laughter] They thought that was a little weird. They did the story, and it was really funny. I wanted to keep that car, but when it finally broke down and quit running, somebody took it, and they were going to try and make a display somewhere or an exhibit. I don't know what actually happened to it, but they were talking about doing that because they

*Marvin M. Sedway (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1982 until his death in 1990. The longtime Chairman of Assembly Ways and Means was an optometrist.*

thought it was funny that some legislator would drive that thing for all those years.

**Erquiaga:** So what other legislators do you want to talk about from your time there?

**Price:** I have to say, I have many friends that I just thought the world of, but one especially stands out in my mind, and it was Lawrence Jacobsen from the Minden-Gardnerville area. I don't know anyone who didn't think the world of Jake. He was very nice, very knowledgeable. Two or three years ago, Jake died from a heart attack, if I remember right, and they had very special services for him. On that particular day, we all gathered at a special location—a park of sorts—and spent most of the day listening to various people from all over getting up and talking about his history and things that he did. It was even suggested—and I would have supported the idea to any extent that I could—that they wanted to change the name of the county to Jacobsen County, which I thought would be great. But that never came about. Jake was very special.

Over the years, I had many friends and people that I dealt with that were just very knowledgeable and good. As it turns out, I was the second-longest serving member of the Assembly with 29 years, Joe Dini, I believe, had two or three years more than I did. He was

*Lawrence E. (Jake) Jacobsen (R-Douglas) served in the Assembly from 1962 to 1978 and in the Senate from 1978 to 2002. The longest-serving legislator in Nevada history passed away in 2006.*

Speaker, of course, for many years. He was just a very good friend and a very special person, too. He eventually married the lady who was our Chief Clerk, and they have been married for quite a few years now. Many years. Anyhow, over the years, there were just many, many good friends.

*Joseph E. Dini, Jr., (D-Lyon) served in the Assembly from 1966 to 2002. He was Speaker a record eight regular sessions and named Speaker Emeritus in 2001. Mouryne Landing was the Assembly Chief Clerk from 1973 to 1995. They married in 1995.*

**Erquiaga:** Now when you first got to the Legislature, the Speaker's job would change almost every session [**Price:** Yes], and then Mr. Dini became the Speaker, and he was *the* Speaker.

**Price:** He was *the* Speaker, yes.

**Erquiaga:** What was the change?

**Price:** For one thing, there was just an overall change in the operation, and people began to realize how important it was to have someone who knew what they were doing, who had the experience. I believe that was happening in some other states also.

**Erquiaga:** You would have to be the prime example of a citizen legislator—a union guy who worked throughout your service. How did that aspect of legislative service change in the 29 years you were there, or did it?

**Price:** I believe that over the years we've done a lot more training and being involved in national organizations. When I started, we did not participate in any of the national organizations

or see much about what was going on in other states. That is not the case now, and so I think one of the big changes is there's a lot more opportunity to get ideas and see what's happening in this state and that state and trying to gain from their knowledge and experience also.

**Erquiaga:** Tell me about lobbyists. You served with a lot of different lobbyists. Who do you remember?

**Price:** Many lobbyists come to mind. Jim Joyce was probably the first long-time friend and influential lobbyist for many years in the Legislature. His daughter became involved in the legislative process in Washington, D.C., and she has a national television show called *Eye on Washington*. Marilee Joyce is her name—a very, very nice young lady. She has a weekly show and it deals not only with the Nevada Legislature but also with legislatures in other parts of the country. Her show looks at subject matters that are happening in Washington that will affect the various states. In our case, a lot of it has had to do with the Nevada Test Site and whether we should store the waste on the Nevada Test Site and so forth.

Harvey Whittemore is another lobbyist who was very influential in his day. I would consider myself friends with him and helped on many different things over the years. The

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

*Reno attorney Harvey Whittemore has been a legislative advocate since 1978.*

lobbyists are very important. With the Nevada Legislature, there is so much out there to help train organizations and regular citizens who come into the Legislature. I think we get a lot of citizen input now, too, that is important.

**Erquiaga:** You did a lot of work on women's issues.  
[Price: Yes] Tell me about that.

**Price:** I had been very opposed to issues that limit women's rights because of the organizations that I'd worked with and also having been married to a politician. There was a time when the general mentality of the average citizen was that men would make better legislators and be more involved than women were. I thought that just didn't fit in with our time now, so that's how I got involved in that whole subject matter. Of course, now it's very extreme in the other way. As a matter of fact, I think in some cases women in the Legislature and in political positions around the country hold more positions than guys do. It's turned around very actively.

**Erquiaga:** When did your wife Nancy run for office? Do you remember?

**Price:** Yes. As I said, her first involvement was helping her good friend run against me. She became quite interested, and then she ended up running and being elected as a University Regent and was very involved. When we got



married, she was a Republican in her politics and so forth. Eventually through the activity of one of our very involved and very successful politicians, she ended up changing and becoming a Democrat. And I have to give my thanks to George W. Bush for that. He helped her change her mind and decide she should become a Democrat. [laughter]

*Nancy Price was elected to the Board of Regents in 1992, serving until she ran for Congress in 2000.*

**Erquiaga:** What was it like for your family to have two elected officials serving at the same time?

**Price:** It always worked very, very well. I have three daughters, and they were all off on their own by the time Nancy and I got involved in politics. She has two sons, and they were on their own, too. They were not involved in politics, so they've always been very helpful in helping us whenever we needed it to get involved. But it worked out very well.

