

California State Government  
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

**JULIAN BECK**

California State Assemblyman, 1943 - 1953  
Governor's Legislative Secretary, 1958 - 1959

August 17, 24, and September 25, 1987  
San Fernando, California

By Carlos Vasquez  
Oral History Program  
University of California, Los Angeles

RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

None.

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## PREFACE

On September 25, 1985, Governor George Deukmejian signed into law A.B. 2104 (Chapter 965 of the Statutes of 1985). This legislation established, under the administration of the California State Archives, a State Government Oral History Program "to provide through the use of oral history a continuing documentation of state policy development as reflected in California's legislative and executive history."

The following interview is one of a series of oral histories undertaken for inclusion in the state program. These interviews offer insights into the actual workings of both the legislative and executive processes and policy mechanisms. They also offer an increased understanding of the men and women who create legislation and implement state policy. Further, they provide an overview of issue development in California state government and of how both the legislative and executive branches of government deal with issues and problems facing the state.

Interviewees are chosen primarily on the basis of their contributions to and influence on the policy process of the state of California. They include members of the legislative and executive branches of the state government as well as legislative staff, advocates, members of the media, and other people who played significant roles in specific issue areas of major and continuing importance to California.

By authorizing the California State Archives to work cooperatively with oral history units at California colleges and universities to conduct interviews, this program is structured to take advantage of the resources and expertise in oral history available through California's several institutionally based programs.

Participating as cooperating institutions in the State Government Oral History Program are:

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University of California, Los Angeles

The establishment of the California State Archives State Government Oral History Program marks one of the most significant commitments made by any state toward the preservation and documentation of its governmental history. It supplements the often fragmentary historical written record by adding an organized primary source, enriching the historical information available on given topics and allowing for more thorough historical analysis. As such, the program, through the preservation and publication of interviews such as the one which follows, will be of lasting value to current and future generations of scholars, citizens, and leaders.

John F. Burns  
State Archivist

July 27, 1988

This interview is printed on acid-free paper.

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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

### Interviewer/Editor

Carlos Vásquez  
Director, UCLA State Government Interview Series,  
UCLA Oral History Program  
B.A., UCLA [Political Science]  
M.A., Stanford University [Political Science]  
Ph.D. candidate, UCLA [History]

### Interview Time and Place

August 17, 1987  
Judge Beck's home in San Fernando, California  
Session of one hour

August 27, 1987  
Judge Beck's home in San Fernando, California  
Session of one hour

September 25, 1987  
Judge Beck's home in San Fernando, California  
Ten-minute summary session

### Editing

Vásquez checked the verbatim manuscript of the interview against the original tape recordings, edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling, and verified proper names. Insertions by the editor are bracketed. The interviewer also prepared the introductory materials.

Beck declined to review the edited transcript but authorized the UCLA Oral History Program to finalize the transcript.

### Papers

Beck's papers provide much specific information that the judge, at the time of the interview, had difficulty recalling. His papers are deposited at the Urban Archives Center, California State University, Northridge, and are cataloged as the "Julian Beck Collection, 1932-86," access number 87-6, box code JB 1-3. The collection includes scrapbooks, newspaper clippings, legislative bills, personal documents, and other memorabilia.

## Tapes and Interview Records

The original tape recordings of the interview are in the university archives at UCLA along with the records relating to the interviews. Master tapes are preserved at the California State Archives.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Julian Beck was born on May 13, 1905, in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. His father was a restaurateur until the family moved to Los Angeles, California, in 1923.

Beck received his bachelor's degree in economics and political science from UCLA in 1929 and his master's degree in history from the University of Southern California in 1935. He was awarded a law degree from Loyola University Law School in 1935 and was admitted to the California bar that same year.

During his school years, Beck worked at many jobs including streetcar conductor and accountant. He began teaching business courses at San Fernando High School before completing his law degree and continued to do so while practicing law and serving in the California State Legislature. As a teacher, Julian Beck was very active in various local and statewide teachers' organizations and served as their advocate and lobbyist among state legislators.

Beck ran successfully for a seat on the Democratic party central committee for Los Angeles County in 1940. Then, in 1942, he was elected to the newly created Forty-first Assembly District in the San Fernando Valley. For three years (1949-1952) he was minority floor leader. In 1953, Governor Earl Warren appointed Beck to the Los Angeles Municipal Court bench. In 1958 he joined Governor Edmund G. Brown, Sr.'s staff as legislative secretary. In 1959 Governor Brown appointed Beck to the Superior Court bench in San Fernando, where he presided until retiring in 1975.

Beck's legislative career reflects his ongoing interest in education and social service programs as well as civic improvements in his district. He carried the legislation establishing the California State University, Northridge, as well as creating the Superior Court in San Fernando.

I. LIFE HISTORY

[Session 1, August 17, 1987]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

Family History

VASQUEZ: Judge Beck, could you tell me something about your personal background, where you were born?

BECK: Yes. I was born back in Philadelphia. My folks were more or less of German heritage. My daddy came from Germany, my mother was born over in Austria. He ran a restaurant there. Before he ran a restaurant, when he first came to this country, for about a year or two he made picture frames.

But then he got into the restaurant business and stayed in that business until his death. One time while he was in this restaurant business . . . . I'm just trying to find the area, whether he was in the Los Angeles area at the time. For some reason, he made a trip over to the Hawaiian Islands. When he came back, he said he was renting some bungalows over there, or something,

where people could come in and stay and take things in, over to the islands. He was of German origin, very active in the Masonic organization. He had quite a family, of which his family, his sons and daughters, all worked in the restaurant, whether it was morning or evening or some other time.

VASQUEZ: How many of you were there in your family? How many brothers and sisters?

BECK: There were four boys and two girls.

VASQUEZ: How many are living?

BECK: Let's see if I can think of anybody. Isn't that funny? Goddamned.

VASQUEZ: Well, let's just go on.

BECK: Wait a minute. I have no brothers living at all. Now a sister has to be a female. I've got a sister living in someplace--goddamned--I think. How the hell would I double-check on this?

VASQUEZ: We can come back to that.

BECK: No, if I had a book. . . . They send out Christmas cards. See if I sent one out. . . . I think I have a sister someplace. I'm not sure. Goddamned, isn't that awful?

VASQUEZ: In what part of Philadelphia did you live?

BECK: North Philadelphia.

VASQUEZ: That's where your restaurant was?

BECK: Yes.

VASQUEZ: Where did you go to school?

BECK: I went to the regular elementary school in that particular area. Then the high school was called Northeast High School. At that time, the Philadelphia high schools were all boys or all girls; at Northeast it was all boys. It was about two miles away, and many times I'd walk over there, or catch a streetcar for a nickel, and chase streetcars and get over there. At that time, my dad had a restaurant on Allegheny Avenue. I was running that restaurant, so I had to get up at 5:00 in the morning and have the breakfast served. I think my mother did the cooking over there. Well, about that time, trade was off so I went over to the school and somebody else handled the restaurant business the balance of the day. So that's how I started out.

Coming to California

VASQUEZ: What occasioned you to come out to California?

BECK: Well, my dad came out here to visit and he liked

it. He came back, and he thought he'd take the family out to California. Which he did. In the meantime, while he was out here the first time, he got an option to buy six cabins or units down at Long Beach, which were rented out as furnished units. He had to put down a deposit on it to buy those units. So we all moved out to California. He had a different house for us and he bought those units and operated them. So that's how we got to California, got to Long Beach.

VASQUEZ: I see. You were a young man?

BECK: Yes, I was out of high school.

Higher Education

VASQUEZ: Did you go straight to college here? Or did you work?

BECK: Well, it was timely because when I moved into Los Angeles, I was starting to go to. . . . I think I started some law school. So I moved to Los Angeles and I got me a job at the Title Insurance and Trust Company. It paid fifty dollars a month. I got a house to live on, what they. . . . Oh, not Angel's Flight, but this was up pretty high. I paid \$2.50 a month.

VASQUEZ: This is while you were going to UCLA [University

of California, Los Angeles]?

BECK: This is right before I started going there. I had this job at the title company. Then I had a job across the street at the bank. That took in two years. Then, at that time, I applied for . . . . The application went up to UCLA. At that time I was living up in the hill area there, around Third [Street] and Grand [Avenue].

VASQUEZ: How did you get all the way out to UCLA every day from the downtown area?

BECK: Well, at that time, UCLA was on Vermont Avenue.

VASQUEZ: I see, at the original campus.

BECK: In fact, I was in the last class that attended, I think, and got a degree in the 1929 class. So I used to go out on the streetcar. There was a streetcar on Hill Street going out towards Santa Monica Boulevard. One car fare and you were just a couple of blocks away from the university. Since I worked for the railroad, PE Railway [Pacific Electric Railway] I had a pass. So it didn't cost me anything. But the fare was only about a nickel. So I did go to school there all the time I was working as a streetcar conductor.

### Becoming a Teacher

I met a fellow out there named Jones. He and I lived together for a number of years. Ray Jones. He became a school teacher, also, but he didn't teach very long. He became business manager at the Redondo Beach Union High School District. I stayed with the teaching profession and taught for many, many years. I don't know how long, ten, twelve years.

I taught in the high school district, sometimes at Manual Arts High School, sometimes at some other school. But then mostly out at San Fernando High School. I taught out there practically the rest of my career. In 1935, my wife and I got married and we moved to San Fernando. Our children were born in San Fernando and I spent, I don't know how many years in San Fernando High School. Probably about eleven years.<sup>1</sup>

And then I was elected to the state legislature from the district that included San Fernando. I stayed up in the state legislature

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1. Judge Beck taught in what was then called the Los Angeles City High School District from 1931 to 1946.

for, I guess, over ten years. During that time, I was elected the Democratic floor leader at each session of the legislature. For San Fernando, I put a through street in called Truman Street.<sup>1</sup> It was just a sandy street at the time.

I put courthouses in, a branch court, so the Los Angeles and the municipal and superior courts [would be] in San Fernando. . . . and got the board of supervisors to put up a building.<sup>2</sup> I located the courthouses at First Street. I had a question in my mind whether I would locate it on First Street and San Fernando--it was only about a block or so from San Fernando Road--or locate it near the Elk's temple, which is out in sort of a residential district. Because the choice was up to me. The supervisors left that up to me.

I decided to put the courthouses, the municipal court, on First Street. There were no buildings between First Street and the rear end of the buildings on San Fernando Road or Truman

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1. A.B. 32, 57th Leg. Sess., Cal. Stat. 1370 (1947).

2. Courthouse.

Street. I put it there so people going to that courthouse--or the jurors, witnesses--would all see the rear end of those businesses. If I had put the courthouse over near the Elk's, they would have been no help to any of the businesses in town. So that's why I put those buildings there. And they're still there at the same place.

