California State Archives
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

ART AGNOS

California State Legislator
1977-1987

November 5, 12, December 3, 10, 2002
January 7, 21, February 4, 11, 18, March 19, April 2, 16, 28, 2003
Berkeley, California

VOLUME 1

By Laura McCreery
Regional Oral History Office
University of California, Berkeley

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None.

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Interviewer

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Interview Time and Place

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Editing

The interviewer edited for punctuation, paragraphing, and spelling; verified proper names and compiled a table of contents and biographical summary. Mr. Agnos reviewed the transcript, making only minor corrections and additions.

Tapes and Interview Records

The audio recordings of the interview are in The Bancroft Library, University of California at Berkeley. Records relating to the interview are at the Regional Oral History Office. Master audio recordings are deposited in the California State Archives.

Biographical Summary

Art Agnos was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, in 1938, the eldest of three children of Greek immigrant parents. He attended public schools and worked in his parents' store until his entry into Bates College in Lewiston, Maine. He was drafted and served in the U.S. Army from 1961 to 1963, attaining the rank of Specialist E-5 in the Fifth Infantry Division before being discharged with an Army Commendation Medal. He returned to Bates College and completed his B.A. degree before going on to Florida State University in 1964 for a master's degree in social work on a National Institute of Mental Health scholarship.

Mr. Agnos moved to San Francisco in 1966 and joined the staff of the San Francisco Housing Authority. After working as a volunteer in Leo McCarthy's successful campaign for state assembly in 1968, he became Mr. McCarthy's first chief of staff, a position he retained after Mr. McCarthy became speaker of the assembly in 1974. During the early 1970s Mr. Agnos also served as consultant to the legislature's Joint Committee on Aging. Meanwhile, he completed all the course work for a doctorate in social work at the University of California, Berkeley.

In 1976 he ran for the state assembly himself, and he went on to represent eastern San Francisco in the 16th district of the California legislature for twelve years, serving as both chair and whip of the Democratic Caucus. He chaired the assembly Ways and Means subcommittee on health and welfare, and he authored key legislation on welfare reform, child support, civil rights, housing, health care, services for the elderly, and the first urban state park, which was created at Candlestick Point in San Francisco.

Mr. Agnos left the assembly in 1987 after a successful run for mayor of San Francisco, an office he held from 1988 to 1992. From 1993 to 2001 he served as western regional administrator of the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development and a commissioner of the Federal Housing Administration during the Clinton presidency. Now formally retired from public service, he volunteers his time to many social and political causes in San Francisco and around the world. He serves as a director of a Southern California bank and as a strategic adviser for an investment banking firm in Los Angeles. Among other things, he is a national advisory board member at the Institute of Governmental Studies at UC Berkeley and a member of the board of overseers for the Leo T. McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good at the University of San Francisco.

[Session 1, November 5, 2002]

[Begin Minidisc 1]

McCREERY: This is interview number one, November 5th, 2002, election day. This is Laura McCreery. I'm going to be interviewing Art Agnos for California's State Government Oral History Program.

Would you start off in a very straightforward way by just stating your date of birth and then talk a little bit about where you were born?

AGNOS: My birthday is sort of an open question because I was born, I thought, on September 1st, 1938, and I sort of celebrated it to the extent that the Greek culture allows for a celebration for your birthday. It's not something that the Greek culture truly celebrates, so I never grew up thinking that birthdays were a big deal. In our culture, in the Greek-American culture or the Greek culture, the big deal is the day of the saint that you're named after. That is called a name day, and that is truly a big celebration, where you roast the pigs and the lambs and everybody comes over and celebrates with you.

Anyway, that's the day that we looked to and I grew up thinking of as a big event. My birthday never was. When I went to get my work permit, which was required at the age of sixteen in Massachusetts in those days, my birth certificate said September second, and so when I went home and asked my

mother why my birth certificate said September second, she said, "Well, you were the first-born son, and your father was very happy and celebrated once you were born, and when he went to record your birthday, between his broken English and his hangover from the celebration, it somehow came out September second. But, still," she said, "I think you were born on August thirty-first, but it was so close to the first, we wanted to start it on the first," so I have a three-day kind of period where my birthday—and the older I get, we celebrate more on the second than we do on the thirty-first.

McCREERY: What is the naming day in your case?

AGNOS: It's Ayios Athanasios [Saint Athanasios] in Greek, which is not translatable to Arthur , but it's the closest, and it comes in February.

McCREERY: Thank you. And talk a little bit about where you were born. I know it was Springfield, Massachusetts.

AGNOS: Well, I was born in Springfield, Massachusetts, about fourteen or fifteen months after my parents came here as newlyweds to the United States. My father had come to the United States when he was fifteen years old to work on the railroads in the Midwest, doing construction work, laying tracks with his older brothers. After a few years of that, the brothers had migrated back to Springfield, Massachusetts, from the Midwest—the Illinois area and Indiana. They went back to Springfield because they had a relative there who promised to help them start in business, which they thought would be a more long-term productive kind of work than laying tracks on the railroads.

So the brothers went back to Springfield, borrowed money, and started a restaurant, which many Greek immigrants did in those days. This was in the early twenties. They were very successful until the Great Depression hit this country and ruined their business, as it did for many. The brothers kind of split up in order to survive, and each brother went his own way.

My father started a small shoeshine stand and hat cleaning and blocking [business]—another, even smaller business that many immigrants of that day would pursue. The store was probably about 500 square feet, and he cleaned and blocked men's hats and had a shoeshine stand, sold cigars, cigarettes, newspapers. It was across the street from the telephone company, and I grew up shining shoes there, next to my father.

But in 1938, at the age of thirty-five, he thought that he was now ready to be married, and like a good son he went back to the village of his birth, which was in the southern part of [the] Peloponnisos of Greece, about 150 miles south of Athens. The big city of the region was Pirgos, but he came from a little village called Grainseca outside of Pirgos about four or five miles.

So he went back and presented himself to his father, who immediately went out to the other fathers of the region and advertised that he had this son who had just come from America and was ready to be married. My mother's folks thought he would be a good catch because, as my mother used to tell me, in those days in Greece there was a saying that in America everyone is so wealthy that even the birds wear shoes.

And so my father was a very desirable catch, as someone who had come from America. My mother, who was a couple of steps up—her family and class—came down in class to marry this farmer's son because he was from America.

Anyway, they were introduced and had a very brief, supervised courtship for about a month and then were married. So it was an arranged marriage, which was not uncommon. In fact, that was what was done in those days. This is 1937.

They came to the United States on Thanksgiving in 1937, and my mother was shocked at the cold weather and the poverty that she saw in this new country, because of the imagery that clearly was different from that in the "old country," as they say in Greece. But this was still the Depression, and my father had this small business where he eked out a living, and it was not quite what she expected, and she was very depressed.

It showed in the son that was born in September of 1938, the following year. I was a very colicky baby and had a lot of difficulties, she tells me (I don't remember this), because of her own emotional turbulence over this difficult transition from a comfortable, middle-class Greek lifestyle to, really, poverty in this country, to start with.

So that's how I sort of came into the world, and the environment that I came into.

McCREERY: How had your father settled on Springfield, Mass.? Do you know?

AGNOS: Because of the relative who loaned him and his brothers money to start their business, who was from the village and was an older man, who was already living there and established. And so it was the immigrant sort of culture, helping one another succeed in the New World. This was not uncommon in those days, and to this day immigrants still help each other.

McCREERY: Was there much of a Greek-American community?

AGNOS: Oh, yes, there was a pretty strong Greek-American community in Springfield in those days, and still is, on the east coast. A couple of churches and a relatively strong community.

McCREERY: Going back to when your father earlier had been out west, working on the railroad, did he tell you much about the details of that?

AGNOS: No. Unfortunately, my father died of cancer when I was fifteen. He got sick when I was thirteen, and he was, I'm told, a very honest, a very decent man, but we had the kind of relationship that was not unusual in the immigrant family, where he was the provider, left for work at six in the morning, came home at six at night. He usually was tired.

And so we didn't have the kind of relationship I hope I have with my sons, which is involvement in what they do and their sports and all that kind of stuff. He was just a very decent man who I had a great deal of respect for, but the only thing we had in common, other than going to church on Sundays, was listening to *The Lone Ranger* on Wednesday nights at eight o'clock, and *Gangbusters* on Saturday night on the radio. We had no TV, of course, because we were poor. We didn't get a black-and-white TV until the late fifties.

McCREERY: Did you have any siblings?

AGNOS: Sure did. I have two wonderful sisters, both of whom are younger than I am. We all grew up together and got through college. My mom, who was an extraordinarily strong woman, took over our family business when my father became sick with cancer. When I was thirteen, my younger sister was ten, and the other sister was six. So it was a tremendously stressful and difficult time for my mom because in 1953 there weren't any medical plans or anything, which really led to my interest in health care later on.

Our health care was paid for "cash per visit." When you went to see the doctor, you paid the doctor on the spot. When we went to the hospital, you paid the hospital on the spot. With cancer, it was a tremendous drain. We used whatever small savings they had. I know when my father came home, we couldn't afford nursing care, and we had to keep our little business alive, which was six days a week.

So the way my mom did it was I would go to school—I was in high school at the time, and I had an abbreviated schedule. So I would start school at eight-fifteen, and then I would leave at noon, and my mother, who would come down at eight o'clock to run the business, would leave the phone off the hook at home in order to talk to my father by the two phones being off the hook. She would call me before she left the house, and then we'd leave the two phones off the hook for the five hours, so she could talk to my father, who was in bed.

This went on for about nine months before he died. She would tell him, "Now it's time to take your pill. It's right next to you. Drink the water. It's

right there." That was nursing care until I got to the business to run it from twelve to six in the evening, when my mother went home to take care of my father in person.

But for about five hours a day, it was done by phone, home and at work. It left an indelible impression on me, obviously, about what the needs are for people to have a proper health care and support, that obviously carried on when I became a public official.

McCREERY: How early did you start working with your father before he became ill?

AGNOS: This was an immigrant family, and it was expected that the son would go to work as soon as he was able, so I started about nine years old, shining shoes, and did it until I was seventeen, when I went to college. My father had died when I was fifteen, but we continued the business. When my mother took it over, she stopped shining shoes. She never shined shoes. She just did the hat cleaning and selling of cigars, candy, newspapers, et cetera.

So I started at a very young age. Every Saturday I would go down and work next to my father for ten hours or eleven hours, whatever the day was. I remember shining shoes next to my father. He'd be doing somebody's shoes next to me. There were five seats in our shoeshine stand. And he would be talking to me in Greek under his breath, saying, "Now, you need to go to college. You're going to go to college so that you can be the one who's having his shoes shined, rather than doing the shining, as we are." I remember that very clearly, because there were these executives that would come over from the telephone company to have their shoes shined. He wanted me to be an

executive at the telephone company, which I still think is an attractive job, but I never got there.

McCREERY: But he was drumming that into you.

AGNOS: Oh, absolutely, from nine years old. My mother was even more sensational. My father, as I said, died when I was fifteen and my sisters were very young. On his deathbed, he said, "Promise me that the boy will go to college," and my mother made that promise, but she also made sure that the girls went to college. She thought that they needed the same kind of opportunity I did, so she was far more progressive than most people were her age, including my father, in her time. And both my sisters got through college with master's degrees. She did it all with an income then of about $4,500 a year. But she had an extraordinary capacity to save and scrimp. We never knew how she did it, but she sure did it, and she's revered, obviously, in our family.

McCREERY: I wonder if you could just describe her a little bit more.

AGNOS: My mom was born to a middle-class family in Greece, in a small village outside of Pirgos, where her father was a merchant. She had a life of reasonable privilege, and the shock, as I said, when she came to this country and found that she had married a man who was a struggling, decent, wonderful guy but certainly wasn't capable of giving her what she had in her family's home—she accepted that, because that's what women were raised to do. You were raised to respect and work hard for your husband, and if you were lucky, you might fall in love later on.

There's something to be said for that system [Laughter], as I look at my young sons today and wonder about some of the women that they date. But I obviously can't do that.

Anyway, prior to my father's death, she was a stay-at-home mom who provided all the meals and did the cleaning and kept the house spotless and all of those kinds of things. She wasn't a social mom. She never came to the Cub Scouts or to ball games and those kinds of things. We had to sign her name for our report cards when she looked at the grades. She did understand the grades.

The real big transition in her life came when she had to take over the business when my father became sick. She didn't speak English that well, but she had to learn on the job, so to speak, as well as to manage a business, because there was no welfare. There was nothing other than you had to work to survive.

This is 1953 we're talking about. My father died July 4th, 1955. So for those two years, it was a great period of stress and difficulty for all of us, and especially for my mother, who had to be the medical provider, had to be the provider for her children, the nurturer for us, the nurse for her husband. It was extraordinary. She was a strong, strong woman. During that period she had to have a hysterectomy, and three days after the operation she was back working twelve hours a day. Just an extraordinary woman.

She died a couple of years ago at the age of ninety-three, and had the great opportunity and joy to not only see her grandchildren, two boys and a girl, born—the girl belongs to my sister—she saw her grandchildren, which was the

most important thing in her life. Then the next most important thing in her life was seeing her children succeed, among them her son. Holding the Bible when he was sworn in to be mayor of San Francisco was a great, great thing from her perspective. And so she enjoyed a long, rich life, in which she reaped the rewards for all that she did for her children by seeing their success and feeling their love.

McCREERY: Now, you mentioned the Greek language. What language were you speaking at home as you grew up?

AGNOS: Obviously, as immigrants, my parents spoke Greek at home. We learned Greek. My first language was Greek. Indeed, when I went to school when I was five years old I only spoke Greek, and I was sent home from school. My father had to come to the school with my birth certificate to prove that I was an American citizen, born in this country. When the principal asked him, "Well, if he was born here and raised here until now, why doesn't he speak English?" These are immortal words in our family. He said, "I spent the first five years of his life teaching him the language I know best. Now I send him to you, for you to teach him the language you know best."

So I learned English through the immersion program in kindergarten, and some people still don't think I really learned it that well. [Laughter] But anyway, I'm still bilingual, and I've found it to be very useful, not only with Greek people—being able to speak to them in their language and also when I traveled to Greece as a mayor and as a public official, being able to speak Greek. I also found it useful [to know] not only the language, being bilingual,

but the whole dual culture. Obviously, I'm proudly American first, and proudly Greek second.

I found it to be very useful in politics because San Francisco is a very ethnic city with many different cultures, and I found it very easy to relate to people of dual heritage, either Chinese-American or Japanese-American or Hispanic, Latin Americans, African—just understanding the duality of culture and walking in both worlds and somehow feeling a little different when people didn't understand your culture.

I remember when I was in school, for example—I used to tell this story when I was in public office, to let people know I knew what they were feeling. When I was a youngster, my mother would make these wonderful, aromatic meatball sandwiches with cucumber and these spreads that she would make, that you would pay a lot of money for in a Greek restaurant now, with dark bread. I would be ashamed of these sandwiches because they were not peanut butter and jelly like all of my schoolmates' were. And so I would throw these sandwiches away and ask my mother for peanut butter and jelly. She was horrified that I would want peanut butter and jelly instead of this very nutritious food that was usually a leftover from what we had eaten the night before. Today I'd kill for these things.

But when I tell these stories, people go, "Oh, he's been there. He knows." In City Hall, in the mayor's office—which is this very ornate, beautiful place—on the fireplace in the mayor's office was a picture of my immigrant grandfather, who had come here with his sons and then stayed a short while

before he left, and my grandmother in the black babushka, and all those kinds of things that you see in the pictures of the late 1800s in Greece. When they see it, people know. When you come into this office, there is someone who has been through the same experience that you have. For those who were not of some cultural background—and there are many in San Francisco—they just found it interesting.

McCREERY: Now, you touched on school. Talk a little bit more about your early education and what you thought of it.

AGNOS: Well, like most young people, especially adolescents, school to me was an imposition on my play time. I was a mediocre student. In junior high school and high school I had to go to Greek school after American school, as we said, so I didn't have a chance to socialize as most kids ordinarily do. In high school, my father was sick, and so my school years were not happy times for me. They were stressful, and now that I look back—I didn't realize it—but I was not as happy as I could have been because of the difficulties going on in our family life.

I got into a very good school, because I went to a good high school and the principal, who knew what I'd been going through—working and my father's illness and all those things—helped me get into a school I probably didn't deserve to get into because of my grades, which were Cs and Bs, and that was Bates College.

But I did have a chance to play a couple of sports, basketball and baseball, in high school, but they were not the greatest years for me. The best years for

me came in college, where I was away from home and all of the stress of cancer and single-parent incomes and all the other things.

McCREERY: Let's talk a little bit about Bates College. How did that principal help you select that particular place? Do you remember?

AGNOS: Well, it was very simple. He said he could get me in, and it had a good reputation as being a great liberal arts college. It still is.

McCREERY: This is a private school?

AGNOS: Yes, it's in the same kind of league as Williams, Amherst, Bowdoin, Colby. You know, New England has many small private schools. I didn't even think about what the cost was going to be, but my mother never flinched. She went and borrowed the money to get me through, worked hard to pay it all back, and never let me worry about it. And it showed when I went to college because I was finally relieved of all of the responsibilities from my father's illness and all of the things that came with that in the store, the small shoeshine stand and the hat cleaning store that my mom had.

So when I went to college, I did not study, chased the girls, played sports, and had the kind of delayed adolescence that I probably should have had when I was from fifteen to seventeen or something. But I did it freshman, sophomore, and junior year, and flunked out because I was one of these people who waited—I was a crammer. I waited until the night before the exams. In those days, you had hour exams and then finals that were two and three hours, and two or three papers and term papers, and all those kind of things. I was

always the guy who was pulling an all-nighter to read the book for the first time, and it didn't work.

It finally caught up with me in my junior year, when my grade-point was 1.3, and I had to have a 2.0 to go into my senior year. So I flunked out, and that was probably a turning point in my life because I had to face up to the fact that at twenty years old I was a failure in college, academically. A pretty good athlete, but that was all. It didn't mean anything. I thought it did.

And therefore I applied, with great confidence, to the worst job I ever had in my life, which was working for a finance company. This was MAC Finance in Springfield. It was a company that loaned money to people who couldn't qualify for a loan at a bank and so paid exorbitant interest and put up as collateral, usually, their dilapidated furniture.

My job, as a new junior executive with three years of college, was to go to these homes and convince these people to make a payment on this exorbitant-interest loan. I failed there, too. [Laughs] I would go back, and I would see this poverty. It was a very important period. I saw poverty first hand, in a way that I had never experienced it, even though we were poor. We didn't know it, because of my mother's extraordinary handling of money and providing us with clothes and food and educations.

But I saw poverty first hand, and saw people who would open their refrigerator and say, "I don't have any money. How am I going to pay your finance company?" So I would go back, and I often paid the loan myself, to tell the boss that I had been successful in collecting the money. [Laughter]

Well, clearly, this didn't work too long because I didn't have that much money. But the payments would be fifteen dollars a month or twenty dollars a month in those days. This is in 1960, '59 and '60.

So the boss called me in after about nine months and said, "I don't think you're cut out for this business," and I got fired. Well, coming on top of the college flunkout, then I got fired my first job. It was probably the lowest time in my life.

It was shortly after that that I was drafted into the United States Army, in 1961. I sort of faced the fact that I had not done well and met that challenge by saying, "If I can't make it in the Army, I'm not sure I can make it anywhere." So that was the beginning of a sort of maturing, if you will. I was twenty-two and became an outstanding soldier in a peacetime army, fortunately, from 1961 to 1963, and quickly rose through the ranks in a two-year period. This was a period when, as I said, there was a draft.

So I became an outstanding soldier and received great recommendations, a couple of peacetime medals, and my superiors could not believe that I was a college flunkout, that I had been fired from my job, because I was so diligent and superior in all of the work that I did as an intelligence noncommissioned officer. I was a Specialist E-5 or the equivalent of a sergeant.

So I got back into college. I went to the same one that I had failed at, Bates College, and I made dean's list because by this time I knew how to study, I knew what my priorities were, and I went from the anchor man in my class—the bottom of the class—to the top half in one year, with good grades.

So I graduated, and I was trying to figure out what I was going to do, and I had a terrific sociology professor who said, "Why don't you think about being a social worker?" I had been offered a terrific job with Mobil Oil because I was a prime candidate at graduation. I had finished my military obligation, which every young man had in those days. You had to do two years in the service. I had done well in my senior year and demonstrated the maturity that companies were looking for. So I had a very lucrative offer in 1964 of $10,000 a year, which was a lot of money.

My father used to say, when we were shining shoes together, he said, "I want you to go to college so that you can make $5,000 a year." This was big money in the early fifties. So here I was, getting twice what my father thought college would provide me, and it was very tempting, but this professor had piqued my interest with social work.

I'll never forget. I said to him—his name was Bob Doel. I said, "Dr. Doel, what the hell is a social worker?" He said, "Well, a social worker is someone who helps people, and as I read your papers and stuff, I think you're interested in that kind of work."

So he directed me to a couple of social agencies in Lewiston, Maine, where I was going to school, and also to a family service agency. What was it? Community Chest, I think, in those days, the Boys' Club, and a couple of others, where social workers worked in my hometown of Springfield, Massachusetts. The more I saw, the more I liked.

In those days, President [John F.] Kennedy was, in order to recruit mental health social workers, offering National Institute of Mental Health [NIMH] grants and scholarships. I was interested in the civil rights movement in the sixties, as many people my age were, but I was never interested in going on what we called in those days Freedom Rides, a one- or two-week sojourn to Mississippi to do voter registration.

I wanted to spend more time there to sort of understand what it was that would cause people to say, "You can't drink at the same fountain I can drink at because you're not the same color I am," and a whole variety of other things.

McCREERY: You were the perfect age when all that was happening.

AGNOS: That's right. It was right in the middle of the whole thing, in 1964. I was offered a scholarship, a full scholarship to go to Florida State University and get my master's degree in social work. Florida State is in Tallahassee, which is in northern Florida right near the Georgia-Alabama border, so it's a much different part of the state than the southern and middle part of Florida. In fact, they always celebrated the fact that Tallahassee was the only Confederate capital that was never conquered by the North in the Civil War.

So I thought that would be a good place for me to pursue my civil rights interest as well as my graduate school education, so I chose that over a couple of other schools that I was accepted at in the North, and went to the South.

McCREERY: You say you were offered the fellowship. What did you have to go through to get NIMH funding?

AGNOS: Basically, it was my grades and some aptitude tests that I took and interviews. I think it was $3,200 a year, and I was eligible for the G.I. Bill that gave me another $1,000 a year, so for $4,200 I was a well-to-do graduate student in Tallahassee, Florida. So I went there and spent two years there.

Tallahassee was also the home of Florida A&M [University], which was the black school. I remember being stunned, from the very first week I was there, as I was taught by people who were there that you don't go to that part of town. When you go into the movie theaters, you sit downstairs in the front. You don't go upstairs. That's where "they" sit. [I was] seeing "colored" and "white" drinking fountains and all those kinds of things in 1965 in Tallahassee, Florida.

Of course, some other students and myself immediately rebelled against these kinds of historical separations, so we would go to the A&M games and sit in the black section. We would go upstairs in the movie theaters and integrate the black section as well as bring our black friends downstairs, and all those kinds of things. At the same time, [I was] pursuing my graduate school, where I fell in love with social work. I loved it, got straight As and fulfilled the expectations of those who had taken somewhat of a chance, considering the spotty record I had in undergraduate school.

[I] spent two years there, learning the skills of professional social work. That was probably the best time in my life, because I had money, I was going to school, I had my priorities of academic discipline and socializing. It was a great time. I enjoyed it very much.

McCREERY: When you say you and the other students were breaking some of the barriers that you saw around you, were these mainly social work students?

AGNOS: Yes. This was the graduate school and, as you would imagine, the School of Social Welfare was a place where progressive students often gravitated. Even those from the South had attitudes that were enlightened. It wasn't like the School of Engineering or something like that, where they were a little slower about these things. So we were often leading these kinds of things on campus and off campus.

McCREERY: Did you ever get in any difficulties?

AGNOS: I got in trouble one time. I can't remember the town, but it was a small town in Georgia, where my Massachusetts plates on my black Volkswagen, which was a symbol of our kind of activism—students in Volkswagens, in those days. I got stopped in a speed trap, and this guy put me in jail and wouldn't let me out for a day, because I was saying that—and I had a black student with me, and that kind of thing. Clearly, he was just hassling us. The other student was let go.

We also supported Martin Luther King [Jr.] in those days, but I never experienced any specific physical difficulty. Some of my fellow students had more difficulty, but I never encountered any.

McCREERY: How did you like living in the South, generally?

AGNOS: I liked the weather, I liked some of the people I met, but it was not a place where I knew I was going to spend the rest of my life. I never did get an answer, by the way, to the question which took me down there, which is, what

is it that makes someone believe that based on your color, you have to go to one drinking fountain versus another, you have to go through one entrance versus another, you have to sit in one place versus another? It was just the way they did it. That was the best explanation I got.

McCREERY: What was the emphasis of the graduate program itself? You mentioned progressives being drawn to it, but what were the faculty interests?

AGNOS: The faculty was basically trying to educate people for a helping profession that's oriented around helping the individual deal with the issues that are causing some kind of dysfunction for themselves or with their families or in the community that they're a part of.

McCREERY: Okay. Did you choose any particular emphasis there?

AGNOS: Yes, social work education had a series of tracks. You could go through the sort of individual therapy called casework, or group work, or community organization, or research. I chose casework, which is sort of one-on-one therapy, if you will. It's combining all of the environmental factors with an understanding of human dynamics to help a person formulate a plan of action and assisting them, for a period of time in therapy, to get to the goals that they set for themselves. I found it a very rewarding profession, and I came to San Francisco shortly after graduation to begin the practice of social work, which I love.

McCREERY: Well, tell me what brought you to San Francisco. How did all that come about?

AGNOS: Tony Bennett was singing a song, "I Left My Heart in San Francisco," for the first time. He's sung it many times since then. California had that allure to

someone from the East Coast. It was the place where [there was] great weather and things were happening. I had some friends out here and knew a girl I dated in graduate school; and so I said to my mother, I said, "Mom, I'm going to go to California."

McCREERY: Had you ever been here?

AGNOS: No, never been here, never been west of the Mississippi River except for a stint in the Army in Colorado, but never got to California. But it just had this kind of magic allure to me. I was going to drive my old Volkswagen, college Volkswagen, and I started off, loaded it up, and when I got about fifty miles out of town it broke down. It just died. So I came home. I got it towed back and sold it for a couple of hundred dollars and used that for a bus ticket and took a Greyhound bus for three days and two nights across the country.

I got off the bus at Seventh and Townsend on my birthday, September 1st, 1966.

McCREERY: Did you have any idea what you were going to do here?

AGNOS: No. Well, I had a master's degree in social work, and at that time California had a very vigorous mental health system, before then-Governor [Ronald] Reagan ruined it. I knew I could get a job, because social workers were sort of hot commodities in the mental health systems of California. I saw ads in professional magazines and stuff, so I knew I could get a job, but I didn't have one.

I was also interested in civil rights, and so when I got to San Francisco and realized that San Francisco was a city that celebrated and supported civil

rights, I went to the city Human Rights Commission. There was this wonderful man, who has since passed away—his name was Frank Quinn—who was the executive director of the Human Rights Commission. As I said, San Francisco was a hotbed of civil rights activism. I said, "I'm a social worker. I'm interested in helping people. But I'm also interested in civil rights."

He directed me to the San Francisco Housing Authority, which had just experienced within the previous six months a series of sit-ins and demonstrations against segregated public housing. The Chinese had housing in Chinatown; the whites had housing in North Beach; the blacks had housing in Bay View; and there wasn't any integration. The demonstrations had called for an end to this, and the administration had agreed to do that and in the process set up a human rights office that was headed by a black woman, Effie Robinson, who became my first professional mentor.

I went to see her and applied for a job as her assistant. She hired me, and she was an extremely influential figure in my life, professionally speaking and personally, because she took my academic skills and beginning professional understandings and really molded them in a way that made me far more effective, by helping me with my writing, helping me with my understandings of the dynamics of community politics.

My job was to work with families in distress in the various housing projects, as well as with the elderly, elderly housing, which was a new development that President Kennedy introduced, housing for senior citizens, in

1965. My job was to work with the elderly people to help them organize themselves to take control of their buildings in terms of making decisions about who their managers would be, what kind of activities they wanted, and those kinds of things.

That introduced me to elderly people as a group of people to work with, in addition to the families and youngsters I was working with in the family projects. I fell in love with the elderly. I found them to be feisty and interesting and vulnerable and moody, and so I found myself being drawn more and more to that side of the work. Effie encouraged it because she believed that the elderly needed that kind of support as well.

I did that for about three years and began to see, in my third year, the limitations that a human rights/civil rights/social work-oriented office had in terms of effecting societal change. I was dealing, and successfully, with a lot of individual problems, with a lot of group problems, but if somebody's not getting enough income from old age assistance, what good is helping them adjust to an inadequate income? Or if a welfare mother was not getting the kind of job opportunities that she needed in order to get out of poverty, what good was my helping her understand what her situation was? She knew what it was better than I did.

So I began to ask Effie, who was, as I said, my mentor—and she's also a godmother to my firstborn son—"How do we change these things on sort of a global basis?" She said, "You've got to get to know the politicians." I said, "How do I get to know the politicians?" She said, "There's two ways. One is

you have a lot of money, you give them money, and they pay attention to you because you're a big contributor." She said, "You don't have that, so the only other way is to volunteer. You're smart, and you can help them as a volunteer to get elected."

McCREERY: Now, just as an aside, do you know much about her background and how did she know the politicians?

AGNOS: She had learned the hard way. She was a social worker. She had an MSW. She was a graduate of the University of California here at Berkeley, one of the first black women to graduate. Effie is about eighty-three or eighty-four now. She grew up north of Santa Rosa in—what's that little town up there?

McCREERY: Guerneville?

AGNOS: No, not quite—what's that—everybody goes up there. I mean, everybody loves that little town outside of Santa Rosa?

McCREERY: Healdsburg?

AGNOS: Healdsburg, Healdsburg. Thank you. Healdsburg. [Hers] was the only black family there. She experienced all the things that—a very popular black family, but she always knew [she] was different. A very sensitive woman. She had learned politics through on-the-job training, meaning community politics and the politics of city hall and all that kind of—so she taught me all that stuff.

I said, "Okay, I'll volunteer," but I didn't know anybody in San Francisco who was a political candidate or anything. I said, "Who do I help?" She said, "Leo McCarthy is a very good member of the board of supervisors here in San Francisco, and he's a candidate this year for the state legislature, to be an

assemblyman from the western part of the city," meaning the Sunset, Richmond, all that area. "Why don't you go help him?"

I said, "Okay." So I walked into Leo McCarthy's headquarters on 19th and Taravel, and I said, "Mr. McCarthy, I'd like to help you get elected." He said, "What can you do?" I said, "Nothing. I don't know anything about politics, but I'm willing to do whatever you want." So I started out as a house sign hanger. In San Francisco, the candidates try to get their signs put in windows. In those days, they'd staple them to the side of a house to advertise their candidacy. So my job was to try to get as many of those up as possible for the campaign, for him.

Within a month or two that was kind of easy, and so he said, "Have you ever done voter registration?" I said, "No." So he gave me a Democratic Party manual and said, "Read this, and tell me if you have any questions." So I read it, and it was pretty straightforward, and I organized a voter registration effort that was pretty successful.

McCREERY: I would imagine, with your housing background, you knew the neighborhoods fairly well.

AGNOS: Sure, absolutely. In fact, it was probably the biggest asset that I had for my work, because it taught me the whole city very quickly.

McCREERY: Where you were living?

AGNOS: I was living on Potrero Hill in San Francisco. I always lived there until I became mayor later on. We had to reluctantly move off to get a bigger house for a while.

Anyway, when that was finished, Leo asked, "Have you ever done 'Get Out the Vote?'" I said, "No." He gave me another party manual. I read that, and we had a very good get-out-the-vote drive. So he won, very easily. I congratulated him and left and went back to my work with Effie, now knowing that I had somebody that I could talk to about issues that were important to me in the state legislature, through my volunteer work.

He called me up about three months later, and he said, "I'd like to have you work for me." He said, "I liked the way you organize things, the way you handle people, and your background as a social worker, your interest in housing, your interest in the elderly and civil rights, and I would like to have someone like that as my first staff person, to help me organize those kinds of issues for legislation."

I turned him down. I said, "I don't want to be a politician, and I don't want to work in politics. I want to be a social worker, and I just want to talk to you when I have an issue." So he sort of took that and called me up about a month later, and he said, "What do you want to do with your life, Art?" I said, "Well, I'm doing it. Ultimately, I want to go get my doctorate and teach." That was my goal, long-term goal.

He said, "Where do you want to go?" I said, "I want to go to Berkeley. They have a good school of social work, and I want to go to the university at Berkeley." He called me back a few days later, and he said, "Look, Art, I really want you to work for me. I think you can make a big difference with me, without sacrificing your interest in social work. If you work with me for one

year, after that I'll help you get into Berkeley, and you can start your doctorate work while working for me part time. When you finish, you can go teach."

I figured it would take me about four or five years to finish the doctorate. So I was interested in this, but I was in terrible conflict because I loved what I was doing. I loved Effie Robinson. I went to her, and she was just tremendous. She hated to lose me, but she said, "This is a great opportunity." So she pushed me out of the nest.

McCREERY: That's what a mentor does.

AGNOS: [Laughs] She pushed me out of the nest, and I went to work for Leo, and he began to teach me about real politics.

McCREERY: Now, just to back up a little bit, when you first went to see him, to volunteer for his campaign, do you remember your first impressions of him?

AGNOS: Oh, yes. He is a very dignified man. He's a very thoughtful man and deeply committed to doing the right thing. He was the kind of person you feel good being around. A lot of politicians look good from a distance and then the closer you get to them, the more you see their flaws and their weaknesses and their vulnerabilities. Leo McCarthy, the closer you get to him, the better he gets, the stronger he gets, the more inspiring he is. He always has been that way. Still is. We're very close.

McCREERY: Had you been aware of him as a supervisor?

AGNOS: No, I was oblivious to politics. I really was, which is surprising, but I was so absorbed in the work that I was doing at the housing authority, loved it, and was learning a lot, that I really didn't pay any attention. I knew who the mayor

was, but I really didn't pay any attention to who these individuals were on the board of supervisors or in any other office.

McCREERY: So he set you to work, convinced you to join his staff.

AGNOS: I was it. I was his first staff member, the only one in those days. He had an office in San Francisco, which he called the district office, and then he had an office in the state capitol. And he did something that I copied when I got into office. He didn't want me to be a district representative who did casework with constituents; he also wanted me to learn the legislative process in the state capitol. So he would bring me to the state capitol so that I could learn how bills became a law. He wanted me to know everything he knew because he thought that was an important part of my being able to represent him properly.

Leo was very devoted to his family. Still is. Very devoted to his family, who were very young then, so he would commute to Sacramento every day. He drove up and drove back, and I drove with him. So we had an hour and a half in the car. That was my seminar on politics, in the morning, at seven o'clock in the morning, driving up to get there about eight-thirty two or three days a week, and coming back home.

I was a bachelor then, and when we got home, his wife Jackie would have a wonderful dinner, and I'd eat dinner, and I'd play with his kids, and I'd go home. It was a great time in my life and a very productive time.

So three hours a day, I had this man who I believe is a political genius giving me daily seminars on politics. For example, he would cut out something in the newspaper that was of political interest. He'd give it to me to

read, and he'd say, "Now, tell me what you see here, and read between the lines." And I'd tell him what I thought. He'd say, "Look at this." And "Do you see that?" It would help me analyze what I was reading in the paper, what was going on behind the scenes.

Or he'd take me to meetings. In those days, S. I. Hayakawa was the president of San Francisco State [University]. We're talking about 1969 and 1970. SFSU had riots, and President Hayakawa is famous for his Tam o' Shanter and challenging the students who were rioting for some kind of issue. I can't remember right now, offhand, but he rose to prominence by standing up to the students, and so the campus was a mess. There was a lot of turmoil, with the mayor there, Joe Alioto, the police, and all that kind of thing.

So he said, "We're going to go this meeting, and you're going to come with me." He always took me with him to every meeting. He said, "What I want you to do is watch. Here's what the mayor is going to be trying to do. Watch what he says. Here's where Hayakawa is coming from. Watch what he does. The police chief will be playing this role."

Afterwards, he'd debrief me. "What did you see? How did you see it?" And so it was an extraordinary learning process, watching history in the making. It's something I copied when I got into office by doing the same thing with my staff.

Well, after about a year and a half of this, he was true to his promise. He said, "It's time for you to go to Berkeley, as we talked about." And so I applied

to Berkeley and was accepted to the School of Social Welfare as a part-time student in the School of Social Welfare, for a doctorate in social work.

So I started going to school in the evenings or in the afternoons or in the morning, and I'd make up my work afterwards—you know, take two hours, zip over here and take the course, and go back to work, and then do my homework at night or something.

Doctoral education is writing papers and reading. It's not the kind of details that sometimes undergraduate work requires, particularly in the sciences, so I could handle it with my work at the office. So that's the way my life went for four or five years, until 1973, I think it was. Yes, 1973.

I had just about completed all my course work from '69 to '73. No, '70 to '73, because I found all I had to do was take two—we were on the quarter system. Are you still on the quarter system here?

McCREERY: No, they've gone back to semesters.

AGNOS: The quarter system was very efficient for me because I had to take two courses to be full time and boom, it was over in about ten weeks. So I was able to complete my course work pretty much on full-time status because it was two courses per quarter, and in three years I'd done it. So in 1973 I finished my course work, and I knew I couldn't do a dissertation working part time. It was just too demanding. We were talking about how I would leave at the end of the year to spend a year, year and a half, doing a dissertation.

In December of 1973, I was shot and wounded twice in the chest, which screwed up everything in terms of my plans because I was in and out of

hospitals for the better part of a year. When I came back and was strong enough again to think about studies, the political environment had changed.

McCREERY: I know you've told that story recently, because it's come up again in connection with current events [sniper killings in Maryland].

AGNOS: Oh, the shooting. Sure. I have no psychological hang-ups or anything like that about it, so I'm very comfortable talking about it. But because of my work in the housing projects throughout San Francisco, I was well known to people in low-income housing, and I became better known when I was an assistant to Leo McCarthy because they thought I had–and I did have–political influence and therefore could affect things that they were struggling with.

So on Potrero Hill, where I live, there is a public housing development called Potrero Hill Annex and Potrero Hill Developments. The people there who knew me and liked me and were neighbors asked me to come and help them unravel some red tape they were having, trying to build a health clinic there on the hill, which is still there. It's called the Caleb G. Clark Health Center. They were going to name it for me if I died, but since I survived the shooting [Laughter], they named it after someone else who was worthier than I was.

I went to a meeting on December 13th, 1973, at their request, to discuss the red tape and what it was that I could do to help them. It was a successful meeting, and I agreed I could help them. It was mostly black people, although there were two Caucasian women, who were also interested in the subject, who were there from the neighborhood.

As I was walking out of the meeting that night about 8:20 in the evening—it was dark, because it was December; it got dark early—the women asked me a question. Many times, people are afraid to ask questions in public meetings, so they wait till afterwards. So I stopped to answer their question on the sidewalk, and as I was giving them the answer, this black man appeared out of the shadows and came up to me at point-blank range and fired twice into my chest, and the third time he missed.

The women who saw him coming up didn't react because it was not unusual to see a black man or person of color in the neighborhood. But, of course, they panicked when he fired and they saw the gun going off. I didn't see it because I was looking at them, rather than him, in our conversation.

So they ran off, up the street, and I ran off after them, trying to calm them down, not realizing that I had been shot. I think that when one is suddenly and violently injured, the body goes into shock to protect you from the pain and the damage. At least, I didn't feel anything, and yet I had two bullets go right through my chest and come out my back, through my lungs and spleen and colon and a variety of other places. It did a lot of damage for a short period of time. It was all fixed in surgery and with time.

So when I caught up with the women, I said, "Don't worry, no one's going to hurt us." I thought it was backfiring of a car or fireworks or something going on. They said, "It's you! It's you! You've been shot," they said. So I looked down, and sure enough, I was instinctively holding my chest on the left side and saw that I was bleeding.

Well, I get, under great stress—in those days, I didn't carry a golf club with me. [Laughter]

McCREERY: As you did today.

AGNOS: Yes. I didn't use my putter. I didn't play a lot of golf in those days. When I get under great stress, I try to deal with the stress by concentrating on what is creating the stress and blocking everything else out. So I knew that I had to get some kind of medical treatment. I said, "We're going to go over to that house. We're going to knock on the door and ask for help."

McCREERY: You were still standing in the street?

AGNOS: Yes, I was standing and bleeding and all the rest of it. So we walked over and knocked on the door. It was a black neighborhood, and this man answered the door, and I said, "Excuse me, I've just been shot. Would you kindly call an ambulance?" He said, "Yes, come on in, come on in."

So I went in. By this time, I was having trouble breathing because the bullets had gone through my lungs, and so I lay down. By this time, everybody had come out of the meeting and there were about, oh, maybe two dozen people gathered around me. I remember being on the floor looking up, and everybody was very upset and concerned about me.

A funny sidelight: There was this guy who happened to be not part of the meeting but was someone in the neighborhood who saw the commotion and came in and looked down—and he was drunk; he had been drinking. He said, "Hey, man, you're bleeding all over the rug." [Laughter] I don't know how that got through to me. I said, "Oh, my God, I'm bleeding onto the rug."

