



# **Nevada Legislature Oral History Project**

**RAYMOND D. RAWSON**  
**Republican**

**Senate, 1984 – 2004**

**MAY 12, 2008**  
**LAS VEGAS, NEVADA**

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**GRANT SAWYER STATE OFFICE BUILDING  
LAS VEGAS, NEVADA**

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

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

## **PROJECT INTRODUCTION**

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

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

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

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



**Raymond D. Rawson**  
**May 12, 2008**

## **RAYMOND D. RAWSON**

Raymond D. Rawson, D.D.S., was first elected to the Nevada Legislature in 1984 and represented Clark County in the State Senate for two decades, serving in ten regular and five special sessions. A dentist and college professor, Dr. Rawson developed a statewide and national reputation as an expert in the issues of health care and education, chairing the Senate Committee on Human Resources and Facilities during all but two of his sessions. The Las Vegas Republican also served on the Senate Committee on Finance and the Senate Committee on Legislative Affairs and Operations for virtually his entire tenure. During the interim periods, he served on more than 50 study committees, chairing many of them.

Dr. Rawson was interviewed in a legislative committee room on the fourth floor of the Grant Sawyer State Office Building in Las Vegas on May 12, 2008. In this interview, Dr. Rawson discussed a variety of issues, including the reasons he initially sought a Senate seat, how the Senate and its committees functioned, important issues of the time, personal perspectives on key political figures, and the effects of legislative service on his family. Although Dr. Rawson was born in Utah, his family moved to Nevada when he was just ten years old. He reminisces about participating in Nevada Boys' State in Carson City as a junior in high school and looking over the railing into the Nevada Senate below, never dreaming that he would one day hold a Senate seat. He initially ran for that seat because of his concerns about crowded schools and surprised Nevada's political establishment with his victory over a better-known, multi-term Assemblyman.

In this interview, Dr. Rawson muses about the qualities of an effective legislator and a good committee chair, emphasizing the importance of diverse opinions and bipartisan cooperation and noting that the Legislature benefitted as the number of female members increased. He remembers Senators Joe Neal (D-Clark), Bill Raggio (R-Washoe), and Spike Wilson (D-Washoe) as particularly gifted orators and recalls the integrity of most of the people involved in the legislative process. He also discusses how hard his legislative service was on his family, recounting the death threats that came in response to legislation that required the use of seat belts and regulated steroids. He and his wife, Linda Downey Rawson, now married fifty years, have seven children and 21 grandchildren. Great-grandchildren are joining the family.

In this interview, Dr. Rawson talks about many bills, such as the 1989 legislation that sought to address excessive hospital profits. That measure also created the Interim Committee on Health Care, which Dr. Rawson chaired for many years. Dr. Rawson is particularly proud of his work on class-size reduction, pre-natal networks, trauma centers, and computer literacy for students. As a member of both money and policy committees, he discusses the difficulties inherent with balancing the competing interests of budget reductions and policy enhancements. He explains the complexity of public policy, the proper roles of church and law in moral issues, and the frustration that comes with never completely resolving a problem. He also details how some of his favorite programs were used against him in a difficult primary. Willing to raise revenue to pay for programs, such as those that helped people with brain injuries and mental illnesses, Dr. Rawson ultimately lost that election. He indicates that he has no desire to return to the Legislature as a lobbyist, but

is currently working in the private sector to advance many of the programs he began as a Nevada Senator.

In 2005, Dr. Rawson was inducted into the Senate Hall of Fame, and Governor Kenny Guinn appointed Dr. Rawson to serve on the Nevada Gaming Commission. Governor Jim Gibbons did not renew that assignment; instead, in January 2009, he appointed Dr. Rawson to the Board of Regents of the University and Community College System in Nevada.

The formal interview ran for about an hour and 40 minutes. After its conclusion, Senator Rawson reviewed some of his photographs and memorabilia, which was filmed and included on the DVD that accompanies this transcript.

Dana R. Bennett  
May 2009

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

**Ray Rawson:** Hi. Good to see you again.

**Bennett:** It's good to see you, too. Let's think back to the very first day you walked into the Nevada Legislature as a Senator. It's Opening Day—Monday, January 21, 1985. What did you find when you walked into the Legislative Building for the first time?

**Rawson:** It was big. It was sophisticated. There was a lot of excitement. There were other new Senators and all of their friends and lobbyists. It was a bigger crowd than I expected to see. When I was a high-school student in Boys' State, I had stood up in the gallery and looked over the Senate, never dreaming that I would ever sit there. It was a very exciting day.

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

**Rawson:** We had a good-size family—we had seven children—and they were all in various parts of the school district. There were issues; there were problems. There were double-sessions in some of their schools and not enough textbooks—all of the issues that we still face today. Growth was just out of control in Nevada. We were in a new neighborhood, but the schools hadn't kept up with it. I thought we could do better. It happened to hit me one night that the only way I could make a change was to be on



the inside to make that change. I spent 20 years finding out that it's very difficult to make change in education. But we did some things.

**Bennett:** Why did you pick the Senate? So many people in Nevada tend to start with the Assembly.

**Rawson:** It was the window—the opportunity. We had long-term Assemblymen who were in place, and actually, I thought they were doing a pretty good job. There was an open Senate seat. I'd known the Senator that was there. I'd never dreamed of running for the Senate. When he stepped aside, it was an open seat. There was probably never a better chance to step in and say, "I think I can do something about that."

*In 1983, Clark District No. 6 was represented by Keith Ashworth (D-Clark). He had been in the Senate since 1976.*

**Bennett:** Tell me a little bit about your first campaign. How did you go about getting elected?

**Rawson:** Wow. I was an absolute underdog. Nobody knew who I was. Roger Bremner, who was the Chairman of the Ways and Means Committee in the Assembly, had decided to run for that seat. So here was one of the most powerful men in the Legislature, and I was virtually an unknown. I think that worked to my advantage. They didn't take me too seriously. I organized and worked hard. I knew a lot of people in the neighborhood and throughout the district.

*Douglas Roger Bremner (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1972 to 1984. He had been Chairman of Ways and Means in 1981 and 1983.*

It was a huge district at the time—went from Nye County clear to the California border. I actually went to 65 percent of the homes, and

I knocked on those doors and talked to those people. I couldn't catch a few people in the out-lying districts at home. When it came right down to it on the night of the election, I think I won by 600 votes. It was a squeaker. I didn't know until two in the morning that we'd actually won it. It's kind of the American dream. A lot of people have a dream, decide that they can make a difference, and sure enough, an individual can make a difference.