VASQUEZ: At the time you were also a director in the chamber of commerce, weren't you?

BECK: If I was, I was not very active in it. But that's why I got the courthouses there. And the supervisors said, "We'll give you all the land you want out here." And so, we put the courthouses there. And they're still there and they're still functioning. I don't know if I can tell you any more about those courthouses.

VASQUEZ: Well, we'll come back to that. But let's talk a little about your years as a teacher. Why did you want to be a teacher?

BECK: I don't know where I got my first. . . . But in order to do it, I had to take education courses ahead of time. So I think it just must have come to me in a dream, that some of these men that

taught at the high school were teachers, why shouldn't I become a teacher? I had my choice. I had already passed the bar exam. I could go out and practice law. If that was successful, I could become a teacher. But I thought I would enjoy it.

I had been teaching at Belmont High School, some of the evening courses--even though I didn't have a credential--like business law and so on. But I thought, well, I had a college degree and everything else. And I had a job at San Fernando High School. I got that job without having a teacher's credential. I thought I'd just complete that and get the teaching credentials and keep on adding some more so I could teach almost anywhere. So that's my background on the teaching. I enjoyed teaching.

VASQUEZ: What kind of courses did you teach at the high school?

BECK: Well, at the high school I came there to teach business subjects. That's the business course. I taught typing. I taught bookkeeping. I taught business law.

VASQUEZ: You taught advertising?

BECK: Yeah, advertising. So I taught the business courses at San Fernando High School. I had a general credential, so I didn't have to get a special credential to teach that.

VASQUEZ: Tell me, as a high school teacher, did it bring you in contact with a lot of community groups?

BECK: Groups? No, not particularly.

## II. POLITICAL CAREER

### Activities with Teacher Organizations

VASQUEZ: You were pretty active in the teacher organizations, were you not?

BECK: Yes, I was, because I represented a group in their legislative action. I was one of the few, usually, in a group that had some legal training. So they looked up to me. When I was a probationary teacher, they named me as chairman of the probationary and substitute teacher organization [Probationary and Substitute Teachers Organization of Los Angeles]. And the same way, when I passed that stage, I became chairman of legislative groups, where I was contacting the board of education or the legislature.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember some of the issues you took on in

that capacity? Did you have problems with teacher retention, for example?

BECK: Hmm. Well, I thought I'd never forget. The big issue in those days was the fact that it was the Depression and they cut down. [Looks for paper] I don't know if this has something to do with it. No. No.

VASQUEZ: This isn't it.

BECK: No. They had cut down on the number of teachers teaching. So I was out of work, because I was one of the beginning teachers. I didn't have seniority yet. So I went out and took some college courses. I don't know where the hell I kept busy on the other scene, as far as political activity was concerned. Maybe that's where I got the idea of running for public office.

Running for Public Office

VASQUEZ: Do you remember exactly how that happened?

BECK: Running for public office?

VASQUEZ: Yes. Tell us something about your first campaign. Because while you were teaching, you were also active as a lobbyist, weren't you, a teachers' lobbyist?

BECK: That's correct. That's because I had a legal

background. And with respect to what they called the Affiliated Teachers Organization representing not the high school here, but, all of them, I was a regular member of that. Did service on it. And when they had activity up in Sacramento, I was called upon for that because I had not only a legal background, but I had a background of working up in Sacramento.

Public Speaking

VASQUEZ: Looking, at the record, you seemed to have been quite a popular speaker with some of the community groups here in San Fernando. Was oratory something at which you were especially adept?

BECK: No, I didn't make too many talks. I was able to talk. If I got interested in politics, of course, it was something I could talk about. I couldn't go around and talk about education very well to these. . . . Who were the. . . . What you call it? The Kiwanis Club, the Rotary Club and so on. But I did get an opportunity to speak and I used the opportunity. Funny thing is that using that opportunity, it probably helped me get elected to something. I don't know what I first

ran for. Do you know?

VASQUEZ: Yes. You ran for assemblyman of a new district, the Forty-first.

BECK: But no other group in that area before that time?

VASQUEZ: You were very active in teacher groups.

BECK: I had an advantage running for office. It was all local people who ran. San Fernando had the biggest population. The other candidates were from San Fernando, good friends of mine. But I did have the background of being a lawyer, as well as a schoolteacher. Well, anyway, the district elected me in the primaries. And I served up there for, I think, twelve years.

The Forty-first Assembly District

VASQUEZ: Tell me about the district. How was it created, or how did it come about? What kind of district was it then?

BECK: Well, the original district at that time was from Chatsworth to Lancaster. And it was primarily a farming area, agriculture. San Fernando was the biggest area. It probably had a population of 7,500 to 10,000 people at the time. But imagine running for a district that went from Chatsworth up to Lancaster and Palmdale and Little Rock, as

well as Newhall and Saugus. It was kind of rough.

VASQUEZ: Did you have to travel around the district a lot?

BECK: I couldn't do it too much. But I spent more time up at Lancaster and Palmdale than I did in some other parts of my district because in other parts of my district, I assumed that people knew me. For instance, San Fernando High School, the kids from there came down from Saugus and Newhall, and even from Chatsworth, to attend. They had all grown and were all voters. So I had that bunch of ex-students. They knew my name. There were five people who ran in the primaries, and I was the only one anybody knew, so I got elected. And after that nobody particularly ran against me for each of my terms. So I got elected five or six times. And I did a nice job for my community. I can't think of all the things I put in, but people are still talking about Truman Street. I don't know if you know where that is.

Widening Truman Street

VASQUEZ: It's a few blocks from here. Yes, I just crossed it coming here.

BECK: It used to be a sandy street.

VASQUEZ: It's a large boulevard now.

BECK: Yeah, it was a sandy street. No cars. You just couldn't go up the damned thing. So I made a paved street out of it. And boy, did I have a job making that a paved street. It wasn't named after President Truman because that was thirty years before he became president.

VASQUEZ: I thought that.

San Fernando Municipal Court

BECK: So I put that in in San Fernando. I put those courthouses in there in San Fernando. I had to put them in before I became a judge there. And I had to put them in to make sure that they didn't go someplace else. So I said that, "There shall be a courthouse in every city in the county of Los Angeles that's completely surrounded by another city"--San Fernando is completely surrounded by Los Angeles--and some people wanting to file a lawsuit in the municipal court traveled twenty miles through that city, and another twenty miles to file their lawsuit. See, that gave the legislature some reason. That's why they approved that as--what do you call it--a municipal court area.

VASQUEZ: So you tailored it pretty much to fit San Fernando?

BECK: I did a lot of that on the bills. I made all those little testimonials so nobody could copy it. Maybe you ran across one of them. Did I have one for the courthouse? That was the one, I think, that was completely surrounded by another city and some people have to go, come twenty miles through that city? I think that is what it was. I was pretty nice on those things.

First Political Campaign

VASQUEZ: Let's go back to your first election, your first campaign, who were your main endorsers? Who did you seek help from?

BECK: Who? I really didn't need to seek help. There were five people running. Not one of them had any legislative experience. Not one of them had any experience, particularly, in politics. My little experience in politics was serving on the [Democratic party] county central committee, or something like that. But I had one thing the rest of them didn't have. And that is that most of my district, two-thirds of it, the kids going to my high school, their parents were the

voters. So everybody knew me.

And then I belonged to the service clubs, like the Lions Club and other groups like that. I was chairman of the churchmen's group, all the churches met once a month for dinner. And I headed the YMCA [Young Men's Christian Association]. I wasn't thinking of running for anything at that time, but I had those jobs.

I was voted [in] because I had a background in education and everything else. I was a lawyer. And so, people in San Fernando knew me. Kids from Newhall, when I was teaching in high school, they had to come down to San Fernando High School. So, they told their parents, "Oh, that's our teacher." I mean, that's how I got in. They had five guys running against me and none of them stood a chance with that kind of a background.

#### Service Organizations and Politics

VASQUEZ: How important were memberships in the Elks, the Masons, the Lions Club, and YMCA, in those days, when one was involved with politics?

BECK: Very little. Three percent out of 100 percent, at most. Most of the time, they don't advertise

it. I mean, the person belonging to the Elks Club, and so on, he doesn't advertise it.

VASQUEZ: Is that right?

BECK: He enrolls in Rotary or Kiwanis. After a while, if he's a member of the Elks Club, he doesn't advertise it. But he sends the members of the Elks Club. . . . He gets that list. [Laughter]. No, it couldn't very well do it. At least, they don't do it. They recommend against doing it. If you're a member of the Kiwanis Club, you don't send out stuff saying you're a member of the Kiwanis Club. Somebody in the club may send something and say, "He's a member of the chamber of commerce, member of the Kiwanis Club, member of . . . " this, that and so on, and in between. But not specifically come out with one item.

VASQUEZ: I asked you because in looking over some of the background of your colleagues that were in the assembly at that time, many of them seemed to belong to these same service clubs. They seemed to belong to the Elks. A lot of them belonged to the Lions Club.

BECK: You mean people who were running for public office?

VASQUEZ: People who were in the legislature at the time you were. That's why I asked how useful those things were.

BECK: Well, I think people in the legislature do belong to organizations like, you say, the Elks and so on, because those are the people who probably supported them the first time they ran.

VASQUEZ: Uh-huh.

BECK: It might have been the chamber of commerce. Or it might be almost anything. But you can't take a person that nobody knows and run for office. He may belong to a church. And then, of course, he advertises his church.

VASQUEZ: So, you attribute the success in your first campaign to name recognition, that you were known, people knew you?

BECK: That's correct. And the kids, youngsters going to school, telling their parents.

VASQUEZ: You were also an attorney, as well as a teacher?

BECK: That didn't carry any weight.

VASQUEZ: No? The fact that you were in the newspaper as an advocate for teacher groups many times in

Sacramento, do you think that helped any?

BECK: It helped me because I was a teacher. It also helped because of that, too. I mean, they threw a few pennies into the pot.

VASQUEZ: How much do you think it cost you to win that first election?

BECK: About \$750, maybe. Maybe \$500. I don't know.

VASQUEZ: Is that right.

BECK: Very little literature was sent out, except the last week. There were five people who ran for the job. They were all outstanding people. Somebody from Northridge was head of something, some kind of museum. I forget what it was. And so it was tough competition. The population was around San Fernando, and the kids going to school and other people in town organizations.

VASQUEZ: Were the local newspapers very useful to you in running for office?

BECK: Oh, yeah. They finally endorsed me. Especially with the five guys running. They finally endorsed me. But very seldom did I get any backing from the newspapers. But most of the times I ran, there was no opposition. The only time when there was tough opposition was when a

kid named [William G.] Bonelli [Jr.] ran against me. His father was a . . . : What was his father? Board of Equalization, or something. And that was a tough fight, because I expected it to be kind of crooked. We had to spend some money, but we did win. So I had no trouble winning, particularly.