I started to scoot off the rug, and everybody said, "Oh, stay still, stay still. It's okay." And then, fortunately San Francisco General [Hospital] was only about ten blocks away, on the other side of Potrero Hill, and they were there in a flash. Several people from the meeting went with me to the hospital. I remember holding Jim Queen's hand. I was starting to get cold, and he was assuring me everything was going to be okay.

We got to the hospital, and the wonderful trauma team, which was sort of a new development in medical care there, was at the curb when the ambulance pulls up, because they call it "the golden minute." That minute or two that they can save by being at the ambulance door when it pulls up to the curb, rather than waiting for you in the examining room or the surgical room, can be the difference between life and death.

So the whole team was there: the doctors, the nurses, the attendants, and as the door opened, here were six or seven people in various kinds of white clothing. They put me on the gurney and were wheeling me through the emergency room, where people are in various stages of alcoholic distress and drugs and other kinds of medical priorities, and I'm going right through them all.

Another funny incident: when I was taken out of the ambulance and put on the gurney, they immediately went to work because all they knew was gunshot wounds to the chest. They had this well-rehearsed protocol, where one person starts cutting off a jacket and shirt on one side; the other person is using a scissors, cutting off the other.

There was this young, attractive woman resident surgeon, who jumped on the gurney and straddled my waist, and she was ripping open my shirt to find the gunshot wounds. Now remember, I'm in a certain kind of shock, but I'm still a bachelor. I'm seeing this attractive woman—I remember her name, Carol Raviola. She's now a terrific surgeon over here in the East Bay somewhere. I haven't seen her since.

But she's tearing open my clothes. Everything is being cut off me as they're getting me ready for the examination to do surgery, right? And I look up at her, and she was wearing a dress that was sort of sliding up because she was straddling me. I said, "You know, lady, for a woman I just met, you're getting to know me awfully well."

She cracked up, and she said, "Will someone tell this man that I'm examining him for gunshot wounds in the chest?" By that time, we're inside, and there were a whole bunch of other surgeons there with her. They decided I needed surgery, obviously, to clean up and examine everything.

I didn't give them permission because I was—this is another part of my shock—I said, "I'm fine." I could see these two bullet holes, but by this time I was bleeding out of my back rather than the front, because I was on my back. I had evidently told them Leo McCarthy's number, and he was there when I got there, even though it seemed like just minutes. He got there.

I said, "Just put a couple of Band-Aids. I'll go home." And Leo was there. I remember looking at his face, and it was just so ashen. He's Irish and pale anyway, but, boy, he was certainly ashen. He said—remember, I was still

working for him, "Art, why don't you sign the paper?" because there was nobody to do it for me. "Let them do the surgery, and I'll stay here with you. It'll be okay."

Well, he was my boss, and I was used to taking orders from him, so I signed the paper, and when I woke up two days later, there were all kinds of things, because I had a colostomy and tubes and all the other things. But it all turned out well for me, even though it didn't for the other victims.

This was called the Zebra killings. There was a series of racially motivated killings done by a radical, extremist, racist sect of the Muslims called the Death Angels, and they [each] had to kill a white person in order to be initiated into this sect called the Death Angels. They shot and killed, I think, thirteen or fourteen people, and they wounded about four or five, of which I obviously was one. I'm the only one that I know of who was not crippled in some form, so I was very lucky.

They were subsequently caught, six months later, and are serving life imprisonment in state prison. Never admitted that they did it. More recently, because of the sniper killings in Maryland, people recalled that San Francisco went through something like this in '73 for about nine months, and it was a terrible time.

But it turned my life in a different direction because I was convalescing for the better part of the next year, and it wasn't until the summer of '74 that I was sort of back on the job, walking around, because I had to have a couple of surgeries and things like that.

By this time, Leo was into a contest for the speakership of the assembly, against Willie Brown, and Leo was the underdog, decided underdog, and I was his biggest asset in terms of helping him strategize and succeed with candidates, to get their votes to be speaker. So he needed me, and I had to forgo my plans to go back and work on my doctorate dissertation until that was decided.

McCREERY: And, of course, that fight for the speakership is legendary.

AGNOS: Oh, absolutely.

McCREERY: Maybe we'll save that for next time, but I'm interested to know that you went right back working for him and presumably didn't have any hesitation because of your experience?

AGNOS: No. I never had any hesitation. I remember people from the projects were so upset, because they were friends. They still are. They would come to my house and say, "Now, you're not going to leave us, are you? You're not going to go somewhere else?" I said, "No, why should I?" Even though [the crimes] were racially motivated, I did not experience any kind of negative feelings towards black people in general because of what a couple or several demented, racist black men had done to me, any more than I would hope that black people would not hold it against me for what racist, demented white people have done to them historically throughout their experience in America.

So it was just an experience in life that I don't recommend, but certainly it gave me some insights into myself and whether I really believed in these

principles that I talked about during my civil rights work. And I did. It was tested.

McCREERY: It's the kind of thing that could have shaken your faith in social work, but—

AGNOS: No, it didn't. I just accepted it as something that happens along the course of things, but with people who obviously weren't good people.

McCREERY: All right. That's a good stopping point for today. Thank you so much.

AGNOS: It seems like I do a lot of talking in this, but I guess that's what this is about, huh? [Laughter]

McCREERY: It is.

[End of Session]

[Session 2, November 12, 2002]

[Begin Minidisc 2]

McCREERY: We were talking last time quite a bit about how you came to San Francisco in the mid-sixties and got your start out here, and I was wondering how much attempt did you make to connect up with the Greek-American community here?

AGNOS: Initially, I was so preoccupied with getting into my career as a social worker at the [San Francisco] Housing Authority and getting into the issues of San Francisco after the housing authority, I really didn't get that involved with the Greek community. I sort of, if you will, accidentally, as I sort of rose in the political sphere as Leo McCarthy's assistant, people began to recognize my name, which is, at least in the Greek culture, an easily recognizable Greek name. It's been shortened from Anagnostopoulos. Way back when my father first came and got off the boat, so to speak, in Ellis Island, some immigration agent, I think, couldn't say Anagnostopoulos, and shortened it to Agnos.

People knew that name in San Francisco because there was a wonderful city attorney named George Agnost, which was the same original Greek name, Anagnostopoulos; however, whenever his family had their name shortened, it was shortened with a "t" still at the end. It was amusing because right from

my first day in San Francisco, when I would call a restaurant, when I was working at the housing authority and literally did not know my way around the city, I would call restaurants for reservations and easily get them because people were confusing me with the city attorney, who was a very prominent person in San Francisco, George was.

I remember a couple of times I'd get to the restaurant, and as you know, I'm about six feet. George Agnost was about five-eight and balding. I have a full head of hair, and so people would look at me and say, "You're not George Agnost." I said, "No, I'm not, I'm Art Agnos." They'd say, "You're not the city attorney." I said, "No, I'm not."

But I had the tables, and it was a wonderful thing that I enjoyed joking [about] with the city attorney. But then he retired and I became mayor, and he got the benefit of my sort of celebrity, if you will, because he went and got the same kind of opportunities that I had gotten originally.

Anyway, as I sort of found my way around the community, I would meet Greek-American people, and they would say, "You've got to come to this event and that event," and so I was sort of drawn into it by people who said, "You have to come to the church fund raiser," where they sold Greek food, the Greek bazaars and Greek things and stuff like that.

So I sort of found my way back to that community through that. After about five years in San Francisco, I still kept it at modest length, not arm's length but modest length, because I was too absorbed in my career and the issues that that were there then, than to get huckledy-buck into the church

activities. I always supported it, always gave them whatever they needed, but did not become what they sometimes wanted, which was to become a leader in the church and all that.

McCREERY: Now, George Christopher, a Greek-American, had been mayor before you arrived.

AGNOS: A much different experience, yes. Absolutely. George Christopher was an icon in the Greek community. He was one of my early heroes because he was the Jackie Robinson of the Greek community. He broke ground and fought a lot of early prejudice as a Greek-American. Now, George was a more original Greek, if you will, than I was. I was born in this country shortly after my mother arrived, but he was born in Greece and came to this country as an original immigrant at the age of three, I think, from reading his book, his biography, and grew up in Greek Town, which was in the South of Market in San Francisco.

The center of it was right around where the Moscone Convention Center is now, and you'll find a plaque there. But that was where the original coffee shops were and the little Greek restaurants and bakeries and those kinds of things, and that's where George Christopher grew up, deeply involved in the classic immigrant community of church, work, and what many immigrants did, which was stay inside their ghetto, if you will, the community that is their source of strength.

As he grew older, obviously, he went to school and became educated, but he had a more traditional "original Greek" kind of immigrant experience, as an

immigrant himself, than I did. Even though I speak Greek, he spoke it much better than I did and was, at least throughout his career, more identified with the Greek community than I was initially.

Subsequently, as I moved up the political ladder in my own career, I sought it out for political support, and as I grew older my need for that kind of identity grew stronger. As a young man in my twenties, I was sort of rebelling against a lot of what I had gotten earlier, which was a heavy dose of Greek school, which I hated. I used to have to—did I tell you this before? Yes. Had to go to Greek school after American school, all that.

So I rebelled against that in my twenties, but I was over that in my thirties and started to reach out to the Greek community and find it a great source of strength and pride and all the things that come with it.

McCREERY: Now, around the time you arrived, George Christopher ran for governor and was beaten by Ronald Reagan in the primary. Do you have much memory of how that played in San Francisco?

AGNOS: Actually, he ran in the Republican Primary in June of 1966—three months before I arrived in San Francisco. I heard the stories, but since I was not heavily involved in politics in 1966—I really didn't get involved until 1970. I obviously knew about it, knew who he was, followed people who knew him, but I did not get involved in it.

McCREERY: Okay. We talked about how you joined the campaign of Leo McCarthy when he was a supervisor running for the assembly. I note that he had been a

longtime aide to Eugene McAteer. Did he talk to you much about that relationship and how influential it was to him?

AGNOS: Yes, Leo was a top assistant to Gene McAteer, who was tooling up to be the mayor of San Francisco. He was a very powerful state senator. Leo thought that he was going to sort of move into City Hall with Gene McAteer. However, McAteer's sudden tragic death, with a heart attack on a handball court, ended that and propelled Leo into running himself.

He had a much different relationship, and I think the relationship that he had with Gene McAteer was a much more formal, traditional employer-employee or staff position. I think I was the beneficiary of that because Leo treated me more like a younger brother as we sort of grew together in politics.

For example, as I told you, Leo was very devoted to his family, and so when he was elected to the state assembly in 1968, he commuted back and forth, and I would drive with him. Rather than dropping him off at his home and going on my own way, the way he did with McAteer, he would invite me into his house, where his wife had prepared dinner, and I would sit with his family, his young children and myself, and spend a wonderful hour and a half or so with the family. As a bachelor, this was a wonderful thing, but it just sort of bonded me with him in a way that many staff people don't get with people they work for. I think that was part of his wanting to make a different experience and a different relationship with his staff than he had earlier. It was not negative with McAteer; it was just a more formal relationship.

McCREERY: Okay. Let's talk a little bit more about Mr. McCarthy's first election to the assembly in 1968, just to expand on what we did last time. Can you talk a little about his district and his constituency and what kind of message you were trying to get across to the voters there?

AGNOS: Leo was, is, a liberal Democrat, but in San Francisco he was seen as more moderate than the typical liberal, ultra-liberal, if you will. It's hard to define people, but he was anti-death penalty, he was pro choice, he was pro civil rights, he was pro gay rights. I don't know how much more progressive you can be.

But he chose to run in the western half of San Francisco, where there was a large Irish population. That was sort of the middle-class belt of San Francisco, which is everything west of Twin Peaks. It involved the Richmond, the inner Sunset, the inner Richmond, and it went all the way down the coast, if you will, to what was known as the Ocean View-Merced-Ingleside area, which is that area a little bit south and a little bit east of San Francisco State [University].

So he represented an area that was, oh, maybe 8 or 9 percent black, and the rest was white. The Chinese population had not really grown in 1968 to be what it is in 2000. Although there was a growing Chinese population, it was not as significant as it is today. It was largely a middle-class, working-class kind of area that he represented, but he was very popular because he had run citywide several times, two times, I think it was, as a supervisor and was well known throughout the city. He had had a major election for the state senate against George Moscone, which he had lost also.

So he was well known and easily won the assembly seat. He was the pick of the party and was supported strongly by then-Speaker Jesse Unruh, who was the superpower of California politics in the sixties. He spoke to the usual issues, to the traditional issues that the Democratic Party spoke to, which was employment opportunities for people, good health care, good education. The elderly were a special interest, and housing was a special interest of Leo's, which is how we kind of hooked up. I think I told you. Did I tell you about how I walked into his headquarters and how Effie [Robinson] guided me to him?

McCREERY: You did. You were working with her at the housing authority.

AGNOS: That's right. I did the voter registration and all that stuff.

McCREERY: That's right. But yes, I can see how you connected on the housing issues.

AGNOS: The housing and the elderly, which was what I was working on in 1966, '67, '65. As I said, John F. Kennedy had started low-income public housing for the elderly, and in fact the first one in San Francisco was named after John F. Kennedy. It's still on Sacramento Street, right by Fillmore. It's a big high-rise called JFK Towers, John F. Kennedy Towers. My job was to organize those elderly people. A number of them after that were built in San Francisco, on Twin Peaks, Woodside Gardens, another one in Mission Dolores, and so that's where I developed my interest in the elderly and found them to be fascinating, interesting people. I was twenty-six years old. I wasn't supposed to be interested in the elderly, but that began a lifelong interest, and ultimately caused me to study geriatrics here at Berkeley and all that kind of stuff.

McCREERY: While we're talking about housing, I'm thinking about the San Francisco Redevelopment Agency and what interaction you may have had with that entity when you were working for the housing authority.

AGNOS: The redevelopment agency was a superpower in city politics in those days. It was headed by a very dynamic and strong, opinionated leader, Justin Herman. San Francisco was sort of more development-minded then, and it had done some major redevelopment projects.

Probably the best one they did in those days was down near the waterfront, Golden Gateway, where they cleared away a lot of the old originial farmers' market—I was never there; it was before my time, but it was kind of a run-down area, where there were a lot of produce markets and stuff, and now the Embarcadero Center and the Golden Gateway is there.

The next big project, that was extremely controversial, was the Western Addition redevelopment because the black community rose up and resisted the wholesale urban renewal-style clearing of whole neighborhoods. Block after block would simply be razed, and there would be just lots where there had been homes. We now have learned, painfully, that was a terrible mistake, but at that time, that's what was going on. There was a tremendous opposition among the progressive community, and as someone who was into housing and into public housing, I joined that progressive coalition to resist Justin Herman.

A special opportunity came up in 1966 when, in the South of Market, there was some slum housing that was to be cleared in order to build what is now known as the George Moscone Convention Center. Poverty lawyers filed a

lawsuit against the project because they weren't preparing enough replacement housing for all of the elderly housing they were knocking down to clear away the land to build the convention center.

Justin Herman proposed, in his kind of efficient vision, to build a mega-block of 500 units on one location for the elderly. Effie Robinson, my supervisor and the director of human relations at the housing authority—and the mega-housing, the 500 would be run by the housing authority—were involved because we dealt with the social and management components of senior citizen housing.

Well, Effie Robinson was extremely adamant that this was a terrible social policy. Clearly, the literature and experience said you don't put 500 units for the elderly in one location because it simply overwhelms. It creates too much critical mass with aging people, who have a lot of health and social needs, especially as they age in place. So she began to resist it, and it was clear that no one was paying attention to her. So she decided to go public, but she needed to make sure that I would support her because, in the politics of the housing authority, they were trying to split me off as the young, white, up-and-coming guy from this older black lady. She said to me, "Art, are you supporting me?" And I said, "Of course."

McCREERY: Who was trying to split you off?

AGNOS: The executive director, who was the former—his name was Eneas Kane. He was sort of romancing me, saying, "You have a bright future in politics, and

you need to recognize what the future holds for you," and all those kinds of things. Never talked about the project itself.

Effie wanted to make a public statement and, in effect, take on Justin Herman. I signed, with her, a letter that said—and there's literature I'll bring in to you—"This is a terrible idea. It would be awful social policy. Everything we know about the elderly says you do not create that kind of a huge facility for older people."

Well, it was very controversial at the time, that somebody with Effie's stature would say this. It prevailed, and the redevelopment proposal was reduced down to 250 units in two separate buildings, each with their own social facilities, which was appropriate and consistent with the kind of social policy that was progressive for elderly people. And they're there now. They're called—oh, my goodness—Clementina Towers. But they're there now, and they became the model for what was to come after that, which were small, sort of scattered units, housing for elderly people and, for that matter, families.

We've learned, painfully, that these huge Chicago-style, Cabrini Green public housing units, which puts everybody in the same place, is a terrible plan because it just brings too many people with enormous problems in one location, and the social services and resources of the community simply can never match what they require, and what we need to do is break that up and integrate them into the community with smaller, scattered-site units that allow

the helping agencies to go there and help them cope with their issues and hopefully help them elevate their status.

If you take a look at the modern public housing being built for elderly as well as younger families, we no longer build monolithic high-rises. That all began, in San Francisco at least, with that issue in 1966 and '67, with Effie Robinson and the redevelopment agency. It's the first time they were ever stopped from doing what they wanted to do and Justin Herman, I don't think, ever forgave her or me for it.

McCREERY: How well did you get to know him?

AGNOS: I didn't have much to do with him. He was in the top echelons, so I never really had much to do with him personally or directly. Effie did, but I didn't.

McCREERY: Speaking of the redevelopment agency, Joseph Alioto, of course, had served there, and then he replaced Mr. McAteer as the mayoral candidate.

AGNOS: That's right.

McCREERY: Under what circumstances did you get to know him?

AGNOS: I got to meet him through Leo, when I became, in 1968 and '69, Leo's assistant. As I told you, Leo would take me everywhere, even though I was as green as they come, because he was grooming me to be the kind of staff person he wanted me to be, which was to understand what the issues are and be able to think and integrate the factors that were going on so that I could advise him.

So he would take me to meetings in the mayor's office. As I told you, with the example out at San Francisco State, he would say, "Now, Alioto is more conservative. He's more pro-development. He's going to be doing this. We're

going to be approaching it from that point of view." I just listened, and then afterwards he'd debrief me.

So I got to meet the mayor. I was always just the very respectful junior staffer. I was never an equal to him in those days. This is 1969, '70, '71.

But because of my strong interest in the elderly, Leo asked the mayor then to appoint me to a newly created Commission on Aging. So here I was, at thirty years old, joining a bunch of sixty-five-, seventy-, and seventy-five-year-olds on this newly formed Commission on Aging. Mayor Alioto appointed me at the request of Leo—not because of my request, because I didn't have that kind of clout with him, but certainly Leo did. They had a relationship, a political relationship.

So I started serving the mayor and would see him maybe once or twice a year to tell him what the commission was doing. The Commission on Aging then was just beginning, and it was not seen as an influential commission by any means, but it was the start of developing good policy for the elderly in our city. But it was not a Class A, if you will—like the Airport or the Police Commission or the Port Commission or the Public Utilities Commission and those kinds. This was seen as sort of an entry-level commission, where prospective people were developed and learned the ropes, if you will, and then moved up in city government.

I was just interested in the social policy of the elderly and wanted this commission to do a good job. Because of my background and experience in

working with the elderly in public housing, I wanted to make sure that their needs were addressed.

So that's how I met Mayor Alioto. Ironically, fast forward to 1987 and '88, when I became major, we suddenly were peers. He was the former mayor, and I was the mayor. I made it a practice to do what Leo had taught me in the legislature, which was to always treat former legislators as kind of members of the family. I suppose you see that in academia as well, where former professors are given certain courtesies at the university, or former chancellors are given certain courtesies in the university.

Well, Leo taught me that that's the way we should always treat former legislators. Members of the legislature who came back, for example, to the legislature never had to ask for an appointment. They simply walked into the office, and if I was there, my staff knew that, for example, former Assemblyman Bill Bagley is here, and he'd walk in.

So when I got to be mayor, I made sure—it's an interesting story; I'm getting ahead of this, but sometimes we may not think of it [later].

Well, when I got elected mayor, I was the mayor-elect in 1987. I took office in January of '88, but I got elected in December of '87. And so between December and January, of course, I was the mayor-elect, and I was invited—suddenly all the perks started coming my way. One of them was to go to a 49er football game, and so they sent the limousine out, and my family and I were riding in this limousine in a special lane for VIPs, into the special VIP parking

lot, which is for players and coaches and big shots who come as guests of the owners, which we were.

And so as my family and I were kind of thrilled with all this stuff, we were in this special lane, and it was right next to all the lanes where the rest of the fans sort of drive into the parking lots at Candlestick [Park] stadium, and I looked to my right, and there was Mayor Alioto in a station wagon with his wife and his kids in the back, driving in like the rest of the fans.

So I said to my wife and my kids, "Do you see who's over there?" And they looked over there, and the kids—I said, "That's the former mayor of San Francisco. The treatment we get today leaves as soon as I leave this office, and let's never forget that that's where we came from, that's where we go, and we need to never believe that this is somehow our divine right or anything like that. We need to perhaps enjoy it while we're here, but it's not going to stay this way, so don't get used to it."

Then I went back to the office, as soon as I was sworn in, and I made sure that Mayor Alioto got the same VIP parking place that I got, so he could go in, and all the other mayors. Funny story. I don't know why—and I sent the same pass to other legislators. John Burton was one of them who got the VIP parking, as a courtesy of the mayor. I'll never forget. He sent me a note, "Thanks for the parking place, Art, but I can't get into the stadium without a ticket." [Laughter] And I sent him tickets, too, after that.

After that, Mayor Alioto and I became personal friends. He would have me over to his house. We'd go out to dinner, either ourselves or with our wives,

and we are still very close to his children and his widow, Kathleen Sullivan Alioto.

So it was interesting to start off my career at the beginning and be a junior staffer when this man, who was bigger than life as mayor, and a terrific mayor--and I was a junior staffer who sort of stood at the side and waited for Leo to give me the signal to even walk into the room—and then suddenly—. That was '77, '78, '79 and '80, and then twenty years later we're walking arm in arm and we're buddies.

McCREERY: Talk a little bit about Mr. Alioto as mayor, again from your vantage point as a relatively young newcomer.

AGNOS: He was a very dynamic man. He was a mayor's mayor. Even though he was more conservative than I was on issues—he was more pro-growth, pro-development, he was a strong labor guy, but he was just a little more connected with the power brokers of San Francisco. He moved in those circles, because he was a super lawyer and a multimillionaire because of his tremendous successes as a lawyer, so he was very comfortable moving in those circles with the CEOs of the city and the power brokers of the city.

I was not. I learned who they were and knew how to deal with them, but I didn't socialize with them. I didn't interact with them other than whatever I had to do as a public official. He was used to that, and it showed with his comfort and with some of his philosophy. But he was very strong with working people. Always remembered labor. As a mayor, I think he's remembered as a good mayor of San Francisco. It was a different time. There

weren't so many of the controversial issues we have today. He perhaps wasn't as aggressive on gay rights as he could have been, but he was okay. He was tolerant, if you will. But he was someone who, as my mother used to say, when he walked into the room, he would fill up the room because he was such a dynamic force. I admired that ability of his. When he made a decision, he stuck to it.

For example, one of the things that I remembered well when I was mayor is that when the Transamerica building was being proposed, he strongly supported it, insisted that it be built, yet many in San Francisco thought it was an abomination. Now it's part of the San Francisco skyline, and you see it wherever you see it and you say, "That's San Francisco," because of the Transamerica Pyramid building. So he had vision and had the courage to stick to his vision, something I was reminded of when I was faced with similar choices on whether we demolish the Embarcadero Freeway or not, later on.

McCREERY: Yes, these are tough choices at the time.

AGNOS: At the time. When you look back, you say who in the world could be opposed to the Transamerica building? It's a terrific place. Because of the pyramid, it created more open space and all that, but it was an enormous debate. Same thing with the Embarcadero.

McCREERY: We will talk about that. I have one last bit of question for you about when Mr. McCarthy ran for the assembly, going back to '68 again. You say he was the pick of the party and of Jesse Unruh at the time. How did all that work? What was the role of the party in selecting someone to fill a slot like that?

AGNOS: Leo is a more professional politician than I am. Remember, as I told you, I never liked party politics, never went to a convention except the one in '88 with [Michael] Dukakis. But Leo went to all of them. He understood them. He studied them. He mastered them, which is to his credit as a public official, because it made him more effective than I was in those areas where the party played a role. He learned that as McAteer's staff person.

In those days, the party played a bigger role. During my prime, if you will, in public office, the party declined a little bit in its influence because of public finance laws and disclosure laws and a variety of other things. But the party in his early days was influential. There were people who ran it that picked people to run for office. Today they don't do that as much.

Jesse Unruh, in his own way, supplanted the party with his enormous power and fund-raising capacities in the state legislature, so when it came to the legislature, the state assembly in particular, which was what Leo was running for at the time, Jesse Unruh supplanted the party at picking people to run.

At that time, there was an incumbent who had gotten into some trouble by paying his babysitter with state stamps. In those days, the state legislature gave stamps to legislators to communicate with their constituents and to respond to mail. Today it's all done by postage machines and all that. But then, they used to give you rolls of stamps, and he used a couple of those, foolishly, to pay a babysitter who was watching his children. That got in the papers and destroyed his career.

So Leo, who was then a supervisor and had lost, two years before, a vigorous election against George Moscone for the state senate, decided to run for that, moved to the western part of the city. He was living in the Marina then, just outside that assembly district that he wanted to run in, so he moved over there. Went up and talked with Jesse Unruh, who encouraged him to run. Jesse Unruh liked him and thought that he had the skills that he wanted up in the legislature, that he would be a good producer of legislation, et cetera. So Leo was the chosen one, if you will. So no one really ran against him of super-credibility. There were a few other candidates, but it was clear Leo was going to win because he had the backing of Jesse Unruh and, to a lesser extent, the party in terms of influence.

McCREERY: Was the involvement of the California Democratic Council pretty minor by then, do you recall?

AGNOS: Yes. I don't even remember them ever being part of it.

McCREERY: You've already described your own circumstance and how he wooed you to joining his staff. You wanted to go to school and indeed were going to school, but I wonder, as chief of staff, how did you go about putting together a staff for Mr. McCarthy and deciding what to do in the Sacramento office versus the district office?

AGNOS: Leo gave me the parameters. He said that he wanted to have a diverse staff that reflected San Francisco and his district. He insisted on the highest competence of everybody, and then he said, "I want everybody to know what the various parts of the jobs were." In other words, too many legislators say, "This person

will be a district specialist," so they stay in the district where the member is elected and deal with constituent issues. Somebody comes in with a problem with a state agency or the bureaucracy, and that person intervenes, but they don't know what the legislative side is or the political side.

Leo never wanted his staff—and he started with me, as I told you—to be so specialized and limited, and he said that everyone should have that, so even secretaries would come up to the Capitol to witness what was happening in a particular committee that Leo was presenting a bill before, or watch the floor sessions on the assembly.

Now, in 1968, when Leo began—the election was '67; he began in '68—his staff consisted of me, as a professional person, and one secretary in the Capitol and one secretary in the district. As he rose in prominence within the legislature—when you become a committee chair or you become a party leader, like caucus chairman or whip, you add more staff people. So in the succeeding years, he added part-time people, who became full-time people.

One of them, for example, was Anna Eshoo, who is today a member of Congress from San Mateo, but she started in our office as a part-time professional person. I would teach her some of the things about what Leo wanted to do, show her how we did it. She had her own intelligence and added to it, and worked with Leo for—I can't remember exactly, but I believe it was around four or five years and then went to San Mateo, where she ran for local office and now is a member of Congress. But mainly for the first two or three,

almost four years, I was the only full-time person from '68 to '72, '73. I hope I'm not forgetting somebody, but I was the main guy.

McCREERY: How did you divide up your time? Did you stay mostly with Mr. McCarthy?

AGNOS: I usually was going back and forth with him, and then if I had things to do in the district, I might stay there, but we mostly tried to reserve most of our district things for Fridays, or I might come back early and deal with an issue in the city. But I could use my own judgment. I usually went up there three days a week and was in San Francisco two days a week, during the week, and then Saturdays always in the city as well.

But basically, after the first year I sort of made my own decisions about the workload, and that determined—if there was something important to him happening in the city, I would stay there. But much of what was going on was in the Capitol, so I would go up there and deal with issues there.

By 1970, Leo had decided that he would run—or '71—he began to see that the then-speaker, Bob Moretti, was going to run for governor and vacate the speakership. He wanted to compete for that. Bob Moretti was very close to Willie Brown. He anointed Willie Brown as his successor.

So one of the roles that I took on, from 1970 on, was to manage campaigns. I would go off the state payroll for a period of time. In those days the laws weren't as stringent, so I could even do some consulting, if there was a reason to be there for state business, and then at night go talk to candidates, off-duty or something.

But mainly Leo would try to impress prospective members of the assembly with his leadership qualities, with his own persona and advice, and then he would say, "I have this bright young man who can help you on the scene, run your campaign." Many candidates didn't have expertise or couldn't afford it, so I would go off the payroll and he'd loan me to a candidate.

This candidate would be—the profile would be someone who could win, who shared Leo's values and would be inclined, although it was not a quid pro quo, to support Leo for speaker. We started in 1970, and by 1974 we had been so successful, winning about sixteen campaigns, that he had a cadre of people in the legislature that wanted him to be the speaker and were prepared to vote for him against Willie Brown, who was [then] a lot like he has been as mayor, only probably more arrogant.

And I mean that respectfully, but Willie had achieved great prominence in the legislature in the early seventies. He was chairman of Ways and Means, his best buddy was the speaker, and he could say and do anything he wanted with impunity. That ultimately cost him because, even though people couldn't resist what he did to them when he was "supreme power," as soon as the secret vote came and his protector wasn't there, suddenly they turned on him. So that in 1974 the black caucus voted for Leo McCarthy, a white Irishman, against Willie Brown because the members of the black caucus had been offended over the years by Willie's arrogance.

The Hispanic caucus, the minorities, all voted for Leo McCarthy, this kind of white, Irish Catholic, progressive politician, against the "minority," quote-

unquote, candidate because Willie's personality—and it was really about that—was something they did not want to see in the speaker's office because they knew how abusive it could be toward them.

Willie will never admit it but ultimately that's what happened, and Leo pulled the upset of the year when the cadre of people that he had been electing over the four years that this unofficial campaign—it got very official in the last year—had been unfolding, combined with people who didn't owe Leo McCarthy their election the way this cadre of folks did.

Among this cadre were people like John Foran, whose campaign I ran in 1973. Now, he had been in office, but there was a redistricting plan which changed his district, and he was very close to Leo, and so I came out of the hospital with a colostomy. I was wearing a colostomy and out of the hospital about two months or a month and a half, and I was directing the key elements of his campaign, developing media advertising and all the kinds of things that managers do.

Another was John Thurman in Modesto, Alister McAlister in San Jose, Ernie LaCoste in Modesto, and Norm Waters in Calaveras, and people like that, who knew that Leo had been influential and without whom—Dan Boatwright in Contra Costa, Barry Keene in Santa Rosa. All these legislators came to the Capitol knowing Leo, having worked with him, knowing that they had been elected with his support and my direct work, and were inclined to support him because they liked his style.

When that cadre of people, as I said, combined with some of the others who didn't owe Leo anything but resented the style that Willie had showed as chairman of Ways and Means—I can't remember the kinds of things, but one of the more famous ones that Willie did [later] as mayor [of San Francisco] that comes to mind more easily was when he said that Elvis Grbac, the quarterback of the 49ers, was an embarrassment to humankind because he hadn't played well that Sunday. Well, when you say that about a politician who might vote for you for speaker in a year or two, you might forget—because Willie loves to entertain and thought maybe he was just getting a laugh, but when you get it at somebody else's expense, that person doesn't forget it, and so a lot of legislators joined with this cadre of people that Leo had helped elect, who were sort of inclined to vote for him just out of gratitude, and pulled the biggest upset in the history of the California state legislature in 1974.

Many people, including Willie, say that without me, he couldn't have done it. I say, without Leo's genius, we couldn't have done it. But the two of us were an extraordinary partnership, and it was really the two of us, with the support of a lot of other people in the general area, but it was us for four years sort of behind the scenes, doing the kinds of things I've just described.

McCREERY: It's interesting that he started so far ahead [of time], and that really did pay off, as you say.

AGNOS: Absolutely.

McCREERY: Now, talk a little bit about Southern California, and the north-south power struggles. How did that play into this procedure?

AGNOS: Southern California. I went down there a couple of times to help with a couple of legislators' campaigns there, too. I went down there and stayed there for a couple of months to run a couple of campaigns. However, there it was more the personality of the two major candidates. McCarthy, who was this man who treated everybody with great respect and never made fun of anybody to get a laugh, was seen as a serious legislator who would bring great dignity to the house with his almost too sober, sometimes—I always used to remind him that we had to loosen up, because Leo was always preoccupied with the work of the legislature.

An amusing sidebar: one time John Briggs, who was a Republican, stood up on the floor and accused Leo of being Captain Queeg [from *The Caine Mutiny*]. We sensed that Leo had been—Leo was always pushing the legislature to do an agenda of nursing homes or public finance or whatever it was, and politicians don't like to be pushed too far out there, because they are always thinking of reelection. So Leo needed to lighten it up because the Queeg remark by Briggs had sort of touched a nerve.

I remember I said to Leo, I said, "You know what we need to do? We need to lighten this up." I went out and found a bunch of little steel balls, machine bearings, and my mother worked for three days, sewing these little red velvet bags, and we put two little ball bearings—you know, Captain Queeg was famous for rattling these steel balls, right? And so we handed them out in the general session of the legislature to each member of the assembly, and it defused the tension that was sort of building around McCarthy being too—this

is after he was speaker—being too serious, too pushy, too dominant, and sort of lightened up the atmosphere.

But that was always something we were struggling with, with Leo, because he was always on the edge, moving to get something done, trying to pass an agenda for the legislature and the people of California. In the Southern California area, though, it was really Leo's personality, Leo's leadership capacity, and the contrast with Willie Brown that helped him gain a lot of the Southern California votes.

McCREERY: Okay. Some of the accounts suggest that Howard Berman played some sort of role in racking up the votes that Mr. McCarthy would need. Does that ring any bell with you?

AGNOS: Perhaps, but they had a tremendous battle a few years later, but Berman—

McCREERY: You're thinking of 1980, probably.

AGNOS: Yes, yes. Berman was new, and I don't remember him—although I'm sure he played some kind of role, I just can't remember Berman being that significant, although he became the minority leader, so he was not—but Leo wanted to have someone from Southern California to balance the Northern California influence and stuff like that.

McCREERY: Was there much attention paid to the north-south—

AGNOS: Leo was very conscious that there were a lot of legislators from the south. Leo is also a very fair man, and he believed that they needed to be given the kind of attention—a place where most of the population is—so he didn't have the

Northern California bias, if you will. He recognized that the south needed attention, and it was politically astute of him to do that, in his best interest.

McCREERY: Now, before he became speaker, had you had much knowledge of the way the previous speakers operated in that job? I mean, going back as far as Jesse Unruh or whoever you—

AGNOS: I didn't. He studied it so that he could be familiar with it, but I didn't have any idea, because I wasn't interested in that part of the business, political leadership and all that. I was the social worker who wanted to do legislation that helped people and all that. That was more Leo's strength. I learned to think strategically because of his training and would help him from time to time in that area, but he is, he was then and he is today still the best political mind I've ever seen, although he just doesn't brag about it the way other people do.

For example, you're going to see Nancy Pelosi become the minority leader [in Congress]. Leo McCarthy has been there since two years ago, helping her count votes, advising her as to what the best message might be, so you're already hearing her saying, "Look, we're going to have an inclusive leadership," because people are suggesting that a San Francisco liberal will be too far to the left to lead the Democratic Party in the Congress against George Bush.

You watch. She will not compromise her personal political values, but as a leader you will see her broaden her message, broaden her inclusiveness, broaden her outreach to give accessibility and room, and she will do something

else that Leo has taught her, which is put other members of the Congress on center stage to promote the issue of the day, rather than hogging it for herself, which was something that was very attractive for Leo when he became speaker.

Rather than do what too many leaders did then, which people reacted to by electing him, and what they still do because they're all interested in running for president or something, they would promote themselves and sort of steal the limelight from someone who had been laboring in the vineyards on this issue and now had primed it for presentation to the public, saying, "Here's the person who did it." Let them do it. You watch Nancy Pelosi. She'll do that, and that is in large part because Leo's been her mentor behind the scenes. You'll never see stories about it because he doesn't need to promote it.

But here he is, at seventy-two years of age—I was in a car coming back last Tuesday from an advisory meeting on the assembly fellowship program, which is where students go up and spend a year in the state legislature, and he was on the car phone. I'm driving. It was like déjà vu. You know, we were right back in the seventies. I'm driving, because he's a terrible driver, because his mind is going a hundred miles an hour—it's so busy, he doesn't pay attention to the road.

But anyway, I'm driving. He's on the phone, talking to Nancy's chief of staff, counting votes for this leadership battle, saying, "Now, tell her to call this person, and make sure of this, and I want to know what this person"—and he is sort of the disciplinarian of the strategy. The next day, she declared victory.

And he's been doing that for the last two years. He's seventy-two years of age, and he is treating her like he's the staff person, helping her, guiding her. Now, she's got her own talent, and I don't mean to diminish that. She is going to be a star, a star. You watch. She's going to turn them all upside down who think that she's too liberal and just another pretty face and all that kind of stuff. She's probably the best politician I've ever seen, the best. I mean, you watch. She's going to be a star. I don't know if that's for the oral history project, but you just watch what happens.

McCREERY: Here's your prediction.

AGNOS: Yes.

McCREERY: Well, it sounds as though he's coaching her to do what he did as speaker.

AGNOS: That's right, exactly.

McCREERY: Now, how did he carry that out? How did he let others share the limelight?

AGNOS: First of all, in the campaign, as we were saying, we started out early, and he did it one by one. First he identified parts of the state where there were candidates who could win, and then he identified what they needed to do to win, and then he went and met them and offered to give it to them. But he never said, "And in exchange, you're going to vote for me."

McCREERY: Right.

AGNOS: He respected people's integrity, but he assumed that if he did what he knew he could do—and nobody ever disappointed him that way. Now, he was disappointed in votes, but for other reasons, and that happened in 1980, but in

1974, people that he identified and strategized over four years all came through for him.

Once he was speaker, he had a kind of personal maturity and a political maturity that said that "I need and will share the limelight that follows my position as Speaker of the Assembly with the people who do the work to create the issues that we are promoting in this year's legislative agenda," whereas previous speakers would hog it, if you will.

Willie had demonstrated, as chairman of Ways and Means, the same kind of earlier speaker proclivities, and people didn't want it. So as speaker, Leo would bring in the member who was working and promoting and give them the limelight.

Nancy Pelosi is already saying she's going to do the same thing, and has done it. Over the last eight months, she's been the Democratic whip. When they make strategy sessions, she brings people in, gives them a role, gives them an opportunity to develop themselves, and that's what people like. That's what they want, especially someone who gets into politics with all the ego needs.

McCREERY: Well, now, as speaker, how accessible was Mr. McCarthy to the entire legislature?

AGNOS: He had a rule. Any time a member wanted to see him, they just walked in. But many times, when you're in that kind of position, and I experienced it as mayor, people are afraid, because of the image of the position, to treat you the way they did before you got it. And so a lot of them would come to me and tell me things that they wanted him to know. We would communicate every

couple of hours. If there was member stuff, I just would walk through the door and tell him what he needed to know or tell him I needed to talk to him as soon as he was free, and all that kind of stuff. By that time I knew him, I knew how he thought, I knew what he wanted, and so we were seen as very close. It helped him because all that training he had put in since 1967 paid off in '74 and the next couple of years I was the chief of staff.

I was really a kind of unofficial chief of staff after that, when I got elected to the assembly. That's why he wanted me to get elected. But he knew that it was important, and it was his style, anyway, for members to feel comfortable talking to him and have access to him, so that was never an issue.

McCREERY: Now, what kind of relationships did he have with the various governors while he was speaker? I guess he came in at the tail end of the Reagan administration.

AGNOS: Reagan was still in office, and then Jerry Brown was governor, and then [George] Deukmejian and then [Pete] Wilson. He was lieutenant governor for a while there, too, which is odd, because usually the president and vice president, and governor and lieutenant governor come from the same party, but in California's system we have two separate elections, so it's conceivable to have two people at the top from different parties. That really should be changed, and I think Leo would say the same thing, because a governor sometimes is reluctant to leave the state unless he trusts the lieutenant governor not to do any shenanigans while they're out of the state, and that kind of stuff.

Leo always treated governors with a great deal of professionalism and the respect for the office. It was just his style, and he never was going to embarrass them or himself by doing something spectacularly irreverent or rebellious, the way Mike Curb did. When Governor Brown was out of office, Lieutenant Governor Curb tried to appoint some judges or tried to reverse some policies.

Leo knew that was not his role, and that would be counterproductive. If he had a disagreement, he always did it in private, if he could, first, depending on who the governor was, and then might go public with it afterwards if it wasn't addressed properly. But even then, it was always done with a great deal of professionalism and respect because he felt that the dignity of the office needed that, and the working relationships needed that.