**Bennett:** What surprised you the most when you got to the Legislature that first session?

**Rawson:** I thought, "What am I doing here?" It was a very impressive body. Senator Jim Gibson was the Majority Leader. I was in the minority; I think there were four or five of us. There were a number of surprises. It doesn't take you very long to realize they're just people, just like you. They're dealing with the same issues you are, and most of them want to make the same kinds of changes. I think most of them are pretty altruistic about really wanting a better state.

It surprised me that Senator Gibson really made room for me. He cleared a spot on the Finance Committee and told me that I was going to want to serve on Finance in the future, so I should sit as a member of the committee. He told me that they'd provide me with the books and that I should follow the budget

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

because that's where I was going to learn state government. That was the best time I ever spent in the Legislature, right there with an analyst on one side and a Senator on the other side, looking at the state budget, issue by issue. That was a very beneficial year.

I went on to Human Resources as a minority member. Senator Joe Neal was the Chairman, and he didn't have a lot of time for minority opinions on anything. Fortunately, though, that changed. Within a session or two, we had taken the majority, and all of a sudden, I was Chairman of the Human Resources Committee. If you can set the agenda and if you can see that certain things are heard, then you can really start to make a difference.

*Joseph M. Neal, Jr., (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1972 to 2004. He chaired the Senate Committee on Human Resources and Facilities from 1981 to 1985 and again in 1991.*

**Bennett:** So you were made chair of that committee fairly early in your tenure. [**Rawson:** Yes.] How did you learn to be a chairman?

**Rawson:** Watching good chairmen. I'm a pretty good student. I've had leadership responsibility in a lot of things through the community—things that I didn't think were that important or would lead to much. But if you've had to chair committees, if you've had to gavel people, if you've had to deal with dissidents and things like that, that all comes back to you very quickly. All of the time that I was sitting in Finance or in Human Resources, I was watch-

ing really good chairmen. There's also wonderful staff. Our Legislature, I think, does an excellent job of providing staff and the professional resources behind the legislators.

Still, there's trepidation that first week, the first day. There were a few times that Senator Neal simply would not follow the Chair, and he would issue a minority opinion and things like that. Rather than getting excited and trying to stop him from speaking, I decided early that this is a man who wants to be heard and should be heard, and then it'll finally come down to a vote. I got along with him pretty well because I didn't try to shut him down. That's probably just his style. I've learned in life you can be confrontational, but then you're going to be wrong sometimes when you're confrontational and controlling. We're here to hear it all. Let's hear it all.

**Bennett:** What are some of the issues that stand out in your mind that the committee dealt with?

**Rawson:** Oh, gosh. It's every big issue you can think of. Our state went through several recessions in that time, and so we had huge issues of balancing the budget. Sometimes, it was all by cutting, and sometimes it was by raising new revenue. Both are hard. You see people suffer in a state like Nevada when you cut programs. When you try to raise revenue, then—whether

people are actually suffering or not—they [chuckles] get very vocal about it. So you learn quickly those issues that shouldn't be touched or should be touched very carefully.

I went in with the idea of education and economic development. I thought we were too dependent on gaming. Nothing against gaming; it's just I didn't think our whole economy shouldn't depend upon one industry. It's interesting. Over the 20 years I was in the Legislature, by my last session, we were more dependent on gaming than we were the year I went in. But a lot of that was because other industry grew, but gaming grew so much faster. It's just always remained the powerhouse in our state.

We had inflationary costs to medicine—health-care costs were just out of control—and private industry was crying because they couldn't afford insurance anymore. As a state, our welfare budgets were beginning to grow, and Medicaid was just starting. In my first session, I think we had a \$57 million budget for Medicaid. Senator Gibson remarked that this budget will bury us in ten years and that we'd better be careful of this one. Well, it's over a billion dollars since the time I was there. He was right about that. That became the Pac Man for every state in the union. They cut education. They cut prisons. They cut everything else

because the Medicaid budget just continued to grow.

We got involved early. By my second term, we were right in the hospital wars and wrote A.B. 289, the big hospital bill that put limits on them. It did control their economic growth to a certain degree. It also established disproportionate share funds for the counties. Out of all of that came a trauma network and a perinatal network. We have a world-class trauma center now and a burn center. The foundation for all of those was laid in those early discussions.

*Introduced in 1987 by Assemblyman Morse Arberry (D-Clark) and others, A.B. 289 restricts certain costs related to hospital care in Nevada and creates the Legislative Committee on Health Care.*

**Bennett:** Restraining the costs of medical care was a major issue in the 1987 and 1989 sessions. How were you able to get that legislation through?

**Rawson:** There are amazing stories behind that. We had CEOs of these big national chains who would come in, and they would have their lobbyists lined up. They were very powerful. We also had a Governor who was willing to say no—that enough’s enough, and we’ve got to stop this. Both Governor Bryan and Governor Miller were very forceful in saying that something would come out of the session. I’m in the health-care industry, but I saw this as a major issue, and we had to do something to control it. Maybe they were expecting to roll over the

Legislature, but we didn't let that happen. One of the pens that I've kept is the pen used to sign A.B. 289, and I think I have a picture with the Governor. That was kind of a triumphal thing for the Legislature in general and especially for a new legislator.

**Bennett:** Looking back on that legislation from this vantage point, is there something that you might have done differently?

**Rawson:** We probably should have hit them harder than we did. The issue is that the problem hasn't been solved anywhere in the country. Health-care costs are still the fastest-growing component. There were three profit-centers in the hospitals then: it was laboratory, x-ray (imaging, they call it), and pharmacy.

I think pharmacy is still out of control in this country. The national approach to it was basically put together by PhRMA [Pharmaceutical and Research Manufacturers of America], and it gives them very little restriction on their ability to advertise. They couldn't advertise at that time, and so they gained power. You can't really negotiate. Even Medicaid can't negotiate effectively with these big companies.

On top of it all, there's been new technology, and the utilization of medicine has just gone through the roof. It's not just individual procedures that are too high but there are a lot

of new procedures, and almost everybody gets those procedures now. We still have a significant issue in this country. I think that, eventually, it'll be some kind of a universal care. Hopefully, there'll be some private insurance components to that and not just a government program because I look at Medicaid or Medicare as an example that government isn't a final answer. But I think that the country does need more access, better access, and affordable access to care.