VASQUEZ: He was drafted, wasn't he, right before the election?

BECK: Who was?

VASQUEZ: Bonelli. Wasn't he drafted into the service?

BECK: Oh, I don't know about that.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember which papers endorsed you? Which local newspapers?

BECK: In San Fernando, there's only one newspaper, the San Fernando Sun. As far as the Los Angeles papers, it was a . . . . If they did make an endorsement--I'm not sure--it would be the Los Angeles Times.

VASQUEZ: How about the outlying areas, like Lancaster and like that? Are there local papers out there that might have endorsed you?

BECK: There are local papers, but I don't recall them endorsing me or the opposition at any time.

VASQUEZ: Did you ever try to get them to endorse you?

BECK: No.

VASQUEZ: Did you ever know any of the editors of any of the papers that endorsed you?

BECK: Oh, yes. I knew them personally, the same way as San Fernando, but I never asked any of those papers to endorse me. When they endorsed me, fine.

VASQUEZ: How did you get your political message, your campaign message out? Did you go speak before community groups?

BECK: First of all, it was mailings and advertising. I had [Thomas C.] Tom Carrell, my campaign manager . . . . I don't know if you know Tom Carrell. The automobile [dealer] man, he became a legislator, too. And so, we just sent out some letters in the district, and some advertising in the local newspapers. But not too much. We didn't spend \$1,500 altogether with everything, mailings, and so on. And after that, for reelection, I never spent more than \$500.

VASQUEZ: Who do you consider was the backbone of your support?

BECK: Well, first of all, Tom Carrell. And then, of

course, I think my ex-school students, and people that knew me in any organizations like the Elks or the Masonic organization and didn't know anybody else, didn't know the other people. People not so much in the church group, because the church group. . . . San Fernando Presbyterian Church is local and, at that particular time, they didn't go out in the various areas. But it was a rough district because you had people up in Palmdale and Lancaster and Little Rock, they didn't know who I was. And the Ledger Gazette up at Lancaster was supporting somebody else besides me. Made me kind of angry. But that guy got whipped in the primaries. I beat him. I think it was Bonelli who was running against me at that time. That's the Bill Bonelli. He was on what? Do you remember Bonelli? I forget what his son was running against me for. But, anyway, I got elected. But, with all five people running against me at the primaries--and I forget who was running on a Republican ticket--and thereafter nobody filed against me for the next four elective terms. Yes, my name was the only one on the ballot.

Running as a Democrat

VASQUEZ: And you always ran as a Democrat?

BECK: I never put Democrat or Republican. You always ran as a Democrat.

VASQUEZ: When did you become a Democrat?

BECK: I always voted that way, so I don't know. I guess when I first started voting.

VASQUEZ: Was this as a result of your upbringing, do you think?

BECK: Not necessarily.

VASQUEZ: Something you picked up on your own?

BECK: Yeah, I guess so. Because I always thought Republicans were these rich people and stuff like that. And so, whenever I got to be twenty-one and voted, I voted Democratic. And not only that, I attended Democratic conventions back in Chicago before I ran for the legislature. So I must have been in my early twenties.

VASQUEZ: In what capacity did you attend the conventions?

BECK: As a delegate. When they nominated [Harry S] Truman, I was back there and met him and we nominated him.

VASQUEZ: So, as a teacher, you were already active in politics . . .

BECK: Yes.

VASQUEZ: In county Democratic politics, is that right?

BECK: That's right. I didn't bring in my politics. I was interested in the school politics, too, but not party politics. Going up to Sacramento, trying to get a change in the law with respect to teachers like probationary teachers. I don't [remember] whether there was a three-year limit checking on them, but if there was, I tried to raise it to five years. So I did represent what they called the ATOLA [Affiliated Teachers Organization of Los Angeles].

National Democratic Conventions

VASQUEZ: Do you remember anything about the national conventions you attended in Chicago as a delegate from Los Angeles when you were still a teacher? What can you tell me about that?

BECK: I went to two of the conventions back there. The first one, I think, was in Philadelphia. And I forget, the second one must have. . . . I can't tell you too much about it, except that a lot of times I didn't stay at the convention. I went through town and had fun because it looked like there was no question that Truman, or whoever was

running at the time, would pick up the marbles.

But I did get elected, not by the people in the district; it's an election by the heads of the Democratic party in this area. I had to pay my own way back, though.

VASQUEZ: Was the Democratic party pretty strong here in San Fernando?

BECK: Well, it seemed to me it was stronger as far as membership. But as far as money, the Republican party had it. Because you had Leo Flynn, who owned a hotel here in town, and other guys that were rich. They were running the Republican party. So we didn't have many Democrats.

Appointment to the Bench

VASQUEZ: When you served in the state legislature--and we'll come to that later on when we get more into detail in that part of the interview--you were in the legislature until 1953. In 1953, you were appointed municipal court judge by Governor Earl Warren. Tell me a little bit about that.

BECK: That's correct. Hold it up a minute. I went down to see him about something else, but before I could talk he stopped me. Oh, go ahead, I . . .

VASQUEZ: No, go ahead.

BECK: No. I forget what it was, now.

VASQUEZ: When Earl Warren asked you if you wanted to be a judge, 1953.

BECK: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: You were then minority floor leader.

BECK: I remember something about what had happened. I was down to see Earl Warren on something. I told him that they were thinking of making Truman Street a new San Fernando Road, where cars would go both directions on Truman Street. And they were going to widen it. And I told him I was against that, that we had San Fernando Road for people who go either way. On Truman Street, I thought maybe they should be just going one direction, so all the cars would go in that direction. So I don't know finally what happened on that. But, at least I was interested in that street. Did you ever cross it?

VASQUEZ: I crossed it today, coming here. Now, is this what you were talking to Earl Warren about when he asked you about the municipal judgeship?

BECK: No. On Truman Street, does the traffic go both ways now?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

BECK: So, I guess it's divided up so it made it wide enough. But that was something. Oh, Earl Warren told me. . . . He had told. . . . Or he had signed the bill for Truman Street. I don't know. . . . He didn't know where Truman Street was. And for some reason, I was down in the office to see him on something else and he told me about that. And I said, "Gee, that's really something. Really something." I said, "That's a sandy street, now it's going to be all paved." And I'll bet he's used it, too. He drove. . . . I interrupted you on something.

VASQUEZ: No, that's quite all right. We were going into when you became judge of the municipal court here in San Fernando.

BECK: Let me see if I know how I got down here in the first place.

VASQUEZ: Earl Warren appointed you.

BECK: He did? Or had I already run for election and got elected?

VASQUEZ: I think you had been reelected. But then you were appointed by Earl Warren in 1953 to the . . .

BECK: Wait a minute. How did I get to be the judge in the first place?

VASQUEZ: That's what I want to know. What I see here in some of your legislative record is that you were a Democrat in a Republican-controlled assembly, with a Republican governor. But you were still adept at moving legislation through the assembly.

BECK: Just off the record a minute. See if I've got anything in this what-you-call-it. I don't think so. No. Isn't it funny how you forget these things?

VASQUEZ: Well, let's not worry about how you got appointed. Let's talk a little bit about . . .

BECK: I was in to see him. For some reason he brought up--or I brought up--Truman Street. Well, he was still there. They weren't doing anything with the bill over in the senate committee to put Truman Street through. Warren called up the chairman of the committee. The chairman says, "We'll have it on your desk in two days, governor." That's how it got on his desk, to widen Truman Street. But I forget the exact year that it was entered. But it sure has taken the load off of San Fernando Boulevard. But let's get back on where we were.

VASQUEZ: Okay. So you were appointed the judge of the

municipal court here in the San Fernando Valley, and you served there for . . .

BECK: I wasn't appointed to the San Fernando Valley. I was appointed municipal judge to the Los Angeles city limits. At that time, I could go to Van Nuys. I could go downtown. I think we had the courthouse in San Fernando also there. So, if I remember, I started over in Van Nuys, in that courthouse, and was municipal court judge over there for maybe six months or more before I came over to San Fernando. Then I didn't stay in San Fernando too long, either, because I got appointed to the superior court, didn't I? When was that?

VASQUEZ: In 1959, you were called upon by Governor [Edmund G.] "Pat" Brown [Sr.] to serve as his legislative secretary, which you did for the first legislative session, I guess, for the first nine months of the Brown administration. And then he appointed you superior court judge. As I understand it, that's how it went.

BECK: Off the record, I want to see if that's true.

VASQUEZ: Well, that book's not going to tell you, because that's from 1946.

BECK: No, this is too old now, yeah. You say Brown appointed me?

VASQUEZ: Pat Brown.

BECK: What I remember about Brown is he says, "Come on up here and help me out for a couple of months and I'll put you on the superior court." And I didn't go up. Did I go up and help him out or what?

VASQUEZ: Yes, you did.

BECK: For how long?

VASQUEZ: For about nine months.

BECK: Nine months! Oh, gee, I don't remember that.

VASQUEZ: Is that right?

BECK: Then they appointed me back to the municipal court.

VASQUEZ: No, the superior court.

BECK: Oh, he appointed me to the superior court.

VASQUEZ: Superior court.

BECK: Oh, okay. Oh, all right. That's all right.

VASQUEZ: I remember you showing me that picture of you and Governor Brown, you're presenting him a piece of legislation.

BECK: Yeah. Oh, well, gee. I'm sure glad you're refreshing my memory.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember anything at all about your years in the municipal court?

BECK: Yes. I do. Over at Van Nuys, it was the only municipal court at that time in the [San Fernando] Valley. And over at Van Nuys, at that time, in municipal court all we had coming up before us were the drunks, the prostitutes, and that took 80 percent of the time.

I was sitting, and most judges who were there like myself sit on a courtroom where they just bring cases in.

The person pleads guilty or not guilty. If they plead guilty, you make the fine. If they plead not guilty, you set it for trial. And then, in the afternoon, you would have a trial someplace. I lived in San Fernando. Sometimes I had a trial there. Sometimes I had it over in Van Nuys. So, that's the way it worked over in Van Nuys. [In the] morning, we had the people appear before us and plead guilty or not guilty and fine them, or put them in jail. In the afternoon, [one was] taking something for a better job, studying law and other departments.

VASQUEZ: What preparation do you think your years in the

legislature gave you for your judgeship?

BECK: What?

Legislative Background on the Bench

VASQUEZ: Do you think that your years in the legislature helped you prepare at all to become a judge?

BECK: No, never even gave it a thought that my years in the legislature would have that effect.

Of course, many members of the bench were former legislators. One reason is, of course, when you're a legislator, you make a contact with a governor, where that chance might be only one in five hundred if you're just an ordinary citizen or ordinary lawyer. And it's up to the governor. He's always got lots of appointments to make. The curious thing about my appointment was I was appointed by a Republican, and I was the Democratic floor leader at the time.