McCREERY: This was still very much the bipartisan era in the legislature, from what I understand.

AGNOS: Yes.

McCREERY: What about his working relationship with—

AGNOS: Great question. He had an excellent relationship with the Republicans. He would meet regularly with the Republican leader, who was Paul Priolo at that time, who now lives in San Francisco but at that time represented a district in southern California. Together they produced some great legislation. Don't ask me what it is, but I remember that we had some great successes, because they understood and respected each other and were able to work together and find common ground. Leo was always very proud of that, and I think Priolo was.

But you're right, there was an era then that said, "Okay, there will be times when we disagree, but our disagreements will not be so vitriolic that when the disagreement is over we can't come together on those issues where we think we can work together, because we agree for the most part." I think it was a very productive era and a productive style, which I tried to use in the legislature when I got there. I never, except in the couple of times with Jerry Brown who—I was somewhat immature then, but he certainly was, too, in some of the things he was doing, and I did some public things symbolically that we can talk about later on.

But after that, I always treated governors the way Leo had taught me. I'm a little more rebellious than Leo is, though, [Laughter] and so I'd be a little edgier, but never disrespectful. I had George Deukmejian, and I'll tell you some stories about all that stuff as we go down our path here. But I also learned to work in a bipartisan fashion, based on what I saw with Leo, in passing some of the best legislation I did, which was on welfare reform, working under George Deukmejian with a very conservative, if not right-wing, but certainly very conservative secretary of Health and Welfare, David Swoap. That was GAIN, the Greater Avenues to Independence [program].

McCREERY: That's right, but I did want to ask [first] about relationships with the senate while he was speaker. Did you have much of a view of how he operated there?

AGNOS: The same way, the same way. Leo was always very proper if the other person demonstrated to him that they were serious about issues, that they were committed to the legislative process. There would be tensions between the

senate and the assembly. It's in the nature of the two institutions. They're a little competitive. One, the senate, thinks that they are the senior and all that. The assembly is always more aggressive in those days. Today it's changed a lot. Term limits have ruined the assembly, and it's really not much of a factor in the legislative process the way it was in the pre-term limit days.

But in those days, Leo always tried to meet regularly with James Mills, who was the president of the senate, and other members of the leadership, because he knew that it was in the best interests of the legislature for the two houses to have a decent working relationship, especially if the governor was from a different party and the two houses, which was the case then, were in the hands of the Democrats.

McCREERY: Yes. Now of course, the governorship did change hands. You were reminding me that Mr. Moretti gave up the speakership to run for governor in '74, but, of course, he didn't even survive that primary.

AGNOS: Yes, he didn't get out of the primary.

McCREERY: Yes. How did things change when Jerry Brown took office?

AGNOS: We had a Democrat for the first time, and people were very excited, very enthusiastic about the future because we'd had eight years of Governor Reagan and so there were going to be a lot of opportunities to affect policy, to appoint judges, to do all the things that a party that's been out of power has to do when it gains the executive branch.

But Jerry Brown was—I wish that he had been governor at his current age, because he's really matured and really grown, and I think he's a much better

mayor of Oakland than he was governor of California, although he did some things. I'm not saying he didn't. But his style of interacting with the legislature really retarded what could have been many more achievements. He sort of got elected coming from outside the legislature, on what he perceived to be a reformist kind of—he was sort of a younger Jimmy Carter when he ran for the governorship, that type of a moral superiority to this legislature.

And it didn't hold up well. The one insight that stuck with me during the whole time he was governor was when Leo was speaker, I was the chief of staff, and he had just been sworn in. The governor had just been sworn in. Those were the days [U.S.] Senator George McGovern was promoting nutrition for children, and he had done some studies and shown that there was a lot of hunger in America, especially among poor kids and all that stuff. Leo was very influenced by that and proposed that the state sponsor free breakfasts for poor children in low-income areas, to help them with their learning capacities by having breakfast when they came in. So he had legislation, and it was going to be costly. It was going to cost some money from the budget.

So we went down for a meeting with the governor, for Leo to tell him what he was doing and gain his support so that when it got to his desk, he would sign it. I'll never forget. Leo went through his dignified kind of professional presentation of what the statistics were on hunger among poor children and what we could do and how to pay for it.

One of the first things out of the governor's mouth is, "Well, I don't know, Leo," he says, "You know, I don't know why we need to give free breakfast to

these kids. Nobody ever gave me a free breakfast." We both were astounded. Now, I think, as I reflect back, this was probably Jerry Brown doing his ask-a-million-questions, sort of an irreverent style, to challenge people. But it came off so badly, it soured me forever with this guy, at least forever for the next fifteen or twenty years, because it was so insensitive, from a person who had literally been raised in the governor's mansion and had not experienced anything close to what Leo was trying to address with this bill.

I remember Leo walking out, being so upset at the thoughtlessness behind that kind of a statement. Leo got over it, in that he was able to—but it left me with an indelible bad image of him that made me far more edgy in my relationship with the governor, because it told me this guy really did not come from an experience in his life where he understood what it was like to be anything less than the governor's son, and everything that comes with it.

Leo always worked extra hard to maintain a good outward-appearing relationship with Jerry Brown, because he did not want the public to be disappointed that the Democrats had gained the governor's mansion, ran the legislature, and didn't get along. Leo had too much professionalism to do that. He, to outward appearances, got along well, but internally he was not crazy about Jerry Brown, never was. Neither was I, until I got to know him more recently when I was the HUD [Housing and Urban Development] administrator and had to go over and deal with him as mayor. I found him to be, at the age of sixty, what he should have been when he was thirty-seven. But who is, I guess. [Laughter]

McCREERY: Okay. Well, turning back to the city of San Francisco for a moment, George Moscone had been elected mayor in 1975, and as you were working on Mr. McCarthy's staff and all these things were developing in the Capitol, I wonder how much attention you were paying to San Francisco politics, as part of his constituency and so on.

AGNOS: I was still not a politician in those days. I had delayed my departure in 1973. I'm sorry for being repetitive, if I am, but as you know, I joined his staff in '68, and he promised that once I learned the job, he would help me get into Berkeley. He did, and by 1973 I had just about finished all my course work over here and wanted to leave to go do the dissertation, but I couldn't because he had the speakership that was alive and very close, and I wanted to help him.

So when he became speaker, then he needed to have somebody like me as his chief of staff, so I delayed, again, another year or two, until we could develop—and by this time he had a big staff. We were bringing smart young men and women to develop, and had been developing them. So by 1975, I was beginning to think of leaving to go do the dissertation again.

I was healed from the gunshots and all that stuff, and I was feeling good again. But Leo began to say, "All right, I need you as a member." [Laughter] "I need you as a member." Many people said to me, from the time I went to work for Leo in '68—they said, "You should move to the western part of the city. You should move into the Sunset so you could take his place," because everybody saw Leo moving up, and I could be groomed as his successor.

I was living on Potrero Hill, on Connecticut Street. I said, "But I don't want to be in politics, and I don't want to go into the western part of the city. I love where I live in Potrero Hill, and I don't want to leave." And everybody kept saying, "Well, you're in the wrong place. This is Burton country." The city was sort of divided right down the middle. The eastern half of the city, which is traditionally more liberal and progressive and more diverse than the western half—but if you take that western half and put it anywhere else in America, it is the most liberal part of that city, but here it was seen as the more conservative, and it is within the San Francisco context.

The eastern side of the city, which is very roughly the eastern side of Twin Peaks: Chinatown, the Mission, North Beach, Hunters Point, Castro, all that—was Burton country, Phil Burton, John Burton, Willie Brown. They were in an ultra-liberal, if you will, camp, and Leo McCarthy, John Foran—before them Gene McAteer, Joe Alioto—were seen as the more moderate liberal camp. I was in the middle of Burton country, and everybody said, "You've got to go over to the other side, and you can take his place and move up in politics." I said, "I don't want to. I want to leave politics. I'm going to go into social work."

So in 1975 there is peace in San Francisco, meaning in San Francisco there are no more internal battles with Moscone versus McCarthy, and John Delury, who was one of Leo's staffers and associates when they worked with McAteer, running against John Burton for the assembly in the eastern side of the city, and there were constant political clashes between the two camps.

Well, in 1975 there was peace in the land. George Moscone had been elected mayor, Phil Burton was in Congress, and—I'm forgetting how it all happened. Oh, John Foran was in the assembly. And I had, over the years, developed a terrific working relationship with Burton's staff because living on Potrero Hill, close to the public housing projects and working in the projects, I had always heard in all the public housing projects, whether they were in the Burton district or not, if you got troubles, you go see Burton. I was fascinated with that, among poor people, that they all saw Phil and John Burton as the politicians to go to when you needed help.

So I would go to Burton's office. John Burton's office was right down the corridor from our assembly office, where Leo's office was. I would talk to his staff. I remember Gina Pinestri and others. I would say, "How do you do these things? How come people always want to come to you when they're in trouble?" They would tell me things that they did, about how they used their elected official's political power to strong-arm, if they needed to, issues for poor people, which I was very interested in.

I knew the legislative process, but I was still learning how to use political power to motivate an intransigent bureaucrat. I don't think, in that package of stuff I brought you, my legislative manual [is there], but I've got to bring that the next time and show you the principles I developed that they still talk about in the legislature that came from these various experiences I had as a staff person.

One of them was from Phil Burton, who said something—he had a number of notable quotes, but one of them says, "When all else fails, you've got to terrorize the bastards." He was talking about the bureaucracy when he was trying to get them to do stuff for the people he represented. And by "terrorizing the bastards," that means you would threaten their budgets. You would say, "You're not going to have any desks. I'll take away your rugs," or whatever the perks were. I mean, you'd just intimidate them. So I got to know Burton's staff very well. So in 1975—Laura, I cannot, I'm drawing a blank on why—

McCREERY: Mr. Foran won a special election to move him into the senate.

AGNOS: Okay, that's what it was. He was going up to the senate. I was in a position to take his place. He had gotten to the senate, John Burton was the congressman, Phil Burton was the congressman. Both brothers were. Leo wanted me to run. Leo was the speaker of the assembly. The Burtons were no longer interested in the assembly because they were both in Congress, and Phil was then in a competition of his own to become the speaker of the house. He lost by one vote to Jim Wright of Texas.

But they were preoccupied with the Congress, so everybody had their place in the sandbox, so to speak. Moscone had city hall, Burton had Congress, McCarthy had the state assembly, and there was no need to fight anymore. And I sort of became—since Moscone knew me and liked me—I knew him well, the same way that I knew the Burton staff and all that. They all liked me because they saw me as perhaps more outwardly liberal than Leo. I certainly

had a personality that was more easygoing, if you will. Leo was always intense, and I was kind of always reminding him to relax a little. I can be intense when I'm competing with something, and if you look at my—some of the people talk about me when I was mayor, I was always seen as too intense and all that stuff, but compared to Leo, I was relaxed. I played basketball up in the state capital with Burton once in a while and stuff like that.

They liked me, and there was no need to fight, so when Leo said, "I'd like Agnos to succeed Foran in the state assembly," they had no interest in it and liked me and therefore John Burton said to his brother, who didn't know me as well, "This guy's good, and he'll represent your district well." Phil Burton was very intense about that eastern side of the city and a philosophy that said you've got to respect minorities, you've got to promote their issues. John assured him that I would pick up that mantle that he and his brother had left behind.

McCREERY: Did you talk to either of them during—

AGNOS: I did. I talked to John, and he then talked to Phil, and then the day came for me to see Phil. It was really interesting. I had never talked to Phil before, and this was like going to Mecca, political Mecca. Leo prepared me for all the kinds of things that Phil would require of me for his endorsement, because that was tantamount to election.

So I went in to see him. It was in a hotel in downtown San Francisco on the corner of 8th and Market. It's not there anymore. He opened the door, and I walked in and sat down. I was the respectful junior staffer. And he says,

"Look," he says, "kid," he says, "I don't know you too well." He says, "I hear good things." He says, "My brother says you're okay; therefore, you're okay with me, and I'm going to support you."

He says, "There's only one thing I'm going to ask." I'm ready for all this stuff that Leo prepared me for, from appointments to the [Democratic] Central Committee and whatever these other things [were]. He says, "All I'm going to ask you to do"—and this has an interesting bearing on what happened later on, but he says—"All I'm going to ask you to do is take care of my wife if something happens to me."

I was blown away. It was the last thing I expected this powerful member of Congress to say to me. And it must have showed, because he then went on to say, "Look, I don't have any money. Money's not important to me. I'm never going to have much of an estate." He says, "I got a little bit of a heart problem, they tell me." And he said, "If something happens to me before I retire, I need you to take care of my wife."

So I said, "Well, all right, I will. But how will I know what to do?" He sort of struggled with that and hesitated and looked at me quizzically. I said, "I know. I'll just ask John Burton." He looked at me and says, "He said you were smart. That was the smart answer." He said, "That's exactly what you should do."

So that was it. I left, and I went back, and I reported back to Leo, who was waiting, and he was dumbfounded and amazed at that, as I was. But it was—I can't remember how many years later, but it wasn't too many years later when

Phil Burton died suddenly of a heart attack, and everybody was saying—because I was the assemblyman for that district—that I was the heir apparent and that I would go to Congress.

But I knew what I had promised. I remembered what I had promised very clearly, and so I went to the hotel room where his wife, Sala Burton, was staying and saw John and Agar Jaicks, who was very close to the Burton family and the former chairman of the San Francisco Democratic Party. The papers had begun to suggest that she would take his place as the congressperson, run to succeed him.

I just went to the hotel room and said to John—I said, "I'm here to support Sala if she's running." He said, "She is." I said, "Then put my name down next to hers." And I left. That's how I kept my promise to take care of his wife, so to speak. I just knew that was the only way to keep the commitment, so I did not run. That was the second time that I chose not to run for Congress. If I had been—I don't think I had much of a choice then. I had a bigger choice prior to that.

McCREERY: Yes. Tell me about the first time.

AGNOS: The first time was when John Burton was in Congress, got sick and hospitalized himself to—what do you call it when you—

McCREERY: Detox?

AGNOS: Yes, he went into a hospital to detox, and resigned. I always played the junior staffer role with Phil Burton, even as the assemblyman. He would call me into his office on Fridays. He didn't like to go out in the district as he got older, and

I was always out in the district, and he would call me in on Fridays, when he came back from Washington. I would tell him what was going on, what the major issues are, and brief him the way I used to Leo, only here I was briefing the Congressman, as the assemblyman, on things that he might be interested in.

It was interesting. He would always say to me when I walked in—it was in the afternoon, Friday afternoons. He'd call me over. He'd call up and say, "Hey, kid, you doing anything?" I said, "No." He said, "Come on over." So I'd walk across the street to the Federal Building and go up to this office. He said, "Would you like a glass of water?" I'd say, "No." He'd always offer me a glass of water! I always thought it was weird.

And so he says, "Well, Suzie, I want a glass of water," so she'd come in with these little Styrofoam paper cups and give him—it looked like a glass of water. Well, one time I was thirsty. He asked me, and I said, "Yes, I'll have a glass of water." He says, "Bring us two glasses of water." [Laughter] And I took a slug. You know how you drink water. You just sort of throw it down. And it was vodka! [Laughter] It almost killed me! So he always drank vodka, and that's how I learned what "water" meant in his office.

But he called me one of those times, and he said, "You know, Johnny's sick. He's in the hospital, and he's going to quit," and he said, "I want you to take his place." He said, "You've been loyal, you stick to the issues, you're terrific," blah, blah, blah. And so I said—I can't remember when this was, but at the time—

McCREERY: Eighty-two or so.

AGNOS: Eighty-two? I said, "Phil, I don't want to go to Congress." He said, "No, you don't understand. No one will run against you. You're taking Johnny's place, and it'll be a free ride," as they say in politics, which means you're in office, you run for another one without giving up the one you have, so that if you lose it, you've still got the one you've got. But no one's going to run against you, so it's a free ride.

I said, "But I don't want to go to Congress because my children are too little, and I don't want to commute back and forth, and I don't want to leave them on one side of the country while I'm on the other." I had two young sons. "I just don't want to go there."

So he said, "But you don't understand." He said, "But you don't understand." He says, "It's a free ride. No one runs against you. It's yours. You become a member of Congress." I said, "Phil, I don't want to go." He said, "But you don't understand." I said, "Yes, I understand. Here's what you've got to understand." I took out these two pictures I had of my two boys, who were at that time—'82—one was one, and the other one was four or five, going on five. I said, "Here's reason number one, and here's reason number two."

He took these two pictures, this big bear of a guy. He took these two pictures, and he held them. He did not have children. He looked at them for about what seemed like a minute or two. Big sigh. And then he said, "What am I going to do for a candidate?" He accepted it, you know? He just accepted it. He gave me my pictures, and I remember saying to him, "Well, Barbara

Boxer is a pretty good supervisor." I had known Barbara because we had worked together on John Burton's staff. She was one of the people I used to talk to as I was learning my way around on Leo's staff. I had helped her run when she was running for supervisor in Marin County. I said, "She's a pretty good supervisor. I think she'd be a pretty good member of Congress."

He picked up the phone, he called her up, and he said, "Barbara, I want to see you." [Laughter] I swear that's one of the ways—I'm sure she had her own connections and stuff—but that's one of the ways that Barbara Boxer went on to run for Congress and succeed and ultimately years later became a senator, at the expense of my mentor, Leo McCarthy, who lost to her in the Year of the Woman, when Leo was a candidate. But I suggested—I sort of pointed her name out, and he moved on it. He didn't waste much time. I was not going to run, so he was looking for a candidate.

So that was the first time. The second time was—the kids were older, but I still knew I had a commitment, and there was no thinking twice about it. So Sala Burton got elected. The next time came when she died, but I was more interested—I was running for mayor, and Congress was—

McCREERY: But that choice was pretty clear to you?

AGNOS: Oh, absolutely. Sala Burton? I had made a commitment, and I remembered it, and there was no doubt about it. Sala Burton was the person I was going to support, and she won, and that was it. Not many people know that story, by the way, so that will be interesting.

McCREERY: Yes. Well, when you did first run for assemblyman in '76, you say it was Mr. McCarthy's idea?

AGNOS: Yes, the campaign was '76, and I took office in '77. It was McCarthy's idea because by this time, he trusted me like—only his wife is more important to him than I am, politically speaking. She's his real partner, and I was a partner, too, you know? And he had trained me. As I said, I knew how he thought, and I was good at it. I was good at it.

McCREERY: You must have thought of running for office by that time.

AGNOS: I thought about it, so when he said to me, "I want you to run for the assembly. I want you to be a member." He said, "You're ready to move up." Remember, he didn't keep people, as I say—this is my word, not his—as indentured servants. And it's what I did when I got elected. He said, "I want you to run." I said, "But Leo,"—remember, I was in Burton country, so if I really had political ambition, I should have gone to his district. It turned out that I would have been stuck over there.

And so he said, "Look, you're a social worker." I said, "I don't have political connections. I have political knowledge that I use for you, but I don't know this district." He says, "Oh, yes, you do." He says, "You've been involved working for the public housing authority." Most of the public housing projects were in that district. He said, "You've been active in civil rights with the NAACP. You've been active with mental health through your social work. You've been active in housing with your work as a social worker and all that, and that's the perfect district for a social worker because it has

those kinds of needs, those human needs, and you always say you want to be an empowered social worker. Well, politics will empower you."

I had never thought of it that way. I said, "But I don't have the money." He said, "I'll provide the money." Obviously, he was the biggest bear in the woods, as the speaker, so he could rally a lot of support for me. So I decided to run, and I'm not going to say I'm without ego. Once I started to understand that I could be my own boss, which was part of what I wanted to go back to school for, to teach and be my own boss, so to speak, as a professor in school, because there comes a time when you don't want to just constantly be checking off with other people to make decisions.

He knew that. He knew that I had the potential and was realizing it. So he said, "You can be your own boss for your own district, make your own political decisions, and be my ally in the assembly. I need people among the members because there is a different status when you're a member of the assembly as opposed to being a top staffer."

McCREERY: You have a vote.

AGNOS: Sure. You have a vote, you talk as a peer to other members, et cetera. He thought I'd be a good politician, I'd be a good public servant. Public servant. It's interesting that the name that he by and large chose for the foundation that he's creating at USF [University of San Francisco] is the Leo McCarthy Center for Public Service and the Common Good. Now, think about that. I mean, that sums up Leo's political career: public service and the common good. That's the name of the center that's going to start in January.

He's going to raise $7 million, contribute some of his own, and it will be a place where the students can take classes that help them understand public service and the common good, and bring people like me to talk to students, to help them blend the intellectual knowledge that comes from political science or the law or anything they're interested in, and the practical experience that people like me have had that you're taking an oral history of.

But that's Leo, the public service and the common good. He said, "You will be a great public servant as an elected official, and that's what that district needs." So I said okay. Clearly, he helped me raise the money, because I wasn't a good fund raiser. I'm still not. I hate to raise money. It's so demeaning to go beg for dollars from people and all that it implies. At that time, my campaign was about $75,000. He raised it all for me. I raised about $8,000 or $9,000 myself by asking people, and he gave me the rest.

I ran on those issues. If I brought you my brochures, you would think it was a social worker running because that's what I spoke to. And Moscone supported me as mayor. The Burtons supported me as members of Congress because I was, in '76, sort of the common denominator for political peace in San Francisco, because I could walk into any of their areas and they liked me. They still do, those who are still here now.

McCREERY: How did it happen that Harvey Milk decided to run against you in the primary?

AGNOS: Good question. Harvey Milk had run for the board of supervisors before I ran [for assembly] in '76. He had run in '73, his first effort. He ran as a sort of ponytailed—he had a ponytail in those days, and he was not, certainly, as well

known as he is today and subsequently became. He was a small-business man. He had a camera store on Castro [Street]. He ran [again] for supervisor in '75, I think it was, seen as one of those many, many wannabes who are also-rans. But he had demonstrated, in a citywide election, that he had a certain appeal in the small area that was then defined as the political gay area of the Castro.

I had developed a list of community leaders by communities of interest: the Mission, Bayview, Hunters Point, Chinatown, North Beach, South of Market, Tenderloin, et cetera, that I needed to go and seek their support and tell them what I was going to do and all that, to develop a campaign. This is what we'd always done as we developed our other campaigns.

On my list for the Castro and the gay community was Harvey Milk, so I went to his camera store and said, "Harvey, I'm running for the state assembly. I'd like to have your support. Here's what I stand for. I'm going to do these things," and all that. And he says, "You know, I'd like to support you." He says, "You know, I did very well in this community in the Castro. Come on with me."

We went in the back of his camera store, which was sort of his political nerve center, and on the back wall of the supply area, whatever it was back there—there was a camera behind the curtains—was a big map of San Francisco. "Here's the precincts," he said, "that I can help you with." He had colored them in. Politicians color in different colors for different percentages of support. The Castro was—I can't remember the color, but it was very strongly identified as areas that people had voted for him in large numbers.

He says, "Here's where I can help you, and I'll put your signs up here, and I can get all my friends down Castro Street to put your signs up." I said, "Great. Does that mean I can count on your support?" And he said, "Not yet." I said, "Oh. Well, what will it take?" He said, "Well, look," he said, "let me be very honest with you." He said, "There is a chance that I might run for the assembly." I said, "Oh, really?" I said, "Have you thought about the legislature?" He said, "No, it's just another way to get my name out there because I want to run for the board of supervisors."

"But," he said, "you know, if it's a crowded field, with my strong area here in the Castro, I could sneak in past someone like you." I said, "Okay, so what's a crowded field?" He says, "Oh, three or four candidates." I said, "So if there's not three or four candidates, then I can count on your support?" He says, "Oh, yeah."

The next day, he went down, and he was the first one to enter the race. [Laughter] His ambition got the best of him, I think. Either that or he wasn't impressed with me when we talked. I don't know. But he was the first announced candidate. He said that his strategy was to take on the machine, and his signs and his whole thrust was "Harvey Milk versus the machine." Didn't say who the machine was, but it was Burton, McCarthy, Moscone, et cetera, and that I was their tool. He chose to run as a conservative. All his literature and stuff said that he was the businessman and that we needed to "throw the bums out" that were—that was his word he used—that were bureaucrats who really didn't know what it was like in the private sector.

I must confess, I was a little arrogant in those days, or confident, super-confident, over-confident, which led to arrogance, because I had this juggernaut, this machine behind me. The machine was not in the sense of a Chicago-style machine. It never has been in San Francisco. The media likes to portray it as such, but in Chicago, Mayor [Richard J.] Daley had a real machine because he had thousands of jobs that were patronage, that depended on him staying in office for that person to keep their job.

In San Francisco in those days there were no jobs. There was no patronage. The "machine" was an alliance of ideologies that believed in certain progressive values and principles that were really headed up by Phil Burton, and everybody who believed in those values and principles of politics just allied themselves with him, whether they were in office or just community leaders, and so they were very loyal to that whole platform.

Because of his loyalty to those principles and to the constituents that elected him, Phil Burton had, in effect, a de facto machine because the black leadership, the Chinese leadership, the Hispanic leadership would support him with what we call in politics yellow-dog loyalty. They'd vote for a yellow dog if it was Phil Burton, because he always came through for them on their issues.

So that was the machine, and that's how you define the machine San Francisco style, and Harvey was running against that. Frankly, I was confident because I had this enormous support. So I remember we took a poll about three weeks before, and it showed he was within ten points, and that was

enough to get us nervous, or eight points. That was too close for comfort, even though it was a comfortable margin.

So we started to spend money. Leo didn't want to spend money in my campaign because we didn't need to. I was going to win so easily. So we spent money and put out some brochures. I wound up winning by 55-45, which was a comfortable victory but not a landslide. Anything over 55 is considered to be a landslide, so I was right at the cusp.

But during the campaign, I got to know Harvey because whenever you go one on one—and it was just the two of us in the election—you hear the other person in all the debates, at the community forums. You can almost recite their rap, if you will, as well as your own. He had what we called the throw-the-bums-out speech. "We need to get rid of this bureaucratic style of politics. We need to get rid of the bureaucrats. This guy is nothing but a social worker, and he'll bring you social work programs. We need to go to a private sector style of government," and all that kind of stuff.

So I said to Harvey—and I liked him. He was funny, and he was amusing, and as I said, I liked him. So I took him aside one time, and I said, "You know, Harvey, you've got to drop this throw-the-bums-out speech. In politics, if you want to go someplace, you've got to give people hope, and you've got to make them think about the future and how you can make it better for them by giving them hope."

Well, Harvey was a quick study. Sure enough, in the last couple of weeks of the campaign, he came up with his give-'em-hope speech, which was what I

had counseled him to do, and he started talking about—in the gay community, for example, he said, "That kid in Altoona [Pennsylvania], who's in the closet. I want to give him hope that there's a better life for him in San Francisco, where he can come out of the closet and be who he wants to be. I want them to come out of the closet in Altoona." He'd always pick a city in some remote part of the country. And that was the beginnings and the first trial run of his give-'em-hope speech, which he became famous for, and he always did it after that. But I beat him. You couldn't be angry at Harvey, and I'd won comfortably enough, and he never insulted me privately or publicly.

The following year, district elections were introduced in San Francisco, and Harvey decided to run for the third time. By this time, he was building himself up politically and became a candidate again and was one of the favorites to win in a district that he had originally sort of defined as his territory.

Well, I supported another outstanding candidate who was also gay—his name was Rick Stokes—who had long been active in the civil rights movement for gay people and in the general civil rights of minority people, blacks and stuff. He was a lawyer, and he had been a supporter of mine, so he decided to run and I supported him. He was a liberal and progressive. But Harvey had, over these three elections, developed so much momentum that my candidate came in second and Harvey won, so he became a supervisor.

McCREERY: That's what he wanted all along.

AGNOS: That's what he wanted all along. He became one of the supervisors and became celebrated as the first up-front gay man to be elected, and as I said, Harvey and I always got along well. We liked each other. He had a good sense of humor. Even though I hadn't supported him, he understood why. He knew the game, the rules of the game. Afterwards, he came to me. He says, "Look, okay, I'm in office, you're in office, and I want to work with you." And we did, from time to time.

In 1978, before he was killed, he was getting ready to run. He had been elected for a two-year term and was getting ready to run again in '79. He came to see me in my office with Wayne Friday, who was one of his right-hand people, right-hand man. He and I met, and he says, "Look, Art, I want your support." I said, "But that's two years away." He says, "Yes, but I've been watching how you and McCarthy and Burton and all those people do it, and you start early." He says, "I'm starting early, and I want your support." I said, "Okay, Harvey, I'm going to support you, but let's wait and see how it goes before it becomes public."

McCREERY: Why did you say that? Do you remember?

AGNOS: Yes, because I remember the guy who said, "Oh, I'm going to support you, but let's just wait and see if it's a crowded field." Now, I was not going to run against him, and he knew exactly what I was saying. He smiled and he said, "Okay, let's wait, but you're going to support me down the road?" And I said, "Yes." There were some other people who were interested in running that I needed to make some accommodations for and let them know that I was going

to support Harvey, but I didn't want to offend them too early. Then it wasn't too much longer after that when he was assassinated by Dan White.

I only had one other sort of interesting thing that might be—one time, and I can't remember—this was before he came to see me to support him but after he had been elected a member of the board of supervisors. We were sitting in that converted synagogue where the Reverend Jim Jones had his congregation. Jim Jones was a major political figure. I had never been involved with him, and when I got elected in '76, he was in Guyana, but I guess he would come from time to time to San Francisco because he was a member of the housing authority commission and had been appointed by George Moscone. But I never met him face to face, that I can recall anyway, and never had any interaction with him.

But like all the other politicians, when I was invited to his congregation for some kind of a civic event that I can't remember what it was, I went. The church, which was a converted synagogue—and I say that only because synagogues are built differently than churches—was filled to capacity, mostly with black people. But I wound up sitting where the politicians sat, and Harvey Milk was sitting to my right. Jim Jones was talking to us over a short-wave radio, to the congregation, doing this sort of demagogic kind of rant.

I remember Harvey leaned over to me, and he says, "There's something wrong with this guy. Don't ever get close to him." He knew him better than I did. I never forgot that because, quite obviously, later on we know about the Jonestown massacre [of November 1978] and all that. I remembered Harvey

telling me this as a sort of friendly warning, because he knew him better than I did, from whatever experiences he had had.

But Harvey, I think, was smart, grew rapidly in office, and became a liberal. He became much more liberal when he was a member of the board of supervisors because of the district he represented. The Castro and Eureka and Noe Valley to this day is one of the more liberal, most liberal in the city. And so he had to change, and he was adaptable in a mostly good way [Laughter] and grew in office to the point where I think he would have had a very good chance, after a couple more reelections, of being the first major gay candidate for mayor, and a successful one.

McCREERY: But as you say, when he attempted to run against you for the assembly, he did stake out a very conservative position compared to yours.

AGNOS: He did.

McCREERY: Did that surprise you?

AGNOS: No, because I didn't know him, and nobody really knew him, and that's really where he was then. He was a stockbroker when he was in New York, had been outed there by somebody and had to leave, but his orientation was a stockbroker, pro-business, more conservative—again, by San Francisco standards. I'm not saying he was a right-winger. He was a small-business man in the camera thing, and he just decided that's the kind of tack he was going to stake out, running against this liberal social worker. But he quickly jumped to my side after he was elected as a member of the board of supervisors and was

consistently very liberal and progressive. But the thing about Harvey is he wanted to get into office, and he was going to do it, and he ultimately did.

McCREERY: Yes. It is interesting to think about what might have been.

AGNOS: Yes.

McCREERY: He had quite a political future, if he wanted it?

AGNOS: He did, because he was a better politician than I am, in the political sense, and learned very quickly. I was more and always have been more interested in the public service side—more, you know, how do you help people, how do you empower people, as I told you before. You see that running through my legislation.

McCREERY: Absolutely. You wanted me to remind you—we talked last time about your being attacked during the Zebra killings, and you were saying that you [later] met the perpetrators in the course of the '76 campaign for assembly.

AGNOS: Oh, yes! Yes. The campaign occurred in '76, November elections, and then you take office in January of '77, so you're sworn in in January. Just so the timing is [clear], I was shot in December of 1973. The wave of killings went on for almost six or seven months, so it wasn't until near the end of '73 that they were all caught. By the time all of the investigations and trial preparations and everything—the trial occurred in late 1975 and '76. It was going on. It was a long, long trial, and so I was a candidate while these guys were in jail and on trial.

Part of my campaign was to deal with the crime issues, and so we did a photo op with me going through the city jail with the sheriff. As we're walking

down the corridor of the jail, the sheriff said to me—it was Mike Hennessey—he said to me, he says, "You know who's up here?" He says, "It's the Zebra guys." He says, "Does that bother you?" I said, "No, it doesn't bother me." You know, he was just thinking of any emotional or psychological—since I had been shot by one of them.

I kept on walking. I said, "We'll just walk right by him, and we won't acknowledge [him]." As we walked by the cell, this guy, one of the guys, says, "Hey, Agnos," he says, "I know you." And I looked, and it was one of the guys. I can't remember his name right now. He's sticking his hand out. He says, "I know you." I looked at him. I said, "Where do you know me from?" [Laughter] He says, "Oh, because you're a candidate," he said, "because you're a candidate for public office," and he stuck his hand out, and I, being a rookie politician, grabbed his hand [Laughter] and shook his hand!

I've always thought back on that conversation because subsequent to that they were convicted, and their attorney—who was a wonderful attorney, Clinton White—was appointed by Jerry Brown as a member of the court of appeals. I would see him in the state building, because I was a state legislator, and the courts were upstairs in the state building on McAlister Street, and I'd bump into him as I was walking into the building. He had this big booming voice. "You know," he says, "Agnos, my clients always liked you, and they felt bad about what happened to you." I said, "Why is that, Judge?"

He says, "Because of your record on civil rights and all the things you had done in the South that you talked about," because when I went to trial—I was a

witness at the trial—the district attorney sort of had me, to establish my, I guess, credibility or whatever, recite my civil rights work in the South, when I went for my master's and then working in public housing and working with the NAACP, where I was chairman of the membership committee and all the variety of other things that I had done. These guys were sitting there, listening to me recite this, and yet these guys were on trial for killing a white person as an initiation into their radical, racist sect called the Death Angels.

So he said, "They always felt bad about what happened to you because they didn't think you should have been a victim." I always found that to be sort of a remarkable thing, coming from their lawyer and a judge. To this day they're still in jail, and every now and then I hear from the mother of one of them, who wants me to go and testify to release her son. I don't know if her son is the one who shot me. But none of them have ever acknowledged what they did. They continue to insist they were innocent. And so I've always refused to show any acknowledgement or any mercy, if you will, because, as I tell his mother, "Your son has never acknowledged what he did, much less ask for forgiveness for what he did, to not only me but to whatever other people who were victims."

McCREERY: Many of whom didn't survive.

AGNOS: That's right. So they continue to serve their life in prison. They were sentenced to life in prison, which was the maximum sentence in those days. It was before the death penalty was restored.

McCREERY: Quite a story.

AGNOS: Yes. I always said—people have said, "Would you have voted for the death penalty?" I said, "No." I said, "What I would have voted for them to get was a colostomy," because that was one of the most searing experiences to have. You know, here I was, a young thirty-three-year-old, thinking I was hot stuff, and then when you've got a colostomy attached to the side of your body, it sort of humbles you. It left me with an indelible memory of that whole experience.

McCREERY: I take it, after all this about the primary campaign and so on, your race in November for your first assembly seat was a breeze?

AGNOS: It was a breeze. As any Democrat does in San Francisco, I got over 70 percent of the vote. It was just no contest. The only reason the Republicans offer a candidate in San Francisco for any of the state legislative or congressional races is for internal party politics. The candidate gets to choose people to serve on the governing committee of the party, called the Republican Central Committee. They go to conventions. So if you're a political activist in the Republican Party, this is one way to gain some attention from Republicans in other parts of the country. They're insignificant in San Francisco, but in other parts of the state or the country, they have a role to play, and so they seek it through that strategy, but they're really not a player in the actual election.

McCREERY: No. Anything else you want to say about your first election?

AGNOS: No. I was thrilled that I won, and looked forward with great optimism to what I was going to do because I really did feel Leo had helped me prepare, and I was ready to be my own boss. Instead of doing it by finishing a dissertation and becoming a college teacher, I did it by getting elected to the assembly and

looking forward to developing my own staff in the tradition that Leo had taught me with his staff and pursuing the legislative goals that I thought were needed for the district that I was now elected to represent.

McCREERY: Okay. Let's stop there for today.

AGNOS: Great.

McCREERY: Thank you.

[End of Session]

[Session 3, December 3, 2002]

[Begin Minidisc 3]

McCREERY: We talked last time about your election to the assembly for the first time in the 1970s. I was thinking about the fact that after the primary, which was the real challenge—

AGNOS: In June, yes.

McCREERY: —in that case, you had a bit of time before you actually took office. You were still campaigning and so on. But I wonder, to what extent can you remember how you spent that time and what you were thinking about as far as the changes coming in your life and what you wanted to do.

AGNOS: Well, prior to that, I had been the chief of staff to the speaker, and some people suggested that it was a step down to get elected because I was in such a powerful staff position to the speaker and our relationship was so close. They said, "You'll never have as much power as you've had over the last couple of years you've been the chief of staff." Leo McCarthy, my mentor and the speaker then, anticipated that and arranged—by indicating to the membership of the caucus in the months from June until December, when I took office along with the other freshman class—for me to be elected caucus whip, which was the beginning level of leadership in the assembly Democratic caucus.

This was really very unusual because it happened the first day I was sworn in as a member. The membership understood it because of my extraordinary relationship with McCarthy, and I had worked with so many of them as the chief of staff. There was none of the kind of resentment that could have understandably arisen by them saying, "Well, how can a freshman, who hasn't even served a day in office, be elected caucus whip?" Well, the election was really a sort of respectful courtesy to the speaker, who said, "I'd like him to be the whip." And so everybody says, "Okay, that's your team."

Nevertheless, there was a potential there for resentment and difficulty. But fortunately, I had developed a relationship as a staff member and as a campaign election consultant to many of them, so I had the kind of relationship that didn't allow that to happen, so I became the caucus whip, and it became easy.

Where that was useful to Leo, as the speaker, was that I could attend leadership meetings. As a member of the leadership, there are four positions. There's the speaker, there's the Democratic leader, the caucus chairman, and the whip. The floor leader, the Democratic floor leader, is number two after the speaker, [who] is number one, and the caucus chairman, who manages and is sort of the moderator of the caucus meetings when the Democrats gather to discuss issues, and then the whip, who goes around and gathers the votes for major issues where the Democratic caucus has taken a position, to remind people what the position is, what the strategy is, and all that kind of stuff.

Now, those were all things that I had done as the chief of staff, among other things, so it was an easy transition. Now, during the time from June to

December, in addition to making sure that there would be no difficulties with people accepting that role, which was an unusual one for a freshman, I also did the customary things that I had been doing for the previous six and a half years, which was going around to assist other Democrats who had more difficult elections against Republicans in the general election. I was not on a state payroll or anything like that, so I was free to play a very visible, active role to make sure that Democrats got elected in the general [election] of 1976, November 1976.

So my job was, during that period of time, to assist, to make sure we kept the Democratic majority, to meet and establish relationships with people I would be working with once we all were sworn in, and to assemble a staff. Now, as a freshman I didn't have a big staff, but the main person was a young man, who has now become a major figure as a campaign consultant in California. His name is Richie Ross. At that time, he was a rookie and didn't know much about politics, and I taught him because I saw the potential. He came from the farm worker movement, where he was an organizer with the farm workers, and over the years he learned a number of the campaign skills: how to develop a strategy, how to put it onto different kinds of mailers, in print, electronic form. He's gone on to become a superstar in his own right in the state capital, with a large public relations firm. He was capable of being elected himself, had he chosen to do that; however, he chose to stay in the role where he elected other people.

McCREERY: How did you find him and decide to make him your chief of staff?

AGNOS: It was a great story. I was the chief of staff to the speaker. He was a Coro intern, I guess they called it, Coro intern in the state Capitol. He was living in the Tenderloin [neighborhood of San Francisco] with his wife, who was a Chicana farm worker he had met working for Cesar Chavez in the Salinas area, trying to organize the lettuce workers. He had two small children, under the age of three and a half, I think, three and a half and one and a half. He was living in a one-room apartment in the Tenderloin, and so he would hitchhike back and forth to Sacramento because he was saving money. He didn't have money as an intern.

Somebody else on the staff—I hadn't met Richie, because I was operating at a different level than the interns—came up to me, one of my friends, and said, "Hey, you know, there's this sharp young kid who's struggling to make ends meet, and he needs a ride back to San Francisco. He's hitchhiking back and forth when he doesn't have the bus money." Because occasionally he did take the bus. "So would you give him a ride back?" And I said, "Sure. Have him ready to go at 4:00 p.m."

He was there at the appointed time, and we got in the car, and we started talking, and I took a shine to this idealistic young man, who was working so hard to get an education. It touched me because of my own experience, and so I sort of took him under my wing and made him my protégé and began the process of teaching him the skills, the knowledge, the techniques of political campaigning, which I had learned from Leo over the previous six years or so.

By that time, Leo had started telling me that he wanted me to think about running, and if there was an opportunity, he wanted me to go for it and all that stuff, and so in my mind, I was thinking, "If I do, who will be my staff?" This young man emerged as the leading candidate, and we bonded. To this day—I'm the godfather to his son, and we retain a close relationship.

McCREERY: How did that relationship change over time as he worked on your staff?