**Bennett:** One of the things that came out of that legislation was the statutory Committee on Health Care. What were your original hopes and thoughts for that particular committee?

**Rawson:** I wanted to be sure that the session where we got some controls wouldn't be the last time that the issue would be looked at. Over the years, that statutory committee did some remarkable things. You almost always fall short of being able to do everything you want to do, but I think they did hold people to reasonableness along the way. You staffed that committee at one time, and you understand the heavy pressure and the *tremendous* amount of material that went through the committee. There were times that we were more effective than others. There were a series of chairmen over the years who dealt with it. I think it kept a scrutiny on

*Bennett staffed the Legislative Committee on Health Care from 1989 to 1991.*



health care costs that would not have been there without it.

**Bennett:** Did you think about doing something similar for education?

**Rawson:** Education is such a dilemma. It's so big. It's the biggest single expenditure in our budget. People just don't realize that. I went in with the idea that we've got to add more minutes to the day and more days to the year. Well, it was \$15 million to add a minute to the school day. The public just does not comprehend that. I can't remember the number of millions, but it was like \$100 million to add a couple days to the school year. We just never got very far with that. There were two things that I really thought would make a difference.

Class-size reduction was an idea that came out of a meeting I had with a group of constituents. I asked them to tell me what needs to change about education. Some of them were teachers. Some of them were parents. It was a wonderful session. The teachers said that they couldn't teach in a class with 45 kids. They couldn't get anything across to them. They were all concerned about the discipline and the lack of authority they had in the classroom. We wrote the class-size reduction bill out of that discussion. My basic idea was that if kids can come out of the first three grades knowing how

to read, then they'll be able to get along in all of the other years. So we set it at 15 students to one teacher in kindergarten through third grade.

That was a huge fight, and my party almost disowned me over that. They thought it was throwing money after a problem. It ended up in a floor fight the last night of the Senate, and we won it by one vote. I kind of made an enemy out of Senator Bill Raggio over that. I don't think he ever did really forgive me, although we worked very close together after that. He was embarrassed to lose an issue that he didn't want to lose, and he thought it was going to be too expensive.

It's turned out to be an expensive program, but it's been whittled away. First, we had school districts that thought, because they didn't have enough classrooms, they could put two teachers in a classroom of 30 to have 15 to one. That isn't what was needed. It didn't teach kids to read, and it was a waste of resources. Most of the districts did build the classrooms, and we did end up with smaller classrooms in the first grades. Reading scores have gone up in Nevada. We were at the bottom of the country. They went up. We tried some similar things with math, and math did go up. But I saw this year that we were 49<sup>th</sup> in the country in math scores. Every day you have to fight that fight

*A State Senator since 1972, William J. Raggio (R-Reno) was floor leader for the Senate Republicans during Rawson's tenure.*

over again, and you have to stay on it, or it will never break out.

We had the lowest going-on-to-college rate in the country. We had the highest drop-out rate in the country. There are a lot of issues in Nevada. The Millennium Scholarship changed that almost overnight. We ended up 29<sup>th</sup> instead of 50<sup>th</sup> in the country as far as kids that go on to college. Now, it was expensive. It cost a lot of money. But how many thousands of Nevada kids went on to college who wouldn't have?

Education is probably the biggest disappointment that I had out of the Legislature. We did tremendous things, and it's still the biggest budget, and it's still harder to make change there than anywhere else. The kids still don't have all of the opportunities they should. So there's still work for people to do there.

**Bennett:** You were in an interesting place as the Chair of the committee that oversaw education and health issues, and then as Vice-Chair of Senate Finance. How did you balance what are often competing interests?

**Rawson:** It was really a natural-kind of wedding of interests. They divided up the money issues into various subcommittees, and mine matched perfectly with Human Resources. So the reality is that, for 12 or 14 years—with education and welfare—I had control of 82 percent of the

*Proposed by Governor Kenny Guinn and approved by the Legislature in 1999, the Millennium Scholarship provides funding for highly-qualified Nevada high school graduates to attend a Nevada college or university.*

Nevada budget. If I'd had prisons in there, I would have had the whole Nevada budget. It was all of the important things to me, so I could advocate for—I could fight for—or I could see a solution. There were ways to get it funded because of that joint committee responsibility. It was a unique opportunity. There are probably few legislators who have the opportunity to be on the scene and then be able to do something about it.

I've never been a person who's just been looking for power; that's just not part of my personality. Yet I ended up in a very powerful position. But I learned early that you either want to do something or you want to be somebody, and I wanted to do something. So you don't put your name on the bills. You don't have buildings named after you. You don't spend all of your time in the press. You see that things are planned and funded, and you let other people take the credit for those. That's an effective way to get things done. Really, the things that have hurt me the most in the Legislature were the things that I got my name out in front of. That's good advice for anybody who's looking at it in the future. Decide: do you want to be important, or do you want to accomplish something? You can have either one you want, but you usually can't have them both.

**Bennett:** Who were some of the legislators who were the most effective at accomplishing some of these tasks?

**Rawson:** There are only a handful of people who were really effective in being able to accomplish things. Everybody would get a bill through that they could take back to their constituents. Everybody would vote on something so they could say, "I'm tough on crime," or "I voted against property tax," or whatever. Out of the 63 legislators, there are less than a dozen who could see an issue, say, "We're going to solve that issue," and go after it and really do that. Both the Assembly and the Senate had a few outstanding players.

When I first went in, Senator Gibson could pretty well decide what he wanted to spend on anything in the state. Now he might have to fight an issue, and especially if he let people know that it was important to him, he would fight it more. After him, Senator Raggio took those reins and was as effective a majority leader as I've ever worked with. He was basically conservative. He didn't want to waste the resources. He wanted to promote those things that would be beneficial to the state, and we worked very, very closely to accomplish the things that we did.

The majority usually sets the agenda. The minority, if it's done appropriately or rightly, they get major programs through, too. If they're simply a thorn in your side—if they're just fighting for political purposes—then they usually don't accomplish very much. Behind the scenes, I would see that minority senators were able to do things that were meaningful for a couple reasons. You know that you're not always going to be in authority or in control. There are good people there, and they shouldn't just be pushed down. If they've got good ideas, then they ought to be able to get those through. There were times when we were in the majority that we would put their names on an issue that was important to them and let them carry it through. That was good for them politically, but it was good for the state, too.