[Laughter] That was Earl Warren.

Relationship with Governor Warren

VASQUEZ: Do you have any idea why that was?

BECK: He had a lot of good faith in me and he believed 100 percent anything I would tell him, any recommendation that I would make.

VASQUEZ: How did you get to engender that kind of

confidence in his mind?

BECK: Because that's the way I was with people. I had no claims to anything. I had nothing I was pushing at any time. If I was pushing it, I'd tell him. I never had any trouble with Earl Warren. He knew exactly what's what. He knew I wouldn't try to pull a fast one on him. He could talk to me, tell me whether he was not going to do this, or not going to do that, or "Watch out for this bill. I hope they kill it." You see. He'd give me an idea of what to do if it was a bad bill. So, no, he had a good deal of faith in me, even when I was Democratic floor leader.

VASQUEZ: Did you have an affinity with him politically, in the sense of what his programs were?

BECK: No. We were both Masons. He was quite active in the Masonic organizations. Of course, not since he was governor, even before. And I belonged to the Masonic organization. But I don't think that had anything to do with it. I just admired his work, and for some reason he admired mine. There wasn't a lobbyist who influenced me on anything, even the education lobbyists. If they wanted to talk, fine. Warren knew that, and I think he

appreciated it.

Relationship with Lobbyists

VASQUEZ: And you were in office during the heyday of the [Arthur H.] Artie Samish organization.

BECK: That's right.

VASQUEZ: And the kind of lobbying that is most often seen as negative. Can you tell me a little bit about that, how the lobbyists would operate when you got up there to the state legislature in 1943?

BECK: The only lobbyists who asked me to do anything all the time I was up there, were the education lobbyists. The others never approached me. They knew I called them as I saw them.

VASQUEZ: So, you had a good record?

BECK: I don't remember any other group who came over and asked for a vote.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember what it is that the education lobby would ask you to do?

BECK: Oh, if there was a bill up there to help teachers out, to get seniority or get permanency. In other words, if you teach three years, you automatically. . . . They can't fire you without cause, or something like that. So, this teacher group always had some kind of legislation.

They'd rather give it to a person who was in the teaching profession, like myself or a couple other fellows up there, and have us push the bill for them.

VASQUEZ: What areas do you remember took up most of your time in the state legislature? What committees were you most active on?

BECK: Well, of course, on the legal committee.<sup>1</sup> That would probably be the committee I was most active on. Any changes in the law, or changes where the location of courthouses, in Van Nuys and San Fernando and so on. I served on the ones that handled politics. I don't know whether you'd call it a political science committee or something. But there was one where politics would be involved.

VASQUEZ: You were active on the Education Committee?

BECK: I was active on political science committees. Anything that had to do with politics, with the law or putting out things that go on the ballot each year.

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1. Judge Beck served on the Judiciary Committee during the session under discussion.

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

VASQUEZ: When we stopped the machine a moment ago, we were talking about your tenure as a municipal court judge in San Fernando Valley, at Van Nuys and then in San Fernando. Tell me, as a former legislator and a municipal court judge, were you called upon to help out on particular legislative battles? Were you asked to contribute to political campaigns and be active in them?

BECK: No, not as a judge.

Governor Brown's Legislative Secretary

VASQUEZ: Not as a judge. Okay. Now, in 1959--actually, 1958--Edmund G. Brown was elected governor, the second Democratic governor in this century. And he called on you to come to Sacramento for a few months to help him out as his legislative secretary. Do you remember anything about that at all?

BECK: Yes, I do.

VASQUEZ: Tell me something about that.

BECK: Well, he called me up and he wanted me to come up there to be his legislative secretary and recommend to him what bills I suggested he sign,

and what bills he shouldn't sign, and some of which I didn't know what to do about myself. As every bill was submitted to him, I'd give him a brief summary, one or two lines, so he wouldn't have to read the bill through. He'd just sign it, or not. I remember one bill that I sent on to him I shouldn't have. But I didn't want to make a recommendation on it. I forget what the heck it was. I forget [Laughter] what the darned bill ever was. It had something to do with some religion, or something, and I didn't want to take the blame. I forget what the goddamned thing was. But I said, "I hope he catches it."

VASQUEZ: Tell me, when you got up to Sacramento as legislative secretary for Governor Brown, were there a lot of people still in the assembly that you had served with you before?

BECK: Oh, yes. Oh, yes.

VASQUEZ: You knew a lot of people up there then?

BECK: That's correct.

VASQUEZ: Did you know the leadership?

BECK: Governor Brown said that when I completed my work up there, he'd put me on the superior court. So I expected to go on the superior court. So it

was kind of interesting when you get all these hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of bills and make a recommendation to him. When you make a recommendation, you don't use more than one or two sentences. Because, after all, a governor gets fifty, sixty, seventy of these things. What the hell is he going to do with them? So he depends on his legislative secretary. And not once did he come back and say to me "What the devil do I do about this?"

VASQUEZ: Did you have staff?

BECK: No, it was staffed with people. But I was the only one to recommend, and so on. It was something to do with the San Fernando Valley Fair I know I had a problem with. I forget what it was. I think I just didn't make a recommendation one way or the other. I forgot. Even Truman Street, I don't think I was up there. For some time, I wasn't with him on making recommendations on these bills. Some had come before him, and I was down here in southern California. And one of those was Truman Street. Gee, if he had killed that, I'd have died.

VASQUEZ: You served less than a year?

BECK: Oh, yes. I told him . . . .

VASQUEZ: Were you serving a transition . . . .

BECK: . . . at the end of the year. . . . Let's see, when he called me up there, I was a municipal court judge.

VASQUEZ: Right.

BECK: And I told him when he wanted me up there that if I went up there, I wanted to be appointed to the superior court. No sense in me getting away from the court and go through all that grief and so on. He said, "It's a deal." I assumed he would have done that, anyway. I don't think I did say anything to him. I don't think I ever did say anything to him.

VASQUEZ: So were you part of a transition team?

BECK: No, we just . . . .

VASQUEZ: Because you were only there a year.

BECK: He . . . .

VASQUEZ: Why was that?

BECK: A year what?

VASQUEZ: You were there less than a year as a legislative secretary.

BECK: Six months. Six months. No, he called me up and I never did serve up there before for anybody

else, or for any other team. And it's the only interruption of my judicial career. He wanted recommendations whether to sign or not to sign a bill.

VASQUEZ: Had you known Governor Brown before he was elected?

BECK: Yes, because he was the attorney general.

VASQUEZ: And you knew him as attorney general?

BECK: He was our leading Democrat.

VASQUEZ: Yes, he was.

BECK: Earl Warren. . . . Oh, Warren liked me, you know?

VASQUEZ: Yes, you told me.

BECK: It's the funniest goddamned thing. I told you what happened about the court?

VASQUEZ: Yes, you did.

BECK: Now, I went to his office, and he had already been appointed to the [United States] Supreme Court. "Beck, I want to appoint you to the Los Angeles municipal court. Will you accept?" [Laughter] Here's a guy appointed chief justice. Funniest goddamned thing. I mean, isn't it? But he had a lot of respect for me, and I had for him.

VASQUEZ: When you were on the court, did you miss the

legislative hurly-burly of Sacramento?

BECK: No. No, but I did go back up there during Pat Brown's administration, I think--what?--for a short time, a month or three weeks or something. Oh, no. I didn't miss. . . . A hell of a lot more fun up there than being on the court. Yeah, there's no question about that.

VASQUEZ: And then, Pat Brown appointed you superior court judge, where you served until 1974?

BECK: Let's see, who put me on?

VASQUEZ: Pat Brown.

BECK: Who put me on the municipal court?

VASQUEZ: Earl Warren.

BECK: Oh, Earl put me in. See how I got a good memory?

VASQUEZ: Right.

BECK: And, in fact, he put me on the superior court. I didn't ask him. And he didn't ask me to do anything for him. Did I? I don't think so.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember any particular piece of legislation while you were Pat Brown's legislative secretary that gave you problems?

BECK: When I was whose legislative secretary?

VASQUEZ: Pat Brown's.

BECK: No, because I don't think he gave me anything.

He gave me the legislative secretary's job, I think, to pass the bills coming to him to make a recommendation. But, personally, about introducing bills on behalf of the governor's office, I don't think they had any.

VASQUEZ: I see. So you were basically just someone who did analyses of the legislation?

BECK: That's correct.

VASQUEZ: All right.

BECK: And to pass or vote against.

VASQUEZ: And made recommendations on it?

BECK: Yeah.

VASQUEZ: But you didn't help draft legislation?

BECK: I might have on some simple thing, but I don't. . . . It wasn't a big idea at all, one way or another.

VASQUEZ: All right. Why don't we stop for today.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

## III. REMEMBERING CALIFORNIA POLITICS

[Session 2, August 27, 1987]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

Early Political Career

VASQUEZ: Judge Beck, when we last talked we had gone over your political and public career, which included five terms in the state assembly, a number of years as a municipal court judge, a short term as the governor's legislative secretary, and a rather long tenure as superior court judge here in San Fernando.

BECK: I believe I served twenty years before I retired. I think five years on the municipal court. I think the other fifteen years were on the superior court.

VASQUEZ: Exactly twenty years.

BECK: Of course, sitting on the superior court, out in the [San Fernando] Valley, you'd like to sit over at Van Nuys or if there was a courthouse in San Fernando, rather than chasing into Los Angeles. I did that most of the time.

VASQUEZ: I wanted to talk a little bit about your early years, how you came to run for public office. As a teacher, you were active in legislative matters

and in teacher organizations, high school teachers organizations, different groups.

BECK: Well, I think the basis is the fact that I served on teacher organizations. We always had legislation, so we were always checking it, either for or against it. And then I got into politics with the Democrats. No matter where I lived, there was a local Democratic party organization. I would join. I wasn't running the show at that time, but at least I was getting acquainted with the Democrats in the area and the public officials who represented those particular areas.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember what year this might be that you first became involved in Democratic politics? I know you were elected to the central committee in 1940.

BECK: All right, let's take around the time I was in, at the probationary teachers [organization] and others [who] all got laid off in Los Angeles. It was in the early 1930s, let's say sometime [around] '32, '33 to '35.

VASQUEZ: Nineteen thirty-five.

BECK: I belonged to the beginning teachers, probationary teachers organization--I belonged to

that, was active in it as legislative chairman. Then I was a member of the Affiliated Teachers Organization of Los Angeles. That's including junior high school, elementary school, and senior high. Then because of my legal background, of course, they put me on as the legislative chairman there, too.