AGNOS: He and I share the same values, the same ideology, and basically, as you'll see throughout my career—and I think I've said this before—it's about empowering people who have never had that experience or a very limited experience. That applies not only to poor people or disenfranchised people, minorities or ethnics, but it also applies in many respects to middle-income people who, while they may have the resources to live a comfortable life, can be disempowered because of frustrations with bureaucracies or with other issues that come up in daily life in a community.

So Richie and I shared a very strong, common bond around ideology, values, and commitments to issues like the farm workers movement, the opportunities for immigrants, the empowerment of poor people and making sure that they got their fair share of what this country promised to everyone and often didn't deliver. So that was really, I think, the essence of our relationship, and so it was easy for him to carry out what I wanted as a mission for my office, because it was his.

He recruited and developed staff people. We took a young man, a black man from Ingleside in San Francisco, who was working with gangs in Hunters

Point-Bayview, Claude Everhart. He's on the list among the others who had never ever been in politics. We took a young woman who was a Filipina, who was working with Filipino gangs and youth work in the South of Market. That was Anita Sanchez. We recruited a Chinese American woman, who was working with immigrant Chinese women, with a program called Ding Ho. Her name was Donna Yick, and Donna was training these immigrant women, who didn't speak English and had no skills for jobs, in homemaking and childcare. We took another Latina, Mavis Toscano, who was working as a social worker. Donna was a social worker also. We recruited a gay man who was working as a waiter, working on his education, getting a master's degree.

All of these people had one thing in common. They'd never been in politics before. Some of them never even thought about politics. But we wanted to empower them so that they could use that knowledge, the skills and the techniques, while on my staff to help people in the district that I represented and then to graduate and move on to positions that they chose for themselves, in or out of politics. Virtually all of them, except for Richie, are out of politics, into key positions where they are empowering others as a result of what they learned.

For example, Anita Sanchez, the Filipina, is the number two person at civil service. Mavis Toscano is the number one person at Sun Microsystems, a Silicon Valley technology company, in government relations. The gay guy got his Ph.D. and is a teacher, was at USC [University of Southern California]. I think he's just recently changed and went to another school. Eric Schockman,

his name was. The black guy has his own public relations company and was most recently working as the head of government affairs for a waste management company.

So they've all moved up. Donna is retired. She worked with me throughout her whole career and went with me to the mayor's office. Tim Johnson, who is a Caucasian guy, has his own printing business. But they all remain committed to public service in their own way and do it as volunteers or are doing it as part of their work.

Those are the main characters. There are another couple of dozen who sort of passed through the office for a year or two, who are part of kind of like an alumni group who still stay in touch. Larry Bush—I don't know if I gave you his name—he was my speechwriter. He's working for HUD now and is someone you should talk to about some of the issues we did, because he was very important as we developed our AIDS work in the early eighties.

And Cleve Jones is another gay man who's in Palm Springs now. He was the guy who was the founder of the [AIDS] quilt project, Cleve. But he was the first gay person to work on my Sacramento staff. I had gay people working in San Francisco, but Sacramento was a huge step because in those days, in the early eighties, 1980, they just never had an up-front gay person working up there.

So the whole theme that Richie and I developed was how do we empower people? First we had to train our own empowerment specialists, and then they would use that knowledge and skill on behalf of my constituents for the short

run, which was three to five years, and then we expected them to move on to positions of more importance for their own career, to move up to positions of leadership themselves, so that they could continue to spread the political gospel, if you will.

That was sort of unusual, I think, in that politicians love to have a comfortable staff. They love to have people who know them and can anticipate what you're going to do, just like you did this morning when you—see, you'd be a good staffer. You anticipated that, hey, he's got bad legs [from a recent minor injury]; therefore he won't be able to walk back and forth, and you were waiting out there. I was going to stop the car, by the way, and walk in to save myself—but there you were. See, you've got the makings—I would make note of something as simple as that and say, "Now, that's anticipation."

McCREERY: That leads me to ask: What did you look for in a new staff member?

AGNOS: I looked for people who could write well, to start with. We would give tests, verbal and written, to a prospective staffer, that would be a case study of a real problem that had happened in our office, a constituent. We wrote them up and had a whole series of them. The person would come in, we'd do the normal thing. Where did you go to school, how you did, and all those kinds of perfunctory things. Why do you want to get into politics and all that.

Then we'd say, "Would you mind sitting down and writing your answers to this scenario that we have?" They'd say, "Okay." So we'd put them in a room and give them this case study, and at the end there would be questions. What's the central issue? What do you think of how it came out? What would you do

differently? What would be your strategy? Define your strategy. Write a press release, or write the themes of a press release. They'd have an hour to do this stuff, and then we would sit down and look at what they wrote, and so the first thing we could see is, can they write? And if they couldn't write, there would have to be a lot of other things going for them for us to take them, because I insist on people being able to write without looking over my shoulder, saying, "Well, what I meant to say was this, and what I want to say is the other." You have got to be able to write.

Then we saw their analytical skills throughout the responses to the questions that were spelled out. So that was how we chose people, and as I said, we did some very aggressive outreach in the ethnic and racial communities that were a dominant part of my district, which was heavily—you know, it was a majority minority district between ethnics and racial minorities, although clearly a number of people were Caucasian, from time to time.

So that's how I recruited staff. I once recruited a woman who was testifying in front of me when I was chairman of the Health and Welfare Subcommittee of Ways and Means, Sally Melendez. She's now an executive or some kind of top consultant—I just heard from her about four or five months ago. She called me after about five years, six years. She said, "You know, the stuff you taught me, I still use." This was fifteen years ago, and she's become an executive of some sort in the East Bay, over in Alameda.

It was an extraordinary story and symbolic of what we tried to do. We were having a hearing on whether we should reduce—because there were cutbacks

like we're going to see in the state in the coming year. Back then, Jerry Brown was trying to cut welfare benefits, and so she was part of a welfare rights group, just as a mother with a young child. She got up in front of our committee in Health and Welfare, the Ways and Means subcommittee, and delivered a very powerful extemporaneous—it wasn't written—testimony on what the effects of these financial cutbacks would be on her and women like her with children. It was very powerful. It was well reasoned and put together. And she was unemployed. She said, "I'm unemployed. I can't find a job. I'm looking for a job." All that kind of stuff. She had one or two years of college.

So after she finished I sent a message down that I wanted to see her after the hearing. So she came to my office, and I hired her right then. I asked her what she was doing. I said, "Would you like to come to work in my office as a part-time adviser on these issues?" So she did, and she worked for us for, oh, I don't know, two or three years, maybe longer, and we taught her. She was really undisciplined. She was a very bright woman and talented, but hadn't developed the kind of discipline which I and Richie insisted on to be successful. You had to do your work. You had to be there on time, you had to follow through, you had to work longer than anybody else, you had to outthink everybody else—just like we say in our principles.

McCREERY: Yes, let's talk about the Agnos Principles.

AGNOS: I haven't brought them, huh?

McCREERY: What are those? I've heard about some of those.

AGNOS: As I said, we just had a bunch of principles, and then in the manual, which—you don't have it? Didn't I give it to you? I'm not sure. It's an interesting thing, because no one else I've ever seen had a staff manual that started off with a set of principles that said here's what we are about, and here's what we do, and then had sections of how to do it. The kind of guidelines for how to write a letter for Art Agnos. Because at one point, I got up to about eight or nine people who were working for me, and I didn't want eight or nine styles going out with letters. So people learned a basic guideline and then filled in, of course, with the appropriate stuff. How to prepare legislation, how to prepare testimony, how we approached community groups, how to write a press release. All these things were sort of spelled out in this staff manual. It was prefaced, as I said, by these principles that said in order for us to succeed for the people that we represent, we have to outthink, outsmart, out-wait, out-work our opponents.

We had another one that I borrowed from Congressman Phil Burton that said: "And when we're advocating on behalf of our constituents, when all else fails, we have to terrorize the bastards." [Laughter] What that meant was when we were advocating on behalf of somebody with a bureaucracy that was obviously stonewalling, we would threaten their personal budget. Every bureaucrat has a personal budget for their creature comforts in the office, whether it's rugs or a new automobile, agency automobiles, remodeling, training trips that are often to nice places for inservice training. So that's one

example of, we knew they had that and we would go find it in the budget and say, "That's going to get cut out."

Another principle that we had was, "When you have them by the budget, their hearts and minds will follow." [Laughter] Things like that. I mean, these were not the most erudite, but they made a point, and everybody got it. There were a whole bunch of those. Basically, they spoke to a kind of aggressiveness, a kind of discipline, and a kind of tenacity and determination that said, "We simply will not fail, because the people that we are working for have had too much failure in their lives, or frustration and discouragement, and for one brief, shining moment, if that's all it's going to be, we want them to experience the satisfaction and pleasure that comes from succeeding in something they had a right to in the first place."

That's what it was all about, and people that we recruited bought into this because many of them, if not all of them, came from similar backgrounds and understood what that was. Even though they were college graduates with master's degrees and all the rest of those kinds of things, they came from a background, as did I, that had experienced those kind of feelings that were often foisted on people from that kind of background or class, that left you feeling powerless.

McCREERY: Was this a concerted effort on your part to avoid the insider staffers who were already entrenched in Capitol ways?

AGNOS: I respected my colleagues who were staffers. Yes, I guess it was a concerted effort because of the commitment that I felt strongly about, which was to bring

in people who had never had an opportunity to be empowered through the political knowledge and experience that all the other staffers had, for the most part. There weren't a lot of blacks, there weren't a lot of Hispanics, there weren't a lot of Asians, there weren't a lot of women in the seventies and the sixties in the state Capitol. The women were secretaries, and the men were the staffers, and they were usually caucasian. Rarely did you see, in the state Capitol—now, often members would have minorities in their district offices to relate to their constituents, but in the Capitol the policy jobs, the policy adviser jobs, were often white.

We made a conscious, concerted effort to, as I said, empower people who had not had that kind of opportunity by recruiting them from San Francisco and sometimes other parts of the state and bringing them to the Capitol to learn what that's all about.

McCREERY: All right. Let's turn away from staff for just a moment and talk about your interactions with the other—

AGNOS: But it's good that you asked me about staff, because I was well known, and still am, and I'm proud of it. That's why I'm obviously telling you about it—but people knew that I had a great staff. People often recruited my staff, and I welcomed it because I thought it was important for them to move on, to develop their own careers. As I said, politicians sometimes like to, often like to, keep the same staff for twenty years because it gets comfortable after they learn the business. It makes your job easier.

But if you've got a turnover, that means you've got a new person that you've got to sort of break in, and that's why we had the manual, and there was a culture in the office that I'm sure, when you speak, if one does, to some of these staff people about the culture, there was a common culture that everybody shared with one another, so a new person quickly got it, what that culture was about, these things that we're talking about, and the staff manual helped in that regard.

But what I want to say is that I was known for having staff to the point where even today, just about a month ago, a headhunter who is with Heidrick & Struggles, Betty Armstrong, which is one of the premier headhunters in California, a big company, will call me to say, "Do you know of any minority or ethnic folks? We're looking to recruit for this kind of a position." Because Art Agnos, as a state legislator and as a mayor, was well known for recruiting people from these communities where traditionally talent has not been recruited in politics in the early days and business in the more recent days.

McCREERY: Certainly, that theme of discipline stands out in terms of how you operated with your staff. Now, what did you do if someone didn't work out? I'm not asking for names, but how did you operate as the boss?

AGNOS: We would sit down. We would correct—try to show them what they were doing wrong and stuff. We usually did a good job at the front end of getting people who were highly motivated, who wanted to succeed. There was only one person who I had to let go, and basically, I let him go because he lied. That was unforgivable, because in politics, a person's word is the commodity that

we work with, we exchange. In business, while clearly character is important, the commodity usually is money. You have a product that I want or you have something, I pay you, you take my money, I take your product.

In politics, we don't exchange money. We exchange commitments that are reinforced or—not reinforced, are underwritten by your word. "I will do this. You have my promise." So if you break your word, you're bankrupt as a politician and as a staffer. So this was another one of the principles, one of the values. You have to keep your word, or you have to tell the truth, even if it's painful. This person was a habitual liar, so we just had to let him go. It was a character flaw I couldn't correct. That was the only time in twenty years.

McCREERY: Okay. Let's talk a little bit about your interaction with your new colleagues, the other new legislators. First, tell me about being sworn in.

AGNOS: It was a very exciting day, to be sworn in, because it was—you know, I was elected to the state assembly, which was an important position, and here I was, the son of an immigrant who shined shoes with his father until he was—my father died at fifty-five, and I shined shoes until I was fifteen, with my father, and shined shoes in the store until seventeen. I was the first in my family to go to college and all that stuff. So here I was, suddenly achieving a position where I represented 250,000 people in a city like San Francisco. It was an extraordinary event.

My whole family was there, my mother, who was very proud, and my wife and my sisters and all that. I was humbled by that whole—I remember the feelings of humility, because I had been to the village where my mother and

father came from, where, even when I went back there in 1970—I was elected, of course, in '76—people were herding sheep and raising vegetables to eat and stuff like that in the village, my relatives. So I knew where I had come from, and for me to get to this place was an extraordinary feeling of accomplishment for me, but that's not bad.

Frankly, getting elected mayor was even bigger and that day, because of the nature of the swearing in of a chief executive versus a legislator, which—you're done en masse. There's maybe a dozen new legislators or whatever. As a mayor, it was a big thing in city hall, and I had my mother—one of the most precious photos I have at home is my mother holding the Bible for me, with me holding my hand on there, the traditional photo, as I got sworn in to be the mayor of San Francisco.

So those two days stand out in my mind. The one for the legislature was the first great day, and the one for the mayor was the second.

McCREERY: What were some of the routines for new members? You were assigned an office, a car. Did you have any particular stand-out memories of that period?

AGNOS: For me, it was an easy transition, and it wasn't as thrilling, perhaps, as it was for someone who hadn't been the chief of staff to the speaker, who hadn't been a committee staffer, who hadn't been an administrative assistant. It was like going from college to getting your master's degree. You go from college to graduate school. Now, it's exciting, but it's not like going from high school to college.

McCREERY: You were ready.

AGNOS: I was ready, and it was a natural step. If I hadn't done that, I would have left politics and finished the doctorate and gone on to teaching. I was ready for this step, and it was a natural progression for me.

What was the most exciting part was to be, in a much broader sense, my own boss. I now had my own, as Leo had predicted, opportunity to make my own decisions without having to check with him, because it was his district that I was the assistant for. Now I had my own district. That was the most distinct feeling I had, that I was now on my own, with obviously a lot of support, but I was now on my own.

McCREERY: Tell me about your duties as caucus whip and how you carried those out.

AGNOS: Again, it was a natural progression from what I did as a chief of staff, but basically it was to establish working relationships with new and established members, and each one—and this is where my social work helped a lot, because as a social worker one learns to use the intellectual knowledge they gain from academic training in human behavior and the dynamics of personality and all that stuff. I used that, naturally, because it was my training, to establish relationships with people, to sort of see, well, who is this person? Where are they coming from? What do they want to do? What are their goals? And how can I assist them while achieving what the leadership wants as a Democratic agenda?

So I would sort of casework each member to see—if this person was for Modesto and a dairy farmer, as John Thurman was, he would be much different than Maxine Waters, who was a freshwoman from the Watts [area of Los

Angeles]. You didn't approach them in the same style. That's where my social work training came in extremely important, to sort of read them, understand them, listen to them carefully, and then establish a working relationship so that I could get Maxine Waters, who was much harder than John Thurman, to go along—she still is; she's always been rebellious, wonderfully rebellious—to join in the caucus position on issues. Sometimes they didn't want to do that, so it was my job to convince them, after the appropriate educational effort, to support what the leadership wanted.

McCREERY: And then you fairly quickly became caucus chair.

AGNOS: Yes. I can't remember why that position became open. Usually someone moved to a chairmanship and that kind of thing. It was shortly thereafter that that position became available, and Leo just moved me up, and everybody expected it because I was, again, so close to him and had done a decent job as the whip--hadn't offended people, had a smooth style that enabled people to feel comfortable with me. Very often people would use me as a conduit to get a message to Leo, because they didn't want to say what was on their mind to him, so they said it to me.

McCREERY: You had experienced some of that as his chief of staff.

AGNOS: That's right. That's why all of this was just such an easy, logical transition from one role to the other. And Leo, in his genius, knew and expected that. That's why he wanted me in that role. I was his alter ego, and therefore people felt comfortable. They knew when they talked to me, it was like talking to Leo. But there is an aura that I experienced as mayor that I didn't experience

[earlier], that Leo had, which was when you were the leader, the number one person, there is an aura that people tend to project more onto you, and they're [more] afraid to say things when you're in that position than when you're not.

I recall after I was mayor, people would say things. I'd ask, "Why didn't you tell me that when I was mayor?" "Well, I couldn't say that to the mayor." "Well you're saying it to me now. I'm the same person." "No, you were the mayor then."

It was the same problem that Leo sometimes had, which was, well, he was the speaker; you couldn't say it to him, so they'd say it to me. Leo wanted me in that role so that I could receive information or issues or problems and bring them to him so that we could then respond.

McCREERY: To what extent were you a gatekeeper for him? Were there some issues that you didn't take to him?

AGNOS: That's part of what I'm talking about, yes. That was part of it, and that was also an easier way for him to say no. People would sort of test what they wanted to do with me, and then I would go to him and he'd say, "Well, I really don't want to do that," and so I would go back and say, "We're going to sort of go in a different direction." As my Chinese constituents told me, it saved face for everybody, and it was an easy way to get past it without a confrontation, without a rejection. That's the role that the sort of subsidiary leadership plays within a group like a caucus, if they're doing it right.

McCREERY: Yes. And clearly you had the advantage of having come up all the way under Mr. McCarthy's wing.

AGNOS: Well, that's right. Absolutely.

McCREERY: How did you use that advantage?

AGNOS: Well, I knew what he would think. I often knew, and so if you came to me, or if a person came to me, and said something and I knew right off the bat—not always, but very often I knew how Leo would react to something because we'd been together so long and I had been so well tutored by him. I could immediately start to set up, if there was going to be a rejection, set up the rejection. "Geez, I think that's going to be difficult because there are some other things already in motion. I can't tell you all of it, but here's where it may be. But I'll run it by him, just to make sure." Well, the person had the beginnings of what was going to be a no, and I knew it was going to be a no. But we would go through the process for the political value of keeping that person interested and committed and all the rest of those things that are part of keeping a group of politicians on the same track toward a common objective on an issue.

Leo was very aggressive with the Democratic agenda. He felt that we were there to do something, and every year he tried to plan, with the caucus and with his own ideas, a Democratic agenda that said, "We're going to stand and move for these things." When you do that, you risk a lot of your political capital. We have seen recently, in the elections of 2002, where many people have suggested that the Congress—the Senate—was put in Republican hands because the Democrats didn't stand for anything. They sort of did me-too-ism, with the president on homeland security and a number of other issues that

President [George W.] Bush has been speaking to in the first two years of his administration, rather than saying, "Here's what we stand for. It's different than this. Here is why." They didn't want to risk it because they saw that President Bush had a lot of personal popularity after September 11th.

McCarthy was a different kind of politician in that he wanted the Democrats to have a specific identity that they stood for and sometimes, that said, you had to use your political capital, which is basically your popularity and your credits within the caucus. So you would go to a member. For example, if he wanted to do farm worker protections, well, the farm area legislators didn't want to do farm worker protections very often. They were more farmers. Some of them were farmers. So Leo would have to use credits and his popularity to get them to support him if he needed.

Or if we were pursuing a bill on gay rights, well, there were conservative areas where people didn't want to support that because they were worried about the backlash in their own districts. You have to try to convince the person on the merits, but if that didn't [work], you use credits.

By credits, I mean a committee chairmanship. Well, come on, you're the chairman of the committee. That helps you overcome what downside there is to voting for farm worker legislation, because you can do so many other things that will compensate for that demerit, if you will, political demerit in your district. Or you had helped them raise money for their campaign, or you had allowed them to carry important legislation that someone else could have carried but gave them the credit.

So all of those things were resources that one used in a leadership position to bring along more recalcitrant members on issues, to keep a Democratic agenda moving forward. So when I talk about credits, that's what I mean.

Other people responded to a junket. You might say they wanted to go and study foreign business investment in California by going to Paris. Sometimes that happened. Or they'd go look at rail—the transportation committee would go look at rail systems in Europe. Now, there is a merit to that. There is a meritorious reason for that. But it's also a very pleasant way to find out. So the speaker could authorize or not authorize those kind of one-week or two-week trips to look at the rail system of Europe or certain countries in Europe.

Those are all resources that leadership has at their command. Good office. Big office. Somebody wants to move to an office. Someone wanted to add staff members. Things like that are all part of the resources that are available to the leadership that are credits, that you then come back and call upon when you're trying—in McCarthy's case, trying to move important legislation, to save the bay, to do nursing home reform when the industry doesn't want it, and a variety of other things that are part of what he would define as the agenda for that term.

McCREERY: Okay. Now, with Jerry Brown in the governor's office, how was the Democratic Party faring in terms of accomplishing that Democratic agenda?

AGNOS: One would think it would be very easy, and initially it was. There was a great deal of enthusiasm and excitement when he first got elected because we'd had a Republican before that, Ronald Reagan and all that. And so this young man

with so much promise had a wonderful honeymoon. By the second and third year, though, some of us at least began to see that he was not really performing on some of the core issues that we thought he should have been. There were hard times. He was making decisions that impacted, at least in my view at that time, on people that should have been protected more.

I remember—I don't know what year it was, but he proposed a twenty-eight-dollar cut for welfare benefits and particularly the elderly. I thought that was too harsh, and there were other places where we could have achieved those kinds of savings. There was a great line. Did I tell you this part yet?

McCREERY: I don't think so.

AGNOS: There are two stories. One thing that started to sour me, and it's ironic because now I have an excellent relationship as a former mayor and he is the mayor of Oakland. He's sixty-four, I guess, and he's matured a lot, but he was thirty-five when he got elected. He was really not ready, in my view, to be governor of this state because he had never had the kind of seasoning that is necessary, the maturity. I think that a chief executive, be he or she a mayor or a governor or, clearly, a president, should have had a set of experiences that give them a seasoning in life so that your awareness about what people are experiencing in their daily lives is not just an intellectual one that comes from reading about it. You should know either by being neighbors or being in it yourself as a single or a married person or a parent. All of those are important experiences that help you relate to issues, because when you're in an important legislative or executive position, it is hard to get close to people. There are too many

impediments, at that time. And, as I said earlier, the aura around you causes people to not open up the way they should. At least I found that a lot. Not always, but a lot.

Well, thirty—was he thirty-seven or thirty-five? I can't remember. You know, here's a man who had been trained in the seminary for a long time and then gone virtually straight into politics, never really worked or had the kind of seasoning that would have, I think, made him a much better governor.

Anyway, one story that occurred that sort of gave me this distinct impression was, even before I was elected, the year before I was elected, I remember going down with Leo to see this new governor. Leo at that time was the speaker and was proposing a breakfast program. I didn't tell you this?

McCREERY: Actually, you did. I'm recognizing it now that you say it.

AGNOS: Yes, okay. And so when he said what he said, which was "Nobody ever gave me a free breakfast," it just stunned me that he was so unaware of who he was and where he had come from that he would say something like that about poor kids.

Well, fast forward now to when I was in office, and here he was proposing that poor people and elderly take a cut in order to balance the state budget when we could have been doing things in other areas, like taxes. He didn't want to take on the business community, and he proposed—he said, "Well, let those who do not want to cut government wear a black hat, and let those who want to make the cuts wear a white hat. I'm going to put a hat rack in my outer office, and they can put their white and black hats there." So the notion that if

you wanted to protect poor people you were somehow supposed to wear a black hat really angered me.

So, the State of the State message, which is sort of like the State of the Union message, was coming up within a week. Did I tell this story, too? No. A picture of it is in there. I don't know whether you've seen that picture in one of my annual reports.

Well, the way that a member seeks recognition from the speaker is to raise their microphone in the air, and it is tantamount to holding your hand up, but it's a much more pronounced thing. When your mike goes up, the speaker sees it and calls upon you. Well, when Governor Brown came in to give his State of the State message, which is an annual event, I had purchased a big black cowboy hat. When he came up and was introduced to speak, I raised my mike and put the black hat on top as a protest and a statement saying that I was wearing a black hat because I did not want those cuts. I could see his face visibly get crimson [Laughter] when he looked over in my direction. He never looked again, but he did when he started his speech, and it got in the newspapers. It was a statement, and it was the nature of my relationship with him in those days.

I also got into another beef with him over the firing of an exceptionally well-qualified doctor, who was Dr. Josette Mondanaro.

McCREERY: You have a clipping here from the *Examiner.*

AGNOS: Yes, right. This sort of capsulized the disagreement between us.

McCREERY: Tell me briefly what happened with her.

AGNOS: Dr. Josette Mondanaro was a very competent doctor in the public health system. I can't remember how it happened, but it was discovered that she was a lesbian, and he fired her, had her fired. I protested this because I was advancing a bill that was aimed at protecting people [by] adding sexual orientation to the protected categories for the Unruh civil rights laws that said you can't discriminate against somebody based on their race, creed, color, et cetera. We were going to add sexual orientation. And here, he, a Democrat who was supposed to be a progressive, was firing a woman because of what she did in her private life. She was not advocating. She was not talking about her sexual orientation on the job.

So I met her and became a spokes-advocate for her. I appeared at the hearing. When the hearing upheld the governor's firing, I hired her as a part-time consultant on health issues—because she was so well qualified and again, to make a statement. Those kinds of issues, whether it was cuts for the poor or civil rights for gay people, caused me to not be as supportive [of Jerry Brown] on issues as one would expect if we were members of the same party and both seemingly progressive people.

McCREERY: Yes. Now, the date on this article in the *Examiner*—it's pretty early on, February '78. You had only been in office a short time. What kind of political risks were you taking in speaking out so openly?

AGNOS: At that time, he was at the zenith of his power, and I was a brand-new member of the legislature. But I had my own power with the speaker, who was loyal to me, understood, and I would tell him my beefs so that he would not be

blindsided. But to Leo's credit he never tried to talk me out of doing anything that—I was now my own man—if it represented what I thought was important in my district. The issues of poverty, the issues of gay rights were all important to me. But basically it was a visceral thing as well, because this man simply reflected, in his administration, a kind of insensitivity to these issues that I believe so strongly in.

I just decided that I would take him on, on those issues that he was not being as responsive to. Some people, the press said that it was a risk because this was a very popular governor, who could retaliate. But to me, the issues were more important and the risk was not. Plus, in our principles, we said we had to be tougher than them. We never demagogued these issues. We emphasized, my staff did, that we had to have the arguments that would persuade the person who was persuadable, the person who was open. We just didn't demagogue issues, if you know what I mean. We always made sure we had a strong, sound argument for issues that we challenged the governor for. It was not because "I don't like him," even though I didn't like him at the time. To be perfectly candid, some of it was a class thing. Here was this son of a governor who was not caring about these things, and I was the son of an immigrant, and why didn't he pay attention? Why wouldn't he listen?

I was taught by Leo—if it was Leo as the governor, he would have had me in there and said, "What is it about this thing that's bothering you? What do you really want to do?" Sometimes by the mere fact that you ventilated that and thought he listened to what you had to say, you say, "Okay, you've heard

me. If you don't want to do it, at least I made my case." The governor never did that stuff, and it was to his, I think—not only with me but with others—ultimate loss.

McCREERY: How did your relationship with him change, if at all, during your years in the assembly?

AGNOS: It didn't. We got stuff done—of course, he never had a great relationship with anybody. He was sort of a loner, which is unusual for a politician. I mean, he didn't seem to enjoy socializing—he was famous for his robin's egg blue Plymouth that was a state car. He was famous for sleeping on a mattress in a bare-bones apartment, and he sort of cultivated these images, whether they were real or not, and so he was never really popular with any of the legislature. Others got along better than I did, but he was never really popular. But people respected, politicians respected his popularity, the popularity that he cultivated with the public and his strong reelection, so they gave him wide latitude on these things. I didn't, but they did.

And, frankly, I was secure in my district. I was working hard and doing the things that would get me reelected—and did—so my relationship with the governor during his term and mine never really changed. But he had good staff people who were better at human relations than he was, and I was able to accomplish things through them. And it worked, that way.

McCREERY: As you predicted, he was reelected.

AGNOS: He was reelected, and that was the end of it for him. You know, he tried to move on and was limited by whatever those factors are that determine whether

you're going to be successful as a presidential candidate or not. He kept trying. Some people say he's going to try again.

McCREERY: Yes.

AGNOS: But, as I said, sometimes in politics, you know, they say it's better to be lucky than good, or at least it's better to have a lot of luck than a lot of talent, and I think that his timing was such, coming as a secretary of state--and that was a period when political reform in the post-Watergate era was a major issue; and he had championed that as a secretary of state, to his credit, and he rode in on a political reform sort of platform--and his youthful energy and good looks and all that, so he got elected. A different time, different place, he might not have been so fortunate.

McCREERY: In that political reform era, shall we call it, how did the mood change in the legislature itself? What were the effects there as time went on?

AGNOS: I think, to the governor's credit, he did do a good job in that area in helping establish the Fair Political Practices Commission, the FPPC, and that set in place a lot of transparency, to use the word of today--at that time, it was "disclosure." But basically we had, for the first time, a real political watchdog who watched politicians, to whom they had to respond in terms of disclosure, that citizens and advocates could complain to and get some kind of investigation and response. So I think that and farm worker legislation, which, again to the governor's credit, he believed in, with Cesar Chavez. He was deeply committed to him. Those two major accomplishments will be, I think, the things that I remember most about his gubernatorial time. I'm sure there

were others, but those are the things that I remember. I think that it was a turning point in political reform in this state.

Now, since then, we've had some down times, some bad periods where individual legislators have been prosecuted for dishonesty, but I think that the time that Governor Brown came in and during his time was a seminal point in California politics that changed from the times when money did everything, flowed freely, from which we remember the quote from Jesse Unruh, who was a speaker before Leo, before Bob Moretti, in the late fifties, early sixties, that "money is the mother's milk of politics." In many respects, it still is, but now we know who the mother is that's providing the milk. We now know where the money comes from, and we can trace it. The public has a better understanding of how it works. I think Governor Brown made a lot of that happen.

McCREERY: How effective has the FPPC been in carrying out its mandate?

AGNOS: I think that over its history it's been pretty effective. These commissions often are dependent on who the members are, so if you have a strong membership that has a genuine commitment to pushing for these things, the commission will be better than other ones that don't have that kind of membership. So different governors who have had a commitment to that kind of political reform have put people on there who they trusted to be more aggressive. Others have not, and so we've seen a diminution of the commission during times like when Governor Wilson was there. We didn't see as aggressive an FPPC as when Governor Brown was there. And so I think that it depends on who is appointed to the commission. But overall, the Fair Political Practices

Commission—and now just the presence of it—helps keep order in the political world when it comes to the issues of integrity and honesty.

McCREERY: Now let's talk about some of your committee assignments in the early years. What did you seek out, and what did you want to do there?

AGNOS: Well, as I said, I was interested in health care issues because of my interest in the elderly and the poor. I was interested in social welfare and civil rights. And so the main committees that I sought to get on were Health Committee, so I could pursue that, and I did serve on the Health Committee my first year, and—I'm having trouble remembering.

McCREERY: Well, let's see, Finance, Insurance and Commerce.

AGNOS: Oh, yes. Finance, Insurance and Commerce. That's an interesting one. That's the one that dealt with a lot of business issues, a lot of insurance company issues, and basically just business. I was not as interested in those issues then, but I asked to be on it because it was a very powerful committee, and I wanted power, legislatively speaking. Conservative legislators who carried a lot of pro-business issues had to come through that committee, and I wanted to be a vote that they needed to pay attention to so that when I came with my liberal, progressive issues to them, when they served on the committees that were important to me, they had to pay attention to me and didn't dismiss it.

That was why I wanted to be on that committee. Of course, Leo was the speaker who appointed the committees, and he would give me pretty much what I wanted, and so I served on Finance, Insurance and Commerce because I wanted to be in a position to terrorize the bastards when all else failed. And it

worked. It worked, because when I went in my district to a business that was mistreating a constituent that didn't have any ability to influence them, I could empower them when I went with them, because they knew I was on a committee in the state legislature that was dealing with a lot of the issues that *were* important and *were* critical to them, and therefore they needed to pay attention to me.

For years prior to my getting elected, PG&E [Pacific Gas & Electric] was trying to expand a power plant in my district that people thought would be unhealthy in a dense, urban area. Well, when I was on these important business-oriented committees they dropped it, because they knew I was in a position to kill other legislation or to affect other legislation, if not kill it, that was important to them. So the perception of power was important to me when I represented a district that didn't have a lot of it, or people in it that didn't have a lot of it. Again, that was where I was coming from, to empower people to make decisions or affect decisions that impacted on their lives.

McCREERY: Now, how did you stay in touch with your district, through your office and other ways?

AGNOS: Well, I had a wonderful staff. As you know, I made a great investment in staff and trusted staff, primarily because, as I said before I think, it's how I was trained by Leo. I listened to them. We had staff meetings every Friday when I came back to the district, and they would give me a briefing on the major issues and things that were happening, or special issues. Each one of them came to the Capitol during the week because they all carried their own

legislative—every one of them did a bill or two. We would talk then, as we drove back and forth to the Capitol or in the Capitol.

The staff and I did walks in the district, like when you're campaigning, you walk precincts, door to door, to give people your campaign literature, and hopefully they'll be impressed enough to vote for you. We did it after I was elected, to sort of stay in touch with people. I always enjoyed the reaction of people. "You're not running for anything." "No, we just want to hear what's on your mind." We did a lot of community forums and all those kinds of things to stay in touch with the district and hear from them what it was that they needed to have done by me, and we would work on it.

McCREERY: In terms of your other committee service, for example the Subcommittee on Aging, I know you were very much carrying out what you saw as the needs of your constituents. How did you go about getting advice from them on some of these issues? Was that through your staff?

AGNOS: As I said, some of the staff—and I had a woman who was an elderly woman herself, Betty Lou Treguboff, who specialized in problems of the aging, reached out to the aging community, although she didn't do it exclusively. Nobody did anything exclusively. I wanted my staff to be generalists, with an expertise in a particular area that I wanted. So I would get it from her. And because I had been on the Commission on Aging when I was on Leo's staff, appointed by Mayor Alioto, I had a lot of contacts with the elderly, and we started working—and my own work as a social worker prior to that had exposed me to a lot. So I knew the elderly or the geriatric community

professionally and just constituent-wise, with the groups that represented them, very well. That's why it was easy for me to be informed about their issues.

We started with nursing home stuff right off the bat. What else was there? Were there any other issues on aging that I had?

McCREERY: Establishing adult day health services.

AGNOS: Oh, one of my first acts was working with a group of professionals that were establishing at that time an adult day health care program in Chinatown called On Lok. It's an interesting story because there was a very dynamic social worker, a woman, Mary Louise Ansak, and a Chinese doctor named Dr. William Gee. The two of them had this idea that these elderly people in Chinatown, who could live in their own homes but needed a place during the day—hence adult day health—to come to in order to remain in their own homes and not deteriorate to the point where they had to go into a nursing home. So the day care for elderly people around health care issues kept them in their own homes.

Because of my strong interest in the elderly, they came to me and asked me to assist them in getting recognition for the program on a state basis, to fund it, because they couldn't do it initially, as they started, with just contributions from well-meaning people and generous people. And so I started back in 1977 to do that and got them recognition from the state health department with grants and stuff like that. And slowly it built over the years with these same two people into what is now, today, in 2002, an HMO [health maintenance organization] for elderly people. They just do older people. It's a health plan,

just like you might have Kaiser [Permanente] or whatever it might be, Blue Shield.

Well, On Lok is a health plan that's primarily in San Francisco, citywide, but also in the Bay Area, for elderly people to keep them in their own homes. That's what the health care plan is designed to do. They have their own doctors, podiatrists, dentists. But they also have people in their health plan who will go to an elderly person's home and assist them with the daily living activities that they need to stay in their home, like a bath, like a meal, like cleaning up, like getting dressed, and then they will take that person to the day care—at their number of centers.

The reason I'm telling you so much about this is because in 1977 I started working with them to first get it funded, brought them their first check from the state, because they needed the money so desperately, they couldn't wait for it to come in the mail. I drove it to them. Mary Louise still remembers that, although she's retired. And then, when I was in HUD, at the federal level, I also helped them get recognition from HUD to do housing above their health care centers.

And then, just three years ago, when my own mother, who was ninety-two, became frail and we never—I'd promised her when I was a little boy that I'd never put her in a nursing home. My sisters, who had been the saints in taking care of her, going over every morning to make sure she was up, make sure she was dressed, make sure she had eaten, all those kinds of things—she had a little dementia, but not total. I would pop over there three or four times a week,

but they were there every day two times a day, seven days a week, you know, that kind of thing. Put her to bed, all that stuff.

Finally, they were exhausted. They couldn't do it anymore after two years of that, and they said, "You know, we're going to have to take a look a nursing home." I panicked. And I called On Lok, not realizing what they'd become. I had left off about five years before. What we found was this health care program. So we took her out of the UC [University of California] health care system and put her into On Lok. They saved our lives and hers. For nearly two years, they had a worker [who] came to her house. She went to their day care center. When she was hospitalized, their doctors took care of her. And it was just a health plan.

So here I was, in the year 2000 and 2001, the beneficiary of a program that I had supported as a legislator in 1977. Now I work as a volunteer over there. But it was a remarkable experience in being the beneficiary of something that I had thought I was helping other people do. But that was On Lok, and my interest in the aging.

One of the other bills that I did that also came out of my interest and experience with the aging was another project that was a first of a kind in the country, and that is Alzheimer's, which now is well known, but at that time, they really didn't know much about it. This was in 1977. This came from the staff. It's an interesting example. During the week a woman had come in, Anne Bashkiroff. So my staff said that there's this woman who is really aggressive and upset and angry, and she wants to see you. And I said, "I'll be

there on Friday," which was my normal office hours because I was in the Capitol Monday through Thursday.

So on Friday, in walked this woman. She was an attractive, middle-aged woman about in her mid-fifties, and she was so upset, just so upset, and she'll tell you this story, so angry because she had a husband who ultimately was diagnosed with Alzheimer's, and he would drift off. They had been married for years and years, but he was showing all those symptoms of people with Alzheimer's, and she couldn't get anybody to pay attention to her. Doctors didn't understand. The medical plan that they had didn't know how to treat it. This is '77, and she couldn't get help.

She was coming to me to help her. She was so upset. She was really upset, crying and hysterical and angry and hollering. I remember saying to her, "Calm down. Just calm down. I'll help you. I don't know how, but I'll help you. Calm down." So she just sort of calmed down, and so we began. It was an example of something I've done throughout my career, which was we had to invent a program, working with other people, to deal with a new problem that our systems weren't prepared to address. And that is, how do you help middle-class people? See, for the poor we have the systems, but a middle-class person who can't afford three thousand dollars for a place, how do we help them get the kind of assistance to deal with a member of their family who needs care?

So we developed a pilot program called the Family Caregiver Program. It was a five-year pilot that was designed to show that we could save money for the state and help people with brain problems at the same time, because what

you had to do was spend all your money, become poor, and then the state would step in. So the pilot program was the first of a kind in the country that took people with brain issues, primarily what is now known as Alzheimer's but also people could become brain damaged because of car accidents, of falling down and hitting their heads and never having the same mental capacity. They weren't retarded, they were just damaged.

So the program, after five years, demonstrated financial feasibility and, far more importantly, programmatically it made a difference in the lives of the people in the family who had to deal with it. So we made a statewide program, and today it's the biggest in the country. It's called the Family Caregiver Alliance, and I'm going to their twenty-fifth anniversary—they called me to speak next week. I haven't talked to them in years, but they remembered how we started and how we got it to be a statewide program, and now many other states have copied the model in California, and it's primarily, although not exclusively, around Alzheimer's, which now has gotten a lot of attention. California is on the front edge of dealing with that, giving care directly to the person to treat or manage them, but more importantly to help the family deal with it through counseling, through respite care, through advice on how to deal with financial issues and stuff like that. It's a wonderful program. I'm very proud of it.

We started in 1977 with a constituent, a woman, Anne Bashkiroff, who comes in and was hysterically upset—understandably and appropriately so—over her husband's condition, which nobody could diagnose, much less treat,

in 1977. There will be no Anne Bashkiroffs now because of what we set up, starting then. But that was a constituent who just walked in the door as a last resort, who didn't know where else to go, having gone many other places.

So those are the kinds of things I did in my early years, because of my strong interest in the aged and the empowerment of them and other groups that didn't have it.

McCREERY: Another example that I'm thinking of, if you want to talk about it now, is the coming of AIDS into the gay community in San Francisco. Tell me about your education on that issue and how you got involved.

AGNOS: AIDS didn't really start to rear its head until 1981? Eighty-one, yes. I think it's '81. We didn't even have a name for it. The earliest names that I recall were KS, Kaposi's sarcoma, but AIDS was not the name in those days. In fact, even before we had Kaposi's sarcoma, I remember Cleve Jones, who is one of the major figures in San Francisco, [in] California, and, I would say, in American history around AIDS, was the first up-front gay staffer I recruited to work with me as caucus chairman in the state Capitol. I did it because I wanted to expose the rest of the Capitol to a gay man, to see that they were human beings, ordinary human beings just like we were, and there was no reason to be prejudiced or fearful. Because I had been carrying legislation since the day I got there to add sexual orientation to the protected categories against discrimination. This was part of my strategy, to make legislators deal with the fact that there are gay people and it was not just an abstract concept from a legislator in San Francisco.