**Erquiaga:** Of all the legislation you sponsored as a member of the Legislature, is there a bill that you are most proud of?

**Price:** It's a little bit hard to choose one particular bill because over the years, I was very happy with and proud of different ones that I had been involved in. I was very happy that we were able to take the sales tax off of food. I was happy and proud of that. There were so many that nothing immediately comes to mind.

**Erquiaga:** You did some work on lobbyist registration?

**Price:** Yes. Disclosure of how the money was being spent by the lobbyists and who they were working for and dealing with. I felt, and I think most people do, that it's important to know who the influential people are. Now we know that in Nevada, of course, gaming has been—and it's not surprising—one of the most influential lobbying groups, and they should be because most of the money comes from there. In 1991, I ordered up what turned out to be Assembly Bill 651, and every legislator except one, and I can't quite remember who it was, signed on to it. It requires lobbyists to provide additional information on registration statements and monthly reports. It goes on to talk about them having to tell where they're spending the money and who's giving it to them, and that sort of thing.

*A.B. 651 (1991) died in the Senate. Two years later, Price's A.B. 4 passed, making various changes concerning lobbyists' reports.*

**Erquiaga:** At a very low threshold, as I recall.

**Price:** Yeah.

**Erquiaga:** So what was life like in Carson City? Did you go out a lot? Did you see lobbyists after hours?

**Price:** Well, the answer is, yes, you do. Now the legislators also have to give reports and do things. So it's gotten a little more detailed—or probably a lot more detailed—than it was in those days. There were maybe three or four restaurants or places that you went and had dinner or what have you, and the lobbyists

would come over and talk to you and buy you dinner and things of that nature. That was pretty common. There were occasions when you might even take a trip or go somewhere on a meeting, like San Francisco for the National Conference of State Legislatures. Lobbyists would be there from your state to discuss issues and procedures mostly, so there was a lot of interchanging.

**Erquiaga:** You had a life-and-death incident at the Reno Airport at one point in your career, right? Tell me about that.

**Price:** It was in between legislative sessions, and I was coming up to the Legislature for an interim committee meeting. I lived in Las Vegas in those days. I got on the airplane and flew from Las Vegas and got to the Reno Airport. One of our security people had driven up from Carson City to pick me up to take me to the meeting. So he was waiting for me there where you get off the airplane. I got off the plane, said, "Hi," and started to talk to him. All of a sudden, I started feeling really weird. I ended up falling over, and as I was falling, the last thing that I saw—I like to kid about it, but I'm happy it worked out this way—the last thing I saw was this very beautiful tall, blond girl. I went down, and actually, when I hit the ground I died. They estimated that I was out for about three minutes or so, and of course, I was taken to the hospital.

I ended up having a three-way bypass on my heart. In fact, my heart had quit working.

It turned out that the tall, blond girl and I got some cute press over it. Her father, who was my age, had died a couple of years before; she was there with him, but didn't know how to help him or anything. She'd felt guilty about it, so she learned how to give mouth-to-mouth and resuscitate someone. When I went down, she saw me, and I was about the same age as her father. She came over—and of course, I don't remember any of this—but she gave me mouth-to-mouth and resuscitated me and actually brought me back. So naturally, I was very happy about that, but as time went on, there were a lot of interesting newspaper articles about it. Some people speculated, "Why would anyone ever want to save the life of a politician?" [laughter] Other people in letters to the editor said, "You have to remember she didn't know he was a politician." But anyhow, I was very happy how that came about.

I have a pacemaker now. Initially, I started out with a defibrillator for a few years that kept me going, and then we started having some problems with it, so they removed it and put in a pacemaker.

**Erquiaga:** Good. Did you change anything after that experience? Did you approach the job differently?

**Price:** Although I'm not as good as I should be, I try to get more exercise and be more careful about what I eat.

**Erquiaga:** You look great. You're thinner than you were in the legislative days.

**Price:** Yes. We sign up to go to senior dances. [laughter] Get a little exercise dancing.

**Erquiaga:** Bob, is there any piece of legislation or a vote that you wish you could take back? Is there anything you regret in those 29 years?

**Price:** I have to say nothing immediately comes to mind, but I know that if I did a little studying of the thousands of bills that I voted on, there would be some that I would. But nothing immediately comes to mind.

**Erquiaga:** What do you think you heard about the most from constituents? What kinds of issues would they call you about or write to you about?

**Price:** From the citizenry, you got a very broad situation of people being interested in many things. Obviously, everybody's interested in taxes and things that cost them money. But nothing else immediately comes to mind. Now at different times there would be subject matters that would be of public interest. Educa-

tion is probably one of the most continual subject matters that you have. Of course, the people who are in the field—teachers and educators—are very knowledgeable and very talented. So I would say that education is an ongoing subject that's generally of high interest. I think that's true in most Legislatures, too.