So, as a result, I did have the opportunity to meet various politicians. I had to in that particular office, whether I met at Sacramento or met them down here in Los Angeles County. But, usually, it would be in Sacramento where I'd be going up with respect to legislation which was pending, either for probationary teachers or permanent teachers. I'd get a chance to know them pretty well and they got to know me pretty well.

VASQUEZ: Now, that's the mid-thirties. In 1935, in one year, you received a commission in the National Guard. You took and passed the California bar exam. You received your law degree from Loyola [University Law School]. You received your master's degree from USC [University of Southern California]. And you got married that year. You

were now a lawyer and a teacher. How much time did you devote to a law practice being a full-time teacher?

BECK: You mean before I got appointed to the bench?

VASQUEZ: Before you were elected. Early on, right after law school.

BECK: When I was teaching, of course, I put in only an hour or two hours in the law office. I usually was associated with somebody who could put in full time. For instance, my law partner in San Fernando, after a few years I started there, was a fellow named Allen Miller. He took my place in the state legislature.

VASQUEZ: Yes, he did.

BECK: He took in a person named Stillwell, Parkes Stillwell. So, we had a law firm of Miller, Beck, and Stillwell.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember what year that you formed that firm?

BECK: No, I don't know what year.

VASQUEZ: How did you first meet Miller?

BECK: Well, I first met him when I was in a law office and he decided to join me in a law office. That helped pay the rent. [Laughter] There wasn't

much money we made out of the deal.

VASQUEZ: What kind of law did you practice?

BECK: Just general. Because the things that occurred most often in a general office were probating an estate, and the other was divorce. The rest was stuff which might take a long time in court.

VASQUEZ: Now, this was during the Depression?

BECK: Well, this is since I started practicing law.

VASQUEZ: Right.

BECK: The peculiar thing in that office was that, eventually, we took in a young fellow named Parkes Stillwell. Of the three--Miller, Beck, and Stillwell--all of us were appointed judges of the superior court. [Laughter]

VASQUEZ: Were you all Democrats?

BECK: No, Stillwell was a Republican. Miller and myself were Democrats.

VASQUEZ: Did Stillwell serve in public life, in an elected capacity?

BECK: No, I guess not. I guess not.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember who appointed him? Who appointed Stillwell judge?

BECK: Stillwell was appointed by Brown.

VASQUEZ: Which Brown? Pat Brown?

- BECK: Pat Brown, the father. I was appointed. . . .  
Oh, no. I was appointed by . . .
- VASQUEZ: You were first appointed to the bench by Governor Earl Warren.
- BECK: Earl Warren. He was a Republican; I was a Democrat [Laughter] floor leader. He appointed me. He had high regard for me.
- VASQUEZ: And Brown also appointed you to the superior court.
- BECK: And Brown appointed Allen Miller.
- VASQUEZ: We'll be talking to him.
- BECK: All three of us got appointed on the bench. Stillwell got appointed on the bench, I got appointed on the bench, and Miller.
- VASQUEZ: Now, what kind of activities, political activities, did you first get involved with, within the Democratic party. I know it was political to be involved in the teachers organizations. But within the Democratic party, when did you start getting involved in those kinds of politics?
- BECK: At the same time I was in the teacher group. If there was very little organization at that time, then I had very little opportunity to participate.

VASQUEZ: Now, in 1940, you were elected member of the Democratic county central committee. Can you tell me about that? What inspired you to run for that?

BECK: I was in politics at the time. In 1930, was I up in the legislature at that time?

VASQUEZ: In 1940. This is 1940. You were elected county central committee member.

BECK: Anyway, since I was active in teacher organizations and I was a Democrat, if I had any contact with Democratic legislators, they called on me. So, I got an interest in the Democratic party and attended their meetings. There were always Democratic clubs somewhere.

VASQUEZ: Last time, we were talking about your first campaign for elected office. But before we get into that again, what inspired you to run for the assembly? What was your mission? What was your purpose? What did you want to accomplish?

BECK: Well, first of all, I only ran because there was a vacancy. There wasn't any incumbent.

VASQUEZ: Was it a new district?

BECK: If they had an incumbent, I probably wouldn't have run. But there being a vacancy and the

district being Democratic, I said, "This is the ideal time to run for the state legislature." Now, it was possible to file on the Democratic and Republican tickets at the same time. At the primaries, it was possible to win election on both tickets to the position I was running for. I think that happened every time. I don't think I had a Republican candidate run against me in a final election. I must have had at least one, but I don't recall any at the present time.

VASQUEZ: Now, in that first election, you were telling me last time that the name recognition among your students, ex-students, and the parents of the students you had been teaching for a decade represented a lot of your base of support. But labor groups also supported you in that election, isn't that right?

BECK: You're talking about my first election to the assembly . . .

VASQUEZ: Your very first election.

BECK: Well, of course, my students weren't voting. But they had parents. And, of course, here I was teaching classes. They knew I was running for the state legislature. You don't think the kids

would say to their parents: "Gee, we have a teacher who's running for the state legislature. Did you know that, Dad?"

Labor Support

VASQUEZ: How did you get the labor support?

BECK: I can say it very easily that whoever is running against me had no chance of labor support. Because at that time, you could run on both tickets in the primary election, you could file on both tickets. And there wasn't anybody strong enough at that time. After all, San Fernando area was the largest part of the area of population. The district went way up to Lancaster, Newhall, and Saugus--very few people--and up at Lancaster, Palmdale, and Little Rock and that area, very few people.

VASQUEZ: Were there strong labor groups here, then, in San Fernando?

BECK: I wouldn't say strong labor groups, no.

VASQUEZ: But organized labor was there?

VASQUEZ: [There were] very few union organizations at that particular time. At least in the San Fernando area, because San Fernando area was a farming area. It was agriculture. When I went up to

Sacramento, I got on the Agriculture Committee because that's what they did in my district, from Cuca--not Cucamonga--from, oh, I forget the name of the community. Way over to the west. Whatever it was, in the Valley, my district started way over there. There were orange orchards there, as well as every other place. So agriculture was the big thing in my district, whether up at Lancaster, Newhall, or San Fernando Valley. Whether they was raising chickens or orange orchards. I was on the Agriculture Committee every time I was serving up at Sacramento. One of the good things I did was create the San Fernando Valley Fair.

Agricultural Fairs

VASQUEZ: Tell me about that.

BECK: Well, certain leaders in the agriculture business decided to have a fair. They had a fair which was halfway successful, and they heard about state fairs, because there were state fairs in Fresno and Bakersfield. And they wanted to do that, because the state was giving them so much money. I forget how much money. It can't be \$65,000, but something in my mind says \$65,000.

I know they got very little money, at least at the start. But they did get assistance from the state.

Now, this is a funny thing. [Laughter]  
This is a little history about the fair district. A member of the state assembly, before he got appointed on the bench, was a fellow named Allen Miller. Allen Miller had a horse. He had the horse stabled in property belonging to the fair district. Now, Allen Miller took my place in Sacramento. When I got put on the bench, he became the assemblyman. The manager--I forget his name now--of the fair, a German fellow [Max Schonfield] hesitated, wouldn't let him use the stables anymore. So Miller, who had just been elected to the state legislature, said, "Okay. Don't let me use it, and I'll see that the state of California no longer recognizes this fair district."

VASQUEZ: So, the fair district became . . .

BECK: So, they didn't believe him, I guess. But the funny thing was, a number of years ago--I don't know when it was--Governor Brown asked me to help him with being his legislative secretary the last

few months of the session. I worked out some kind of a deal with somebody so I could go up there to help him. Well, one of the bills that came before me to make a recommendation on the fair district. Miller had told the manager of the fair that if he didn't get a place to stable his horse, he was just going to kill the fair district, period. Well, while I was up there as legislative secretary, what comes before me? A bill signed by Allen Miller. It said that district--whatever the district number was--was "hereby terminated." Just one little sentence.

VASQUEZ: What did you do?

BECK: I was [supposed] to make a recommendation to the governor. There wasn't a letter for it; there wasn't a letter against it. I tried to check newspapers to see if there was any publicity, any personal letters. There wasn't a darned thing mentioned at all about killing that bill. So what was I going to do? I said nothing and I just passed the bill on to the governor without a recommendation, one way or the other. The bill said, "Fifty-first Assembly Agricultural District is hereby terminated."

VASQUEZ: Did it pass?

BECK: And they terminated it.

VASQUEZ: They did?

BECK: I guess they have renewed it. Miller no longer is up there. He's on the bench.

VASQUEZ: That's an interesting story.

BECK: It's interesting what a legislator can do. Imagine a story like that for a guy's horse.

VASQUEZ: Right. [Laughter]

BECK: Another peculiar thing about fair districts. The head of all the fairs in the state, up at Sacramento, [was] a fellow named [A.E.] Al Snider. And the reason we know him is because he used to be the editor of the San Fernando Sun down here in San Fernando. He knew a governor--I think [Culbert L.] Olson, I don't know--and he made him state director.

Now, I could have gone up to see the state director, but he didn't send any letter down. I said, "Gee, it's up to him to send something down to the governor's office." But, what's he going to do when nobody opposed it. Not a letter up there, no publicity or anything else. Nothing for me to act on. So, all I could do was put it

on the governor's desk and let him sign it or not sign it. I didn't want him to know all the rigmarole. So I thought you'd find that interesting.

VASQUEZ: I think it is interesting.

BECK: Think if somebody would say, "If you don't let me use the stables, I'll kill the fair." Imagine a guy doing a thing like that being appointed a judge of the superior court, too. I don't like it. He was my law partner, but it just didn't make sense to me.

#### The Judicial Appointment Process

VASQUEZ: What do you think about the means by which judges are appointed?

BECK: The process?

VASQUEZ: The process by which they are appointed. Many times, it is for political reasons and not for their judicial knowledge or capacity.

BECK: There's no process. They're appointed by the governor. Now, if some group asks the governor to--or individual, let's say--asks the governor to have himself appointed and gives his background. If the governor knows the individual, or individuals backing him, he may

call up some of those individuals and say, "This John Smith, has he got a pretty good background on law that I should appoint him?" Or, there may be somebody who the governor has an obligation to, and he may appoint that attorney to the bench. The funny, darned thing about this fair district, was none of the fair districts wrote to the governor's office. I don't think they knew anything about the bill. I tried to check all the newspapers, see if they had any report on that. The bill was now before the governor's office. Not a thing [appeared] in the San Fernando Valley [newspapers].

Democrats in the Assembly in the 1940s

VASQUEZ: Judge Beck, when you got to Sacramento in 1942 as a freshman assemblyman from a new district, did you find an affinity group, a group with which you had a greater affinity and could work with? Were you a loner?

BECK: No, no. I always worked with the group, the Democratic group. But I always got along very well with the Republican group, as well.

VASQUEZ: Who were the Democrats in the assembly at that time that you remember were leading figures?