I told Cleve—I remember talking with him, and I'll give you his number; you can talk to him now; he's in Palm Springs—"You're going to face some hostility up there. Are you ready to deal with this?" His job was going to be not only to advise me on constituent issues but to run campaigns, work in campaigns, and "You're going to be going into a straight politician's campaign. You're not going to be wearing gay rights on your lapel. You're going to be like everybody else. But if he happens to ask, I don't want you to hide it, I don't want you to be closeted, I don't want you to do anything. You're just going to be an ordinary person, because that's what I'm trying to convince them of."

So he agreed and came to the Capitol. He has his own set of stories around that. He's writing a book, I think. So he divided his time between the Capitol and San Francisco. I remember coming back for a staff meeting, and he says, "Art, we've got to do something. We've got to do something." And he says, "There's this terrible disease sweeping through the Castro that's killing people." And I said, "What is it?" He said, "We don't know what it is. It's just some kind of a disease. They don't have a name for it. But we've got to do something." I said, "Okay, Cleve, tell me what we're going to do, or let's talk to the experts."

So he went out and was trying to get some sense of what this was, and over a month or two he said, "We've got to set up a foundation where people can walk in and we can start connecting them with medical care and all that stuff." And so—I guess this will be the first time I've ever said this, but we took

supplies from my office, state supplies [Laughter]—we took papers and pencils and pads and whatever you needed to start an office, and they had this walk-up office somewhere on Castro, a little one-room office that he started, and that became what is now known as the San Francisco AIDS Foundation. That was the start of it, with purloined supplies from my state office.

He would work there part time on his own time, and then gradually as they got contributions he started working with some of the experts, or some of the people who became experts from the medical field, to try to address—and then we got the name, Kaposi's sarcoma.

Then, in the following year, we started to realize that there were tests that could be taken to determine a diagnosis and that insurance companies would not insure people with this. We introduced legislation—this is where Larry Bush came in, who was the second gay person that was working with me. He had developed expertise in this area. We sort of had to learn it as we went. We had to protect people because the insurance test would go to their employers, which would tell them—if they hadn't told their employers—they were gay, and they were subject to discrimination on two counts, their health care costs and health diagnosis, as well as their sexual orientation.

So I introduced legislation to protect people from that, and it was opposed by the Deukmejian administration, it was opposed by—because it was seen as a, quote, "gay disease." We kept insisting that it was not a gay disease, that it was a human disease that would affect all people unless we got a touch on it. It just happened in this country to break out first in the male, homosexual

community. But in other parts of the world, we already knew--and tried to make the case--it was breaking out in the heterosexual community.

All these arguments fell on deaf ears in the early years because of this preoccupation with sex and homosexuality. We kept trying to find ways to educate the legislature and California—the ordinary citizens—because this thing was growing. One of the major turning points came in, I think it was early '85. Dr. C. Everett Koop was the surgeon general of the United States, and looked like everybody's favorite doctor, with his white hair and this big, imposing figure. The surgeon general wore a Navy uniform. The surgeon general is some kind of a naval officer or something. So he wore a wonderful uniform—he looked like an admiral.

And so he, to his credit, to his everlasting credit, as a physician and as a man, agreed to come and address a joint session of the legislature on AIDS. Now, remember, he was working for a president who had never uttered the word, "AIDS." Never said it. But he agreed to come for a three-day swing through California at our invitation, and he spoke to a joint session of the legislature, talking about these issues. Now, here's a Republican surgeon general for a Republican president, saying that this was a human disease. We needed to address it. It was going to be an epidemic.

Then he came to San Francisco and visited the model that Mayor [Dianne] Feinstein had started to respond to this disease as a city, because we couldn't get help from the state and federal government, and I was trying to get the state to participate in this. So we did a tour of several AIDS facilities and all that,

and it was a major turning point, in my view at least, in the state's history around dealing with AIDS, because this extraordinary doctor, dressed in an admiral's uniform, stood in front of the senators, the combined senate and assembly, and talked about this terrible epidemic in terms that they could no longer deny or avoid.

So it became easier, although it was not easy, to advance legislation to deal with the effects of this disease, while protecting the people who had it from the discrimination that still exists in many—although in this part of the world it's easier today. So I introduced legislation, as I said, to protect from discrimination, to do certain kinds of tests, and all that stuff. That was the process. Our strategy was to get people who would be irrefutable in terms of giving credibility to the fact that this was a human disease, and Dr. Koop was probably the best example of that.

We also had a Nobel Prize winner in Dr.—I remember his last name was Baltimore [David Baltimore]—who also came and spoke. When you have a Nobel Prize winner and the surgeon general of the United States, it's no longer Art Agnos, gay rights advocate, trying to take care of people from the Castro. It is an American issue. It's a California issue that is way beyond what the perceptions were at that time, which were limited to my district.

McCREERY: You said that by the time AIDS was identified as a problem, you had already been carrying annual legislation to try to add sexual orientation to the list of protected rights. What led you to do that? In other words, how did you begin to take that on as an issue so early in your tenure?

AGNOS: Well, to be very honest with you, the gay community is an important part of the district that I represented, and I had made that promise when I was campaigning. But, quite frankly, I had gay friends before I got into politics—when I first came to San Francisco. I met gay people who taught me about gay rights. I didn't know much about it before. I suppose I had all of the stereotypic thoughts that any educated person has about gay people, coming from a small New England town, where it was not something you were up front about, going through the Army and all that.

I was twenty-five years old when I came here and educable, but I didn't know much. And so in the course of my work as a geriatric social worker I met people who educated me. And then, as I thought back on my own life, I had a couple of friends who clearly were gay but just never told me about it, because they never dated, but we just palled around together. So people like Dorwin Jones, who was in the field of aging but was an elderly gay man, took me to the Mattachine Society, which was one of the early, early groups that tried to educate the straight world about gay rights. Through those kinds of experiences, meeting and hearing and listening and socializing and being friends with gay and lesbian people, I realized that they were just ordinary human beings like anybody else, who happened to do something in the privacy of their own home that was different than what I might do. I didn't think that should be a reason why they shouldn't be employed or why they should not be able to get a house or a place to live, like anybody else.

So I had the intellectual and emotional commitment before I got elected, and then when I got elected, I also had a political commitment because of the people that I represented. It's interesting because years later my sister came out to me as a lesbian. She had been married and divorced and came to California. After I was a legislator, after I was championing all these things, she sort of came out to me, in a very subtle way. I'd always see her at the Gay Freedom Day parade with a woman friend, waving at me. [Laughter] Every year, I'd see her at the Gay Freedom Day parade, and that's how she let me know.

Today we celebrate, and have for many, many years, major holidays as a family. Thanksgiving is my favorite holiday, and that's when our whole family gets together, and her partner of twenty-five years is always there, just like my wife is, in normal family relationships.

McCREERY: I note that in introducing this legislation you sought the number AB-1 every year.

AGNOS: Oh, yes.

McCREERY: Did you have to use up chits with the speaker to do that?

AGNOS: No, I was lucky. But it's interesting you raise that. I did do that because I wanted to make the statement that this was not something that I was doing for political expediency, because I had a, quote, "gay constituency" I was not going through the motions. I wanted people to know that this was a significant issue to me, and it ought to be a significant issue to the people of our state

because gay people are part of us, and therefore deserve the same rights as all of us.

By having it as the first bill in the legislature, it made a symbolic statement that this was an important issue, and it always got publicity because it was the first bill. Now, I got that right because I happened to be the first—you introduce bills alphabetically, and throughout my life, being first in the alphabet, Art Agnos, A.A.—I never saw it as a benefit [Laughter], because in school, I was not the greatest student, and somehow, at least, teachers would call on students and they look down, my name was always at the top of the list, so I always got called on first.

In the Army, I always got picked for KP first, and all the unpleasant things. When they wanted volunteers, the drill sergeant would always look down the list, and A.A. was first. So I was never happy about being at the top of the alphabet when it came to lists of names until I got in the legislature. I was number one, and therefore had the right to introduce the first bill, which I always did, as this gay rights legislation.

Now, my first year I didn't do it because it wasn't drafted in time to be introduced as the first bill, so I did another one, but every year after that I did, for that very reason.

McCREERY: You certainly gave the message that the issue wasn't going to go away.

AGNOS: Exactly, exactly. It was not going to go away. I was not going to go away, and we better deal with it because it's going to be the first bill you got.

McCREERY: Now, it took years to pass.

AGNOS: It did, and I didn't do it, even though I had Jerry Brown, a Democrat who was supposed to be a progressive, who should have known better. But some people said he was threatened because he was single and an attractive man, and some people whispered that maybe he did it because in his private life he had issues of his own. I never believed that. I just thought it was more a political expediency on his part, and he didn't want to take on that kind of thing. Today he would do it. Today he would do it in a heartbeat, but that's because he's had enough experiences to be secure and mature in those kinds of judgments. I think that was a handicap for him in those days. But nevertheless, it never got through when it should have. It was not done until most recently. We pursued it through court cases and stuff and chipped away at it, but it was not done until recently.

McCREERY: That strikes me as a good example of the point you made earlier, of having to create new programs or new positions where there really hadn't been any before. You mentioned Cleve Jones and your staff were working on this. How much freedom did you give him to pursue this area?

AGNOS: They could be as—we couldn't be too aggressive in this area. It was something that was a passion because it was the most fundamental part of human liberty, the opportunity to be employed, to support yourself and your loved ones, the opportunity to live in a decent home. This is a fundamental part of the American promise. What we were saying was, because of what I believe—and I believe that science will prove, if we ever let it—that people are born homosexual, not made homosexual by all of these, I think, specious

psychological theories, dominant mother, weak father, and all the rest of that hogwash. We have seen in recent years that there are differences in chromosomes between gay people and straight people, and I think they're born that way, just like you're born with dark skin or brown skin or light skin or whatever it might be. Blue eyes and brown eyes. I think that's how you are, that's how your sexual orientation is determined.

The reason I think that science has not been allowed to prove this is because it sets up a whole bunch of cultural and sociological problems that I don't think our society wants to deal with, even today. If you base your discrimination on biblical words and then you find out God made homosexual people, what do you say? Too many people [in the scientific community] who didn't want to know were in a position to make it happen, and we still haven't found out. But it'll happen someday.

But I've always believed it, and the reason I believed it was because every gay person I ever talked to in my life has always said they always felt that way. They always felt that way. While they may have denied it for a period of time and tried marriage or tried heterosexual relationships, it never computed for them the way the same-sex thing did.

So I believe there is a fundamental human injustice here, and was passionate about it, and then ultimately it turned out members of my own family were benefiting from my work, and I was very proud that I had been there, without having had them be the ones that convinced me—that I was doing it before I ever knew.

McCREERY: Yes. But certainly this was new ground for the legislature at the time.

AGNOS: Oh, yes.

McCREERY: Did your colleagues give you trouble individually?

AGNOS: Yes, yes. But just to finish the question you asked on the staff, I told the staff whatever means they could think of that made sense to pursue this and educate people, we did. They were as creative as they could be to try to educate, to create information, scenarios, events, programs, whatever it might be to educate the public.

I did it myself, in the sense that—what confused the fundamental clerics, who were my opposition, was that I was irrefutably a family person. I often was seen bringing my children to work because I didn't see enough of them off of work, if it was a late night. There are pictures in the legislature of my kids on my desk. I had a reputation for always going home to my wife, didn't philander, didn't go to the bars the way sometimes legislators did. So I was the quintessential pro-family legislator in terms of my personal life. And it boggled their mind how somebody could be so, quote, "straight" and be so pro-gay. And they kept saying to me—who was this? He's still out there. He says, "You know, Agnos, we can't figure you out, because we've checked you out, and you are clearly heterosexual and happily married and a strong family man, yet you have such a passion for these issues around gay rights." I said, "Because that's a human issue. It's not anything different than what you and I believe in for straight people that they ought to have." I was sort of a contradiction for them. They could not understand it. I said, "You don't know

how many people there are out there that are a contradiction for you, that are living a kind of life that is worthy of the support but can't, because of your prejudice."

So we tried to do it. And, frankly, another way—I was raised in my culture, in the Greek culture, kissing men, and I always did. I grew up kissing my father. My uncles, my cousins, male and female. When we came together for a family occasion, the traditional greeting was to hug and kiss each other. So for me, it was a very comfortable, normal thing to kiss another man who was my relative, who was family, and I've always done that. I've always done that.

And then I realized that in a lot of cultures it's not. I did this as a legislator and as a mayor. When I saw men that I liked, I would kiss them on the cheek, [Laugther] and everybody thought it was because I was sort of a pro-gay politician. They thought I was sort of pandering, and then they came to realize—they said, "Why do you do that?" I said, "Because it is a greeting that I have grown up with, a familial greeting that I happen to like. I think that we ought to do more of it with each other, and if you have difficulties with it, I'm sorry, but I like it."

I'll never forget, there was this man who gained a great deal of attention—this is more than you want to know about this subject, but I was in the Democratic caucus, and John Vasconcellos invited this man who advocated hugging. He passed away a few years ago, but he was on the radio, television. His name was Leo Buscaglia.

McCREERY: He had some books out.

AGNOS: Yes, he had books about this hugging to express oneself. He was [talking to legislators about] how we all ought to hug as an expression of our humanity and to warm up and not be so stiff and formal and far apart and all that stuff. I said, "Hey, this guy is talking my kind of stuff." So afterwards, I went up and I said, "I really liked your thing." I gave him a big hug and a kiss on the cheek and [Laughter] he looked back at me like the kiss on the cheek was too much. The hug was okay. [Laughter] He was taken aback! I said, "Hey, we're doing your stuff, aren't we?" And he sort of nodded, in shock. But I was just sort of pleased, that here was a guy who was sort of talking [about] what I always said, which was, if you like another man don't be threatened by an expression of affection.

Women do this, of course, in our culture, all the time. They give each other—I always tease them. They give each other air kisses. You know, they sort of touch cheeks and kiss the air. I kiss the cheek, which is the way I was raised. So when I would do this with other men—and I always found that the sort of what I call American—non-Greek, non-ethnics, like Italians and Mediterranean types—would sort of stiffen, but they couldn't move away because I'm the mayor. Or they couldn't reject it because I'm the assemblyman. Then after I'd seen them a few times and they understood it was a genuine affection, they'd say, "Aren't you going to kiss me today?" [Laughter] So I found that they kind of grew to like it, because everybody likes warmth and human affection, even if it's a superficial kiss of greeting.

And frankly, I did it not only because it's what I was raised and comfortable with, but later on it became also a political statement, that men could kiss other men and it should not be interpreted as anything more than a human expression of affection and greeting.

McCREERY: As it is in so many other parts of the world.

AGNOS: Absolutely, absolutely, and we Americans need to adopt more of that stuff. But I also knew what I was doing, because when the mayor walks up in front of 500 people and kisses somebody who just introduced him, saying, "Thanks, that was a great introduction," and you give him a big hug and a kiss—because it was the police chief or something—everybody said, "Wow." But it is a way of making a statement, if you know what I mean. It's setting a certain kind of tone. It was just part of a total commitment to advancing the issues that I was interested in.

McCREERY: Let's talk for a moment about Art Agnos, the family man. How did you meet your wife?

AGNOS: Sherry [Cheryl A. Hankins] happened to come from Florida to San Francisco the same week I arrived, the first week of September, but we never crossed paths. She was a nineteen-year-old; I was a twenty-five-year old. She was a nineteen-year-old girl who didn't want to live in Miami, Florida, anymore, where she was working in a dead-end job. She wanted more of life, and so she'd come to California for the same reason I did, just to find more than there was in the small town I grew up in.

When she came to San Francisco, though, it was a little too much life for her, in the five days that she was there. She wanted something a little more manageable and heard that they were hiring people in Sacramento, in the state legislature, so she went up there and got a job as a secretary, even though she had a college degree. She started her career in, what, '66, in the state legislature.

I didn't meet her until I got up there in '69—well, actually, '71 I met her. I used to go up for one or two days with Leo, and then more and more, after he became speaker, and then I met her then in '72. She was a committee consultant. We dated for almost five years, the better part of four years. Got married in '75, and then in '77 our first child was born, Christopher, and in '81 our second child was born, Stephen.

So they all sort of grew up in politics, the boys did, and then Sherry was a tremendous asset because she had been in politics. She understood the demands, the strains and the stresses, and didn't have to learn them the hard way by being my wife. She sort of came into it with that understanding and comprehension. She's been a big, big asset to me, both in the state assembly and as mayor.

McCREERY: I know that political spouses have a range of ways that they either become involved or stay out of the political career.

AGNOS: When I was in the legislature, there wasn't a role for her as my spouse, so to speak. She would come to events with me. She continued to work, because

she was a committee consultant outside the legislature, in one of the state departments. Then when I became mayor, she took on the role of first lady.

And we need to stop.

McCREERY: That's probably a good idea.

AGNOS: We'll talk more about that, but I've got to get going to a one o'clock.

McCREERY: Okay. Thank you.

AGNOS: Right. My pleasure. Thank you.

[End of Session]

[Session 4, December 10, 2002]

[Begin Minidisc 4]

McCRERRY: We wanted to continue today our discussions of your years in the state assembly. We were talking about summarizing sort of the highlights.

AGNOS: Yes, I'm getting a better feel for what we're doing, and I wanted to kind of—even though we'll never get it all done today—I wanted to try to set it up for the next couple of weeks, if you agree, or the next two or three sessions, to cover some things that I think capture my first five years in the state legislature, from '77 to—well, six years, I guess—'83, maybe '77 to '84, maybe even the first seven years. By '82, '83, '84, I was really hitting my stride. Because I always introduced legislation—and I think it's the responsibility of a legislator from San Francisco to be on the cutting edge, to be in front of where most people are in our country and certainly in our state, on issues.

It's interesting that Nancy Pelosi, the new minority leader in Congress, says it is the same thing that she tries to do in Congress. In other words, someone from San Francisco, which is such a progressive area, where there is so much creativity in dealing with issues of our time—a legislator has a responsibility to be more than just a run-of-the-mill liberal or progressive vote

on issues, but to be thinking and working on troubling or vexing issues that face our society and say, "What are we going to do about them?" and try to be on the cutting edge.

I'm reminded, as an example—and here I think it was 1981, but I'll check it as we go along here, because I made a note of it at some point—I introduced a bill to create paternity leave, to allow fathers to take up to six weeks off, with no pay—this is 1981, I believe—to take up to six weeks off with no pay. But what the law protected was the father's right to keep his job when they had a baby, because we were realizing then that very often there were two-parent families and the mother's job was more important than the father's job. So when they were making childcare decisions, they decided that the father would stay home or, whatever it was, the woman wanted to pursue her career, and so the father decided, "Okay, I'll be the house dad." Men were not allowed to take time off.

So I introduced that bill, and it was immediately branded—it was the first time it had been introduced anywhere in the state, or in the country for that matter, and it was immediately branded by the Chamber of Commerce as anti-business, and I was sort of public enemy number one for pursuing this bill and introducing this idea. Well, if you look now, ten years later, we have up to six months off for both parents, either parent, because we believe that it supports families. They now have it with pay, and business has gone along with it, although they resisted it.

But what I'm saying is we introduced the idea in 1981. It was revolutionary, and today, ten years later, we have [the] Family Leave Act nationally, and in California we have a new law that just is taking place this January, 2003, that will allow parents up to six months off, with pay, from a fund that they will contribute to as employees while they're working. That's an example of what I'm talking about, that a San Francisco legislator introduced that ten years ago, when it was considered to be anti-business. It was a major issue for the business groups to resist. Now it's commonplace.

McCRERRY: Where did the idea come from?

AGNOS: From two places. As we looked in the health and welfare area, we saw parents struggling to make ends meet. We saw and heard from our constituents that two-parent working families often wanted to share the parenting responsibilities, and so the father wanted to take the time off so that the mother could work, and vice versa. We thought that that made sense. It shouldn't be just the woman who has that responsibility. So it was a progressive idea that came from San Francisco and also our own observation as we looked at the economics of families in our health and welfare committee assignments and decided that this made a lot of sense. But we had to overcome a lot of opposition.

That's an example of what I'm talking about. I tried to look for bills to be on the cutting edge, and so with that in mind, we'll be talking about the Family Survival Project, which was the first legislation of its kind in the country, again, to deal with Alzheimer's [disease]. Today, the former president of the

United States [Ronald Reagan]—everybody talks about Alzheimer's, but in 1977 nobody talked about Alzheimer's or brain-damaged adults. By brain-damaged adults, I'm talking about someone who suffered an injury in a car accident by hitting their head, or a child, God forbid, who got hit by a bat, by accident, who suffered brain damage. There are all kinds of problems that are associated with that that were not being addressed in those days.

Another bill that we introduced that was the first of a kind was the notion of an urban park, a state urban park. Parks had traditionally been in the country, out in Yosemite, if you will, or places like that—in Monterey. But in 1977, again, we introduced the notion of creating a park next to Candlestick. It's now called the Candlestick Point [State] Recreation Area, right next to Hunters Point, which was a classic kind of black ghetto neighborhood that had never seen these kinds of nice things that came from government.

The child support legislation that I introduced again was first of a kind. Very controversial. That became law in 1984, after four years of never-ending struggle with a number of forces I can tell you about.

So I'd like to focus on those when we talk about my first six, seven years, I guess, and then constituent issues, which are extremely important to me because I always felt that the district that I represented, which was poor, and I've described that in our earlier sessions, was characterized by a lot of poor people, a lot of ethnic people who didn't understand how government could work for them. They came from parts of the world, whether it was Latin America or Southeast Asia or even in Europe, where government was not seen

as a place you went to to help you when you were struggling with issues that affected you, your family, or your community.

And so I felt it was part of my job to teach the Filipino immigrant who was coming from a dictatorship under Ferdinand Marcos that government was not something to be afraid of, that was not going to come in and arrest you and put you away or take the father away and shoot him, as they did in Latin America, in these Central American countries and stuff. So we worked very hard to make people feel comfortable and to reach out to us. So I want to talk about some of the issues that I did to educate and to help, and summarize some of the bigger, high-profile ones and tell you some of the things that went on.

McCRERRY: Okay, that's terrific. I was just going to say the very first of those four that you mentioned, relating to Alzheimer's—I think we did talk about that last time. Is that Anne Bashkiroff?

AGNOS: Yes, okay, good. I couldn't remember.

McCRERRY: Yes, and you mentioned that the disease wasn't well recognized at the time, and you really were breaking new ground.

AGNOS: Absolutely. In five years that it was a pilot program, with six counties here in the Bay Area, it demonstrated that it not only filled in gaps that people clearly needed help with—respite care for the family of the Alzheimer's patient, but also to give them counseling and give them legal advice, financial advice, just to help them deal with the overwhelming demands of a person who was losing their mind in front of them, very slowly or incrementally. But we also realized

that we could save money because very often these people would be institutionalized, rather than kept in their homes.

So what the pilot programs showed us was—in addition to helping people on the merits—financially it made a great deal of sense for the state to support this kind of program because it kept people out of institutions, which were far more expensive than being cared [for] at home, where everyone wanted them to be for as long as they could be.

As I read some of the materials here, the estimates were that we could save something like $7,000 a patient or $7 million for every thousand, $7 million for every thousand people we kept out of an institution—a nursing home or a mental institution, where sometimes they were put—and kept in their homes. So, based on that five-year demonstration, we were successful by 1984 in making it a statewide program, so that every county had this program. Today, it is well established and being copied, and has been copied by many other states who want to deal with Alzheimer's, which has become a disease that people are most familiar with, are very familiar with because of President Reagan's experience and all the rest of that.

But this was a program to help middle-class people get help from their government, through these nonprofits. And so that's what we have today.

McCRERRY: I didn't realize from our last discussion that you started in the six Bay Area counties with the five-year pilots. That's long enough, I'm sure, to show some good results. How much trouble did you have funding, expanding the program?

AGNOS: Every year it was a struggle, even with the pilot program, because those were difficult years, and nobody wanted to spend the money. There were established programs demanding funds, whether it was education or nursing homes and all these other things. But it's important, just as in business, I knew, just as in business, where—a company that's not developing future products, doesn't put money into R&D, as they call it, research and development, is going to fail in the long run by sticking to what they already have.

We knew a new problem was here, was on the horizon in many other places, but it came to our office in the form of Anne Bashkiroff, and we realized as we talked to more and more people that she was not alone, and therefore we needed to get into this area so that we could meet the needs when people began to recognize what they had in their hands.

McCRERRY: And, of course, it was an aging population.

AGNOS: Absolutely, absolutely.

McCRERRY: The problem continued.

AGNOS: That's right. So every year, I had to go to the Ways and Means Committee, and when I became the subcommittee chair, it was easier to put $150,000 to $350,000 and protect it from the governor's veto, or blue pencil, to keep this project alive every year. What happens is you adopt certain projects, and the governor's people realize that, in addition to perhaps being on the merits, they know this is something that's important to you and therefore they better pay attention to it. Sometimes it's called pork-barreling, but this was not something I was trying to do for my district, it was something I was trying to

do for the six Bay Area counties to demonstrate that this was something that made sense. We did.

Now you couldn't take it away, but then you had to nurture it every step of the way by going to the governor. When they'd say, "What's important to you? What are your priorities?" we could always put the Family Survival Project at the top of the list so that it didn't get cut by Jerry Brown or George Deukmejian.

McCRERRY: Yes. Well, I see the problems within the legislature. Now, what about in the counties themselves? Was this much of a hard sell?

AGNOS: No, because it was state funded. They were happy to try a program that they didn't have to spend money on, and their constituents responded to it.

McCRERRY: Was there much recognition of the gravity of this problem?

AGNOS: Not then, not then. It was just beginning. It was just like AIDS was in '81. This was '77. In '81, people thought—and those who did saw it isolated or marginalized as a, quote, "gay" problem. I remember being severely criticized by minority communities when I said, "This is not a gay problem. This is going to affect people who use needles and all the rest of these things."

So it speaks to what I said at the outset, which is that one of my responsibilities was to be on the cutting edge, and sometimes that brought with it unpopularity or it brought controversial reactions to someone who was trying to break new ground. But I felt that, and still believe that, that was an important part of my responsibility.

AGNOS: I brought these other things [related to] the constituent problems. As I said, there were a number of them, and I want to sort of run by them and then go over them a little bit because each one had a little bit of a difference. In 1981—and as we look back now in December of 2002—in 1981, a big issue was African Americans or black people wearing their hair in braids, and there was a reporter for KGO, Channel 7 television. Her name was Dorothy Reed. Dorothy Reed wanted to wear her hair in cornrow braids, which is a very traditional hairstyle for African American women, and she wanted to wear it on air. She was suspended by the television station for wearing her hair, on air, in that distinctive ethnic fashion.

A number of people who supported her came to my office and said, "You've got to support her. This is her right, to wear her hair the way she wants. It's an African American style." Well, frankly, a politician doesn't like to take on the media. You know, they can chew you up if they want and retaliate in a number of ways. But, again, this is sort of what my office was known for, to sort of speak up for unpopular issues or at least controversial issues, and so I joined the picket line, I went and met with the management of KGO to tell them that we thought that this was the wrong policy for them, as a public station, that they ought to reconsider it.

They were adamant about what their rights were as management, and we reminded them that there were license issues at stake that politicians can speak to when their licensing came up, and whether they were being responsive to the community, and those kinds of issues. They finally realized, as more and more

people began to join in the protest, that this was something that they were on the wrong side of, and they—I think, sort of petulantly—agreed to let her back on the air wearing her braids. So that was a victory for us, and her, in 1981.

A second sort of African American issue was brought to me by a friend of mine. I like to play golf, and in 1982, I think—which involved sort of a "Jackie Robinson of professional golf." I'm reminded of this one because of what's going on with Martha Burk trying to break through at Augusta. I'm frankly, at this point at least, disappointed in Tiger Woods not speaking up, because a lot of people before him spoke up so that he could have the opportunity that he has today.

McCRERRY: Yes.

AGNOS: But that's not the issue. The issue is Charlie Sifford is the Jackie Robinson of professional golf, of PGA, Professional Golfers Association. He was never allowed to play in the white PGA golf tournaments that we watch regularly on television until 1960. That's when we got our first black golfer, when he was sixty years old, around sixty, in '82, and he was playing on what they now call the senior tour. When the famous white golfers got too old to compete with the young golfers, people like Arnold Palmer and Sam Snead and a number of others, they set up a senior tour that was easier than the regular tour, and if you were over fifty you could play on this tour.

Basically, they went around the country, and it was outside of Palm Springs, there was a major senior event, in which the top twenty-five money winners among the senior players were automatically invited, except number

thirteen, who happened to be Charlie Sifford. My numbers may be a little off. He could have been twelve, maybe. But he was right in the middle of the pack, is the point, in earnings. And so the top twenty-five prize winners automatically got an invitation, and then they invited others. And so somebody like a Sam Snead, who didn't win a lot of money in those days, because he was really getting old, but they want him because he was so famous, they'd invite him anyway, so he got an exemption, is what they called it.

So my friend, Barry Loncke, who is a judge and a black man—we played golf together a lot—he told me that Charlie Sifford was not being invited to this tournament even though he had earned it. He told me the story about how he had broken the color barrier in 1960, and here he was, bumping into it again in 1981. So we inquired of the sponsors of this tournament, which was called the Vintage, and they said that he didn't meet all the qualifications and a variety of other things, hoping we'd go away. When I wrote to them and asked them, they said, well, he just didn't meet all the qualifications this year and wasn't invited.

Well, they didn't realize who they were dealing with. According to the Agnos Principles, we weren't just going to take that kind of a brush-off and went back and said, "What were the qualifications? Spell them out. Would like to meet with you and you can tell me," and all that. The more we looked into it, the more it was clear that they were obfuscating the issues, and it was just they didn't want him there.

The reason we ultimately found out that they didn't want him there was because the tournament was a draw to bring wealthy people into this area where the tournament was held, the golf course where the tournament was held, because the lots that were next to the golf course sold for, in those days, a quarter of a million to a half a million dollars apiece, and you put a two- to three-million dollar house on there. So they wanted to attract wealthy white people to buy the lots that were next to the golf course, and they attracted them by saying, "You can have a chance to play with Arnold Palmer or Sam Snead or Jack Nicklaus" or all these other famous golfers. And so they would come to play golf, see the place, and hopefully be induced to buy a lot.

Nobody wanted Charlie Sifford because they didn't want to bring any wealthy black people there to play and buy lots, so he wasn't invited. It took us a couple of years of jawboning with—getting the attorney general involved, threatening lawsuits, threatening legislation. I did a questionnaire to all of the professional golfers, saying, "Do you think Charlie Sifford, who has met all the qualifications, within the top twenty-five earnings winners, should be allowed to play?" A couple of them said yes, but most of them said, "It's up to the sponsors." They took a duck, which is interesting because we're seeing the same thing today when it comes to a woman being able to play at Augusta.

So they haven't changed that much, the professional golfers. But the pressure got so heavy because we never went away, and we never let them get away with a flimsy excuse or a brush-off. We were right back in their face. As I said, one of our principles—we "terrorized" them with our constant pressure.

So they finally capitulated and invited Charlie Sifford in 1984 to play. We went down and watched him. He didn't win the tournament but he won some money, and I got a chance to meet him and talk to him.

I noted at the time—and he still does this, even though now he's around seventy-three or seventy-four, I think, or maybe seventy-five, still plays good golf. But he always played with an unlit cigar in his mouth. Played the whole round with this cigar. As the son of a man who sold cigars and cigarettes and all that stuff, I was fascinated with his cigar as he played golf. When he putted, when he hit the ball, he always had an unlit cigar.

So I said, "Mr. Sifford, how come you always have an unlit cigar? You never smoke it. I never see you smoking it. You never light it up." And he said, "Well," he says, "to tell you the truth," he said, "in 1960, when I started to play for the first time on the white PGA tour, a lot of the tournaments were in the South, and when I was getting ready to hit the ball, there would be racial epithets shouted from the crowd."

He said, "For example, if I was on the putting green about to hit a putt that might make a difference in the tournament, I would hear something like, 'Miss the putt, nigger.' I knew I couldn't respond in those days and survive on the tour, and therefore I took to putting a cigar in my mouth to bite down on it so that I could keep my emotions under control, and I've never changed that habit, even though I don't hear that anymore these days."

So I thought that was a fascinating insight to this man, who struggled all his life to play golf and compete with people who obviously didn't want him

because of the color of his skin and who—when Tiger Woods had won his first tournament at the Masters, Charlie Sifford was there with him as his guest, because Tiger Woods understood the role that he had played for black golfers on the tour.

McCRERRY: As you say, as recently as the eighties you were intervening on his behalf.

AGNOS: Yes, in 1984 we finally convinced the senior tour to let him play.

McCRERRY: Now, when you got involved in this, at what point did you speak directly with him about advocating to have him play?

AGNOS: Well, I called him to make sure, because I was going to go public with all of this, and there could have been some impacts on him that I wasn't aware of, and I wanted to make sure he knew what I was doing every step of the way. I wanted to make sure that he did not think I was exploiting his case or anything like that. He was very strong and very aggressive and understood.

But I never did, whether it was this case or any of the others—I never made any political or legislative or public relations moves without the permission of the client, if you will, or the constituent, because it was their lives that I was advocating for, and the impact would be on them. I would take some of the brunt, but I didn't want people to ever feel as though they were not part of the decision making that would affect their lives much more than mine, even though there would be some impact on me as well. It's part of my social work training and all of that, which is people have a right to participate in the decisions that affect them, and so I always—whether it was Charlie Sifford or any of the other cases that I'll tell you about briefly—they always knew what I

was going to do before I did it publicly, so that they were not surprised by what they saw in the paper or by whatever a reporter might ask them if they called them, and that kind of thing.

So I talked to him a lot, and he became a good friend, and I still hear from him from time to time, even today.

McCRERRY: That's a very good example, isn't it?

AGNOS: The other example I wanted to tell you about—I've got a couple more. What I loved about my job most, as I've said time and again, was the use of power to help people who have not had an opportunity to feel empowered. One day, on the Fourth of July, which was my son's birthday, older son's birthday, I woke up, and we were planning, as we always did, a big birthday party for him. He always thought that all the fireworks and everything were for him, for his birthday, until he was obviously old enough to know better.

I read the *Sacramento Bee*, because I always kept my family with me. We never split up the family. I made no bones about that with my constituents. We had a home, obviously, in my district, which the law required. It was a two-bedroom apartment. Then we had a three-bedroom house in Sacramento, where housing prices were cheaper and you might as well buy a house. And so the family went where I went. I didn't leave them in the district. One of the reasons I never ran for Congress when I had the opportunity was that we never could figure out—we could not figure a way or could not see a way where the family would stay with me. I need my family with me to be energized, to be supported, and obviously I believe my family needs me. So I didn't run for

Congress, despite the fact that I would have been unopposed, at least once and maybe twice, when the opportunities came.

McCRERRY: Even Phillip Burton couldn't convince you, could he?

AGNOS: It was because I couldn't take the family with me. But they were in Sacramento [with me], and then we'd come back. So we had two cribs, one in each place, and two sets of everything. But it was easy. We'd just throw the kids in and then we'd go.

So this one Fourth of July in 1984, I woke up and read the morning paper in Sacramento and saw how this youngster who was three years old—Eric Cochran, his name was; he was a Sacramento resident—was dying of a rare congenital disease that slowly destroys the brain. His mother and father were with him around the clock. He was in a hospital, and they wanted to bring him home to die. His arms and his legs were paralyzed. He couldn't speak. He had to be fed through a tube. But his parents did not want him to spend the last month or two of his life in the hospital. They wanted to bring him home because there was no hope.

But the state, Medi-Cal, would not authorize him going home to die because the around-the-clock care was too expensive. They'd rather keep him in a hospital. So I read this in the paper, how the parents only wanted eight hours of care because they were going to do all the rest. But that was too expensive for the state's Medi-Cal program, which is publicly funded health care for poor people. So they said, "He has to stay in the institution or we won't pay."

I read this, and I was so touched, as we got ready for my own son's [birthday]—and we had a three-year-old at the time also. We still have him! He's not three, but our youngest was three. He's now twenty-one. But this boy in the paper later died. But this story shows what I loved about the job. It was about eleven o'clock in the morning on the Fourth of July. I'm the chairman of a powerful committee, the Subcommittee on Health and Welfare, that dealt with about $15 billion in state funds in health and welfare.

The secretary of Health and Welfare, who was the governor's appointee, was a very conservative man but a very decent man. His name was David Swoap. He was also a former Reagan appointee. We had gotten to know each other, and even though we had clear differences in politics, I thought he was a very caring man. So I had his home phone number, as big shots did—we exchange home phone numbers so that we could call each other in emergencies and crises that were usually around the politics of the budget or something like that.

So I had his home phone, and I called him up, and I said, "David, I'm reading the paper this morning, and I'm reading where your agency, under Medi-Cal, will not allow this baby to go home and die with his parents holding him because they won't authorize eight hours of care for the parents to get respite, and they'll do all the rest." I said, "We've got to look into this, and we don't have a lot of time, because the baby's not going to live."

So he agreed he would look into it, and sure enough, the next day he went to his office, and authorized, directly, that the state would pay the cost of in-

home health care for a caretaker for the eight hours that the parents needed for a respite. This is [a picture of] my three-year-old at that time, Steve, who's now a big boy. But that's what I was looking at as I was thinking, "My God, there but for the grace of God go I."

McCRERRY: Exactly.

AGNOS: But the joy of my job was that I could pick up the phone, call the most important man in the state, and say, "We're gonna fix this." I didn't have to jawbone him. I didn't have to terrorize him or anything. It was just call it to his attention and say, "Can't we do something about this right away?" He was the kind of man, and we had the kind of relationship wherein we could work on it right away. It was eight days after that that he announced—first of all, on his own authorization, he said, "That's done." He just made an exemption. Then he started a task force to find ways of changing the departmental regulations so that seriously ill children could go to their home rather than be forced to stay in an institution. That's because I had the kind of job that I could get people to pay attention.

Now, if I was working as a social worker in the welfare department, I could never get to the secretary of health and welfare and ask him to look at this on the Fourth of July or any other day, and that's the difference. That's what I saw my job as being, in doing things like that, whether it was on an individual case basis, for a child in Sacramento that was a hundred miles from my district, or a broad-based, Alzheimer's kind of issue that affected thousands of people, or

child support that affected tens of thousands of children in the state, to keep them out of poverty when their parents chose to divorce.

So that was the case of Eric Cochran. Two others I want to tell you about. One of the longest cases I ever had is still going on. It started in 1984, and it was a woman named Susan Edwards, who was a retired schoolteacher who had lived in a home in my district in San Francisco since 1975. This was 1984, so she had lived there nine years. She was under rent control, which was the law of the city. She was somebody who always was very meticulous about everything, Susan Edwards. She still is. She's 100 years old now, and she still calls me. I'm her advocate, whether it's at home, whether it's when I was at HUD, I've been her advocate.

But it started in 1984, when she got a notice that her rent was being increased by the percentage allowed under the rent control law. She did her own calculations and wrote back to the landlord saying, "Your numbers are incorrect. It's not $333.00, it's $332.50." Now, she is the type of person who checks that. She said, "You're fifty cents off, and I'll pay you $332.50, [which is what] my rent should be."

Well, this was the last straw with the landlord. She said, "I want you out of there because I've sold the building, and you're to be out of there in thirty days." Well, Susan panicked and came to my office, and so we went to work on it and started checking the facts. "Show me the bill of sale. Show me where you're selling it. Who's the buyer?" And all the kinds of things. And we realized that she had just said that, she didn't mean it, the landlord.

But then the landlord started a period of harassment, so we got her, Susan Edwards, a lawyer. She took her to court. She won from the insurance company a $30,000 settlement, and a lifetime lease. So the building has been sold a couple of times, and the new landlords come in and say they look at this ninety, ninety-four, ninety-eight-year-old, and they always try to figure out a way to move her out, but she won't move, and she always calls me, and I go over there, and I remind the landlords of what the deal—the new landlords. I educate them.

I just saw her about five months ago. I went to her house, and she's 100 years old. I'm trying to get her to take some in-home supportive services from On Lok, which is a group that I work with, but she won't do that. She's tough. She's tough with me, too. She gives me—if I am not saying something she likes, she lets me know it.

McCRERRY: She's still completely independent in her living situation?

AGNOS: Yes. She has her son, who is now seventy-eight, come in, so he's taking care of her, and I said, "You know, he's seventy-eight." "Well, he's a young man. He can do it." "No! He's getting fragile." "No, he's not." She says, "I want to save the $30,000 so I can leave it to him." I say, "You will kill him before he gets the money." We have these kinds of conversations. But Susan Edwards continues to be my constituent, even though I've been out of office for all these years. I'm the only one she'll get because she believes that I will deliver, and she doesn't trust the other politicians.

The last case I want to tell you about is also a child. Again, all this speaks to empowerment. I got a call again, from the mayor's office this time. It's kind of interesting. In July of 1983, the mayor's office asked me to help this new city worker, who didn't have all the benefits. The name was Ricky Tellez, and his son, who was I think about three at the time also, or four, also was Ricky. He had a rare liver ailment that required a liver transplant, and the family's health insurance wouldn't take care of it, and they couldn't handle the enormous cost that it would take.