There were times when that control would change. Probably the most effective session I ever had was when I was in the minority. I think Senator Jack Vergiels was Majority Leader, and Nick Horn was Chairman of Finance. I did major, major Medicaid reform during that session. You hear about the rainy-day fund that they're drawing on now? I wrote that as a minority member. All of the emergency management funds for earthquake or fire or whatever—those things all came at a time when I was in the minority position.

*John M. (Jack) Vergiels (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1984 to 1992. He was Senate Majority Leader in 1991.*

*Nicholas J. (Nick) Horn (D-Clark) served in the Senate from 1982 until his demise in 1992. He chaired Senate Finance in 1991.*

So I think both sides really see those people who are sincere and those who are just politically motivated. You need people on both sides of the aisle to be able to get things through. Now, party politics isn't always as forgiving as the Legislature is. Sometimes, your party will reject you because you're too liberal or you're too this or too that. They have no concept of what's really going on. I hate to say that, but they have nothing to do with what the real policy is and, if anything, interfere with what's good for the state. *Both* parties—doesn't matter which one you look at. That's our system. You have to work within that context. It's just like what's going on in the national debates and selecting a new president and so on. Deep down, all of us really want to see people put some of this rhetoric aside and work together. It's time—it's *really* time—that Congress did some things that were good for the country and not just good for their particular party. Maybe we'll see that again. I don't know. I don't see it in the immediate future [chuckles], but maybe we'll see it again.

**Bennett:** Was there a particular reason you ran as a member of the Republican Party?

**Rawson:** You get into a campaign sometimes, and sometimes, you go after individuals. That's a bad side, a dark side, of politics. At the time I decided to actually go down and sign on the

line, there had been a newspaper article about someone who was going to run for that office who had been censured for being drunk on the Assembly floor in the last days of the previous session. That was outrageous to me.

Now, you get past those little flags that actually make you do something, and you begin to realize there's no pressure in the world like the pressure at the end of a session. I never felt the need to go get a drink during that period of time, but there were a lot of people who were probably better off because they did. So after actually living through the circumstances, I'm sure I wouldn't have been as critical of that person as I was before. That was one of the things. I knew that we had problems in the schools, and there wasn't anybody that seemed to deal with it. Here, we've got a Legislature that's seemingly out of control, and that's what led me to it. Then you see a real slice of life, and you understand the situation better.

But it did get me involved, and it probably made me work very hard. I walked neighborhoods in Indian Springs. Ninety-eight percent of the people registered in Indian Springs were of a different party than I was, and I went to bat for them. They had telephone poles that were down, and they couldn't get service from the power company. I don't know how, but I went to the power company and



said, “You know, this is ridiculous. Those poles need to be up this week, and those people need to have things restored.” And they did it. In that first election, that’s the only precinct I lost. But I continued to serve them and to see that their school came up to standards, and over time, they eventually became friends and supporters. Then they were districted out, and I didn’t represent them anymore. I must have been a little audacious—a little Don Quixote—to go to the power company as nobody and tell them that they had to do something in a community that didn’t really mean much to the power company, either. But I guess just somebody making noise got it done.

**Bennett:** As you were talking about the pressure of the end of session, I was thinking that some folks don’t really understand that. It’s been ten years since the last unlimited session, and I’m sure the institutional memory is fading. How would you explain to someone how the unlimited session used to wrap up?

**Rawson:** It was very bad in a lot of ways. Usually, it would be the rural counties that realized that if they could hold the session, they could get what they wanted because eventually all of the people who have homes in the city would have to get home and get to their jobs, and so on. They would play that waiting game that would go on to June or July. We were all on leave of

*Until the voters changed the Nevada Constitution in 1998, regular legislative sessions were not restricted to any particular length, although legislators’ salaries ended on the 60<sup>th</sup> day of the session. The longest session on record was 1997, which ran for 169 calendar days.*

absence; we didn't have an income coming in; and our families had vacations scheduled. Many, many times, I saw people cancel their trips to Hawaii or wherever or send their families without them. It was a game, and it was an effective game. That's probably why a definite limit finally went through. As I look at the two situations now, I think it was a better process before.

**Bennett:** Why is that?

**Rawson:** I think we suspended rules much later, so things had much more scrutiny. As you come down to the end of a session and you know there's so many days, you go through a period of time where the rules are suspended, and that's when all of the real work is done. It doesn't change the deals that are finally made between the rural legislators and the others or whoever. Eventually, you know you have to look at all of the interests in the state. Any leadership knows that. So I don't know that 120 days was the final answer. I'm pretty sure a full-time Legislature isn't the answer. I remember what a relief it was to know when the final day of session was and be able to schedule whatever. That was a relief, but I don't think the process was quite as good as far as scrutiny on the issues and things.

**Bennett:** What sorts of things did you work on in the interim between sessions?

**Rawson:** A lot of it was health-care-related and education-related.

I always wanted to see a teacher-advancement plan. I always felt that one of the ways that you get better teaching is to stimulate the development of better teachers. You don't do that just through a raise. Every one percent raise was \$30 million, and so when we would hold out for a three or four percent raise at the end of the session, you're talking about \$90 million versus \$120 million—that's just where it comes down to. But we knew that whatever we bought in a raise would not change the degree of teaching at all. Same teachers. Same classrooms. They'd just get three percent more.

So I thought maybe there could be a national board certification and then some significant raises for those teachers who really demonstrated an improved methodology. Pilot programs have been started on that, and I think they are effective. We have more nationally certified teachers now, and they follow with their master's and doctorate degrees, and you see them doing really exciting things in the classroom. I had a plan actually lined out that would have stratified salaries. Instead of every teacher getting \$45,000 a year, you'd have

master teachers who would get \$80,000 or \$85,000 a year. I still think there's great hope for that.

Of course, unions don't like to differentiate. They like to have everybody in the same pocket. But incentives, to me, are effective, and people perform if they are recognized for it. We knew that we could never go to a merit system; we simply—politically—could never do that. So I thought it would be effective to make professionals out of the teachers—not just union members, but professionals. That's a regret. Since I've gone, they've had money problems and not a lot of vision about trying to do something like that, so I don't know if we'll ever see anything like that.