BECK: Unless I have something to check, I can't tell you at this time.

VASQUEZ: Okay. Whose support you can count on, being a freshman assemblyman, often determines how effective you can be in your first term. What was your experience in your first term? Who could you count on for support and how were you able to move the legislation that you thought was important at the time?

BECK: Well, before I went to the state legislature, as you indicated before, I was with the teacher organizations. I was very active in their state legislation. I went to Sacramento to represent them. In addition to that, I was an active Democrat in my own area, ever since I became of voting age. I joined the Democratic party, distributed literature for the Democratic party. Eventually, there was an opening in the state assembly, in a new district. Five of us ran on the Democratic ticket. And, of course, my name was better known than any of the others and I won the election in the primary. And at that time, you could also file on the Republican ticket, and I believe, also, I won the Republican nomination.

So in the final ballot in November, of course, my name was the only one on there and I got elected by both parties.

Bipartisanship in the Assembly

VASQUEZ: Now, when you got to Sacramento as a freshman assemblyman, the Democrats were a minority.

BECK: That's correct.

VASQUEZ: But you were effective in getting some legislation passed, weren't you? How did you do that?

BECK: If you've got a good bill, whether you're Democrat or Republican, it's going to be passed by the legislature. If it isn't, it won't.

VASQUEZ: Legislation was passed on its merits, primarily, and not necessarily on a political wrangling among people?

BECK: That's correct. Very little the political wrangling [went on] up in the state assembly. We'd have it, if it affected politics. If something that were changing--the election law--one side may be for it, and the other side against it. But, usually, we were in accord. You have two parties up there, and there are certain parties that represent business interests more than the others, let's say. Of course, it's

assumed the Republican party represents the business interests. They will support their legislation, whereas the Democrats will oppose it.

On the other hand, I'd suppose that most Democrats come from farming areas. And many of them did. And there were agriculture bills up there that had to be voted on. The Democrats, of course, would vote for the bills. And most Republicans would, too, if they had agriculture in their area. And the same way with Democrats. If they lived in the big city they didn't necessarily vote for agriculture. In fact, they didn't. They were more interested in voting for things that their Democrats wanted in the city.

VASQUEZ: You served on the Education Committee. In fact, you were vice-chairman of that committee.

BECK: Yes.

VASQUEZ: In fact, you served on that committee most the ten years you were in the state assembly. Is that correct?

BECK: Well, serving on that committee, of course, was due to the fact that I had a lot of knowledge about education and law. I represented these

different high school teachers associations, affiliated teacher organizations, serving on their legislative committees. And frequently . . . Or, not frequently, every once in a while going to Sacramento. So I knew these laws respecting education as well, if not better, than most folks, particularly those going to Sacramento.

VASQUEZ: Tell me, did the fact that we were at war at that time have anything to do with toning down partisan politics in the state legislature?

BECK: It had absolutely no effect, one way or another.

VASQUEZ: Is that right? What impact did the Second World War have on politics, in general, here in the state?

BECK: So far as I know, absolutely none. Because if the election hit the Republican recruits for the army, navy, and Marine Corps, it also hit the Democrats. So, I don't think it had any effect. The only possible [effect] I could see, might be on the ballots [cast by] men, particularly men, who were in the service at the time. And if you had Democrats or Republicans in the service and mailed them ballots, they came in pretty handy at election time.

VASQUEZ: And registration was overwhelmingly Democratic, in the state, wasn't it?

BECK: Well, it all depends on what part of the state. If you're talking about Orange County, it was Republican.

VASQUEZ: No, I'm talking about this part of the state.

BECK: Well, in Los Angeles County, it was Democratic, yes.

VASQUEZ: But in most cases, Republicans won. Even though there were more Democrats than Republicans registered. Why do you think that was?

BECK: I don't think the Republicans always won, but one reason is that at election time more Republicans, [a higher] percentage of those registered, went out to vote than Democrats.

VASQUEZ: How would you classify yourself, then, within the Democratic party? As a liberal, a moderate, or a conservative Democrat?

BECK: At what period of time? While I was up at the legislature?

VASQUEZ: When you first started out.

BECK: When I first started out?

VASQUEZ: When you first started out.

BECK: I just followed the Democratic party line,

whatever it was. I mean, I had no theory of my own. If the Democrats were against something, generally I'd be against it. If they had something on the ballot, I mean, it certainly would affect my vote.

Working with Governor Earl Warren

VASQUEZ: What Republicans did you find easy to work with in your first term?

BECK: Of course, the one I found easy to work with was a guy named Earl Warren. He was an honest sort of a guy and, as far as I know, he didn't pull any politics. [Culbert L.] Olson, when he was governor, of course, favored the Democrats. It was pretty tough for Republicans sometimes to get their legislation through. Earl Warren treated everybody alike. Interesting, isn't it?

VASQUEZ: Yes, it is.

BECK: Of course, some of the Republican boys didn't care for him, because he was kind of strict. And Earl Warren didn't like people like Artie Samish. You ever heard of him?

VASQUEZ: Yes, I have.

BECK: And certain other guys who tried to control legislation.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that it was Earl Warren's honesty, or his pragmatism, that made him able to work with both parties?

BECK: I wouldn't say he worked with the Democratic party. I'd say, on legislation which appeared before him, whether it was authored by a Republican or by a Democrat, he'd be interested in the vote. If forty-one Republicans voted for it and thirty-nine Democrats voted against it, of course, he'd favor the Republicans. So he might want to look at the vote on the thing. He'd want to see who the author was. Then, of course, he'd want to see whether it conformed to Republican policy, Democratic policy, or if it was one of those things which would conform to all political parties.

VASQUEZ: Do you remember, was there ever a time when you were in the legislature that the Republican governor, in this case Warren, needed certain Democratic support or Democratic votes, particularly yours, for a program or a project or a piece of legislation that he was interested in?

BECK: If he did it personally or through a representative, I never got the message.

VASQUEZ: So there wasn't horse trading going on?

BECK: No. There wasn't any pressure on me by the governor's office.

The Third House and the Assembly

VASQUEZ: Last time, we talked just shortly about lobbyists. You said at that time that only the education lobbies approached you for things.

BECK: That's correct.

VASQUEZ: And basically, they didn't influence your vote all that much.

BECK: That's right.

VASQUEZ: You were in the state legislature when Artie Samish was in his heyday. Tell me about lobbyist activity when you first got to Sacramento in 1942. How did the lobbyists work?

BECK: Well, of course, when I first got there, I said to myself, "With most pieces of legislation, there's some lobbyist either supporting it or opposing it." I could, of course, try to find out why. So I would talk to lobbyists that were in favor of a certain bill. I would talk to lobbyists who were against it. They weren't always sent up there to oppose things. But if they represented retail establishments--business,

let's say--and there's going to be a tax put on business, they'd be opposing it, whether they're a Democrat or Republican, and whether they talk to Democrat or Republican legislators.

VASQUEZ: What were the ways they used to influence the vote of a legislator?

BECK: Big money at election time from some source.

VASQUEZ: Campaign money?

BECK: In other words, if they gave five thousand dollars to a candidate who represented a sugar organization and the legislature decided to put a tax on sugar, he may be able to influence the legislators by talking among his friends, saying, "It isn't a very good bill. Because that's going to affect the household and the housewives, she's going to have to pay more." You know, figure out some alibi for it.

VASQUEZ: Were there any groups of Democrats that were particularly united in what they did, or worked together, in the state assembly?

BECK: Yes, there was a particular group of Democrats that always followed the lobbyists. When I was Democratic floor leader, there were some of those boys (we didn't have any women Democrats at that

time) who didn't follow their party leader on certain bills which affected their so-called "clients." That is, somebody who had put up a lot of money for them at election time or helped them in one way or another.

VASQUEZ: When that happened, when a Democrat followed the lobbyists instead of the party, was there a way to discipline that?

BECK: No. Everybody had a right to vote the way they saw it. They were representing their district and even though I might be a Democrat and got elected in a Republican district, I got a heck of a lot of Republican votes down there. So, I was not going to vote for everything the Democratic party said it wanted. I mean, you were free to do it. If you think it was going to hurt you, that was just too bad. Because if you were doing an honest job, your political party wasn't going to help you win or help you lose.

But, on the other hand, if there was some legislation that your party thought was good, and you didn't think too much of it one way or another, then you started analyzing it and said, "Well, it has its good points." And you may go

along and vote the party but, usually, at least while I was up there for over ten years, I never had the Democratic party send me a letter or had a lobbyist tell me, "This is part of the Democratic program." Isn't that interesting? Maybe they assumed that the Democrat would be smart enough to figure that out. [Laughter]

VASQUEZ: What turned people around on the lobbyists, against the lobbyists, so that Artie Samish eventually ended up in prison?

BECK: I don't think there's anything that turned people around on lobbyists. People never come in contact with lobbyists. They didn't know what a lobbyist did. They didn't know whether a lobbyist was a good one or a bad one.

VASQUEZ: But didn't lobbyists have a rather negative image in those days . . .

BECK: No.

VASQUEZ: . . . as people that corrupted public officials?

BECK: Certain ones.

VASQUEZ: Certain ones?

BECK: Only certain ones. Very few. I'd say 5 percent.

VASQUEZ: What about those?

BECK: Well, you were up there and you knew who they

represented, so you wouldn't take money from them, at all. Because their money was going to the [International Brotherhood of] Teamsters or somebody else.

VASQUEZ: Art Samish was successful for so long. Why?

BECK: Yeah, he was.

VASQUEZ: It had to be more than 5 percent.

BECK: Yeah, for instance, he represented all the liquor industry. I never took a cent from him. Just on account of that, if nothing else. But he represented other groups and they paid him the money. Of course, he was the guy who at election time got money for the candidates. So, as a result, candidates were willing to go along. I had no trouble with them. The school lobby never contacted me. And I can see the reason why. I knew as much about school legislation as they did. Because, in the Los Angeles school district, I represented them up at Sacramento a number of times. Law Firm of Miller, Beck, and Stillwell

VASQUEZ: Now you remained in teaching until 1946, is that right?

BECK: Yeah, I was teaching and going to the legislature at the same time. Not at the same time. When I

was up at the legislature, I wasn't teaching.

VASQUEZ: And practicing law?

BECK: And practicing law after 3:00 or 4:00 in the afternoon.

VASQUEZ: Now, once you stopped teaching in '46, did you become a full-time attorney in 1947?

BECK: When was I appointed to the bench? Tell me that.

VASQUEZ: Not until 1953.

BECK: 'Fifty-three? Gee.

VASQUEZ: So, from 1947 to 1953, you were a state legislator and you were also an attorney. Is that what you did primarily, practice law?