They wanted Medi-Cal to pick it up, but the state policy in 1983 prevented Medi-Cal paying for a liver transplant at that time, believe it or not, because it was considered to be an experimental operation in those days. There were only two places, one in Minnesota and in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, where they did liver transplant surgery. No one had really done them here. UC and Davis was ready to do it, but it was $150,000 in those days. Sounds cheap today, but in those days it was a lot of money.

So he came to me to help. The mayor's office called me. Now, get this: The mayor's office calls Art Agnos to advocate for this person. If I was the mayor, I might let the assemblyman know, but I would call the state, themselves. "I'm the mayor of San Francisco. I want to talk to the secretary of health and welfare." We had a rule that was in the [Agnos] Principles: You go right to the top.

McCRERRY: Oh, yes, some of your staffers mentioned that one to me.

AGNOS: We got right to the top. We don't mess around, because that's where you're going to make the decision. So when I was the mayor, for example, and I had an issue, I went right to the top. I'm digressing a little bit, but just a small example as they come to me. One of the problems we had with the homeless issues, around agencies that served the homeless, are long, long lines of homeless people, and so the merchants would get upset about these people that were blocking access. You see that in the Tenderloin [district of San Francisco], around St. Anthony's, sometimes around Glide [Memorial] Church.

So anyway, we were struggling to try to figure out an answer to this problem of long lines. So I'd been to Disneyland a few times with my children, and if you have ever been to Disneyland, they are the most efficient with lines that I've ever seen. They have these ropes, they have these things, and you move through these long lines in no time, and they're just the best in the world.

So I picked up the phone and called Eisner. What's his first name?

McCRERRY: Michael Eisner?

AGNOS: Michael Eisner. I just called up Disney and said, "I'd like to speak to Michael Eisner. This is the mayor of San Francisco." Well, when you say that, people don't say, "Can I tell him what it's about?" or anything. They just say, "Yes, sir," and they get him, you see? I learned that early in my career, working for Leo [McCarthy] as the chief of staff and all that. And so I always used it. You always call the top.

So I said, "Michael, this is Art Agnos in San Francisco. I've got a problem with lines, and when I come to Disneyland, you guys are the greatest with lines and how you move them." I'll never forget, he said, "Well, you know, that's a proprietary thing." They have a secret methodology for those lines and how they station people and all that stuff, but he said, "I'll send you a couple of my experts up to see if they can help you."

And so he flew up a couple of people to San Francisco to look at the situation and give us some advice. It didn't work, but nevertheless, the example is the point I'm making, which is this man took my call, one of the biggest corporate executives in America, and responded. I understood that technique and used it every time I needed to. But before you do, you've got to make damn sure you've got everything battened down. I would say to my staff, "Are you drop-dead sure? Because we're going to put our credibility on the line."

That's the only power we've really got, is our credibility, and after a while, even if you're powerful, if you do not have credibility people don't pay attention to you the way I wanted them to on these issues. When you're trying to get a dying baby to their house, when you're trying to get a black golfer into a tournament and you're going to the press to embarrass the sponsors of the tournament or whatever, you make darn sure you got your facts drop-dead sure, absolutely certain.

So with Ricky Tellez, we were about to do a first-of-a-kind again. You see this sort of run through all of what I do. We were always on the cutting edge,

and that's why people came to us. They knew we'd do it, and if it was going to be done, we would do it. So without going through the whole thing, because—what I tried to do with my constituents is also tell them, and in my annual report for that year, I did one of those sort of *Dragnet*-style chronologies, if you recall the old TV program, how they'd say, "Okay, it's July twenty-ninth, nine o'clock. We were here doing this. And then July thirtieth at ten p.m., we were here, talking to them. And then on August sixth, we did this."

Well, I did that to try, again, to let people know, first, what's involved when we do it but how serious we are about helping them with issues that seem impossible or intractable. We'll go this far to make it work for you, if it's the right thing to do, if it's something that is right to do, in other words.

So we took this boy, who was told that he could not get a liver transplant because it was experimental surgery and the state would not pay for experimental surgery. Once again, I went to the governor, and the governor said that they didn't want to make an exception because they were trying to develop a policy and they wanted it to be for everybody, not this one person.

McCRERRY: This is Governor Deukmejian?

AGNOS: Yes. And yet we're getting reports from the doctor of the child that he's failing. When a liver isn't working, the child is jaundiced. This boy was greatly swollen, and the stomach was enlarged, and he was dying. And so in my annual report, I talked about how we first had to get the boy on Medi-Cal. Normally it takes thirty to thirty-five days to get a child or to get anyone qualified. We did it in two days, because we walked the papers to the

secretary's office. The secretary said, "You're going to go to that office," and we would stand there while they looked at the papers, checked the right boxes, and then we'd go, "Where do we go next?"

My staff did that, I did that, because, first, the staff had to know and then the Tellezes needed to know that their child was going to get treated like it was my child or the governor's child. That's what I said to him, and he'll tell you that today, Ricky Tellez. He says, "He told me that my child is going to be treated like it was the governor's child. That's when I knew I was going to get everything I could get that was out there for my son."

Long story short, we started this process for this boy, according to my records here, on Friday, July twenty-ninth, when the mayor's office called me to ask me to help this person, and on August fifth, the boy got his new liver. We even had—it's kind of interesting—let me just sort of read this, if I can. This is the last day of the—I'm sorry, the last day was—August fifth, yes.

McCRERRY: And you're reading from your annual report [for 1983].

AGNOS: From my annual report that we sent out to constituents. "Friday, August 5th. Dr. Ward"—who was Ricky Tellez's doctor—"calls in the morning to let me know that a potential donor has been located in Oregon" and that he, just to get to do it, he agreed to do it for free, and so did the hospital. At the same time, the governor's office told me that UC would not be approved because they didn't have the experience. I called the secretary of Health and Welfare and let him know that we had a live donor and that delaying the surgery might be life and death. At four o'clock, the family came to me, and we knew that—you

could see that the boy was so swollen and sick—I'm not reading; I'm summarizing here.

So at five o'clock, after meeting with the Tellezes, I called the health and welfare secretary to let him know how urgently we need the administration's approval of a transplant at Davis, which we had been told earlier in the day was not approved. I urged him to review the policy and rewrite it and include a life-and-death exception, which would allow for an in-state transplant at UC Davis if someone's life is at stake.

That's what we seized on as the way out of the dilemma, which was a life-and-death exception. He did it. He was sympathetic. Fifteen minutes later, at 5:05, he announced an exception to the policy. He had granted the approval. I called the family, and they left their house immediately, from San Francisco, to drive to UC Davis hospital for the surgery that night.

Then, at 5:09 p.m., "The hospital calls and says it can get no verification from Medi-Cal officials. I call the hospital and personally guarantee Medi-Cal funding. I decide to drive to the UC hospital to make certain everything goes smoothly." So I drive to Sacramento.

"At 8:00 p.m., the preparations for surgery begin while the family waits for the special airplane to return from Oregon with the donated liver from another child who had just died. Mr. and Mrs. Tellez and their other two children are waiting in the hospital lobby outside Ricky's room when I get there. The minutes go by slowly as the hand-picked special surgery team arrives at the hospital from numerous places. Some have been out to dinner, others at the

symphony, and some from their homes. But they all shift into gear smoothly. I meet and talk to some of the surgery team for a half hour. They seem confident and up for the ten-hour operation."

McCRERRY: Ten hours.

AGNOS: "Mr. and Mrs. Tellez break into a rare big smile when I tell them that their baby is getting the same treatment that the governor's son would get.

"Saturday, August sixth"—this is the next day—"1:30 a.m. Dr. Ward announces to the Tellez family and me that Ricky is ready and the liver has arrived." I'm sorry, this is in the morning, so we were there at eight o'clock at night Friday night, so this is Saturday morning at one-thirty in the morning. "At 2:30, I leave the hospital to go home to my family, only to find that I was given a parking ticket for an expired parking meter at 11:00 p.m.

"2:45. I quietly slip into my two-year-old's room, watch him sleep for awhile, and then kiss him goodnight with a prayer of thanks."

At 10:00 a.m. I return to the hospital and learn from a relieved Dr. Ward and the happy parents that Ricky's operation is a success. The Tellez family is exhausted. We go out to breakfast and celebrate, and after months of worry, the tension is slow to go away, but a hot breakfast and the good news really helps.

So the boy [lived]. We got the funding. I stood there to make sure that it all was guaranteed, and here was this big-shot politician standing there, telling the hospital officials the money would be there from the state, that I was guaranteeing it. They were going to do it anyway, to their credit, but it

certainly helped to have the guarantee of the $150,000. The family felt better. Subsequently, the legislation and regulations were changed so that all children would be able to get the same kind of operation in California and not have to go through what this family did, as a first of a kind.

So, again, it's another example of doing something that had never been done before, using the power and authority of high political office to make sure that it happened for people who wouldn't have had a chance without it.

McCRERRY: What's the postscript? How did Ricky Tellez do?

AGNOS: He's alive now. I see him. He's twenty years old, I think, and I see him from time to time, and I see his folks. He takes pills, as all transplant patients do. He went to school, graduated from high school. I don't know what work he does, what he's doing, but he's still alive.

McCRERRY: That's a very good example of making a difference, isn't it?

AGNOS: The last one I want to tell you [about] is a community problem, issue. In 1982, the state made a big splash out of building a railroad museum in Sacramento. It's one of the glorious museums in our state around railroads, because the railroad was such an important part in the development of California. There's the great paintings of driving the last spike, as they drove the rails from the east and the west.

You go through this huge museum, twice as big as The Bancroft Library, and you go around and there are these tremendous displays of railroad history in California. But nowhere is depicted the role of the Chinese laborer in the history. It just is missing. I didn't realize it until my Chinese constituents

came to me and said, "You know, we played a major role in the building of the railroads in the West." I said, "Tell me about it." So they talked me through. They showed me the pictures. I was from the East Coast. I didn't know all of this stuff. And clearly they were right.

When I went to the state, they just hadn't thought it was significant enough to include it when they built the museum. Now, they had depictions of the Mexican workers, who were the maintenance people on the railroads, and the African Americans, who were the porters, but they didn't have the Chinese. The Chinese were sort of the silent kind of ethnic group that didn't really advocate for themselves. They do now, but in those days, they weren't quite as confident about who they were and what they were, unfortunately. At least this group wasn't.

So we went to work, and today—in 1984, after two years—there is a wonderful exhibit that was funded by the state, that was added to the railroad museum, after consulting with the Chinese historical society to make sure that they were historically accurate, depicting the Chinese workers blowing up the tunnels, the dynamite, right at the entrance. It was a great day when we opened that because many people brought their children to show them the role that their grandfathers had played, and great-grandfathers had played in the development of this extraordinary state, through the railroad.

So all these constituent problems, issues, and the legislation that we'll talk about maybe the next time, as we get started with that, speak to this theme that I've made throughout my career, that—if there's to be an oral history on Art

Agnos—has to be part of it, which is the notion of empowering people who have not had that experience.

Today I do that when I go abroad as a consultant, pro bono, for the State Department and other groups. I give speeches. In the last couple of years, I went to Angola and also to southeast Turkey, to Kurdish mayors. Most recently I was in Palestine. I'll just tell you that part another time, but basically it's the same thing. Everybody wants to be empowered. Every human being needs to feel empowered in a sense of taking care of their families, having enough to eat, a job, health care, and a place to live. To the extent that government plays a role in that, they need to know that it can be their ally, not their enemy. So I've done that. That message has been the essence of my political career, and I continue to do that, whether I'm in politics or out.

McCRERRY: You've done a good job of explaining why that kind of connection is so important to you, because of your own background and so on.

AGNOS: Absolutely. It started with my own upbringing.

McCRERRY: You must really have the common touch to be able to make that bridge between the powerful and the—

AGNOS: Yes, I'd like to think about that. You know, in politics, I don't have likeability. You know what likeability is? I don't know if it's a real word or not, but everybody knows Bill Clinton had likeability. You see Bill Clinton on TV or you meet him, and you like him. There's an appealing charming quality to him that makes him likeable. Al Gore is not likeable. He's stiff, he's formal, he's somehow wasn't likeable. George [W.] Bush is likeable. You may not like his

policies, but when you meet George Bush—I haven't met him, I met his father. His father was likeable. His father did it more by being unassuming when you met him, even as president of the United States. That's another story sometime.

But Bill Clinton just would walk in any room, and he just sort of made you feel comfortable, and you feel like you've known him all your life. Al Gore walks in, and you want to call him Mr. Vice President all the time. Even though Al Gore is a man of great character, and I think deeply committed to government, I think he didn't win in part because he wasn't likeable.

Now, I won—and so did he earlier in his career—but I'm not likeable when you first meet me. I am whatever it is, imposing when I first—you're looking at me like you don't agree, but when you see me when I'm in my political garb and all that, I'm imposing and sometimes intimidating because I am big. In those days, strong and tall and all that stuff, and when I walked into a room, I sort of didn't have a charming demeanor, because I was often intense about the issue or whatever.

Now, with the people that I was working on behalf [of], all these cases, once they got over that, the first meeting, and realized that, hey, this guy's on my side, they loved it. They loved it. But I've often said that politics is a series of one-night stands, and if you think about it, how often do you see your politician, to get to know them on a personal or intimate basis? You see little blurbs on television, which are usually carefully constructed or carefully managed by PR people. And when they're making an appearance at a

retirement dinner or whatever, which is usually the one-night stand, they're at their best, saying nice things and doing the right thing.

So we really don't see them the way you might see your boss on a daily basis or your spouse on a daily basis or whatever, and so you get that impression based on whatever that person projects. I don't do well with one-night stands. [Laughter] You have got to get to know me to like me, and then I'm likeable once you get to know me. But for the one-night stand, I'm at a disadvantage to the, quote, "likeable" factor, to the person with the likeability factor.

Does this make sense to you?

McCRERRY: I think so. Relate that, though, to your constituents.

AGNOS: Well, with my constituents, I needed to—when I became aware of this—remind them: "Now, I'm really not mad when I'm talking about an issue." I would have to let [them know], "I'm not mad about this. I'm just intense." You could see them sort of, "He's mad," or "He's fierce." I would always have to remind them, and my staff are the ones that used to remind me to relax and not be intense because I needed to make people feel at ease when I walked in to talk about an issue that I was really into and advocating for.

It's a hard thing to talk about. I mean, it's a hard thing to describe. But certainly, at my age now, I'm aware of what it is. I can handle it better now, but when I was thirty-five, I wasn't quite as aware of how to handle it as I am now, and in fact, I didn't care to. I thought I was doing the right thing, so it didn't matter.

But I found in politics that likeability is an important part of your success. People forgave, and still do, Bill Clinton for his sins, if you will. I don't mean in a religious sense, his political sins, because he's got that likeable quality. "Aw, he's a good guy. He didn't mean it." Wait a minute! What do you mean, he didn't mean it? He took a twenty-year-old intern and fooled around with her in the Oval Office. Now, I like Bill Clinton, but I find that unforgivable, unforgivable, because somebody's daughter was entrusted to you in your office and you used the power of a fifty-five-year-old man, as the president of the United States, to overwhelm her, even though she was clearly interested. Did you say, "Time for you to go to your office"?

Because you have a responsibility—and this is where I'd like it—as a public official to keep a standard that may be harder and tougher than anybody else. But if you can't keep it, don't get into this business. Because we are all that the people have to look up to in government. Other countries have their kings and their queens and all these other things that can substitute, but in this country, the political leadership is what this country looks to for a certain kind of inspiration, a certain kind of confidence and stability. When you get into this business, you need to know that that comes with the package. You do lose the right to do some things that others maybe can do, in a social setting.

I didn't mean to moralize here, but it speaks to—I felt this wherever I went. Everywhere I went, I felt that I was on duty as a public official, to make sure that when people looked at me—they may not like my politics, they may not

like my decisions, but they knew that this was someone who was trying to do his best for them, their community, their country, their state, whatever it is.

To this day, I take great satisfaction from people coming up to me and saying, "You know, you were an honorable person," you know? And that's what it's about. So when my kids look at the record or hear from other people, "Your old man was all right. Your old man was honorable." We use that title in front of every politician, but some of them don't earn it.

McCRERRY: That's a good stopping point. Thank you very much.

[End of Session]

[Session 5, January 7, 2003]

[Begin Minidisc 5]

McCREERY: We were just saying we thought we'd start off today by continuing our discussion of some of your legislation in the assembly, and we want to talk a little bit about establishing the first urban park in San Francisco.

AGNOS: If I can sort of preface it by saying that over our sessions, I think I've been trying to—what's the right word?—get at what was the essence of my legislative career. I think there was a paragraph in a *Sacramento Bee* article by someone who's a professor here now, I guess, David Kirp, who I think captured what I was about when he wrote, in an article that we'll be talking about later on with GAIN [Greater Avenues to Independence]. He wrote, quote, "Art Agnos was a social worker before he became a legislator, and he still is in his commitment to a government that cares for those who can't fend for themselves. His fingerprints are all over most of the social programs that have emerged from the legislature in recent years. Agnos led the charge on gun control and the campaign for increased AIDS funding. He's probably best known as a tireless campaigner for gay rights," close quote.

I think that sort of sums up what I was doing throughout my legislative career. The years that we're in now, which are 1984, '85, '86 and '87, are

really the peak of my career because I had learned the legislature; I had developed the relationships; I had learned how to work with members of both sides, both parties, on either side of the aisle. I was sort of hitting my stride. I was at the top of my game. It sort of speaks to the tragedy of term limits because I had been in the legislature now, even with all the head start that I had, from being a legislative aide to chief of staff to the speaker, which was about a five- or six-year head start—when I became a legislator, I still needed to learn the nuances and techniques of being a "member," quote unquote, a member, which is something you can't pick up, no matter how high up you are on the staff power list or chain.

So anyway, by 1984, which was now about six, seven years after I was a legislator, I was at the top of my game. My legislative success sort of reflected that, because I was passing bills that took a while, if you were going to work on tough problems. Good bills that were comprehensive, that required intense studying, lobbying, negotiations, can't be passed sometimes in one legislative session. They take two, four, sometimes even six years before you get it done, because of the changes that have to be made and the studies that are involved in proving the case that you're trying to make in breaking new ground in a problem area facing our state.

It's one of the tragedies of term limits that legislators today simply do not have the time or the capacity with staff resources. For example, the Assembly Office of Research doesn't exist anymore. This was a major resource for the legislature. The kind of top notch expert staff people who want to work in the

legislature on difficult, complex social and economic policy are not there with the kind of salaries that are paid, and benefits. So it's a lot more difficult to do long-term legislative planning for complicated issues than it was in my day, because the motivation is simply not there, beginning with the legislators themselves, particularly in the assembly, where I was, because by the time you get there and learn your way around the place, you have to leave because of term limits.

I think the people suffer a great loss in the quality of their government, and private industry gets the benefit because these legislators often go into lobbying when they are just about hitting the top of their game. The people lose out. It transfers an enormous amount of power to the bureaucracy, which is the only institution with longevity.

Now, the governor always has power because of the tremendous number of appointments that the governor has, and just the constitutional authority vested in the chief executive. But the only real relief from bureaucratic tyranny, from bureaucratic intransigence, from bureaucratic passivity, from bureaucratic—what's the word? What's another word? A lack of information is what I'm looking for, from bureaucratic ignorance, in the true sense of the word "ignorance." The only antidote for all of those problems for an individual or a business person or a community group or a special-interest group that cares about the particular [issue] is the individual legislator who can champion their cause, who can penetrate all of those attitudes that exist in a bureaucracy.

I found that—having worked throughout my career in local government, state government, and federal government—bureaucracies have an institutional kind of attitude that reflects those attributes that I referred to earlier that only a legislator can penetrate. The governor sits at the top of the bureaucratic pyramid, if you will, and often tends to support that and is trapped by department heads or a mayor or a president, whereas the individual legislator or the legislature is not vested in the bureaucracy. Their job, primary job, is oversight. If they don't have the time to learn the enormous amount of knowledge that's involved in a particular area—whether it's health and human services or environment or whatever—the bureaucracy can run circles around individual legislators. With term limits, unfortunately, that's often what happens. You don't see major legislation coming out of the legislature the way it did in my day, and when it does it is often vulnerable to the seduction of lobbyists or the bureaucracy.

The best example we have in modern times is the energy crisis that the state of California faced. The energy reform that passed the legislature was so flawed that it was one of the major factors, if not the major factor, in the energy crisis our state faced over the last couple of years, and we'll be paying for for the next ten to fifteen years, because a legislature that was well informed, well staffed with expert people would not have allowed that to happen. But it did because neither the legislators nor their staffs had a command of the subject matter. They didn't master it the way we did, because they simply don't have

the time and the resources the way we did in the best of times for the legislature, prior to term limits.

So by 1984, '85, '86, which is the time we're going to be talking about [for] some major examples of the legislative work that I did, some of the highlights of those—as I said, it will be child support legislation, gun control, welfare reform, which is probably the best example we'll have to talk about the nuances of the legislative process that really can't be accomplished today, in my view, because of the difficulties I just described.

But some of the others—preserving neighborhood gas stations. Today everybody pulls into sort of a large area with a glass box in the middle. Now they're being expanded so that you walk into the glass box and buy candy and that kind of thing, but you pay through a little drawer, where you shove your credit card or your money, and then you go back and pump your own, as contrasted with the old neighborhood gas stations, where you got service, if you were an older person or a handicapped person, where you got your oil checked and your windshield wiped and all those kinds of things. Well, those were individual businesses that gave people a chance to earn a living and hire other people who could support families.

So I was asked by small businessmen to help preserve their neighborhood gas stations, and it was an economically viable kind of business, but the threat to them was from large corporations—gas and oil—who wanted to control everything from the manufacturing of gasoline at the oil refineries right to the retail end at the gas station. It's no accident we here in the Bay Area, for

example, pay huge prices because we don't have neighborhood gas stations that can compete with one another in the business area. Too many of them are controlled by the oil company that sets the prices.

Some of the other [issues] were in the area of elder abuse, which we've talked about, setting up a California senior fund, where people could check off some of their tax refund to support elderly people, and a legislative program for elder legislators to come and speak to their own issues. Child abuse, AIDS antibody testing were just some of the highlights of bills. Protection for boxers who get hurt. All of them had the same common theme: How do you protect people who can't protect themselves? By empowering them to participate in the decisions that affect them.

McCREERY: Generally speaking, how many of these broad issues came directly from your constituents?

AGNOS: Virtually all of them came from constituents or my talking to people and realizing there was a change needed, or reading the paper about difficulties that were being experienced by people. I would say about half of my legislation came from my own observation of problems. That was the wonderful thing for me, as a legislator, is I could read something in the paper in the morning over coffee, talk to my wife about it, say, "Isn't this terrible?" and then go to the office and do something about it. That's an extraordinary kind of opportunity that few people get, that I really loved about the legislature.

And then about 25 to 35 percent, maybe, came from individual constituents who walked into my office, like Anne Bashkiroff, or it came out of a difficulty

that people came to me and needed help with the bureaucracy. I said we also need to change the law about that, and so while we fixed the problem by jawboning with the bureaucracy, we also would make a policy change so that people who couldn't get to me, who were in another part of the state, would also get the benefit of that kind of change.

Eric Cochran was an example of that. Ricky Tellez was an example of that. Eric Cochran was somebody I read in the paper [about] on July 4th, as I described, in Sacramento, where I was with my child. Ricky Tellez was a constituent of mine that the mayor called me about because she couldn't get anything done with the governor's office and came to me, Mayor Feinstein. But in each case, we changed the law because it wasn't enough to do a heroic thing for an individual person. It was important, obviously, for that individual person—in this case, children—and their families, but it was equally important to make sure that other people who were in the same position or could be in the same position, got access to the same benefits. And so I always made sure that we followed up with legislation or whatever it was to change the policy and didn't just do the heroic thing.

McCREERY: I'm noting that as your legislative career wore on, you continued to stay in very close touch with your own constituents, rather than starting to operate only on a more statewide level. Was that usual, would you say? Was there quite a lot of variation?

AGNOS: It was my commitment because, remember, for me, politics, the legislature was an opportunity to be a powerful social worker, whether it was trying to help the

individual or the group or an institutional group, body that dealt with the needs of people. My job was to empower them, as I keep saying. And so I was not interested in statewide politics. I didn't go to Democratic conventions. I think I said this before, didn't I?

McCREERY: Not to me.

AGNOS: Because I was not interested in the gamesmanship of politics. I tried to learn as much and be as expert as I could in it, in order to be more effective as a social worker. I was a political social worker. We social workers have an inferiority complex. When I used to speak to my colleagues—I hope it's changed now, but when I was going through school and afterwards, in practice, social workers were sort of at the bottom of the human behavioral expert chain. That's right, you're married to a social worker, so you're familiar with some of these. Of course, at the top was the psychiatrist, and then underneath that is the psychologist, and under that came the social worker. Part of it is an image problem because social workers are seen as, quote, "welfare workers," and it was always this blurry line, and so we would add prefixes to our titles. We became psychiatric social workers. We became medical social workers. We became school social workers and all that. When I used to give speeches to social workers—to tell them that we can be as powerful as psychiatrists if we organize and speak to the strengths of our profession—I used to tell them that in order to overcome my professional inferiority complex, I'm a political social worker.

I always saw myself as a political social worker, working in the political setting but doing the work of social work. I used to tease my colleagues, most of whom were lawyers. I'd tell them, "I'm a better social worker than you are a lawyer in politics," because we social workers—basically our skills are to listen and combine our understanding of human behavior with our capacity to develop a relationship with an individual or a group of people in order to empower them to make changes that are troubling them, whether it's a relationship with a child or a spouse or whatever it might be.

Well, that's what I did as a politician. I listened to people carefully, tried to understand what they were doing that was troubling them with government, and then show them how they can change their situation by borrowing my power for a period of time so that they can learn how to do it.

I did it yesterday, for example. Where I live on Potrero Hill, there's a big issue that the Recreation and Park Department of the city is proposing to limit the use of the parks for dogs. And so I go up there—my wife goes up there with the dogs. I sort of walk the dog, but she goes up to the park, and so she said, "You've got to go up there because the people are having difficulty with the Recreation [and Park Department]. They don't know what to do."

Now, these are all people who are sort of yuppies, I guess, professional people, and they were kind of at a loss of what to do about this proposed new rule. So I went up there, and they asked if I would come and talk to them and all that, so I listened to what they had to say, and so I knew instantly what we had to do: we had to go for the power. I said, "First we've got to go to our

supervisor, who represents us." "Well, how do we do that?" "We just go knock on her door." "Will she see us?" "Of course, she'll see us, because she works for us."

I said, "We're going to hand carry a letter." "Why can't we mail it?" "Because if you hand carry it and give it to her, looking her in the eye, saying, 'We brought this because we care about this thing, and we want you to look at it,' it has an emphasis that is unmistakable."

So, long story short, I said, "Here are the elements." "You draft it." "No, I'm not going to do it. You're going to do it, because you need to know how to do this. I know how to do it." So I told them, described the elements. They drafted the letter, I looked at it, made a couple of modifications, but it was a good job. They knew what they were doing. They're smart people and put all the points together, and then they're intimidated by city hall.

So I said, "Okay, I'll drive you down to city hall, and I'll walk with you around the place." So we walked in, and it turned out that the board of supervisors, the legislative body for the city, was closed yesterday because they're going to have their special day on Wednesday, tomorrow, for their inauguration. It's inauguration time right now. So there weren't many people there, and all the offices were closed, so we were a little frustrated. I was surprised. I didn't think of it.

We were looking around. I said, "Well, let's see if we can find somebody." So we go to the supervisor who was our representative, and her door is also closed. Her name is Sophie Maxwell, a decent enough politician. And so

about, oh, I don't know, fifteen yards down the corridor, I see another light on, which is the next door down, but it's so far down, you're not sure. It's clearly not the same office, but knowing my way around, I guess that's probably her private office.

So I go to this door. There's no marking on it. And they're all with me. "What are you going to do?" So I knock on the door real hard, and sure enough, she opens the door, and it's her. Of course, my neighbors' jaws drop. I said, "Hi, Sophie, how are you doing?" She greets me warmly, as a friend. I said, "I've brought three constituents down who want to meet you and talk to you." And so I look at her. [Laughter] And so they immediately go into what we'd practiced, and she was terrific. She was very receptive and said, "Okay, I'll look into it and get right on it," kind of stuff.

So we're walking out, and these people were just full of themselves, because of the success. By the time we got back to our—there's a routine—do you have a dog, by any chance?

McCREERY: No.

AGNOS: Well, there's a whole dog world. You know, you get up early. Before you go to work, you take your dog to the run area, and people socialize, and you know people by their dogs' names. It's "Lucy's dad." It's "Rover's father." I'm "Molly's father," right? And you really don't know the people, except through their dogs. You don't mess around too much with what the people are doing. You talk about the dogs.

So there's a morning time and then there's a night time, because the dogs have to have their night romp. Well, by the time we got to our night romp, the word had come back, by someone else, who had checked with Rec and Park, that they were already showing signs of modifying the meeting time. They were arbitrarily setting a meeting that wasn't convenient to the neighborhood, and we got the word that they were going to change the time, because of the call from the supervisor. So everybody was feeling like we really accomplished something.

But the thing for me was how their successful experience had given them a kind of new confidence. Now, these were people who were all professional folks, by and large, who really don't know government. It was really funny, I said to one of them—he said that he lived on Potrero Hill, in our neighborhood, all his life. I said, "Well, where were you in 1966?" He looks at me and says, "I was born in '67." [Laughter] And I said, "Oh, my God." It just sort of jolts you. He was one of the people I'm coaching. Born in '67!

I find that younger people are not as engaged. Older people know more about doing this kind of stuff. It seems like the younger generation for some reason has somehow been disillusioned with government. A lot of studies—it's not our job today, but maybe Bruce Cain [of UC Berkeley's Institute of Governmental Studies] would know more about that kind of thing. They just don't know what to do, whereas our parents did more of it. Not that they were activists, but they did more of it.

So anyway, the work that I did as a social worker in politics was designed so that when I'm no longer there, they could pick up and move and grow and do what was necessary. That's what power is, when you know how to do it yourself. If you have to go to the politician—which some politicians have a philosophy of trying to foster, create a dependency so that they stay in office. My philosophy was to create independence so that people would know what to do and, if they valued that, then they clearly would vote for me.

But it was part of my professional ideology or philosophy that your job as a social worker is to create a healthy, independent, self-dependent person. In politics, I tried to do the same thing. So you see that throughout my legislative programs, especially when we get to GAIN.

But one of the things I wanted to tell you about, because I think it's important in politics if it's done right, is stunts. Stunts is what I used to call them. Maybe there's a more erudite word for it. But I'll use what I'm talking about in relation to the gun issue. I was a victim, as you know, of a gun shooting in 1973. Did I describe that?

McCREERY: You did, yes.

AGNOS: So the gun control lobby would come to me, and I was obviously very supportive of that. So there were two bills that I tried to pass in the legislature that involved guns. One of them was—and I'm just looking at my papers here; I want to make sure I say this right in terms of what it did. But it was designed to put controls on the sale of handguns, Saturday night specials, between private individuals. If you go into a gun store, where they sell pistols and rifles

and all that, a sporting goods store, they have to wait something like fifteen days while they do a background check on the buyer. They take certain information and run it through the attorney general and that kind of thing, to make sure that the criminal, who is not allowed legally to buy guns or someone who has some other difficulties that is on the record, cannot buy guns.

But if you go to a private individual, there are none of these checks. One of the biggest loopholes was, and still is, in the area of gun shows, and especially in the rural areas. But here, it was always at the Cow Palace in Daly City. But they have them in a lot of places where there are these armories and these places in the rural areas, like San Joaquin Valley, in the show grounds. What do they call them?

McCREERY: The big fairgrounds?

AGNOS: Fairgrounds. Thank you, yes, fairgrounds and those kinds of things. They have large buildings where people come, and it's kind of like a flea market, only the whole place is various kinds of weapons. I mean, you could outfit an army with the ones that I saw.

So one of the stunts—I introduced legislation that would require them to abide by the same regulations and the same requirements as a sporting goods dealer who was selling weapons in the city. Of course, the National Rifle Association [NRA] and all the anti-gun control groups were all over me on that one, and they make a lot of campaign contributions. They had a very powerful lobby in the state legislature. Still do. And so it was very hard to pass that legislation the first time I introduced it.

So I had the idea that I would pull a stunt to prove how easy it was to get a weapon. I went—and the attorney general at that time, in 1985, was John Van de Kamp. I went to him and asked him if he would help me pull this stunt off. Basically what it was that I was going to give money to a convicted felon, and the two of us would go down to a gun show in the San Joaquin fairgrounds in Stockton and try to buy a weapon in one of these gun show flea markets.

I told the attorney general that I didn't want somebody who looked like an IBM salesman but somebody who looked like a criminal. Well, he sure sent me a person who was the toughest looking guy, with earrings and—he was a two-time loser for armed robbery, so he was a serious criminal. But he had served his time. He had spent something like ten or fifteen years in prison. So I gave him $250, and we drove down together. He knew what he was doing. I said, "Do not lie. Answer every question the way you're supposed to." I gave him the money, and the two of us drove down together. We both went in, from different entrances, to buy a handgun. And he bought one faster than I did. They helped him fill out the paperwork, because his writing skills were not that good, and he bought a Saturday night special. I did, too.

Then afterwards, we came out, both of us, with our guns. We had alerted a reporter from the *San Francisco Examiner* at that time, which was a big-time paper, not what it is today. They put us on the front page, with our guns in a criminal-like pose, and told the story of the legislator who went in to buy one. I had no questions asked. I looked more like a middle-class person. But this guy, who was a two-time convicted felon for armed robbery—and they went

through his whole record—bought it faster than I did. It was a big splash in the newspapers, as you can imagine. When I went [back] to the legislature I was able to make this case and move the bill further, but ultimately they got me in the senate. I still never passed the bill.

Another gun bill that I introduced involved the weapons of war, which are these Uzis that can shoot 300 bullets in about fifteen seconds, when it's on automatic. There are so many of these semiautomatic and automatic weapons that are really war weapons that you use in combat, that were just as easy to buy. You can go to the same flea market and buy them over the counter with no questions asked, no background checks, because the background checks are around the handguns. But now we see the proliferation of these weapons of war that are available easier than a handgun and can pump out these bullets.

And we've seen—back in I think it was '84, in San Diego or San Ysidro there was a person who used one of these weapons at a McDonald's and killed twenty people and wounded nineteen, just went crazy with one of these things. He should have never had one. It shouldn't have been as easy to get them. There is no valid reason for anyone to have one except as—for them—some kind of a souvenir. We don't need them, and no one uses them for hunting because they're just too violent a weapon. You wouldn't use a machine gun trying to hunt a deer.

So I proposed that we go through the same background checks and all that, because—this is stunt number two, and a separate bill. The first one was on handguns; this was is on the semiautomatic and automatic machine gun type

things. So I was coming up for the first policy committee in the assembly, and I asked the highway patrol for one of the Uzis they had captured. They had one, so I brought it to the Public Safety Committee as evidence of what I was trying to ban, because if you've ever seen an Uzi, it was one of the scariest weapons. Just lying there in a case, it is a lethal-looking thing.

I took it and described what I was trying to do with the legislation, opened the case and handed the weapon to the members of the committee, who passed it around. It's heavy. It's very, very lethal. It's scary, even in an un-armed kind of status. So I passed the bill. It was the first time anything like this had ever passed. So the NRA was very upset at this small stunt that I had pulled, which was to just simply bring the gun. Usually we're talking in these intellectual terms. People don't see them. Most of the committee had never seen these weapons, even though we read about them in the paper and all that kind of thing.

They were very astute. It shows you the skill that the lobbyists have in many areas, but I'm now talking about the NRA. They went to the next stop in the legislative process in the assembly. First you go to the policy committee, where the idea is discussed, and if it's a good idea then their job is to pass it, vote for it. And if it's going to cost money, then it goes to Ways and Means, which decides, okay, it's a good idea, but can we afford it right now?

My bill was going to cost some money, to oversee the background checks and all the other things that were involved in the sale of this kind of a lethal weapon. They were smart, though, because the chairman of the Ways and

Means Committee at that time was someone who's retiring from the legislature in 2004 as a senator but at that time was in the assembly, and that was John Vasconcellos, who was a peace activist, virulently anti guns, and a wonderful man, a good friend of mine. The "third house"—the lobbyists—study every legislator to see what works, and they knew John hated guns, so they went to Vasconcellos, and they said, "John, you shouldn't allow that kind of a weapon to be in your committee room and passed around, because it's so anti-you, to allow that kind of—" He said, "You're right." He said, "I won't allow it."

So I get the word from the chairman that I am not to bring this weapon, in a case, and pass it around there because it's just the wrong message. I went and asked him. He said, "I'm sorry. I just don't like guns. I don't want them in my committee room." He knew what the NRA was doing, but he said, "They're right. I'm not the type of person who wants a gun in my committee room."

So I'm now saying, "Now, how in the hell am I going to make the same powerful statement as I did with this in the policy committee, by letting everybody handle the gun and see the gun and see how it's so scary and lethal?" It was Christmas time, and I happened to be in Toys R Us, looking for toys for my kids, who were very little at the time. I went by the section where they had water pistols, and they had the most realistic looking Uzi water gun I had ever seen. In fact, later on, in subsequent years, they were banned because a kid got shot in Marin County, walking in with these things, and a nervous shopkeeper shot the kid. So that's how real this thing was. It was an exact replica, except it was made out of plastic and shot water.

So I decided to pull a stunt in Ways and Means, and I asked the highway patrol for the same case that I had used in the policy committee, but I'd take the Uzi water machine gun and fill it with water and put it in the case, and walk in and make my presentation with my witnesses, and then at the right time, as I did in the policy committee, I said, "Mr. Chairman, now I'd like to show you a replica of this kind of weapon."

Immediately the Republican anti-gun control people said, "Mr. Chairman, Mr. Chairman"—because they had been briefed by the NRA—"I object. We don't want those kinds of weapons passed around this committee," and John reluctantly said, "Art, I think we've discussed this." I said, "Mr. Chairman, I do not have a real Uzi with me." I pull out this thing, and I'm holding it. Now, they're up, far away from me, and all they can see is this black, sinister looking replica that looked just like the other one, but it wasn't. It was plastic, and it was a water gun, loaded.

So I said, "I'm sorry, but Mr. Chairman, this is not a real Uzi." "Well, it looks like one to me." And the Republican guys, who were champions for the NRA, said, "That's a real one. I've seen it. I saw it in the policy committee," and all this kind of stuff, and "We can't allow that thing. He shouldn't be allowed to pass it around." I said, "Mr. Chairman, now let me show you how this is really not—" and I take it and I show it [Laughter], and I sprayed the Republican guys, who were raising such objections with this water pistol, which had enormous power, and shot it about ten yards. So everybody's ducking because the water is spraying all over the place [Laughter], and those

Republicans got so ticked off. But everybody was laughing, because it was a water gun, but it looked so real.

Then I passed [the bill] out of there but never got it any further because the NRA got me again. Enormous power. But it was a victory to get it to the floor, because nothing ever got out of committee before. So I used those stunts, one to just increase public awareness with the newspaper article, and the other one just to mess around with them, I guess. [Laughter] Because I knew they were going to do this, and I knew what they'd done, which was play on the chairman's little idiosyncrasies.

McCREERY: Right.

AGNOS: So I sprayed them with the water gun.

McCREERY: Talk a little more about the NRA lobbyists. What kind of direct interaction did you have with them?

AGNOS: I always believed in trying to find out what their objections were, and when it was sensible or realistic I'd try to accommodate so that I could get past it. But with the NRA, it was such a rigid ideological opposition where there was no room for compromise. It was either they beat me or I beat them. And with guns, the NRA was just super powerful because our state has so many rural and suburban legislators, where they can reach their hunters and their gun people, and through fund-raising and campaign contributions. You simply couldn't pass a law, even in the aftermath of enormous tragedies done by weapons, like San Ysidro in I think it was 1984 or '83.

McCREERY: What about on the gun control side of things? Whom did you work with?

AGNOS: Actually, one of the people that I worked with was also a victim of the same series of shootings that I was. I worked with Nelson Shields, the father of a young man who was killed, who left his job and created a national handgun control lobby that still is in place today. But the pro-gun control lobby is not as powerful as the NRA in this country and in this state. Every once in a while we succeed, but overall we have not. It takes a spectacular kind of incident for any intervention to occur legislatively, such as what happened to President Reagan and James Brady. It was the Brady Bill that was probably the major victory in gun control in this country, because of what happened to James Brady and how his wife became a terrific advocate. James Brady used to be in the same ideological camp as the NRA.

But somehow the anti-gun control people intellectualize the difference between what these guns can do and who does it. They always say it's a human being, it's not the weapon. But the pro-handgun control people are determined, they're just not as well organized nationally and, more importantly, not as rich. Frankly, it's a money issue with the NRA being able to not only give campaign contributions but pay for ads, as we saw in Congress, where they pay for ads against legislators who vote for gun control issues. This is an enormous intimidation factor, where legislators say, "I don't want that kind of hassle," and so they'll duck the vote if not vote against it.

So basically the pro-handgun control people or the pro-gun control people are simply not as well organized or as well financed as the anti folks are.

McCREERY: This kind of reminds me, too, of your point earlier, that sometimes issues that you wish to work on take a very long time to actually make progress, if it ever happens.

AGNOS: That's right.