**Bennett:** What's the most fun issue that you worked on?

**Rawson:** I don't know. Did we have any fun up there?  
[laughter]

**Bennett:** Certainly, in 20 years, there must have been a moment or two.

**Rawson:** There are things in the arts that are very worthwhile. Conservative legislators are always down on the arts. But the reality is that a society that's tuned to the arts is a better society.

Early in the sessions, they used to have Third House. They were fun. There were times

that they got vindictive and mean and hurtful. But maybe the press was a little higher caliber when I first went in. Or maybe they were just disillusioned by the time I left. I don't know. But it wasn't as good fun as it was a little more hurtful by the time I left. We had committee meetings that were fun during that time. There were times when people were just in a good mood, and sometimes, the people who would testify would just be hilarious.

There were things I did that I wonder—I had a hearing once about chronic fatigue syndrome, and everybody [chuckles] really wondered what I was doing by the time that was over. We filled a room this size [gestures] with hundreds of people who all came in with chronic fatigue. We didn't know if it was communicable or not, and I figured this was one committee that'd never finish that session. We had a whole room full of people who had been incapacitated for six months in their lives and were depressed and suicidal, and yet there was actually a light side that came out of that. It was the first time anybody ever listened to them. We got the medical school to pursue some grants and put resources into it. They got down to the nature of that disease and what can be done for it. So there were good things that came out of it.

*Purported to have been started by Mark Twain when he was a reporter covering Nevada's Territorial Legislature, Third House has typically been written and performed by members of the press near the end of the regular legislative session to poke fun at the people and issues of that session. It was a traditional part of Nevada's twentieth century legislative process and usually consisted of a series of skits, although in one session (1923) it consisted of an epic poem written by staff.*

Most of the time, we'd keep the decorum of the Senate, and so we'd act officious and so on. We used to have some legislators who were poets and some who were so glib that they could start down a line on something serious and have everybody in the Senate laughing unexpectedly. By and large, they were serious times, though, on the Senate floor.

*Unlike the Assembly, the Senate has consistently maintained a house rule prohibiting "indecorous conduct."*

**Bennett:** Who were some of the legislators who were particularly good speakers?

**Rawson:** Spike Wilson was phenomenal. He had a slow manner of speaking, almost an English humor, and was an absolute master of the language. Senator Raggio was a very accomplished speaker—as impassioned as he needed to be or as angry as he needed to be. Senator Joe Neal was a tremendous orator. There were many times that we would roll our eyes as he started because we knew how long it would be, and he would go through certain phases so you could predict when his voice was going to rise. He always had an issue that he felt very strongly about, and he was considered as one of the better orators. They're the ones that stand out to me as really being outstanding.

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

We heard lots of things on the Senate floor that made you shake your head because you'd know that person would have to deal with those comments the next time they ran

against anybody. Sometimes, they'd say things without thinking.

**Bennett:** You had mentioned earlier that you had learned how to be a chair in the Senate by watching some effective chairs. Who were some of the chairs who really impressed you with how they did their job?

**Rawson:** Senator Gibson was a phenomenal chair. He was fair. They referred to him as "Iron Butt Gibson" [chuckles] because he would just sit there all day long. He controlled his committees. He didn't let things get out of hand. But he listened to everybody. I liked that.

There were Senators who were very hard on witnesses, and I decided very early that that is not appropriate. This is a public house. These people have a right to testify. We may not agree with them, but they have a right to have their views heard. It's not necessary to name the people who were brutal or overbearing, but there were some. I really learned that it was not anything I would ever do, so I would never shout down a witness or tell them to shut up or that they didn't have any business here or anything like that. Sometimes you learn as much from the negative—what you don't want to do—as you do from the things that you'd like to emulate.

Senator Sue Wagner was an effective speaker and also a solid chair. She chaired Judiciary and was not an attorney, so she would have an attorney sit right with her and advise her. I learned a lot from that—how to effectively use staff to see that things are done appropriately. There were a few speeches that she gave on the floor that must still be recorded and remembered up there. So she was effective. There were times that she cried about issues that she couldn't get through, and of course, that's never effective, but you could understand the passion that she had.

*Sue Wagner (R-Reno) was in the Senate from 1980 to 1990. She chaired the Senate Committee on Judiciary in 1987 and 1989. As Lt. Governor, she was the President of the Senate in 1991 and 1993.*

Actually, it's kind of pleasant to reminisce, to think back over some of the days.

**Bennett:** Well, that's good. It was 20 years of your life.

**Rawson:** Boy, does it go in a hurry. It doesn't while you're there. Day by day is very hard. By and large, I think the public has no concept of the effort that goes into it. I started out with this idea that I would read everything and that I wouldn't vote on any bills that I hadn't been through. That's very demanding to do that. I usually didn't leave the building until later at night. I didn't have my family with me in Carson, and I wasn't looking for parties and things. So it was a good college time for me. I remember thinking in that first term that I'd really finished another college degree here.



**Bennett:** What was a normal day like?

**Rawson:** Six-thirty in the morning into the building and typically 8:30 at night to leave. A quick lunch. Not much break along the way. We'd get short breaks but not much. We'd usually have meetings until 8 am, which would be our usual time to go into our major committees. My committees were always the major committees. They had the big bills, the expensive bills, the hard issues, and so five days a week, it was from eight to 11. Then we'd break and run right down to the Senate floor. As soon as that was over, if there was time left before one or 1:30, we'd get lunch. If there wasn't time, we'd go right to our afternoon committee assignments. Mine was Human Resources, so again it was a major committee.

At the end of the day, it was a matter of correspondence; later e-mails came into it, which was no favor to any of us. I would always take a stack of mail down to the Senate floor, and while taking roll and introducing guests and things like that, I would make notes on each of these for the staff to be able to answer. As you got later in a session, they would drop piles of mail on our desk. Then the last few weeks, we would have full mailbags lined up around our desks.

I had this idea that you need to respond to everybody who writes to you. After a session or two, you learn which ones are form letters that come to you, and so you handle that the same way with the same respect they gave you. But you respond to every personal letter personally. That's one of the biggest responsibilities. There's heart-rending stuff in there. There are always stories in there that you know we're not going to be able to do anything that's going to help. So they were busy, busy days in my recollection.