BECK: No, when I was up in the legislature, I had my law partners. We finally had a firm of Miller, Beck, and Stillwell. All of us eventually got appointed to the bench. So when I was up at Sacramento, of course, Miller and Stillwell were at it. When I got appointed, there was just Stillwell and Miller, so Stillwell had to carry the load for the four or five months I was up at Sacramento.

[Interruption]

Tom Carrell as Campaign Manager

VASQUEZ: One of the people that seems to have been

prominent, in your early career at least, was Tom Carrell. Can you tell me about your association with Tom Carrell?

BECK: Yeah, Tom Carrell was my campaign manager, in every one of my campaigns.

VASQUEZ: That's right.

BECK: He was down at a Chevrolet place and he was active in politics, Democratic politics. All I can say is, Tom ran the show. I was the candidate. He was an honest fellow.

VASQUEZ: He also went to the legislature, didn't he?

BECK: Yes. Yes, I forgot all about that. I think he took Allen Miller's place up there and spent a number of years up there. Interesting, isn't it? That little town of San Fernando. People elected those fellows to the legislature, even though the district went from Lancaster and Palmdale, Little Rock, Newhall, Saugus, San Fernando, and then kept on going, oh, to Granada Hills, and so on.

VASQUEZ: But didn't San Fernando have the largest concentration of population? Might that be . . .

BECK: No, we had less than ten thousand people. So there's be about two thousand voters, maybe, or

three thousand. No, but the biggest concentration, yes.

VASQUEZ: Tom Carrell served in what capacity in Democratic politics?

BECK: He was the assemblyman.

VASQUEZ: No, before that.

BECK: Before that, he was active serving what they called the Democratic county central committee. But he was very active in many of the local Democratic clubs.

VASQUEZ: Was he a good fund-raiser?

BECK: [Laughter] It was hard to raise money in those days. I don't remember getting too much money. He might have put up some of his own money.

VASQUEZ: How did he organize campaigns? Around what? Around personal appearances? Around issues?

BECK: First of all, it was knowledge of the people in the district. Since I taught school for over ten years, a lot of those kids that used to be my students, of course, they were now citizens. They were past twenty-one years of age.

VASQUEZ: Did Carrell had an intimate knowledge of this district? Was he from here, from San Fernando?

BECK: Yes. He lived in Granada Hills. As I say, he

managed my campaign. Everybody knew Tom Carrell. He was president of the chamber of commerce. He was a very liberal sort of a person. Head of the Chevrolet company [dealership] here. Everybody just loved Tom Carrell.

VASQUEZ: I see. Was there any other individual who was especially important in launching you into politics?

BECK: I don't think anybody put me into politics.

VASQUEZ: What did?

Why Beck Got into Politics

BECK: I don't know. I got into politics because I was elected to serve on the Democratic [county central] committee and then when they created new districts, San Fernando was one. The district went from Lancaster way over to the far end of the Valley. I forget the name of that community. Do you know what I'm thinking of?

VASQUEZ: Not offhand.

BECK: No. It took in Granada Hills and, boy, that was a big district to campaign in. But most of the people--see, just between you and me--lived in San Fernando, [Laughter] around San Fernando.

VASQUEZ: Did that have anything to do with you staying

here in San Fernando to live?

BECK: No, it had nothing to do with me. Except the fact that that's where the population was. There weren't too many people in Newhall, Saugus. Of course, you got up around Palmdale and Lancaster, there were still fewer people. Around Granada Hills and San Fernando, Pacoima, that's where the population was. But, of course, the biggest thing--and I think I mentioned this before--about me getting into politics was the fact that probably hundreds and hundreds of the students I had were now twenty-one years of age or over. If they wanted to vote for a person that they knew, they could always vote for Julian Beck, their old teacher. So I think that helped in my area.

Relationship with Senator Jack B. Tenney

VASQUEZ: At the time that you represented the Forty-first District, there was only one senator per county. In the case of Los Angeles, that would be Jack Tenney.

BECK: Well, in some counties, there was one senator for maybe four or five little counties.

VASQUEZ: Right, but in the case of Los Angeles, it was Jack Tenney.

BECK: Jack Tenney, that's correct.

VASQUEZ: What was your relationship with Jack Tenney as an assemblyman?

BECK: I just kept my distance from him. I didn't cooperate with him. He never cooperated with me. If I had a bill over there in the senate I wanted to carry, I wouldn't necessarily ask Jack Tenney to do it. I'd ask somebody who I thought might be more persuasive over there.

VASQUEZ: During the years that the Tenney Committee on Un-American Activities held hearings and, in some cases, harassed people, did you ever have occasion to contradict the committee's findings or the committee's procedures.

BECK: No.

VASQUEZ: You didn't think it was necessary to?

BECK: As far as I knew, he was doing his job. The people he was investigating, if they wanted some help and they thought I would help, could ask me to go before Tenney and say something. But nobody ever asked anything. Now, it may be, they never told the person they were going to put on their blacklist why. They would just say, "John Jones hereafter is on our blacklist. He's

working with the enemy." Or whatever Jack Tenney did.

VASQUEZ: Do you feel that had any detrimental effect on civil rights here in California?

BECK: It should have had a big effect, but it had absolutely no effect at all.

VASQUEZ: Is that right?

BECK: I mean that Jack Tenney was calling the shots. What could you do if he and his committees said, "Beck is right on the edge of getting over on the other side."

VASQUEZ: Were you ever a target of any of his hearings or any of his invective?

BECK: No, thank goodness. Because he could do it.

Opposing Japanese-American Internment

VASQUEZ: Did you oppose the internment of the Japanese in 1942?

BECK: Well, it all depended how that bill read, whether it was to continue for a year or two years, or permanently. I think I voted for it. He [Tenney] was a member of the state legislature. He had an investigating committee. If the investigating committee was doing things wrong, you could always introduce a resolution to ask

him to apologize, or change the wording or something.

VASQUEZ: In the case of the Japanese being taken off to relocation camps, that involved not only the Tenney committee, it involved a pretty good cross section of California politicians. What was your view of that at the time, do you remember?

BECK: No, I don't. Except I thought that if I was a Japanese person, I wouldn't necessarily feel safe. You know, I had a lot of Japanese who were my students at the high school. A lot of them were my grocery men, or handled my fruits. Honest guys, honest as could be. It broke me up, I mean, to see all those fine, young fellows--and the women, kids I had in school, perfectly loyal U.S. citizens--being put in the internment camps. But I can see, after what the Japanese did at Pearl Harbor, that they would say, "Well, we can't trust the Japanese . . ." So the good ones as well as the bad ones were moved up there. I almost cried. . . . Some of these, I knew, were just 100 percent Americans. But, they had to play it safe. It almost brings tears to

my eyes, now, the fact that these good friends of mine were sent to internment.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

Comparing Public Service in Three Branches of Government

VASQUEZ: Now, Judge Beck, you served in the state legislature. Then, you were appointed to the municipal court. You served in an executive capacity with the administration of Edmund G. Brown, then you returned to the bench, in the superior court. Compare the different levels of government that you served in. In which of the three, do you think you had the greatest impact, or were able to engender the greatest influence?

BECK: As a state legislator, you're making laws which affect all the people in the state of California. If you're on the bench, municipal court or superior court, you're affecting only one person, the person before you. Although you may be not making new laws, you may be interpreting laws differently which, eventually, may be established as new law.

The executive branch, of course, gives you

the opportunity to veto legislation. But it also gives you, the person in charge of the executive branch, the opportunity of appointing individuals to carry out the activities of government, whether it's street cleaning or whether it's building permits. But anything that has to do with life in the area is actually subject to some branch of the executive branch.

Superior court is a court where trials are held. Trials are held in justice court, which is below the superior court. Cases heard there are limited to a certain amount. Then, above that, is the superior court, which is the highest court in which cases are tried. And, of course, if you're not satisfied with any of the decisions in the municipal court, it's possible in certain cases to appeal to a superior court. If you're not satisfied with a superior court case, you can appeal to an appellate court in the state of California. Now, "comparing," I assume that means the state legislature, municipal court, executive branch, superior court?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

BECK: Now, between the executive branch and judicial

branch. . . . Actually, the one with the most power is the executive branch. Even though the legislature can make laws, the executive does have the right to veto them.

VASQUEZ: Can you give an example?

BECK: That doesn't mean that the legislature cannot override a veto, but it would be a great deal more difficult. Controlling the enactment of legislation without the approval of an executive like the governor, you'd never get anywhere in the state because of the arguments in the state assembly, eighty legislators and forty in the senate, it would be awfully difficult to get a consensus. So the way it works, with the executive branch having the final say-so-- particularly if it's only one person, or one person advised by a group--it puts into effect the will of the people with the proper groups analyzing a bill before it actually becomes law.

VASQUEZ: Do you think you were more effective politically, then, as a member of the executive branch when you were legislative secretary, or as a member of the state legislature?

BECK: Actually, the greatest thing is the state

legislature. If you didn't have legislative powers, then you wouldn't have any opportunity to veto or kill a bill or send it back. In the state legislature, no matter how intent you may be on killing a bill, certain bills will pass and go to the governor.

The executive branch is important because the executive branch can veto legislation, any legislation, that may appear before the governor. But once there's a veto, the legislature can pass it over the governor's veto. So, in effect, the legislature, in the long run, is probably the highest lawmaking bureau in the state. The court system is powerful because it can interpret legislation and interpret it so that it would be illegal or improper.

#### Major Accomplishments as a Legislator

VASQUEZ: What do you think were your most significant accomplishments while you were in the state legislature?

BECK: Well, of course, locally, I think as a principal author of legislation establishing the [California State] University at Northridge. At the present time, they have something like forty

thousand students. I was a principal author. I had two other [San Fernando] Valley assemblymen agree with me.<sup>1</sup>

We went out and picked a possible site for the college. We didn't want to locate it in Granada Hills or San Fernando or some other place. We went out and picked a spot where we thought it would be in the center of the Valley, in an area where it was undeveloped. That's the spot we picked.

In that spot, the sand was six inches deep. And it was hot. We didn't know how they could put the buildings up there, but that spot became the college which was eventually called Cal State University, Northridge. So, by the time it passed through the legislature, not only the three of us in the Valley--me being the leading signer--of the bill, but all the members, they tell me, signed the bill while it was passing through the legislature. I didn't know that at the time because after the bill had gone to the Education Committee with no objections,

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1. A.B. 971, 1957 Leg. Sess. Cal. Stat. 2265 (1957).

and the Department of Education had approved, Earl Warren put me on the bench. So I wasn't there at the finish, when the final vote got to the governor's office. I thought that was interesting.

My law partner, Allen Miller, took over and did a good job of continuing it. But they located the college at a place we thought was pretty good. And it gave the Valley some sort of an institution. Most institutions were in West Los Angeles, down in Los Angeles, East Los Angeles, and so on.

VASQUEZ: What other things do you think were significant that you were able to accomplish?