McCREERY: There's this sort of long view involved in being able to approach things different times from different angles.

AGNOS: Yes.

McCREERY: Did your own tactics actually change on this issue, would you say?

AGNOS: No, you just keep—over time, when you know you're going to be there, you learn more about the subject matter so that you become a person who the press goes to for quotes or for reactions or comments on issues. You're in a position to capitalize when something happens to promote this legislation. But when there's a constant turnover, as I was saying earlier, that body of knowledge does not develop, and there's no place for it to reside, while the opponents and the lobby continue to—so it continues to be influential. But there's no counter to that.

McCREERY: As you said, the shorter terms of legislators does change the balance of power.

AGNOS: Sure. Absolutely. Not only with the bureaucracy but with one of the other major forces, which is the third house, the lobby. An enormous shift in power. Enormous shift in power.

McCREERY: Many of the lobbyists have been around for years. They really do know the system.

AGNOS: Oh, yes. Twenty, twenty-five, thirty years. So they know the system, and they know the pressure points, and they're teaching the legislators, which is a remarkable phenomenon compared to when I was there.

McCREERY: Why do you think the public went so strongly for term limits? In California's case, 1990 was the passage of the ballot measure.

AGNOS: I think the proponents of term limits, who hate government, were able to play on an anti-government sentiment among the general electorate in California and get it passed. If you recall, in 1990 we were going through hard times, and one of the little phrases that I use is that hard times create hard attitudes in the electorate. So people were angry and frustrated and unhappy and saw government as a way to voice it, evidence it. They saw politicians often, while they're having hard times, driving around with their cars and various perks of office, and they throttled them and in the process throttled themselves more than the politicians.

In this country, it's easy to play on the troubles of people for a period of time, play on their troubles and turn them against government. It's easy to do that. I don't know why. Well, I think I know why. Government and politicians are probably one of the few—other than Saddam Hussein and those kinds of people—acceptable public targets to vilify. You know, it's no longer legal and socially acceptable to vilify racial minorities, ethnic groups, women, and all the other kinds of targets people who were frustrated and angry had, whether they were—obviously not appropriate, but still you could get away with it.

Today you can't get away with that stuff. There are very heavy-duty sanctions. But it is perfectly acceptable to vilify politicians. It's the only group that I can think of, the only institution I can think of that you can say just about anything you want, anything you want—and the media fosters this as well—without sanction. I mean, what politician has ever sued a private citizen or a private group and been successful? Because there are even laws that say if you're in the public area, you have a much higher standard, legally a more difficult standard to sue for slander or for libel or for any of that kind of thing. So someone could say the same thing they say about me about you, and you could get a successful libel suit, but with me, I couldn't do it. Few people have.

So I think that's all mixed in. I don't know enough about it. I certainly haven't studied it, but that's just my sort of my empirical view of why the term limits was just another expression of the anti-politician, during a time when one could successfully play on the difficulties that people were going through at that time and pass it.

McCREERY: And, of course, you yourself were not a victim of term limits.

AGNOS: No, I left before it passed, in '87.

McCREERY: Yes. But I wonder, how would you answer those who pick up this cry, "We don't want career politicians? They should go back to where they came from and give someone new a chance."

AGNOS: I used to answer it, because we used to have it from time to time. It's interesting, when studies are made, the studies almost invariably say that

people are not angry at, they support their individual legislator. It's the others they want to get rid of. But I used to tell people, "You know, it's ironic." I said, "If you were going to have brain surgery, would you go to a doctor and say, 'I want a doctor who's never done this before, who hasn't got a lot of experience, because I want somebody who's new and fresh.' Or would you say, 'I want someone who's had twenty years of successful brain surgery and who's had a very solid career in this and is the best I can get—who is the best I can get?'"

But when we talk about our government, somehow it is a value to say we want to get somebody who's never done it before. We want to turn out the people who spent twenty years doing this and know their business because we want to bring new, fresh people in. We don't do that with our money; we don't do that with our health; we don't do that with our education; we don't do that with anything in our lives. We're always looking for the most experienced, knowledgeable, talented, expert people, except in government. There is this cuckoo, upside-down syndrome, value, whatever, that says we've got to keep turning them over.

I tell people that, and they sort of smile and say, "You know, you've got a point." But collectively, it's hard to get it to them when you talk individually or to a group. Why would you want someone who doesn't know what they're doing passing your laws, or when you have a problem you go see him and he's looking at you like he doesn't know—or he fakes it, but he doesn't know what he's doing?

McCREERY: Okay. Thank you.

AGNOS: So I told you about my stunts. I used to do that. I used to look for ways to dramatize. That's what the stunts do. They dramatize the issue. There's a line, and you don't want to make a fool of yourself. But that was the stunts, and that was gun control.

State park, the first urban park?

McCREERY: Yes. I know that was much earlier.

AGNOS: That was very early. It was the first bill I introduced in 1977 when I took office, and it finally passed in 1983. It took seven years. So if I were in the assembly under term limits, it never would have happened—it took me seven years—if I only had six. The interesting thing about the urban park at Candlestick Point, which people would recognize as right where the football and baseball stadium for the Giants and the 49ers was, right next to that. You see it now when you watch the football games, you see the park next to the parking lot. That is the first urban park in the state of California. We have wonderful parks in the sort of suburban and certainly the rural or wilderness areas, but we don't have any in a city.

In 1973 or '74, Willie Brown was then the powerful chairman of the assembly Ways and Means Committee, and he was in the middle of a major donnybrook with Governor Reagan over the budget. Reagan's people said to Brown, "What's it going to take to get past this impasse?" Brown had a laundry list, and they said okay. And he said, "There's another thing." He says, "I want a park for black people in Hunters Point." He had never been

there, he told me afterwards, but he was just throwing everything he could think of in the middle of this negotiating.

Obviously, he was an advocate for black people, but it wasn't even his district. But he is an advocate and has been an advocate for black people, so he said, "I want a park for black people in Hunters Point." They said okay. There were some state lands that were, in large part, under water over there, in the low tidelands and stuff, and above water was a place that was a dump, where you dump refuse. But that was made illegal, and so here was this ugly area in the Hunters Point-Bayview area. And so Brown said, "I want a park there."

The Reagan people, in order to get it, to pass the legislative stalemate over the budget, said okay. The funny thing about it was nobody who was in that room that day—this is Willie Brown telling this—had ever seen the place. But he just did it.

So for about three or four years, nothing ever happened. But it was designated as a state park. Well, in 1976, the new governor, Jerry Brown, said he wanted urban parks. My constituents had come to him and said, "We've got this dump over here, and we want something done with it." The timing was perfect. So I introduce a bill that would implement Willie Brown's original idea, and this is what I found out when I went to him. I said, "What do you have in mind?" He said, "I don't know." He says, "We just were doing all the hassling, and I said I want a park for the black people in Hunters Point, and that's how it came." He said, "I don't know what the hell's going on."

So we started a process where we created a neighborhood advisory committee. Again, it's the theme that you've heard me talk so often about. We said, "Now, what do we want for a park?" And these people, who had never had a park or any real—I mean, they had their neighborhood parks, but this was a state park, with horse trails and fishing piers and picnic areas, just like any of the parks—what's the terrific park up in Marin? Samuel P. Taylor State Park, which is the middle of the redwoods area. "And we want these wonderful trees," and all this stuff, on this dump.

That planning process took us the better part of a year and a half. So these people designed where they wanted their boat marina. They wanted little rowboats and the kinds of things that you'll see out there from time to time. They wanted nature trails and all the good things that go with it. So we laid it all out with the park people, and then I put it into legislation, and we proceeded.

It took me seven years to get through that, because of the unwillingness of the bureaucracy, which didn't like the idea of the urban parks. Below the governor and below the appointed department head, the career bureaucrats wanted the usual type, not something in the middle of a black neighborhood.

McCREERY: Are you talking about state agencies?

AGNOS: State agencies. Yes, the state agency. They even said to me, "Well, we'll get killed over there," because they were afraid of a park in the black neighborhood. There's never been a killing there. There's never been, because the people participated in the planning process and it was their park, the way

they wanted it. If you go there today, you'll see horse trails. In fact, Mayor Willie Brown used to go horseback riding over there. He's a horseman, and he used to compliment me on picking up his idea and doing the right thing with it. But there are fishing piers. The trees have never gotten high enough yet because we had to start them so small, because the winds are fierce over there, and so if you put tall trees in, they get knocked over because of the root system, so they had to start them very young, so that the root systems would get firmly established, and then they grow.

That was done in 1984. It's now been almost twenty years, and it's a mature park, and the neighborhood protects it against the 49ers, who keep trying to bring the [stadium] parking lot into the park. But it is a wonderful place, still the only urban park in the state.

McCREERY: Did you mention, when we were talking off the tape on another day, that later on the chamber of commerce tried to use some of the land for parking or something like that?

AGNOS: Yes, the chamber of commerce and the 49ers, because the 49ers have a parking problem out there when they have their capacity crowds. When it rains, as it does sometimes in the late fall and winter, some of the traditional parking lots closer to the stadium are under water, and they can't park cars there. So they kept trying to get the state to revert part of the park, before it was developed in the eighties, into a parking lot. We fought them off because we wanted to keep it the way the original concept was.

Every now and then I go out there, and it just is a wonderful respite in the middle of what, for California and San Francisco, is a ghetto. You will see black and white people as well as campers who go out there, who are traveling through the Bay Area with their campers, who stay inside this park and enjoy it, and there's never been an incident. The advisory body still works with the state Park and Recreation Commission that we started back in 1977.

McCREERY: Why do you like this example so much?

AGNOS: Well, it speaks to a lot of things we talked about, and that is, one, it was a first of a kind. It was a cutting edge, pushing the envelope. Two, we empowered people who really didn't believe that they could do anything like this. In social work, what I was trained to do is that during the therapeutic hour, my ego, my personal needs, in the therapeutic hour, are supposed to be diminished, are supposed to be absent so that the patient can be the sole—I'm struggling, going back thirty years to my training, but what I was taught was that your ego is not what matters. It's the needs and ego of the patient. You are supposed to subjugate that [in yourself]. You are supposed to diminish it so that you can give what you can for that hour to the person and in that process teach them, because you're the therapist, what they need to know to change their behavior with other people who will not diminish their ego or their problems.

So in other words, if they come in and act belligerent or hostile, I'm supposed to show them, with my skills, a better way to handle it. When the person in trouble, in the therapeutic hour, displays their maladaptive behavior, the therapist is supposed to act in a different way than the people in the

patient's normal life outside, so that they can change. First point it out, and then show them how it can be different, but not react [with] anger or whatever it might be, retaliation.

That, for me, was what I did in politics so that when we started working on a program with an individual constituent or with a group of constituents, my ego was put aside so that I could show them how they could be empowered, whereas some politicians, not all, will say, "Okay, I'll take care of it" and, in effect, say, "I'll show you how I can fix things." But that's not really showing people or teaching people, for the long term, how they can take control of their neighborhood, take control of the issues that are important in their lives that government affects, so that they don't need to be dependent on the politician, as I said earlier.

So that's what I got out of this, was seeing a group of people grow and become confident that they could deal with this by borrowing my power, because those bureaucrats were at the table because I said, "You better be there." There's an old expression—I asked them first, and then if they didn't, then I insisted, and if they didn't, then I terrorized them.

McCREERY: One of the Agnos Principles.

AGNOS: Yes, that's right, in the principles. That's the one I borrowed from Phil Burton. You can terrorize them by messing with their budget. There's an expression I used to use. "When you have them by the budget, their hearts and minds will follow." That's what they do. So you can mess with their travel—and it's things that don't hurt the program. You say, well, no travel, no personal

training, no carpets, no new cars, no new furniture, no painting the office, and things like that, which make life comfortable in the bureaucracy, which you can mess with, if you know where to go get it.

That's why this example, and so many of the others, was seeing people come in, frightened sometimes, hopeless sometimes, just a variety of things that said that they really felt like there was nothing they could do about the situation. My job was to show them they could do something about it and then do it with them.

Part of me also rebels against authority when it is not well used. I told you about Josette Mondanaro. She recently died of a brain tumor, a young woman. But it was wrong, what the governor was doing in the late seventies, because she was an outstanding doctor. She was an outstanding person, and because someone found out about her private life, her sexuality, he fired her. It's wrong. As long as I was in a position, I could rebel against that, just raise hell. That's what I was paid to do. A great job. You know, it's a great job, because so many of us have jobs where we can't do that. But you are elected from a strong district, you can do that. It's extraordinary.

What I tell my sons is the Michael Jordan Principle. Michael Jordan was, or is, one of the greatest basketball players in the history of the National Basketball Association. There were probably earlier people who were as good as he was, but he came along during a time when the media and money and all the things made him truly a very powerful person. He was more important than the coaches, the owners, or anything else, because he was just such a

superb player who made so much money for the television networks and his team.

So I tell my sons, "When you're Michael Jordan, you can do anything you want. Nobody fires you, as long as it's within the limits of social conduct and all the other things, but nobody ever fires you." That's the way it was for me. As long as I was doing what my constituents wanted, nobody could fire me, and I could go look the governor in the eye and say, "You're wrong, and you're doing a wrong thing." Who can do that? How many people in society? Can the chancellor or the president of this university go to the governor and say, "You're wrong. You're doing the wrong thing."? Of course not. So it is a very heady kind of position, being an independent legislator, who is elected by people who are the only ones he's responsible to. Does that answer the question at all? Partly?

McCREERY: It does. It's just interesting because, as a legislator, you were operating in a legislative sphere, as opposed to interacting with constituents. You really held a lot of power and really had to master the playing of that game, and you rose up in the ranks in the Democratic Party caucus and that sort of thing. So they are really very distinct worlds, aren't they? Listening to constituents versus taking action?

AGNOS: Yes. In fact, it's interesting you say that. I was telling you earlier about the dog thing yesterday. When I'm at the park, I'm quiet because I'm more interested in exercising my dog, Molly Brown. She's a six-month-old beautiful little chocolate lab. Anyway, I'm quiet, and we talk about the dogs,

and a lot of people don't know what I do until somebody tells them or, if they ask me, I'll respond. I'm not saying I'm shy. I'm not saying I'm overly modest or anything, but I don't talk about it.

So when they saw me—when we walked into city hall, it was a different person they saw, the ones that came with me, because I know who I'm dealing with, and I know the protocols. I know the system. When we got through, I said, "Now, what did you learn? This is your house, just like it's mine. These people work for you. You need to tell them what your needs are. You need to create expectations with them," and all that stuff. I was in my teacher mode—you know, I think a good politician is a teacher for the citizen to get things done, and to also help them do it.

So they saw me differently then, and they remarked on it. "You're different. Your whole body." I was on duty. I had my game face, as they say in sports. I sensed myself doing it, when I started to walk into city hall. You just get ready. One of the ways I used to get my game face on, in another respect, was—I hate to make speeches. Did I say this before?

One of my biggest weaknesses in politics was dealing with all the folderol and the celebrity of politics. Another phenomenon—again, this is my own empirical view of politics—is, we don't have royalty in this country, and so we tend to, in the best of times, royalize politicians and movie stars, and so we politicians get some celebrity. I used to fight against that all the time. People try to elevate you. They try to treat you special—especially when I was mayor, I saw it a lot. People want to carry things for you. They want to open doors for

you. They want to do all these kinds of things. I was always resisting that because, to me, that's not what—a politician is a political social worker, in my view, and social workers are not celebrities.

But the people demand it. People want it. For example, people were so overwhelmed if I came to their funeral, to the funeral of their loved one, even though I didn't know who the person was, but my staff would say I should go to this funeral. It was somebody who died who was a city worker or an important citizen in the community, that I really didn't know. I mean, I'd know who it was, but I didn't know them, but it was expected that I go. I always felt so uncomfortable speaking, especially when I spoke about a deceased person I had never met, didn't know, and someone had told me what some of the specifics were of their life, so I could talk about them. Many times, I didn't have to speak at all. I just showed up and greeted the grieving family and their friends, and they were so moved by it.

McCREERY: How did you get your game face on?

AGNOS: I'm going to tell you. Then, when I had to go into events, other events that were happier, I used to make believe I was Ronald Reagan. [Laughter] Ronald Reagan was the greatest. I mean, if you think about it. That was my key word to myself, before I'd go in. I'd sort of focus for a minute and say okay—

Another example of what I'm talking about was—my staff had a terrible time; they finally got me to do it—was leading the band. Now, I am tone deaf, and they wanted me in front of city hall, to lead the San Francisco municipal band.

I said, "I don't know anything about music. I can't stay out there and wave my—" They said, "Just stand up in front of them and wave your arms." "What do you mean, wave my arms? I don't know anything. I'm a fool." "Wave your arms. It'll be a great publicity shot. You'll be in the papers." This was my publicity person. I said, "That's stupid. That's got nothing to do with me." "It'll get you publicity. You'll be a nice guy, and it's good stuff. Do it."

So they finally strong-armed me into doing it. They said, "The band will play, no matter what you're doing." So I got up there and waved my arms in some stupid fashion, and the band got through "San Francisco" and all these other songs. I stepped down. Well, sure enough, I was on the front page of the paper, leading the band. Now, I could cure cancer and not get on the front page of the paper. But leading the band. So everybody on my staff was smug the next day, and they were giving me a hard time, but I hated that stuff.

I used to make believe, to get through that, before I stepped on stage, I'd say, "Okay, make believe you're Ronald Reagan," because Ronald Reagan did that so well, and he worked at it. He was an actor, and he knew the role, and whether it was on the—what was it, the shores or the cliffs of Normandy, with those great scenes of him on the historic battlefields, or when I used to see him in person in the legislature, this guy played the role of governor, of president, superbly.

One time I was in his office—I was a staffer—and he said, "Excuse me, I've got to do this quick message." It was a public service message. He said, "Watch this. One take." He gets the script, goes through it just like that. Now,

if I'm going to do something like that, I've got to do it three or four times, but he could do lines. He could do a public presentation, as long as he had his lines, enormously, because of his skill as an actor. I admired that about him, and read books about him so I could get better at it. That was my key word, "Make believe you're Ronald Reagan." I would take a deep breath, square my shoulders, stride in like "I am the mayor." "I am Ronald Reagan." It helped me get over my own kind of complex about this. I'm not saying it's good. I'm not saying this is a positive about me to have this temporary role-playing, because I think it's important for people to have that image in the proper dose. By the end of my career, I realized people do get something from the comfort that you provide in the celebrity leader role in government.

For example, during the [Loma Prieta] earthquake, my job was to put the city back together—people gave me rave reviews. If you look at when I was mayor—I'm jumping ahead now, but it's on the point. People gave me rave reviews for the job I did as mayor around the earthquake. I thought that was the easiest time I had, because frankly it was the same thing as [Rudolph W.] Giuliani in New York. What do you do during that kind of timeframe? In my case, the two weeks after the earthquake or, in Giuliani's case, the two or three months after September 11th.

You do two things, bascially two things. One, you comfort people. You go to the funerals, you go to public events where people express their grief, whether it's a church or something, and you say comforting words. Secondly, you have press conferences where you express and describe the condition of

the people and the city and what you are doing about it. And if you do that well—comfort people and give good information to the press—somehow you're dubbed a hero. In Giuliani's case, because of the whole enormity of the thing, he is now an icon—this was a mayor who was unpopular, struggling, and about to leave office as a so-so mayor, with a little controversy with his wife and girlfriends and all that. All of a sudden, all of that is erased because he did what? Comforted people and gave good information at press conferences.

It's now left to his successor to deal with the tough decisions about what's going to replace this, how are we going to deal with putting the city back, how do we keep the city going, and all the difficulties in the post-September 11th era. He didn't have to deal with it, and he gets $100,000 a speech now. They're putting him on as chairman of the board. He's got a consulting company where he makes millions of dollars telling people how to fix something that happened to them, because of what he did.

And I frankly had the same phenomenon, in a much more modest fashion. My popularity zoomed up, and I kept saying, "What the hell did I do? I made much tougher decisions and did better work on things elsewhere." But it's one of those times when the public—and I felt it—you can feel the eyes and ears of the public, even your opponents looking at you and saying, "Okay, you're the person. Tell us what to do. Get us through this."

McCREERY: It's the aura of leadership.

AGNOS: Yes, yes, and I did. I took a deep breath and went out and did it. But it was easy compared to the day-to-day stuff, where people are backbiting and criticizing and challenging and opposing and all that kind of stuff, because in a crisis, everybody needs the leadership and they are prepared to follow if you provide something. That's where I give Giuliani credit, because he was able to step up and provide the right words of comfort, whatever way he did it, and he presented a demeanor that comforted people and made them feel okay.

I have people coming up to me, in my case, in the earthquake. They said, "I was in Paris watching television, worried about my family, who was still in San Francisco, and when I saw you on television, you were so strong, I felt comforted. It was okay. I knew it was going to be okay." I think to myself, "What the hell was I doing? I was just saying, 'And the city is going to be okay. We have these things in place. We're getting this kind of help from the state. We have this that's going to happen. The fires are being put out.'" Somehow, it's how you do it rather than what you're doing, you know?

And that was my Ronald Reagan thing. I learned that it was important. That's the point I'm making. So I learned to be better at that than I wanted to be. I could do it right now. You and I walk out there, and if there's a crowd that I'm supposed to—you'll watch me change, because I'm going into my leadership thing. I would like to see a world where we don't need that, but I haven't figured out what it is or how to do it yet. I think the more educated our population gets, I think the less they need it, but I'm not sure I'm right.

So where are we here?

McCREERY: Well, I really want to talk next time about some of the welfare reforms.

AGNOS: Oh, child support, I want to tell you about, the Agnos Child Support [Standards] Act. It was the only bill I ever—but I want to try to get more, because that was an important bill, and I can tell you more about the ins and outs of that as well. So maybe we'll do child support and GAIN [Greater Avenues to Independence] next week.

[End of Session]

[Session 6, January 21, 2003]

[Begin Minidisc 6]

McCREERY: When we left off earlier this month, we said we wanted to talk a bit today about the various welfare-reform type issues that you worked on in the assembly. I wonder if you want to tell me maybe first how these kinds of issues came into your legislative career. Do you recall?

AGNOS: First of all, from my professional background. I was a social worker, and I'd always worked with people who were on welfare or struggling to get off of welfare, whether they were young or elderly people, and so I was very sensitive to this area prior to ever getting into politics. Then, obviously, getting into politics, it was an expertise that I brought with me to the legislature. Lawyers brought their legal background as an expertise. Former teachers in politics brought their educational expertise. I brought an expertise in social welfare and so I always, in the legislature, gravitated toward health and welfare and civil rights issues.

And so in 1984 and '85, Governor Deukmejian had been pushing, as part of a conservative Republican platform, the idea of workfare. Now, workfare is not new to California politics or to American politics. Governor Reagan championed it as governor and then as president. He also pushed workfare.

His concept of workfare, as well as Governor Deukmejian's, at the beginning of the process I'm describing, was a make-work project. If a person received some kind of assistance from the government, in the form of a welfare check, then they would be obligated to do whatever the government wanted them [to do] to pay off or to earn or to be worthy of that welfare check.

Now, my notion was, and the Democratic progressive notion of welfare was that someone was needy, and we shouldn't attach requirements to it because they were not in that situation through some voluntary choice but because they had no other choices to be employed and to earn a living. Certainly, welfare has never provided enough to support anybody in any kind of grand means or even adequate means.

So the standoff was that Democrats saw workfare as some kind of, quote, "slave labor," as now-Congresswoman, former Senator, Diane Watson called it. Mayor of Berkeley Tom Bates and then-Chairman of the Health and Welfare Committee, Assemblyman Tom Bates called it, "Sing for your supper." They were right, as Governor Deukmejian's concept of workfare was. If you got some kind of assistance, you have got to do whatever the state wanted you to do, whether it was raking leaves or cleaning the streets or that kind of thing.

McCREERY: How well had that gone, though, under the previous administrations? I mean, we had the welfare reform around 1971, under Governor Reagan. How successful had they been?

AGNOS: Well, the Democrats never let them be successful when they put them in because they were always resisting them. But people simply went through the motions when they were forced, but it never really led to jobs. The idea behind the Republican notion was that this would give them work values, help them learn work values. By showing up to do a meaningless, menial job, they would somehow learn the skills that were necessary to be successful in the job market. It didn't work. We didn't think it worked, and nothing in any study had shown that it led to gainful employment. It certainly caused people to work, but it didn't translate into long-term, successful, meaningful employment.

So that was the dilemma in 1984, '85. I had, by 1985, developed a very good working relationship with the secretary of health and welfare under Governor Deukmejian, whose name was David Swoap. He was the former undersecretary of health and welfare [Department of Health and Human Services] under President Reagan, as well, and had left that position with President Reagan to come to California to take a lead position; that is, to be the secretary of health and welfare under Deukmejian. Very conservative, philosophically the opposite of me. He was pro-death penalty, anti-choice, all those kind of things. I was the opposite.

So we didn't have a lot in common in terms of our political values and political principles or interests, but we had developed a personal relationship because, despite his very conservative political views, he was a very decent person in terms of his personality. He was not a fire-breathing, hostile kind of

person, and he had been recommended to me—and here's where we begin some of the politics—by one of my early models in politics.

Former Congressman John Burton called me up, I'm sure at Dave Swoap's request, and said, "This is a guy who, if he gives you his word he's going to do something, you can trust him. Now, you may not agree on a lot of issues, but"—in politics, as I think I've said, the essence of the process is the capacity to give your word and keep it, because in politics you don't exchange money. In the business world, the private sector, someone has a product that someone else wants. They give them money. They take the product, and they have completed a business transaction. If the product is shoddy, well, the seller or maker of that product soon is discovered and goes out of business.

In politics, you don't exchange money. You exchange your word, "a commitment," it's called. And so if you give a commitment, you have to keep it, and the person who does not keep their commitments or their promises is soon discovered to be a fraud and goes out of business in politics, in terms of their credibility and capacity to get anything done. So when someone says this person keeps their word, it is a high compliment, the highest in politics, or one of the highest, anyway. So when John Burton told me, "You can trust this guy. He keeps his word," that meant a lot because I understood, in the parlance of the business.

We also had some successful experiences that we talked about in this program, in these tapes. Eric Cochran, who was the dying boy whose parents wanted him to go to their home, bring him home to die because he had this

fatal disease at—I can't remember what his age was now, but he was the same age as my youngest son, Stephen. The state rule said he had to go to a nursing home or they wouldn't pay for his nursing care. So I went to Swoap, and, if you recall that story or if someone who's reading this can look back at that story, Swoap made an exception to the rules and allowed the boy to go home to die and be nursed by his parents and get respite care in the home. That touched me [to see Swoap] as a person who I could work with. Then he subsequently set up a task force that looked at the rules to say, why can't a child die at home rather than in a nursing, where the parents always have to go?

The second story, a constituent issue which also created a working relationship with us, was when I had gone to him about Ricky Tellez, the young boy who needed a liver transplant but was supposed to go back to Pittsburgh because there were no California institutions authorized under state law—regulations, health regulations—to do liver transplants, which at that time was very experimental. It was my intervention with Secretary Swoap that enabled the University of California at Davis to be—their medical school, actually, that was in Sacramento is one of the premier medical centers there, and they were seeking to do liver transplants.

So I got Swoap to agree to do it because the doctor that Mr. Tellez had been working with for his son was there, and he had a great deal of confidence [in him]. Anyway, long story short, it was a successful liver transplant. The boy now is twenty-one. He would have died had it not been for Secretary Swoap's intervention at the last minute to pay for it with Medi-Cal.

If you want to get to me, don't take me out to dinner or don't give me a lot of campaign funds, just do something for the people that I care about in my constituency. That meant a lot to me. So we had developed a good personal working relationship. I had protected him, as the chairman of Health and Welfare. When other progressive members wanted to—what's the right word?—harass, perhaps, politically harass the conservative Republicans and department heads, they would often mess with their budgets. I never let that happen and so Swoap was appreciative of that, because there were some efforts to do that toward him.

So we had, by early 1985 and middle '84, we had developed a very positive working relationship, even though we had the Grand Canyon between us in terms of political philosophy. So I think it was '84.

McCREERY: The legislation was signed in the fall of '85.

AGNOS: Okay, all right. So it was in the legislative session of 1984. Swoap and Governor Deukmejian had introduced, in the early part of '84, their classic workfare bill, the traditional one where it just said anybody who gets a welfare check will have to do something for the state, at the direction of the state. That was killed by Bates and Watson. They always did it every year, because the Democrats were in control of the legislature—the assembly and the senate.

I remember it was in August. Swoap—I just happened to be walking down the hallway, and he was coming out of, I think it was the senate, a senate committee hearing, and his bill for workfare had just been killed, and he was very frustrated, and he bumped into me, stopped. I said hello, and we

exchanged pleasantries. He was sort of flushed, and he said, "Art, can't we do something about this workfare?"

Because I liked him, I agreed to listen to him, and I said, "Why don't we get together when the session's over and see what we can do?" So we agreed, and after the session ended, in a week or two, he came to see me, and I said, "What do you want to do?" He told me he wanted people to work, and he wanted people to get off of welfare. I said, "Well, so do I." I wrote down on a card, "The concept as we understand it is—" I wrote the basics of what our two positions were, as a starting point. It was in an article here. This article is wonderful, superb in terms of all I'm doing.

McCREERY: You're talking about David Kirp's article for the *Sacramento Bee* on Sunday, October 13th, 1985.

AGNOS: Yes, right.

McCREERY: Here we go. There's no page number. This says, "During an early meeting with Swoap, Agnos summarized the differences on a scribbled three by five card. Democrats believe 'people want to work and will, given the opportunity, choice and training.' While Republicans assume that 'people do not want to work unless intimidated or threatened with sanction or some forced, undesirable alternative.'"

AGNOS: Exactly. I wrote that down, and I gave it to him, and I said, "Dave, that's where we are today. Now, if you want to try to bring those two things together," I said, "why don't we do something that's never been done before?" I said, "Why don't you take me anyplace in the country during this upcoming off

session"—because the legislature had ended; we were going into what they call interim, so there weren't meetings every day. The session was over. So I said, "Why don't you pick anyplace in the country you think your ideas are in place and working, and I'll come and look at it, and we'll see how it's working."

All we had in the legislature for two or three years was a war of words. Republicans would have their words, that we needed to change the laziness and the shiftless kind of thing of the welfare queen, and Reagan had made a big thing out of the welfare Cadillac queen. And, of course, the Democrats were very defensive about that, and we said people deserve the opportunity to make choices. So I said, "You take me anyplace in the country. I'll go with you. Show me what you have in mind. What is it that you're talking about? Because clearly the words are not getting through, so maybe if we see it." And I said, "I'll take you where I think my ideas or our ideas are working."

So he was fascinated with that, and he came back to me and he said, "Let's do it." He picked West Virginia and Pennsylvania, and I picked Massachusetts because Governor Dukakis, Michael Dukakis, at that time had devised a program that, long distance, sounded good and our staff had checked out. It employed a lot of the kinds of things that we were talking about: employment and training choices. So he took his top people, and one of the key folks, who was his deputy, was a man named Carl Williams who was a hard-line Republican but also the same kind of guy as Swoap, who was very decent on a personal level, and we could talk, plain talk. And I took my top people, among

them Julia Lopez, who was my top adviser on a staff level for politics, and several other staff people from the committees. And off we went. It had never really been done that way before.

We went to West Virginia first, and I remember the governor was Arch Moore, who was a very pleasant fellow. We went to see him, and he told us what they were doing and how they were using workfare to train people for employment opportunities by putting them in jobs in the state that they could learn something that would translate. I was now a guest, if you will, of Swoap and the Republican governor of West Virginia, and they were going to show me what worked.

The first place we went to was the state water treatment facilities, and I remember walking around. They were taking us to meet a person who was on workfare, and it turned out to be this woman who was in her early forties, I think, and her name was Velda Jenkins. And Velda was standing there mopping the floor. And so here we had—you can imagine—the governor's representative, the secretary of health and welfare from California, the chairman of the Health and Welfare Committee of the state legislature, these assorted staff people, and this sort of slow-talking, drawling West Virginia lady who's mopping the floor.

She had been described to us as a person who was training to be a water tester by testing the water as it was going through the water treatment plant to determine the various levels of purity. Then, when she finished this workfare assignment as a water tester, she would be trained enough to get a job in this

area. So that was her assignment in workfare, and that's where we were going to see her, in the laboratory. But she wasn't in the laboratory, she was in the corridor, and she was mopping the floor.

And so we said, "Well, Velda, what are you doing here?" And she said, "Mopping the floor. That's my assignment today." And "How long have you been doing this?" "I've been doing this for the last"—I don't know—"nine months" or "ever since I got here." "Well, have you ever done what the program says you're supposed to be doing, testing water?" "No, I've never been in the lab."

Well, the head of the lab was there with us, as part of the entourage, and so everybody looks at the head of the lab, and he was very honest. He says, "I don't have any time to train her, but we're short of help because they cut the budget. We're short of people to do janitorial work, so we've got her as a janitor." So I looked at Swoap, and I said, "David, is this what we want for workfare?" "No, no, no, no. That's not what we've got in mind."

So out of that came the "Velda factor," which was very important because, you see, now we had live examples that were common examples. It wasn't his word against mine. We'd both been there and seen the same thing, and everybody with us, who was going to ultimately try to put pen to paper about a California workfare program, was seeing the same things. What it provided, and subsequently in Pennsylvania and Massachusetts the same thing—it provided us with a number of models of the different points of view, Democrat

and Republican, which were common, which were not disputable, and therefore would help us build on those examples to create legislation.

The lesson that came out of Velda was that the welfare recipient should be protected from being used inappropriately in a workfare program. We went to Pennsylvania. Again, that was another choice—a Republican governor. I can't remember his name. We went to a National Guard workfare site where somebody was raking leaves. Classic, classic welfare-workfare stereotypic job. There, once again, we saw people just doing whatever the government—and there, the adjutant in the National Guard was very up front about it. He said, "They cut my budget. I use these people wherever I don't have personnel." "Well, Dave, is this what your idea is? This guy raking leaves? Is that going to prepare him?" "No, that's not what we had in mind."

But when we talked to that man, I asked him—I said, "Well, how do you feel about this?", as I did Velda and as I did others, and this is where I got my eyes opened because I remember the man raking the leaves—he says, "Well," he said, "it may not be the most important work that I've ever done, but I'll tell you one thing. At least no one can say I'm getting something for nothing."

That was a common theme that I heard from welfare recipients who were in the, quote, "Republican style workfare program." "At least I'm doing something for my money." The insight that I gained from that was that people, no matter how poor they are, want the dignity of doing something for what they're getting. They don't want something for nothing, which was the classic Reagan-style description, that people felt a certain sense of—I don't know

what the right word is—public condemnation or degradation because they were on welfare, the stereotyping, the stigma, because that's what everybody said they were, or too many said they were. And so workfare gave them a sense of dignity. They said, "I'm not getting something for nothing. I'm earning it. I'm doing what they want me to do." Well, that left an impression on me. It didn't mean that I thought that was the right thing to do, but it did stick with me, that people needed to feel they were doing something for what they got.

See, the difference between welfare and social security, for example, is that people don't feel bad about getting social security. Rich people go get their social security, and they don't need it. Somebody who's got an income of half a million dollars a year will go get social security. The most they can get is $17,000 a year, but why do they go get it? "Because I earned it. I paid for that, or I paid part of it." With welfare, that's not the case.

So then we went to Massachusetts, and we saw people who had made choices about the training they got and then the workfare they did. It wasn't called workfare there. So what the trip in the three different locations provided us was an opportunity to get, as I said before, these live examples, with different people and experiences that were commonly observed by both sides, who had such different points of view on the same issue. So, as I said, it gave us an opportunity to discuss it.

It also gave us a chance, especially at the staff level and the others, to get to know one another, to develop personal relationships that got past political

stereotypes, and we could talk about things in various settings, on airplanes, at dinner, at a bar, out for drinks afterwards. We would be discussing what we saw and how it worked, and what we might do differently in California. So by the time we had concluded the trip, we had a very rich array of experiences and material with which to come back to California and sit down and start, in the fall of 1984.

We did, and the staff was tremendous. We brought in other people as we began to lay out the concepts of what we were into. One of the fundamental things I decided was that workfare was an important symbol, the name "workfare" was an important symbol to the Republicans. They had always argued for workfare, the party, the governor, everyone. If I tried to call the program something else, I would lose it.

So I decided to let them have the name. "We'll call it workfare. We'll simply redefine it in California," so it was no longer a make-work, mandatory program, but it would be something else that would involve choices for the people. It would involve training. It would involve child care. It would involve a contract, where people created a contract with the welfare department about what kind of work they wanted to do and what kind of training they were supposed to get and what kind of childcare they were supposed to get. Because one of the things that we knew, that welfare recipients often complained about, was that welfare workers changed, and they were bounced around, and so they have no continuity. They said, "The last guy said I could do this," and "the last woman said I could do that," and so the

contract—we came up with a contract because of the Velda factor, so that if you were going to do something, whatever you were going to do, that the state was going to do for you, the welfare would be written down.

McCREERY: Had this concept of individual contracts been used in any of the other states?

AGNOS: Never, never. And that's really what the welfare reform [was], which was ultimately called GAIN, Greater Avenues to Independence. That was Swoap's creation, and I let him have that, too, so they could lay claim to enough of a piece, because I was getting what I wanted, and I'll tell you about that in a moment. So we kept the name "workfare." We let them call the program what they wanted, because I was getting the bread and butter that I needed to sell it to my caucus. I had a lot of resistance because my caucus had a very strong antipathy to the notion of workfare, because everybody knew what workfare was, and I had to tell them, "It's the same name but a different cat, a different animal."

McCREERY: That was a hard sell.

AGNOS: Very hard sell, because you had to go out to the world, so to speak, and they knew what workfare was, especially welfare recipients and all the rest of them, so there was a natural resistance that was hard to break through. But I knew that without giving the governor workfare so that he could say, "I promised I would have a welfare reform program that involved workfare," it couldn't work, and it cost him—and remember that letter I wrote about—he said, "The Armenian and the Greek went into business together." Well, that's what he was talking about, that the Greek brought the money and the Armenian and

their partnership brought the experience. And he said, "Pretty soon the Armenian had all the money, and the Greek had all the experience." He said, "You just got even for that," because I have gotten all the money in this welfare reform program, with millions and millions of dollars in training, millions and millions of dollars in childcare, with contracts that said if they didn't get their childcare, they didn't have to do anything until it was ready.

Now, this was to get the senate leader, who was also a liberal, David Roberti, and dead-set against it—but I knew he had a pet project he was trying to get passed in legislation, that the governor always vetoed, which was child care and latchkey children. So I folded that into the bill because we needed child care. I believed in child care as well. I didn't want women going to work if they couldn't know what was happening to their children while they were at work. It's just a very common feeling, whether you are rich, poor, middle-class. You worry about your children if you're away from them and they're young. First of all, if they were under I think it was six, [the parent] didn't have to do anything. They were infants. But once they were above that—in terms of working—then they had to have child care.

So this was David's thing, Roberti's, and I put that in, so Roberti was happy, and I had the senate leader. I already had Willie Brown, who was the assembly leader. So now I had to get through the committees, and Bates and Watson were vociferous in their opposition because of the, quote, "concept," even though they grudgingly acknowledged that we had taken care of every problem they had with the old workfare with this new, redefined workfare,

because of the choices that people had, the training opportunities they had, the child care, the contract that guaranteed what they agreed to at the outset. They could take their contract with them wherever they went and say, "This is what you promised," and file a grievance and be relieved of any responsibility if the state didn't live up to its promises.

But it also laid out—the contract laid out what the individual was responsible for, so they had to live up to what they agreed to do, that they would attend classes, that they would work at the workfare. Workfare in its new form, aside from the support services of child care and training and all that—what workfare became in California under GAIN was a college internship program. Now, it didn't involve going to college, although we did allow—because we knew there were a number of middle-class women who were divorce poor, who were a year away from a nursing degree or a year or two away from a college degree in teaching. I said, "Dave, if we have a woman who's a year away from being a teacher, don't you think if we got her her degree, she would be off welfare forever?" And Swoap, to his credit, agreed.

So we built into GAIN up to two years of a college degree, college education, when it was aimed at employment opportunities such as teaching, such as nursing, that kind of thing. They got their welfare checks, they got their child care, and they went to college. Unprecedented. Unprecedented. And it was expensive, because, obviously, we were giving people the support

services to do real work, not just mop the floor in West Virginia or rake the leaves in Pennsylvania, which is what we saw in the old workfare.

So the liberals tried to stop us, using parliamentary procedures, but I had all the aces. I had the leadership in both houses, who simply helped me get through parliamentary maneuvers that were designed to stop us, and then at the last minute, one of the conservative right-wing Republicans, Pat Nolan, tried to do some kind of opposition in the Republican caucus. I went to the governor's people and said, "Tell Nolan we've done it and to stop fooling around." They did, and he pulled back, and it was signed.

But I wanted to make sure this worked, so we did something else that was sort of unusual, although not unprecedented, and that was we set up an oversight committee of the legislature that I chaired, because I had been the drafter, to oversee the implementation of this new legislation that was a first of a kind. This was a new invention. We borrowed on work done by other people, whether it was in Pennsylvania or West Virginia or Massachusetts, and then came up with our own, new social invention. We didn't know if it worked, because it had never been done before. It was about to be tried, and we were going to implement this statewide.

McCREERY: How were the members chosen for the oversight committee, do you remember?