The first session or two, we would usually get to lunch, but there must have been abuses with that because ethics laws were always tightening. In the last twelve or so years that I was there, you wouldn't go to lunch with anyone because you either ended up paying for it and you didn't have a job, or you ended up on a list that always got published. It's not like any deals were ever really made in a lunchtime. But it might be the only time a lobbyist could tell you about an issue you're considering and how it would affect their industry. That's actually valuable input. That's been limited so much now that the system's probably weaker today because of that. Now there were legendary legislators who partied every night, but that's not typical of the Legislature.

**Bennett:** Who were some of the most effective lobbyists that you remember?

**Rawson:** There are a few who stand out. You would always see Jim Wadhams, Bob Barengo, Fred Hillerby, and the Chamber lobbyists. They'd always have access to, or at least could talk to, everybody in the building. You have a lot of the public lobbyists, like the teachers' union and public employees unions and so on. They were always there. I don't know if you can say they were as effective because everybody knows what their issues are, and so you don't really need to spend any time talking to them.

*Jim Wadhams, Bob Barengo, and Fred Hillerby have all been inducted into the James A. Joyce Lobbyist Hall of Fame.*

I never saw a situation where a lobbyist would try to tell me how to vote. I just never saw that kind of situation. So I don't know that much of that kind of stuff really goes on. I never saw anybody take a bribe or be threatened. There were always rumors. Of the people I served with, I never heard about more than two or three who were thought to be on the take or to have taken money for things. Of course, if there were any proof of that, they would have been prosecuted along the way. So they were just rumors. The way the public thinks about it, you would expect to see more out of that many people. But I just never saw any of that.

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

**Rawson:** The first year I ran, I had a ten-year-old, and I thought that he'd like to be involved in this. He ought to know what's going on. So I took him to walk the neighborhood a few times. One particular day, we were in a hard precinct. At every door that we knocked on, the people were antagonistic. This was the first time I was running, so it wasn't like they knew anything about me in particular. They just didn't have a good feeling about politics. One lady even sent a dog after us. When we finished that precinct, my son said that he didn't want to do this anymore. [voice catches]

You actually *need* somebody to walk with you because it is disheartening sometimes. Then you'd get into a good precinct, and a lot of people would be positive. They'd offer you a cookie or something to drink. But by and large, I formulated the opinion that if anybody tells you they love to walk a neighborhood, they are absolutely lying to you, and if they'll lie to you about that, they'll lie to you about anything. So [chuckles] I never trusted a politician who said, "I can't wait to walk my neighborhood again."

My family did a lot of things together. We had a boat and a cabin. We snow skied, water skied, and did scuba diving. After the first session [voice catches], the kids all said that this was a good experiment, but they didn't want me to go back. I think it did affect them. I

was involved in it—there were good days and bad days, but it was exciting. I think it was not, for them. With seven kids, we had marriages and going off to college and graduations, and the Legislature interfered in a lot of special occasions, especially before we had a limited session. We'd be in the last week of session, and there's no possibility that you can break away, so there would be a missed graduation.

**Bennett:** That had to have been hard.

**Rawson:** Those were hard things. During campaigns or something in the thick of a session, we'd have an issue come up and we'd get threatening calls. The kids would sometimes take those, and these callers would say things like, "Your dad's dead meat. Don't expect him to come home after this session." There were occasions when we had our family under protection. These were the craziest bills. I wrote seat-belt legislation. Because the conservatives and the libertarians don't want any restrictions in their lives, we had death threats for some time over the seat-belt legislation.

**Bennett:** That's somewhat ironic.

**Rawson:** It is. It really is. We also had death threats over regulating steroids. There were things like that that were totally unexpected for me. The newspaper would always publish our phone numbers, so they'd tell people how to reach us. I

always felt like I needed to have my number in the phone book, but there is a downside to being that accessible. They would always do little things like publish what kind of car you drive. For example, Senator Ann O'Connell always had a Cadillac. Sometimes it was ten years old, but she always had a Cadillac, and I respect that she wanted that much iron around her when she was traveling. The publicity draws people to look at things like kidnapping or robbing when they know that you're out of town. I think the newspapers sometimes bring problems into the lives of public people, and they're not sensitive to those kinds of things. By and large, I think my kids were proud of the service that I put in, and they respected that effort. But even to this day, they talk about all the things they missed while I was in session.

*Ann O'Connell (R-Clark) served in the Senate from 1984 to 2004, longer than any other woman in Nevada history.*

**Bennett:** Did they come up to Carson City?

**Rawson:** During one of my early sessions, I had all the kids come up for spring break. We went to Tahoe, rented some snowmobiles, and saw the back country. When that session was over, they all asked where we were we going on vacation, and [chuckles] I kind of joked that they had all come up to Carson City for spring break. They decided very early that Carson City doesn't count as a vacation spot. [chuckles] They wanted to make sure that I always planned a vacation beyond session.

**Bennett:** Did you hear any positive things from your constituents?

**Rawson:** Not much. That's amazing. We would have a lot of contact with people during a session who wanted us to watch out for a particular bill or taxes and told us what they wanted us to do. There was a lot of input from people during a session. When all of the fray was over, none of those people would call back and say, "We appreciate what you did." It's probably like being a teacher or something. You know that there's some appreciation there, but you're not going to hear it for years and years. I've been out of office for four or five years, and I'll run into people who say, "Oh, you must be on a break," "You're doing a great job," and so on, and you just smile at that. They remember that we were involved somewhere along the way. But it's largely an altruistic thing. I think you do it because you feel the importance of it. You don't do it for the thank-yous because there aren't very many.

**Bennett:** What are the things that you worked on that you are the most proud of?

**Rawson:** In education, I'm still proud to this day of the class-size reduction bill. I think that was effective and did a lot of good. I also wrote the legislation to demand that our children be computer-literate and that they have access to

computers. It was just a small thing, but I think it has a big impact. We established the trauma centers and the pre-natal networks, so we had a real effect on the survivability of babies. We fostered things like the neo-natal centers and burn centers. I'm very pleased with those things.

Most legislators will say that they're really proud of ethics reform, but I think most of that is actually meaningless. Ethical people get into government and remain basically ethical, or unethical people go in, and they're still basically unethical. It doesn't matter what rules you write. The key is that we need to look for ethical people to represent us. I read the other day that 89 of the national legislators have had a DUI [driving under the influence]. Out of about 500, that's 20 percent of them who have been prosecuted for a DUI. There's something wrong in the selection process. We can write all the bills we want, but it's not going to change their behavior. That's the critical thing. Look for good people.