**Erquiaga:** One of the issues that would have come up during your time was the nuclear waste dump. Tell me about that issue during the Legislature. What was that like?

**Price:** It's not too surprising that that has been a controversial issue over the years. When the Federal Government started taking a look at Nevada as a possible location for the radioactive waste, I had generally been supportive of the idea, having worked at the location in the tunnel where they were thinking about putting it. I am not quite as concerned as many people about the nuclear waste *except that* I have to say I would have some concerns about when it's being transported, whether it was on a train or bus or whatever. It would be an ideal target for terrorists to take a part in, and so that concerns me to some degree. Over the years, I visited several of the sites where they have the waste stored now, and it seemed to me that most of them are very adequately protected. They have all kinds of equipment

and people and everything there, so in fact, I don't necessarily think that it has to be transferred at all. But I was not always opposed to it coming to the Nevada Test Site.

**Erquiaga:** You seem to have gotten along with everybody while you were at the Legislature, and one of those signs to me is you were a co-sponsor of a lot of bills. Did you have a philosophy about that?

**Price:** I always thought that unless you were absolutely opposed to whatever the issue was, if someone asked you to co-sponsor, I'd go ahead and support them and work with it. There would only be rare occasions when there was something that I absolutely opposed. I was always fortunate that I had many people co-sponsoring with me, so I thought that it just made it work a little bit better.

**Erquiaga:** So you had the rare opportunity to be a committee chair in the famous 1995 session that was divided 21-21. Your co-chair was Jeannine Stroth. What was that experience like?

**Price:** That was really interesting, as a matter of fact. That was one of those occasions where you truly did look at every issue and try and learn as much about what was going on, particularly the politics of it. That was probably one of the more—no, not *one of the more*—that was the

*Jeannine Stroth (R-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1994 to 1996. She and Price co-chaired the Assembly Committee on Taxation in 1995.*

*most* interesting session that I ever had the opportunity to serve in.

**Erquiaga:** Did you take turns in your committee—you would chair one day, Jeannine would chair one day? Is that how you managed it?

**Price:** Yes, we did do a fair amount of switching back and forth.

**Erquiaga:** Committee chairs had to agree to bring a bill to a hearing, as I recall. [**Price:** Yes, right, yes.] The Speakership rotated between Co-Speaker Lynn Hettrick and Co-Speaker Dini?

**Price:** Yes. Fortunately, over the years, I had gotten to be friends with Lynn Hettrick and had served, of course, with Joe. So it was extremely interesting, and it worked out okay. I had some other things happen that year. I had had a foot operation, and with my diabetes problem, I often have to go to the restroom, so they ended up changing my seat over to the very corner and closest to the door going out. But I was also in a wheelchair, and the bathroom there was not equipped so that you could get into it with a wheelchair. The Legislature was good enough to make arrangements, and we had a contractor come in and redesign the restroom—as it should have been anyhow because there are other citizens that come in there and need a wheelchair-accessible restroom.

*Lynn C. Hettrick (R-Douglas) served in the Assembly from 1992 to 2006.*



**Erquiaga:** In 2002, you ran for reelection and had a primary opponent. Was that the first time in a long time that you'd had a primary?

*Kelvin D. Atkinson won the 2002 Democratic primary for Assembly District 17.*

**Price:** Yeah, a real long time.

**Erquiaga:** So how did the last campaign go?

**Price:** Well, it went good. There were some people who felt that there was something a little funny about the actual counting of the ballots because I only lost by a very small amount. If I remember right, I think it was 12 or 13 votes. It was one of those situations where under one way of counting I won, and under the other way of counting I lost. Some people, including Nancy, think I still won. But I didn't challenge it.

**Erquiaga:** What have you done since leaving office? You relocated to northern Nevada. What else do you do with your time?

**Price:** Both Nancy and I, with our backgrounds in politics, are very involved in political committees and organizations. Nancy is also a chief master-sergeant in the Nevada Air National Guard. She is a member of a very important national committee of theirs, and they send her to meetings across the United States; in fact, she's going to be leaving a little later in May to a meeting in Knoxville, Tennessee, for a week. So we've been involved in those types of things. I've served on two or three city or county committees, and we like to go to the

city council meetings. We kind of keep involved in things that are going on around us. We enjoy it.

**Erquiaga:** I understand they're naming a park after you?

**Price:** Yes, that is very special. In Las Vegas, they are currently in the process of building a beautiful park and senior citizens' center, and they chose to name it Robert Price Park. It is very nice.

**Erquiaga:** Assemblyman, as we look back at your 29-year career, what do you want us to remember you for?

**Price:** I think that I would like to be remembered as a friendly person who was interested in what was going on in our community and tried my best to do what I could to be of any assistance. I always felt it was important to try—and this is not unusual among politicians—to get along with folks and to learn what the various subject matters were and to try and get your two cents in. I really have enjoyed that. Nancy is the same way. She's on a state historical committee, so she keeps involved in everything, too.

**Erquiaga:** Very good. Thank you for your time this afternoon.

**Price:** Oh, it's been so great. I can't tell you how much I really appreciate it.

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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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