BECK: I can't tell unless I check with my scrapbook, or something else.

[Interruption]

BECK: The things local I did, Truman Street, I put that through as a state highway. Did I tell you the job I had of getting it through?

VASQUEZ: Yes, you did.

BECK: I did. Then I put in courthouses, municipal courthouses, in San Fernando city, the city. I had a question of whether to establish a

municipal court over Van Nuys or establish it in the San Fernando. Well, I didn't represent Van Nuys, so I put the municipal court here.

Originally, there wasn't any municipal court in Van Nuys. All the Valley had to come to San Fernando. I recall that the next thing was where to place those courthouses. So the supervisor in the district says, "Where do you want your courthouse? I'll put it any place you want." So, you know where I decided to put it? I put it on First Street and I had it face towards the San Fernando Road. So people coming out of the courthouse--jurors or witnesses--would see the backs of the businesses on San Fernando Road, because all of them advertised on the back, in their back parking lot. So that's why I put it on First Street.

Truman Street, that was a sandy street and I had that paved. I had a hard job getting it through, but I did get it through. As far as the city of San Fernando and the chamber of commerce are concerned, that's the most important thing I did in Sacramento, is to make that a paved highway.

It not only took all the trucks off of San Fernando Road, but it made a highway through which people in trucks or passenger cars could travel rather than being slowed up for the traffic in the business areas.

Antisubversive Legislation

VASQUEZ: In the 1950s, you also carried legislation which made sabotage a capital offense.<sup>1</sup> Do you remember that?

BECK: Yeah. I remember.

VASQUEZ: Do you feel that was an important accomplishment?

BECK: I don't know who introduced it. I didn't think it was the governor who introduced it. I think it was some lobbyist group that introduced it. I think we all voted for it.

VASQUEZ: Why did you think that was so important at the time?

BECK: People were doing a lot of damage, and there was nothing to punish them for. If you found them,

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1. Sabotage Prevention Act. A.B. 25., 1950 Extr. Sess., Cal. Stat. 13 (1950). The bill reenacted the Sabotage Prevention Act of 1941 with the additional provision for the death penalty for extreme offenses. Although its principal author was Beck, the legislation was sponsored by the Warren administration.

what would you punish them for? Establishing arson? We got something. I forget what it read, but at least, I think, it gave some penitentiary time. So that's why that bill was passed, to keep these guys from pulling fast things.

VASQUEZ: Did Democrats and Republicans pretty much agree on it?

BECK: Oh, yes, both parties were together on it.

Partisanship in California Politics

VASQUEZ: What is your feeling about partisanship in California politics?

BECK: I think partisanship is a good thing, if you act that way. But so many people in the Democratic party, every once and a while, will vote Republican. Then the Republican party, the same way, came out and vote Democratic.

Well, you yell about it and you say, "He's deserting the party." But if a person is in office, like the state legislature, he's there permanently. If he went there as a Republican and now he's acting like a Democrat, you don't have to support him, but he'll still be elected because it's pretty hard to defeat an incumbent. Pretty hard to defeat an incumbent.

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Session 3, September 25, 1987]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

Amateur versus Professional Lawmakers

VASQUEZ: Judge Beck, you've had a long and distinguished political and legal career. You've had time to observe the political process in the state of California as it has developed in nearly fifty years. In your judgment, do you feel that the full-time legislative career of professional politicians is a more beneficial way of creating law than the old, amateur, part-time legislative method was?

BECK: Well, when you say "old time," you mean where they only would meet for a couple of months and wouldn't meet for a year?

VASQUEZ: Exactly.

BECK: Well, I'd have to say if they are meeting continuously, it's a lot better for the state or the country. Like congress meeting year-round instead of for three months or six months. So, yes, meeting throughout the year is beneficial to the state.

VASQUEZ: Do you think the professionalization of the legislative staff has also been a move in the

right direction?

BECK: When you say "the professionalism of the legislature," by that you mean?

VASQUEZ: Professional legislative staff.

BECK: You mean that the person is going to be a politician for the whole year and not just . . .

VASQUEZ: And can count on a staff. When you were there, you had very little staff, if any.

BECK: That's correct.

VASQUEZ: And now, of course, some legislative members have huge staffs.

BECK: Oh, I think it would be better for the state legislator if he had legislative staff. When the legislature was not in session, they could work on future legislation. And, also, have a secretary in his office, or in his home, or someplace while he'd be working full time.

Costs of Campaign Fund-raising

VASQUEZ: Some analysts say that state politics at the assembly and the senate level has become so imbued with the concern for money, soliciting campaign funds, that it has cut into the quality of lawmaking. How do you feel about the role of money in politics?

BECK: When you say that, do you mean that the legislator running for office, is going out trying to raise campaign money?

VASQUEZ: Right. And some argue that this becomes his primary concern and everything else comes second.

BECK: Well, isn't it the other way around, that the persons putting up their money are going after the legislator to give him support? And when election time comes around, they're sure to give him support because of the fact that they're interested in him.

Now, if they completely ignore him at election time when they can be of help, well then, expect the legislator to treat that particular individual the same way, if necessary. Not that it would be necessary or anything like that, but at least he'd have a better chance of cooperating with a legislator while they're in session than in a situation where he doesn't do anything for them.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that special interests in the state have more influence over legislators than they did when you were in office?

BECK: No, I think they'll always have a greater

interest than the normal group because of the fact that they do have the money and they have the background in the field and education to go along with it. And they've got some good experience over a period of years on the results of their activities. So it's pretty hard to beat them.

VASQUEZ: Do you think that the controls to check special interests' influence over lawmakers are adequate?

BECK: I would say that the special interests don't control.

VASQUEZ: We control them? Does the public have enough control over special interests, do you think?

BECK: Oh, yes. There's no question in my mind about that. There may be some special interests that members of the legislature might be a little partial to because that particular interest helped them get elected. He may not have been elected without their assistance. He may lean a little away from the way he would normally vote. Not that he would go a 100 percent for them, but at least show some consideration for what they've done for him.

VASQUEZ: One of the characteristics of California politics

is that state politics has never been easily categorized according to partisan predilections. Do you think partisanship is stronger today in state politics than it was when you were in office? And do you think it's a good thing?

BECK: It all depends. If you're talking about state politics . . .

VASQUEZ: State politics.

BECK: I'd say that the difference between the two parties--I mean at election time and other times --isn't as rough as it could be. Because a legislator gets a little closer to his people.

When his people and the businessmen know him, if he does a good job, whether a Democrat or a Republican, they won't vote the party line. They're not stuck with a party, and the parties aren't too strong, either, as far as members of the legislature are concerned. I could go through my district at that particular time and the Democratic and Republican party had no particular influence. They may try to get the vote out, but they wouldn't be able to have an effect upon the legislator, like the businessmen in the community. I wouldn't say that they're

too effective [Laughter] like they are back East where, I mean, if you're a Democrat you're a Democrat and everybody knows it and you know it too. We have a little more freedom.

Jesse Unruh's Contributions to California Politics

VASQUEZ: One of the more notable Democrats in California politics, Jesse Unruh, just passed away.

BECK: Yes.

VASQUEZ: What have you got to say about his contributions to the California state legislature?

BECK: Well, he made a great contribution because he was a leader and he wasn't sold out to one group, or even to one party. He was more interested in the welfare of the state legislature and that the proper people were in the legislature. That they didn't have outfits or people in the legislature that tried to pull fast ones, crooked deals and things like that.

Jesse Unruh was an individual who had a great deal of power. He had a great deal of power to kill things; he had a great deal of power to help good things along. He was sometimes helping Republicans as well as Democrats, even

though he was the leader of the Democratic party. He was a strong man. He knew he was strong. His effect upon the legislation must have been great.

I think he was a great man for the legislature, and you'll find very few up at Sacramento. Those who had power, many times were controlled by the lobbyists, and that's why they had power. But not Unruh. The lobbyists were all with him, but he never had to go after them to ask them for any money or any support because they knew [Laughter] they needed his support.

VASQUEZ: There are those who feel that the best way to wield power as a Democrat should be in the most collective way possible. For example, something like the CDC [California Democratic Council], which Jesse Unruh, of course, always had his differences with.

BECK: What's CDC?

VASQUEZ: The California Democratic Council.

BECK: Oh.

Individual versus Collective Leadership

VASQUEZ: And Jesse always had his differences with them. He preferred to deal with things personally,

individually. Which of the two methods do you think is more effective?

BECK: Dealing individually. Because I was a Democrat and the Democratic party would take certain actions, but that didn't mean I had to follow that Democratic party action. I was more interested in the people of my district and the people of the state of California, than something a bunch of Democrats who were able to get through at a meeting and say, "Now, you got to do this because this is Democratic policy." The legislature made its Democratic policy. I would listen, but I would make the final decision.

VASQUEZ: So you think one should depend on the judgment of the individual that gets elected? That's why people elect him?

BECK: That's correct. That's correct. For instance, I was up at Sacramento, I was more interested in the people of my district than I was of the Democratic party up and down the state. Because they were the people who not only put me into office, [Laughter] but they were going to keep me there.

Paying Legislators Adequate Salaries

- VASQUEZ: You've had a long and distinguished career; as we've said, this oral history will become a part of the state record. Is there anything you'd like to say for that record now about your career, about your experience in California politics?
- BECK: Of course, one thing I'd like to say is that they didn't pay a member of the legislature very much money. So it made it very difficult for a person who had a good-paying job or a steady business to go to Sacramento and work for a few months then come back and for maybe six months, nine months. As a member of the legislature, they may get \$100 a month salary. That's all. And they still had their function to perform. It's pretty difficult to get a person to devote 100 percent of his time with a low salary. If they pay good salaries-- let's say \$7,500 to \$10,000 a year--I'd think you'd have them working eighteen hours a day, in the district and up and down the state. But I forget, I don't know what they're getting paid now. What is it?
- VASQUEZ: Significantly more than that.

BECK: How much do they get now?

VASQUEZ: Considerably more than \$10,000.

BECK: But not past the \$10,000 mark, is it?

VASQUEZ: Yes, it is.

BECK: Is it?

VASQUEZ: Yes.

BECK: Oh. I'm glad to hear that.

VASQUEZ: So you think that's a move forward in the right direction?

BECK: Oh, I think so because it's pretty hard to ask people to serve up there for this small amount of money they'd be getting. And it was particularly small. I don't think I got more than \$250 a month. You can see where the lobbyists would be very effective because that wouldn't pay their rent in the apartment for one month. And they had to eat.

VASQUEZ: So you feel that the raising of salaries and the professionalizing the staff of the legislature has provided, maybe, a more honest setting?

BECK: It makes a better legislator when they get paid what they're worth and not have somebody in the Third House pay them.

[End Tape 3, Side A]