I love the Nevada process. Like the founding of this country, we leave our homes and our jobs, and we serve. When that's over, we return to the ranks. There's something very freedom-loving about that. I have deep emotional ties to the process and to the institution. It's a much better institution than I



thought it would be. I think most of the people who serve are much better than they are thought to be.

**Bennett:** What were some of the biggest changes that you saw in the institution over your 20 years?

**Rawson:** Term limits. I think that's fundamentally unconstitutional. To me, the people do a very good job of selecting—they really do. We had a 65 percent turnover without term limits. So people basically see who is honest and legitimate and working hard, and they do a good job. But it takes a session or two to even know what the process is about. I was fortunate that I had people who brought me in and sat me down with them at the major committees and allowed me to learn those things. Not very many legislators get that advantage. By the time you've served eight years, you're really ready to begin formulating some big solutions and some comprehensive answers, but you're on your way out. That should not be done arbitrarily. Some of the very best and brightest minds in the whole process are turned out of office just because of the rules. I think that's a big change and not for the best.

There's always been a push for a full-time Legislature, which is probably not beneficial for Nevada. We have a huge budget, and it's obvious those problems go beyond session

sometimes. But we have ways of dealing with it.

Shortening the session to 120 days is another one of those arbitrary things. I think the hearing process doesn't spend as much time on each issue now. It certainly hasn't stopped any of the game-playing or the deals that are made. As a people, we ought to be careful about arbitrarily changing an institution that's worked for more than 100 years.

Generally, the ethics laws are probably good, but they don't want contact between legislators and lobbyists. When you think about who the lobbyists represent, they represent the people. They represent education and non-profits and companies and city and county governments. They really represent what goes on in the state. Yes, they're a source, and we ought to depend on them for their side of the story—not overly depend on them, but depend on them. I don't really think it's helpful to try to limit that kind of contact. Somebody who buys a lunch for a legislator is *not* going to have a bill thrown his way because of that. That's *absurd* on the face of it. By buying a lunch for a legislator, a lobbyist gets 30 minutes to give his side of the story.

I think the process has actually been hurt by closing off all of that kind of contact.

No, we don't need to have lobbyists paying big dinner and liquor bills and things like that for legislators. But a simple lunch and a simple dinner are not against the public interest. If you look at our day in the Legislature, it basically goes from early in the morning until pretty late at night, so when is someone going to talk to you? You won't put a committee meeting on hold so you can go talk to a lobbyist or a citizen. There isn't much time in a day. Lunch-time is probably a time that ought to be used.

**Bennett:** Is there a bill that comes to mind that you wish you really hadn't gotten tangled up with, whether it's something you introduced that went a different direction than you thought or a topic, perhaps, that a constituent suggested that turned out not to be such a good idea?

**Rawson:** In Nevada, a lot of moral issues come into the Legislature that I think, by and large, shouldn't come into the Legislature. We had a referendum on abortion, which was a good thing for Nevada because it basically established the way the people feel about it, and we didn't have to fight that issue every session after that. That was beneficial to the process. There were other issues, such as parental notification, that are still complex issues. I don't know that we've properly handled that yet because we should be concerned about the medical procedures that a young girl goes through. But it's obviously a

*In 1990, Nevada voters affirmed the state law that specifies when an abortion may be performed. That statute now cannot be amended or repealed by the Legislature.*

complex issue. By and large, I'd like to see the moral issues dealt with in church and community and not in law.

One of the really hard fights in one session was over the sodomy issue. It probably didn't need to be that hard of a fight. I would like to see prostitution dealt with as a society. I don't know that writing more laws about that makes any difference. Outlawing brothels in Nevada might be good for the Nevada image, but it's not going to stop prostitution. I've always looked at that as tantamount to slavery. I think that, 100 years from now, we'll look back on the trafficking in women, young girls, and young boys as reprehensible as slavery was. Maybe it's appropriate to stand up and speak out on that issue, but I think we're a long way from solving it.

**Bennett:** Can you envision a day when the Legislature would say, "Okay, we've done this issue. We don't ever have to deal with this one again"?

**Rawson:** Nope. [chuckles] No. I went in with the naïve idea that you solve this issue with education and then you go on to solve that issue with welfare, but they're too interrelated and far more complex. Education will always be one of those issues that will take a lot of time. The fact that some people are disabled or not able to work or starving or don't have access to medical care

will, I think, always be with us. Hopefully, every year we'll see improvements and changes, but with almost every solution, a new side comes out that's as bad.

What are the classic plagues? Disease, famine, and war, I think. Probably every legislator wishes they knew how to stop war. I don't see it in my lifetime. There may actually be a time when we stop some disease. I think you'll probably see an end to cancer in your lifetime. But there will be new things in place of it. And famine. I thought we were getting pretty close technologically to being able to deal with famine, and then we started burning corn instead of feeding corn to people, and here we are again. Millions will starve this year. So, no, there's plenty to work on.

**Bennett:** You didn't leave the Legislature voluntarily.  
[**Rawson:** No.] It was a tough primary. Tell me a little bit about that.

**Rawson:** I found myself in a position of being responsible for education and welfare—knowing that we had a responsibility in those areas—so I got cross-wise with my party on issues like that. The fact is that we have brain-injured and developmentally-delayed and mentally-disabled people who will never be able to provide a living for themselves, and many of them have no family support at all. I think the Constitution

says we have an absolute obligation to those people, so I was willing to fund programs to deal with those issues. I'm proud of the brain injury programs that we started. The whole disability community is far better off today than they were 10 years ago. I'm proud of those things, but a lot of the people who supported me in the past are not proud of those things.

During my last session, I was willing to raise the revenue to do the things that I thought we had to do. That became kind of a landmark session. We generated the money that we actually need this year, and it was foolishly given back to the people as an excess. It wasn't an excess, and we are short that money now. There will be *no* courage to raise that money again. So this state, one of the most rapidly growing states in the country, will fall behind again in several significant areas because the courage to raise that revenue isn't there.

That's basically what led to my difficulties. I lost in a primary, not in a general election. I've thought long and hard about that. Would I go back and do anything different? I would still stand for the same things that I stood for that session, so I guess it's just that I'm not there any more. There are days that I'd like to go in and try to solve a problem, but 20 years is enough. I gave the best effort I had in

that time; and we did some good things. I'm not ashamed of any of the things that I've done.

There was actually a second part to raising the revenue. We were going to give a property tax break and a car registration break. We got the revenue through, but we didn't get the breaks through, so people were justifiably upset about it. But the reality is that the information that we were looking at was absolutely true. We need that money today. It should have been put into the emergency fund, not returned because it was gone. It was wasted. The people who sacrificed their political lives over that did it for, essentially, nothing. That's tragic.

But government can be too controlling and too expensive. Yes, it can. It can absolutely get out of control. If you don't have corrections like this, it would absolutely get out of control. So I'm not against the process, and I'm not angry at the people who didn't vote for me. I understand where they were coming from. But today they would be better off if that money had been reserved.

**Bennett:** You mentioned that the first time you saw the Senate was as a member of Boys' State. Compare and contrast a little bit the thoughts you had as a young man looking at the Senate and the experiences you had as a Senator.

**Rawson:** I was a junior in high school. That's when you go to Boys' State or Girls' State. We went to Carson City, and it had a dirt road through town. It hasn't changed [chuckles] a lot since then; it's still a small town. As we went into the gallery and looked down on the Senate Chamber, they were old. They struck me as being old men. I don't think there were any women in the Legislature then.

**Bennett:** Probably not in the Senate, no.

**Rawson:** But you could feel the importance, and it was a solemn occasion to watch them. As I went back and sat in that chamber, I felt a lot younger—and I was, actually, 25 years ago. I didn't feel as old as those guys looked to me when I was a high-school kid. But we've watched the Boys' State groups come through, and I think they probably have a very similar impression as I did: "Here's a group of old guys."

The budget then was probably \$250 million instead of \$8 billion. Welfare wasn't their big issue then. I would bet that their big issues were education and prisons. So some things don't change.

I haven't been back to the Senate a lot. They had me back to induct me into the Hall of Fame, and that was a special day. But it's probably still too close to me. I don't really want to go up and watch them make cheese or



make sausage. I'm absolutely determined that I won't go back as a lobbyist to push issues. I had my chance to try to change things, and now other people can change them.

But I'm not through trying to complete some of the things I did. I don't know if it's appropriate to mention. During that time in the Human Resources and Finance Committees, I may have been the deciding person on a billion dollars worth of development in the university system. It's clear to me that there's not enough public money to build everything that the university needs, so right now, I am working with a private firm that's putting together a very nice program to build graduate programs at UNLV [University of Nevada, Las Vegas] and to begin some of their fundamental research and patient care and things like that. There will be millions and millions of private dollars that'll go into that. So I'm actually still trying to finish some of the programs that we started.

**Bennett:** That seems appropriate because you've talked about it being a continuing process.

**Rawson:** Yes.

*After the formal interview, Senator Rawson shared photos and other memorabilia from his legislative tenure. The conversation was filmed and is on file with the Legislative Counsel Bureau Research Library. During that process,*

*Senator Rawson added some information that is transcribed below.*

**Bennett:** [Looking at family photographs] Have any of your kids gone into politics?

**Rawson:** No. I think a couple will, in time. Rick's the one who walked with me that first session, and he's an attorney at Jones Vargas. I think there will be a time when he'll probably do something in politics. Ken was a Sergeant-at-Arms in the Senate, and I think he might get involved one day. Christy was also a Sergeant one year, and I wouldn't be surprised if she might.

We have four physicians, an attorney, a physical therapist, and an early-childhood educator. I was the first member of my family to graduate from college, and now all of our kids have. In one year, I had seven kids in college. In fact, this year is the first year that my income is actually all mine. [chuckles] Of course, I'm not making as much as I used to.

\* \* \*

**Rawson:** [Looking at a photo of the Senate] We had five women in the Senate that year. It's a very good thing to have a high percentage of women in the Legislature. I think it's a better body because of it.

\* \* \*

**Bennett:** [Looking at campaign brochures] How far before the election would you start campaigning?

**Rawson:** Seems to me that I was walking the neighborhoods by March.

**Bennett:** Did your district get smaller geographically after redistricting?

**Rawson:** It got smaller but had more people. In my first district, I had 150,000 people, and it was 150 miles wide. It finally ended up four miles square with 280,000 people.

The last time I ran, I had cancer and didn't really disclose that to a lot of people. I'd been through surgery and chemotherapy. I was going through radiation during the months I was walking.

**Bennett:** That had to have been tough.

**Rawson:** It was a tough campaign. Basically, redistricting determined the outcome of that. I saw that coming. I knew what was going to happen there.

**Bennett:** Did you write all of your own text?

**Rawson:** I did. I worked with volunteers, but we did our own photography and everything. Some of the campaigns were better than others.

**Bennett:** How did the cost of your campaign change over that 20 years?

**Rawson:** I spent \$45,000 in the first campaign. One of the reasons that I was successful is that I had \$20,000 in the bank, and I put that into the campaign immediately. So I had early money, and I think that other people contributed because they saw that I was serious.

\* \* \*

**Rawson:** [Looking at a photo of the Health Science Center on the West Charleston Campus] The Regents decided that they didn't want that 80 acres. They didn't want to build a campus on West Charleston. So I went to Marvin Sedway, and we found a private donor who helped us build the original little building on the corner. The BLM [U.S. Bureau of Land Management] transferred the deed as soon as we put bricks and mortar there. The Regents all circled around me one day, finger in my chest, "You understand what you've done? We're going to have to build a campus there now." I just smiled through that. That's *exactly* what we tried to do.

\* \* \*

**Rawson:** A humorous story. I think you were there when they built the Supreme Court Building? **[Bennett: Yes.]** They had these grand, 150-year-old trees on the campus there. One night after committee, Bob Coffin and I went to dinner, and as we were coming back to the

*Marvin M. Sedway (D-Clark) served in the Assembly from 1982 until his death in 1990. He chaired Assembly Ways and Means in 1987 and 1989.*

Legislative Building, they were getting the chainsaws out to cut those trees down. So we chained ourselves to a tree and stopped them from cutting those old-growth trees down. They saved them, and you can still see them there. So I did my environmentalist stuff, too. [laughter]

**Bennett:** That's wonderful. Thank you so much. This has been a very interesting conversation.

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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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