AGNOS: People who had been involved in negotiations, for their expertise, in the senate and the assembly, and some of the opposition.

Then the other thing we did, Swoap and I said, "We want this to work, and if it doesn't work, we don't want to fool around with it because it's a big, expensive, new invention." We agreed to a five-year study by an independent evaluator, Manpower Associates, to do a study, to tell us how it was working and whether it was saving money. Every year, they'd come up with a report that is part of the record. We oversaw the implementation. There was some resistance in the bureaucracy to this new model, but we would smooth them out, and then the reports started coming back. Do you have a question?

McCREERY: I was just wondering, you put so much emphasis on how expensive it was to fund this. Of course, it's one thing to win people over to the concept, but it's another thing to line up that much money. How did you do that? I know you were well positioned, but how did you get so much for the training?

AGNOS: Because we attached the money to the bill and said, "If the money's not there"—and that was the key—"you don't have to do it." So the bill said a woman on welfare would not have to do what this bill required, which was seek work, unless she had child care. It was guaranteed. So if she couldn't get her child care, she didn't have to do anything. Well, if nobody did anything because they didn't have child care, then the program would flop, and that was the governor's problem, because he was running for reelection in the following year, '86—this is '85—and he didn't want a flop on his hands, so he agreed to the money, and to his credit he was true to his word. He funded it.

He knew it was expensive. Swoap and I sold it to him, knowing it was expensive, saying, "Look, if you want a cheap program, then do what you had

before. Try to force people to rake leaves. But if you want someone to really learn a job that keeps them off of welfare permanently, then you're going to have to take care of their kids while they're being trained for it, and you're going to have to pay for the training for that job, and then you've got to support them while they go out there, and then they're ready."

McCREERY: Yes. And as you say, he was seeking reelection. Had he made a promise to do something about this?

AGNOS: That's right. In 1982 and prior to that, in '78, that was his big thing. Now this was the biggest achievement he had in his eight years, so he wanted it, and he was convinced that if he swallowed hard with the money—remember, that's when he wrote me this note. I got the money, and he had the experience. [Laughter]

But he understood what we were doing, and he trusted Swoap, because Swoap was not a spendthrift, for sure. So it went into place, and the reports that came back every year from the following—I think San Bernardino did it best in their county, of all places, because in the Bay Area we had San Francisco and East Bay. Welfare directors didn't want to do it, because they had more liberal constituencies who resisted the stereotypic notion of workfare, which was what we had kept in there as the title. This was a workfare program. So it took us longer in the Bay Area to do it, because the leadership didn't want to do it and the recipients didn't want to do it.

McCREERY: And the counties had to play that role at their local level, is that right, the implementing—?

AGNOS: They had to, yes. And that's where our oversight—we would go and see them, and we did a lot of educating. I went around and had hearings to explain the program. As people learned it, they began to believe in it, and then the results started coming back, which were that the administrators loved seeing. What happened in the field was that welfare workers, social workers, and administrators, when they tried it and saw the resources they had to work with for the first time in their careers, which was the training opportunities, real education, real education, up to two years of college, training opportunities with programs—and what the bill also said was that counties and regions had to do surveys so that they knew what kind of employment opportunities were out there from employers. So that a welfare [recipient] couldn't come in and say, "Well, I think I want to be a brain surgeon." "Well, we don't have any requirements for brain surgeons in the Bay Area. What we have a need for are people who have computer skills or someone who wants to be a cosmetologist, so you could take a cosmetology program or you can take a computer program, or you can take" whatever the employment sector said, "This is where the jobs are in our region."

"We're going to train you, and while you're being trained, we're going to take care of your child, and we're even going to give you travel money if you have to travel. So what's your objection?" And no one really had one. What the welfare workers realized is they finally had the resources to do something with people, to motivate them. The administrators loved it because there was a whole change in morale among welfare departments, because they

could do something other than sanction people, punish people, threaten people. "If they don't do something, they're going to lose their check." Now they had a set of tools, an array of tools to motivate people.

McCREERY: How well did the contracts with the individuals work?

AGNOS: They loved it. They would write them out, and each side would put in what they wanted and what it was, and if there was a grievance, there was an independent arbitrator we set up. If there was a disagreement between the two parties, just as there is in the real world, outside world, there was an independent arbitrator who would decide the county was right in this, or the welfare recipient was right in this contract dispute, so that there would be real confidence on the part of the welfare recipient that they had something that meant something, that would protect them.

McCREERY: Some power, really.

AGNOS: Yes, power. We were empowering—exactly. Thank you. That was the tool, to empower them in this process where they often felt completely overrun by the bureaucracy and all the rules. They now had power.

Well, it was a big success for me, it was a big success for the legislature, it was a big success for the governor, and some people think it helped him in his reelection because he could speak to it. But the real winners were the people themselves. The welfare recipients finally had a legitimate program that was designed to get them off of welfare. And for five years it was wonderful, not because I wrote it or helped write it and was one of the architects but because the independent evaluators came back with report after report saying this was

saving money. Even though it was so expensive at the front end, to pay for all these support services, at the other end the counties were saving money and people were being employed and getting off of welfare and felt good about themselves. The workers and the administrators felt good about themselves because they were working with people in the way they always hoped they would when they started in this field.

McCREERY: Yes. Now, I just wonder if, during that implementation, kind of the first five years and so on, were there any surprises to you in what transpired, anything you hadn't anticipated or that worked a bit differently from what you planned?

AGNOS: Not really, not really. We were surprised that the conservative areas embraced this, like San Bernardino. I thought that San Francisco would jump all over it, but I had to push San Francisco into it. I thought that Alameda and Contra Costa would jump, but they didn't jump all over it. I was surprised that the conservative areas took it and ran with it and showed the more liberal areas of the state how it could work in a way that they said, "You know, I think we'll try this."

McCREERY: I wonder why that was.

AGNOS: Well, because of the ideology. Yes, it was the name workfare, really. It was the anti-workfare bias. And, to be harsh, I think the liberal areas, some of them, just said, "We ought to just give them the check." I never believed that. I don't think anybody should just get the check if they're capable of working. If they were incapacitated in some way or handicapped in some way, but I think, and learned from the joint Democrat-Republican field trip, that people want the

dignity of doing something for what they get, no matter how poor they are. It's up to us as policymakers to give them that opportunity in whatever form it can be for them and their capabilities.

Other states started to look at it, but it was so big and so massive a change, people were intimidated by it. But the federal government took a look at it and started to go into that, and then we ran into some hard times, with deficits and all that, and they didn't pursue it. They didn't pursue it, at the feds, at the feds. Clinton was interested for a while, but he sold out because he was in trouble in his first term, and he went with a harsher kind of welfare reform that people like—oh, who's that black woman in Washington, a great advocate for children? Oh, geez, I'm blocking on her name. But her husband was the deputy to [then-Health and Human Services Secretary Donna] Shalala, and he quit when Clinton pursued his welfare reform.

But it was severely criticized. And they had a choice. They came to the crossroads, and they didn't have the courage because the politics of reelection took over in the Clinton administration, and they went with this welfare reform program that now has been recognized to really be a punitive one that didn't work, when they had a chance to build in something like this that would give the states the support they needed to do what we were doing in California.

McCREERY: It's a bigger risk, though, isn't it?

AGNOS: Oh, much bigger risk. And so the child care money started to dry up and all that, and so the state here was cut back. But, to tell you the truth, I don't know what the final death knell of it was in California, but I have a hunch that the

money dried up for these programs, and they changed the law to conform with the feds' new welfare program of the Clinton administration.

McCREERY: I know there have been other attempts at welfare reform in the meantime, and the discussion continues.

AGNOS: It continues because it is politically useful for politicians, especially more conservative ones but even, on occasion, the more progressive ones, to use poor people as a political stepping stone and talk about welfare reform or that kind of thing, because it's a hot button. What we did in 1985, and if one looks at the political history of this state—prior to 1985, we had had statewide initiatives on welfare reform. Prop 41 back then was when we cut all welfare benefits in half, because it was a hot-button issue. After 1985, for almost fifteen years, until 2000, it was never an issue in this state. You never heard about it in this state, because we had something that was in place, it was working, and removed it from the table as a hot-button issue for politicians to exploit for their campaigns.

McCREERY: Any regrets at all?

AGNOS: No. I take great pride in—all you can do is the best you can do while you're there. What happens after that if you're not there is not your responsibility, it's the responsibility of those who are there.

McCREERY: Right, and of course you left the legislature not too terribly long after that.

AGNOS: Yes, it was three years later, January of '88, that I was installed as the mayor, so I was not there to see it through. Just to divert for a moment, term limits stops everybody from being there long enough to follow through on things, to

make sure that there is the implementation, to make sure that a program that's working is not interfered with by outside forces that sometimes have a different agenda.

McCREERY: Yes, we touched on that last time. What do you think are some of the most tragic instances, in your view, of term limits?

AGNOS: I think, in my view, we never would have had the energy crisis of 2001 had there been a legislature that didn't have term limits, because in 2002 most of the legislature were new, didn't understand the process. The staff that was there when I was there, that had the strength and the capacity to comprehend the issues, had gone because the initiative that created term limits wiped out the staffs of the legislature. This was particularly true in the assembly, with the Office of Research that did the long-term planning, that did the long-term evaluations, the long-term investigations and could say to members, "Well, here's what's happened over the last ten years. Here's what's happened over the last fifty years in this area." And then a legislator could pick up on that and spend six years, seven years, ten years on that subject and still be there.

Today, the max is six years they can be there in the assembly, and what that does is create a mentality in the mind of the legislator when they get there that "I'm leaving here pretty soon." After the first term, they're already planning on, "Where do I go next?" I never thought about that and didn't have to. I could stay there the rest of my life. As I said before, I think, when I talked about this, it said to a variety of interests, from the bureaucracy to the lobbyists, that you're going to have to deal with this person for as long as you

are going to be here, possibly. Now they know, "Hey, we can wait for that difficult legislator to leave."

McCREERY: Is there any good side to term limits?

AGNOS: No, not at all. It's terrible. Did I ever tell you the story about the A Team and the B Team?

McCREERY: No.

AGNOS: It's a wonderful story. It's from my federal days, when I was a presidential appointee to HUD, as the regional administrator for the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development from 1993 to January of 2002. When I first went there—and this has a bearing on what we're talking about; that's why I'm telling you now. When I first walked into the office and had a staff meeting and we were talking, getting to know each other, one of the—and the office was an experienced office. The average person in the HUD headquarters office in San Francisco, for the four states that it administered—California, Arizona, Nevada, and Hawaii—had been there an average of about twenty to twenty-five years because San Francisco is an attractive area. It's a high-cost area, so once people get here they stay here. So I found a very experienced group of people who had seen political appointees, Democrats and Republicans, come and go.

So anyway, I sat down, and they said, "Mr. Agnos, we're very honored to have you. We've never had a former mayor as a regional administrator. You're going to make a big difference here, because you're really part of the A Team." I said, "The A Team? What's the A Team?" "Well, a presidential

appointee, you're a former mayor. You can do things in Washington with your experience and your knowledge and contacts." And they said, "We're the B Team." I said, "Oh, my. We can't have different teams." I said, "We're all on one team." "Oh, no, no, no, you're the A Team, and we're the B Team." I said, "What's the B Team, then?" And the looked at me, and they said, "We B here when you come, and we B here when you go."

I laughed, and they laughed. But you know what? They were absolutely right. They were absolutely right. Because you know what? They're still there, and I've been gone for almost three years. Now they're dealing with the next guy or gal, and the things that I left, that I insisted on doing—they're changed, because the B Team is still there, and they do ultimately what they want.

I remember I was sitting in a staff meeting—and this is a very important thing—I was sitting in a staff meeting, and sometimes they'd forget I was there. I was popular with the staff, because I respected who they were and what they did. Having been a staff person, I understand what that kind of mentality is. It's not a bad one. It's just what their needs are, what their interests are. So one of the people, the head of the housing section in my San Francisco office, said, "Well, now we can finally change that policy," because the person who was in Washington in the civil service, like them—this is all civil service, federal civil service—finally retired, "and we've been waiting seven years." And I said, "Seven years you've been waiting to change this, and you thought it should have been changed for the good of the programs?"

"Oh, yeah." "Why did you wait that long? Why didn't you just come to me? Because that's my job, and I would go to the secretary of HUD or the president's office and see if we couldn't get this changed."

There was silence, because they didn't want to tell me, but I pushed, and what finally came out was that I was the A Team and they were the B Team, and the B Team that is going to be there when I go would retaliate from Washington. So this guy—if they went around the guy in Washington who had to retire before they did anything—if he hadn't retired and I changed it, he'd make sure that something happened to them within the civil service system after I left.

So those two examples are to tell you that that's why I see term limits as such a dangerous thing, because for the individual citizen or the group or the business, the person who can intervene on their behalf with an uncaring or intransigent or blockading bureaucracy is the politician, but if the bureaucracy knows that that politician is termed out, they will wait six years until he or she is gone and can't touch them anymore. But if they know that they're going to be there for as long as they are, possibly, then they have a different attitude. I've seen that so many different times. So I just think that term limits was something that cut off the nose to spite the face of every voter in this state.

McCREERY: Do you see it as a loss of power for the legislature as a whole?

AGNOS: Absolutely.

McCREERY: As a body as well as for individuals?

AGNOS: Absolutely. Today Sacramento is dominated by the governor and the lobbyists and the bureaucracy, not the legislature.

McCREERY: And, of course, the change of speaker is much more frequent, for example.

AGNOS: They come and go like—just insignificant. The senate has some influence, but the legislature has been deeply damaged by this, and the process. I could not have done the things that I talk about in a term-limited legislature. Another example of that is the child support bill that I want to tell you about, which was one of the major things.

McCREERY: Yes. That goes back in time, but let's be sure to cover that.

AGNOS: Okay. That goes back to the same time, in the mid-eighties, when I was hitting my stride and peak, because I had maximized the positions of power with my experience and relationships so that I could get the most out of an issue. One of the things that I saw when I became chairman of the Health and Welfare Subcommittee in Ways and Means was that in the early eighties, '81, '82, there was a growing number of divorce-poor women showing up on our welfare rolls. These were women who lived in the Walnut Creeks of our state who had been divorced and were left with a small amount of child support by unsympathetic judges. The judges were sympathetic to the father or the husband leaving the home and having to go out and find an apartment, leave their kids, leave their family, et cetera—would often favor them with low child support requirements. We were seeing that mothers were having to go on welfare to take care of their kids when their husbands were making a lot of money, but the wives weren't getting any money for child support. Not

alimony, child support. So the children were being left with so little support from their fathers, as a result of the divorce, that the mother was having to go on welfare to take care of their children and medical care.

Again, we'd hear testimony in the staff of the committees, and the Office of Research started to see these trends, and under term limits, we don't have the staff there that looks at these trends and comes up with ideas. In fact, the person who spotted this, Sue North, who was my chief consultant, is now a lobbyist, and became a lobbyist because they knocked out the jobs. But she said, "You know, Art," she said, "we're seeing a lot of divorce-poor women." She described the thing. So we started to look into it. We focused on it, and sure enough, it was a decided trend.

So we thought we'd put together a bill that would require judges to give more for child support, and it opened a Pandora's box of opposition. Is that a right metaphor? The opposition started to come down on me, from the fathers, who were angry at the mothers and "didn't want her to get all that money so she could go off with her boyfriend," quote unquote, or spend it. "No, this is for your children." "Well, she ain't going to give it to the kids." So there was still the residual of anger over the divorce.

The first year I introduced this bill, I got killed because these fathers came in and raised hell. Who was up there? Legislators, many of whom were divorced themselves, and they didn't want to—I can't remember what the first bill's specifics were, but we increased arbitrarily the amounts of child support for children to what we thought it ought to be, so we set a standard.

Then the second major opposition that came in were the second wives, the wives who married these guys, who said, "Well, wait a minute. I have children with this man now, and why should my children suffer so he can give more money to his first set of kids?" Well, because he should have thought about this before he started having the next set of kids, that he had the first set of kids to take care of. Well, the women went nuts over that one. The second wives went nuts over that.

Then the third body that came in was the judges, who didn't like a legislator telling them what to do. This was the Judicial Council. I said, "But your judges, many of whom are divorced men themselves, are showing—and here's the statistics. They're making awards that are below what we pay in the state for women whose husbands made a lot of money. I mean, fifty, sixty, seventy, eighty, ninety thousand dollars a year." But the judges thought that this was interfering with judicial discretion.

So I had three major bodies opposing me: fathers, second wives, and judges, and all I had going for me were women on welfare who were formerly middle-class, now divorce-poor women. Frankly, nobody brought me this bill. This bill was a trend that we saw with my staff. My great staff said, "We spotted this trend." So we were looking at the materials and the breakdowns, and so we had the idea to do it ourselves. It was sort of a homegrown thing. It wasn't brought in by an advocacy group. So we had to go out and develop a constituency to support us. But it wasn't a well-organized, certainly [not a] well-funded constituency compared to the three that—so I got killed the first

year I introduced this bill. It didn't even get out of committee, the first committee.

McCREERY: Did you have colleagues who joined you?

AGNOS: A few who intellectually understood, but everybody just sort of stayed out of the way, because there was a lot of flak, a lot of political flak and no real support stuff there. This was not supported by the environmental groups, the civil rights groups. A couple of women's groups started to come around.

McCREERY: But as you say, it had to be a made-up constituency.

AGNOS: Yes, we had to hustle them up. So the first year, I got killed. I mean, killed. And so if that was in term limits, I'd say, "Wow, I'm about to get out of here. I can't do much about it." But since I had an unlimited term, we came back and we looked at it, and we introduced a more moderate form, if I remember correctly. Again I got killed. So we're studying the problem, and finally—I think it was me. I said, you know, if we say that a middle-class father should support their children the same way the state does if they're on welfare, that's the minimum, and set that as a platform, how can anybody object? How can a father or a second wife or a judge say, "I don't want this guy, who is making $50,000 a year or $60,000 a year'"—in 1985—"to pay less than what the state pays to poor kids on welfare." I thought that was kind of a brilliant political—[Laughter]—a political strategy.

It turned out to be exactly that, because what could the opposition say? "We don't want to pay this minimum." So in effect, it was like the minimum wage for child support, and that's what it became called. I was so proud of

this. In fact, I am sure that I thought of it now, because I allowed something to happen that I never did in my career before or after, have the bill tombstoned, which means they name it after you. So this became the Agnos Minimum Child Support Standards Act. I was very proud of that, because it said that any time there was a divorce, children would get at least what the state paid to poor kids, and these were middle-class kids.

Now, that had the effect of increasing those minimums, because judges now had to look at what the table said. We also put in suggested guidelines above that, and it saved the state something like $90 million a year back then, because we were no longer paying for these formerly middle-class kids whose fathers had the money but simply didn't have to [pay] under their divorce settlement. It made a big difference. It's still in place. It created a whole new thing that's still in place. This bill was copied by other states. It was the first of a kind in this country. It was a new invention, and it was a very simple idea that I won't repeat but I've said, which was children of middle-class parents who choose to divorce should not have to suffer with anything less than what the state gives to poor kids.

So with that as the floor, judges began to build up child support rather than go down, because they couldn't go below the minimum. It led to the creation of a formula that was put into a computer, a small, hand-held computer, by an enterprising man somewhere in Sausalito, which he called the "Agnosizer." You would plug in how much you made and how many kids you had and punch in the numbers, and it would tell you what your child support was.

If you talk to any lawyer who does family law today in 2003, they will tell you that the Agnos Act or the Agnosizer, which was the first thing—now they've got new manifestations or what do you call them?—new generations of that computer, but they still plug in the number, and so if you, God forbid, go get divorced and you have a couple of kids, this will not be a contentious issue. The lawyers are going to say, "Okay, you make this, he makes that," they punch in the numbers, out comes "this is what your children are going to get." Now, you'll argue over who gets the couch, but you're not going to argue over how much the kids should get, and that's the way it ought to be.

McCREERY: It seems to take all the emotion out of it.

AGNOS: It did. That's exactly right.

McCREERY: It neutralizes it.

AGNOS: Absolutely, exactly right. All the emotion is gone about that, and family lawyers will tell you it's so much easier to do a divorce because they're not arguing about this. They argue about other things, but it will not be what the children get.

McCREERY: As you say, it's still in place and it fared well enough after you moved on?

AGNOS: Yes. In fact, I remember Gary Hart was a good buddy of mine, Senator Gary Hart of Santa Barbara, California—there were two Gary Harts.

McCREERY: The one who didn't run for president.

AGNOS: Who's going to run [again] this year, maybe! Did you see that?

McCREERY: I heard that.

AGNOS: Amazing. [Laughter] Amazing.

McCREERY: A blast from the past.

AGNOS: Yes. But Gary Hart was a wonderful [state] senator and a good buddy of mine while we were in the legislature together. He was more interested in education because he was a teacher, and he became the secretary of education for Governor [Gray] Davis and left after a year. He never said why, but I would bet my pension that he didn't like the governor's micromanagement of this, because Hart was a real innovator in education and a progressive. I don't think he expected what he got from the governor.

But anyway, as I was leaving the legislature in 1988, Gary said he wanted to pick up this subject because it had now become a serious, well-known topic of discussion. He wanted to improve on it. A woman professor at Stanford had done a study that showed that kids of parents who were divorced in California suffered because of this non-child support and weak child support. So anyway, he wanted to pick it up and improve on what I had done, because all I did was get my foot in the door with this political strategy that I thought of after I got my head kicked in two times, arguing over amounts, how much should it be, and it should be this and that. Well, no one could argue about setting it the same as the state.

So he wanted to pick up on that, and I encouraged him but warned him. I said, "You're going to walk into a hornet's nest that you've never seen before, with these three constituencies, the judges, the second wives, and the former fathers.". He didn't know, but he called me up after I'd left and I was in the mayor's office. "Oh, my God!" he said, "how did I get into this? You should

have told me." I said, "Remember, I did." He said, "I know, but you should have told me even more." Because it was a real firefight. But like any new idea it took hold because it was right. It made sense, it was good for the kids, it was good for the families to take that emotion out, and it was good for the state, the best of all worlds.

McCREERY: Yes, the money savings.

AGNOS: The money saved, and it was money that shouldn't have been spent on these kids because the families had the wherewithal to do it. It wasn't like we were taking away from them. When a father went to another marriage, he had to be aware that he had some obligations here. So I was very proud of that one, and these two bills, along with the Alzheimer's bill that we talked about in the past, remain highlights of my legislative program in terms of making a difference with people who formerly had no power.

McCREERY: Yes. I'm interested in your comments about being kind of at the height of your legislative powers by then. As you say, such things as selling this word "workfare" to a group of people that couldn't stand to hear that word—I mean, you were kind of crossing lines, it seems to me, at the time.

AGNOS: I was, absolutely.

McCREERY: And that's something, as you say, that you have to learn how to do over a period of time, and then be in a position to actually carry it out.

AGNOS: And have credibility. I talked to you earlier about what the transaction is in the legislature. It is the exchange of commitments. That's how we do business. The other thing is, your wealth—to use the metaphor from the private sector—

is your credibility, not how much money you've got in the bank. If you're a company and you've got enormous resources, a lot of money and you're a cash-rich business, you're seen as very powerful because you've got a lot of money to do stuff. You're making money, and you've got a lot of money.

Well, in politics, no one cares how much money you got as a legislator. What they care about is can I trust this person? Will this person keep their word? When they speak, do they say something that is important for the issue? In other words, credibility.

And so by 1984, '85, the combination of my experience in the legislature, building on what I had known as a staff person, developing personal relationships with members of the opposition party and the governor's office, and being—and this is important also—being in a powerful committee chairmanship all came together, and I was able to do these kinds of things and then, when they were done, go out and speak to constituents that were distrustful of workfare. "Agnos wouldn't do this." That's what they said. You know, "This can't be bad, even though workfare has always been bad." It would have been a lot easier to sell it if we had changed the name, but then I wouldn't have been successful politically with the governor, who needed that for his own political interests.

McCREERY: So instead, you had to sell it on your reputation.

AGNOS: That's right, and so I would go to—"What have I ever done to hurt a welfare recipient? What have I ever done that was dishonest in this subject?" And people had to say. "Then listen to what I'm saying." So the welfare advocates,

the welfare recipients—and we got it done. That's why I wanted that implementation committee, so I could have the resources and the opportunity to go out and sell what I knew had to be sold in terms of this new program.

McCREERY: What else is there to say about chairing the Health and Welfare Subcommittee and how you approached that role in your liaison with the chair of Ways and Means? Did you ever have any trouble doing what you wanted?

AGNOS: You know, I had to negotiate, but John Vasconcellos was the chairman of the committee. I was the chairman of the subcommittee. But these committees were so big and the subject area so big, so much money—I had $16 billion back then. Today it's probably twice that. But that was a huge chunk. The chairman really didn't have the time to deal with all these issues after we finished six or seven months of processing the budget. The old expression in the legislature was, "When you have them by the budget, their hearts and minds will follow." And so, with these ideas that took the form of legislation, when you had the budgets of these bureaucratic agencies, they paid attention. So that combination of being in the right place, the experience and the relationships and the credibility all came together, and I was hitting on all cylinders in those middle-eighty years.

McCREERY: Okay. Let's talk a little bit more, if we could, about—

AGNOS: I did some stunts that I want to tell you about, just for fun. It's important in politics to laugh and the legislature to have fun, and so I would always use the stunts that I described in our last session, with the water pistol, to make a point

but also sometimes to lighten the atmosphere. One of the things I did with Governor Deukmejian was to remind him where he came from.

It's like what's going on right now with the Super Bowl. You know, each team is trying to figure out what the other team's strengths and weaknesses are and how they can approach this game to be successful. You know, John Gruden is the former coach. Last year he coached the team he's playing against this year, and he knows the quarterback. He was an important ingredient to his success, because before that, he had been a mediocre player, and suddenly he blossomed under the coach he now has to beat. Well, they're sitting there, trying to figure all this out.

I would do that, and any good legislator has to look at who they have to convince to agree with them, and figure out what works with them. I would watch Deukmejian, and I saw Governor Deukmejian as a very decent man but tightly wrapped. He was a Republican. He was very sober and always serious, always serious. His wife was kind of impish. Gloria Deukmejian is funny, Armenian, ethnic. I know Armenians. They're kind of like first cousins to Greek Americans, the Armenians.

So I one time decided to pull a stunt. I told the governor's office that I was coming down. I got Lou Papan, who is Greek American, and Senator Nick Petris, who was also of Greek descent and one of the giants of the senate, one of my early heroes. The three of us were going to go down and have an ethnic picnic in the governor's office. So I gathered all of this ethnic food that I knew that Greeks and Armenians shared, like dolmas—you know, those little things

of meat wrapped with grape leaves and stuff like that, and the black olives and the feta cheese, brown bread, and a bottle of wine, and a couple of other things I can't remember. But anyway, wrapped it all up in—oh, baklava, stuff like that—wrapped it up and then put it in a big picnic basket with a checkered tablecloth. I put it under my arm, and the three of us go down for our appointment with the governor.

So I'm walking past—so here I am, carrying a big picnic basket into this very formal governor's office, the drapes and everybody's in their suits, and the women are all dressed—you know, no casual Fridays in Governor Deukmejian's office. All staff tries to prepare their bosses for surprises, but all the governor knew was these three important legislators were coming down to see him. "What's this about?" "What have you got there?" "What are you going to do with that?" And I wouldn't say a word.

So finally we went into the governor's office. We sit down, and we were in this little—you know, there was one of those kind of cocktail tables, whatever you call them, surrounded by the easy chairs and the sofas, and I plunk my basket down, and he looks. He says, "What have you got there, Art?" I said, "You're going to see." So I take the checkered tablecloth off and start opening a bottle of wine and started opening the olives and the dolmas and the feta cheese and put the plates out. I had told my two Greek colleagues what I was doing, but I didn't tell Deukmejian.

So Deukmejian's looking. He said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "I'll tell you what I'm doing here. You know what this is." He says, "Yeah!"

He's looking at it, and so he takes an olive and he tries it, and he takes some other stuff, and I got it all laid out, and we're all sitting there, sort of nibbling at this, and I said, "Governor," I said, "all three of us are Greek American, and you're Armenian American." I said, "I know your parents came to this country just like our three parents came to this country." Nick was the chairman of an important committee. Papan was the chairman of an important committee. I was the chairman of an important committee. He was the governor. I said, "You know what?" I said, "I just thought that it was time that we sit down, and here we are, telling the whole state of California, we sons of immigrants, whose families came over on a boat, and here we are, the first generation, and we're running the state! I thought we ought to sit in your office and celebrate that."

The guys started laughing, and he starts smiling. He says, "You know, you're right." He says, "Okay." And he reaches in, and he pulled out some Armenian stuff he had and pretty soon we're sitting there, drinking wine and eating this ethnic food, and everybody's outside saying, "What the hell are they doing in there?" We were joking around and laughing, and we just had a very pleasant hour or so eating this ethnic soul food, with no business except just to kind of acknowledge who we were, where we'd been, where our families came from, and where we were today.

But what I also was doing was, frankly, reminding him of who we were, not that he needed it, but I always had—this is my prejudice, I acknowledge—that the Republican ethnic guys always have to be much more careful because

they're in a more Anglo-Saxon world than the Democrats, which celebrate ethnicity and diversity. I don't think you can be quite as expressive. That's just my own bias, and I acknowledge it and take responsibility for it. So I was reminding Deukmejian of who we were, where we came from, and what the world was like.

Another time—I don't know if I had a point in this second one, but people love hearing this story, so maybe someone will read it. I was invited, with other legislative leaders, to a dinner party at the governor's house. This was always—certainly nothing like a White House state dinner, but you're going to the governor's mansion. You're going to have dinner. So we were there with the Republican leaders and Democratic leaders, and we're sitting around, and this was before I did the ethnic little picnic. We were sitting around at a table somewhere near the kitchen, and we had the Republican leader and the Democratic leader, me as the chairman of Health and Welfare, the governor of the state. There were about six of us.

We were sitting around, and it was so stilted, the conversation. I remember we were talking about the lawn chairs outside that we could see through the glass French doors. I'm thinking to myself, "How long are we going to sit here and talk about the lawn chairs?" Then we started dinner, and he starts telling us the china was from Governor So-and-so's day seventy years ago.

McCREERY: This is Governor Deukmejian?

AGNOS: Yes. And he's making table conversation. We're a bunch of politicians—

McCREERY: Talking about china.

AGNOS: —and we're talking about the china. And it's okay for a limited [time], but it went on and on. He's telling us about the salt and pepper shakers came from Governor So-and-so, and certain ornate stuff, and then the flatware. You know, the silver was from another governor and all. I'm so bored, I decided to see how long it would take before anybody saw me stealing the silverware. [laughs] So I started to—right in front of everybody, right at the table—steal the silver by taking it and sliding it up my sleeve of my suit jacket, and then I would drop my arm down to my side and stick it in my socks.

And so I'm taking knives, and everybody was either so bored or something, but I had about a dozen and a half knives, forks, and spoons by the end of the dinner. Now I had all this stuff, and then I'd excuse myself, go to the bathroom, and take it out and put it inside my jacket or in my pockets. So we get through dinner and dessert and we're leaving, and everybody's lined up in a formal line, and Governor Deukmejian and Mrs. Deukmejian are at the door saying goodbye.

So, of course, everybody's [saying], "Thank you very much for having me. It was such a pleasant evening." Of course, [the governor and his wife] would respond, "Thank you so much for coming. We truly enjoyed having you." And so everybody would go through, "Thank you very much for a pleasant evening." "We enjoyed having you. We'll have you again." "Thank you again," blah, blah, blah, and there was all this stuff.

So my turn comes, and I'm loaded down [Laughter] with the silver, right? And I said, "You know, Governor, this is the first time I've ever been to a

governor's house for dinner." I have just broken the pattern, and everybody stops, and they're all sort of looking. "I just want to make sure I get invited again, because I had a very, very pleasant evening. But I have to do something before I leave." This is not the normal give and take, right? And they're both looking at me.

So I start reaching into my pockets, and I said, "I want to give these back so that I can be invited again." I started laying out knives and forks and spoons in his hand. As I said, I had a good, solid dozen and a half of these things in both hands. All of a sudden, Mrs. Deukmejian, who was quick, said, "Oh, my God, George, he's stealing the silver." [Laughter] She starts to frisk me, [Laughter] and she reaches into my jacket pocket and pulls out a couple more [spoons]. "Look at this, George, he's got the soup spoons!" And she puts those out there. Everybody is laughing. We crack up. He gave it to somebody, and we shook hands, and I left, right?

Then about three weeks later a friend of mine, who was a kitchen designer/ remodeler, was redesigning or doing some work in their house around the kitchen and was there as part of his duties. He was a contractor. "You know," he says, "there were about two or three state police," who guarded the governor, "counting the silverware." And he said [to them], "What are you guys doing?" They said, "There was some guy who tried to steal the silverware here a few weeks ago. We're just counting it all to make sure that nothing's ever missing again."

He didn't know who the guy was until we were out a couple of weeks later, and I was telling him this story, and he says, "You know, I was at his house, and I saw the state police counting the silverware," and they were on to make sure they catalogued it from that point on so no one could ever do what I had done.

I would use those kinds of stunts in my career from time to time, just to lighten things up, frankly, when I was bored but also just to—sometimes we politicians take ourselves a little too seriously, and I've always resisted that kind of atmosphere. I saw a lot of it when I was mayor and always fought it then. So I used humor that way sometimes, to make that point to the people. So I thought it would be a kick just to put that on the record, perhaps.

McCREERY: Thank you very much. The sense of humor varies so much in individuals. Sometimes they really appreciate it, and sometimes it's lost on them.

AGNOS: He was okay. He could laugh. Governor Deukmejian, once you penetrated the tight wrapping, he'd laugh, but you had to work at it, and I wanted to work at it, because it was all part of developing the total package of a relationship, to use everything that is there to be as effective—because, as I've said before, when you're representing the kind of district, the poor people that I represented, or the disempowered people—they didn't have to be poor—when you're taking unpopular issues, whether it's fighting for AIDS or all these things, and nobody's on your side, you have to use every tool, every edge, every opportunity you can to succeed for the people that you're working for.

McCREERY: Did you find that you were able to draw on that improved relationship, closer relationship?

AGNOS: Oh, absolutely, time and time again. Yes, time and time again. I guess the operating principle out of all this, it summarizes that a personal relationship can overcome a lot of political chemistry, but it has to be an honest one. It cannot be disingenuous in any form, because you're quickly found out, and then you're really in trouble. So I never did anything that was not honest, if you know what I mean. I liked Deukmejian, even though we were politically opposites. I liked Swoap. And so I could do these things. If I didn't like them, I would not do that. I would not try to improve the personal side instead of the political side, because there was nowhere to go there.

McCREERY: It's a good lesson, though, about crossing over into what normally wouldn't be your own territory, and how you can accomplish things.

AGNOS: Right. Okay? That's it for today, I think. I want to try to find just a couple of more things in the legislature that I want to emphasize—because, as I said, I want to be remembered as someone who tried to empower people who had none. I think I made that point time and time again, but in different examples. And this lady—I'm trying to think of her name—and I had started to develop that kind of reputation, still have it. So people would seek me out, even though it wasn't my district, because they knew that if I took it up, they had the best. There was nowhere else they needed to go.

McCREERY: "Getting things done," which, of course, was the phrase you used when you ran for mayor.

AGNOS: Right, I got things done, and I got things done for people who often had no hope, and that, to me, is the thrill of politics. That was the thrill of public office. That's the psychic reward for me. I didn't get any psychic reward out of all the celebrity part. I remember the first time I went, as mayor, to the San Francisco Airport, which is run by, controlled by, the mayor's office. It's unusual because mayors don't run those things, but in San Francisco the mayor is a very strong mayor and runs things, in both the city and county.

Anyway, without getting too deep—there were ten people waiting at the curbside when the car pulled up for me to go on a trip to Washington. I remember saying to my bodyguard—I said, "What is this? Who is this?" Well, one was the airport director, the deputy airport director, the head of security for the airport, a couple of police officers, the United Airlines supervisor, and someone to carry my bags. They were there because I was the mayor. I said to my staff, "I'm not comfortable with this." You know, it looked like the president was walking through. They said, "That's what we do for the mayor. We greet him at the curb, and we make sure everything goes smoothly." I said, "I'm sure everything's going to go smoothly. I don't need six, seven, eight people to walk me through." I always felt so self-conscious, you know?

The second time I went—I thought they had gotten the hint, but they didn't, and they all were there the second time. So I said, "For the rest of my four years, I don't want to see another person at the curbside." And nobody—they all disappeared. [laughter] I said, "Because when I'm no longer mayor, I'm

going to get out of the car, I'm going to give my bags to the curbside person who checks them in, and I'm going to walk through the airport like I always have." And sure enough, I think of that every time I go in the airport today, and have since '90. I go by myself. Nobody's there. Once in a while, a ticket agent recognizes me and says, "Hello, Mr. Mayor," and I greet him, but I go by myself.

It's just an example of the royalization of politics that Americans tend to do because we don't have any royalty, but it's not healthy for them or for us, I don't think. So I would try to minimize that. But some people like it, and some people need it, and on those occasions I would do it.

[End of Session]

[Session 7, February 4, 2003]

[Begin Minidisc 7]

McCREERY: We talked about starting off today with more about the Democratic politics in the assembly during the 1980s. I thought we could start off with just a little bit more about Leo McCarthy's time as Speaker of the Assembly. Can you talk about the nature of his working relationship with Jerry Brown as governor?

AGNOS: Leo always had a very proper relationship with the governor. Personally, he thought [Brown] was somewhat immature in the way he approached the governorship, with his lack of life experiences in dealing with issues that affected so many Californians.

Leo also believed that he had a special role, as the speaker, to guide the assembly caucus and to keep the Democratic agenda on line and work with the governor, even though he had different personal views. Do you want to get into the speakership thing?

McCREERY: To what extent was there actually a power struggle between Mr. McCarthy and Mr. Brown during those years?

AGNOS: Leo never would ever publicly criticize the governor. He felt it was not appropriate for members of the parties to be squabbling in public. He was very forceful internally, with his staff, his chief of staff, and with the governor, one

on one. He never even did it in front of me. He was, as I said, very proper in his relationships and respected the office if not the individual and therefore would not let any personal feelings interfere. He was a student of government—he is a student of government—and he understood that there was a difference in the roles between the governor and the speaker, and he never allowed his personal views to get in the way of what he saw was the proper functioning of government, because he thought it was far more important to keep the governance by the Democratic Party on track than it was to indulge himself in his own feelings.

McCREERY: Yet it certainly wasn't unheard of for him to lead an override of Brown's veto, for example.

AGNOS: He might do that, but he would not do it in a vitriolic or a hostile or a demeaning way to the governor, as others have.

McCREERY: Okay, thank you. I just want your thoughts about when there's a Democratic speaker and a Democratic governor. In principle, how much cooperation and coordination should there be, realizing that principle may be different from practice?

AGNOS: As a rule, they give each other the benefit of the doubt, whereas with a Republican governor, unless there are opposing parties, there will not be that kind of—benefit, for lack of a better word. And there are other pressures that come on individuals, common friends, common institutional supporters. For example, in the case of Democrats, the unions will play a role with the governor and with the speaker or with the president of the senate to keep them

on track with issues that are important to working men and women, so that personalities do not interfere with the progress that should be achieved.

But every now and then, there can be a real dustup. Leo never did it because Brown was in range. More recently, though, we saw with President pro tem John Burton outright threatening Governor Davis if he ever vetoed the farm worker bill, which the farm workers felt was extremely important to their survival as a union that represented people in the fields, farmhands in the fields.

Jerry always was in range, so to speak. He was within the margins, not on the margins, and therefore they usually worked out their differences in personal discussions or with staff discussions.

McCREERY: In your view, they were able to operate successfully that way, putting personalities aside?

AGNOS: Absolutely, absolutely.

McCREERY: Then leading into the issue of the change of speakership, I wonder what happened that the Democrats did eventually desert Mr. McCarthy, over time. Why don't you set up that story?

AGNOS: This is the speakership fight of 1980, and it's probably one of the great tragedies of modern politics in the state legislature. Howard Berman was the majority floor leader, number-two person under McCarthy, as an elected official—a very bright, very committed, progressive, liberal, Southern California legislator, and ambitious to be the speaker when Leo started to show and make moves, political moves, to run for higher office. Most speakers look

for higher office because the speakership is considered the second most powerful—was at that time; it isn't any more—was considered the second most powerful position in the state legislature. It gave them statewide prominence and therefore they usually began to think ultimately of statewide office.

Leo was no different than many of his predecessors. He began to think of running for the United States senate and began to make that known to his close supporters and began to do things politically in the state to create and set up an atmosphere that would be conducive and ultimately successful for him to run. Well, whenever a speaker does that, it immediately creates tensions, even among his supporters, because they begin to wonder, are the things that he's doing in the best interests of the Democratic caucus, which is the body that elects him, or he is doing it to benefit his own political ambition?

As time gets closer to that, as time moves forward to that election, there is introduced an additional tension, which is, is the money that the speaker is going to raise—because one of the primary roles of the speaker, politically speaking, was to raise money to help other candidates so that the Democrats could stay in power by having a majority of seats in the assembly, which is forty-one-plus. So when they see a speaker as a candidate for a higher office—whether it was for governor or U.S. Senate or other statewide office—raising large amounts of money for that campaign while claiming he's going to raise money for the assembly candidates, additional tensions [arise], because they

see him as siphoning off the money that they could use for their own survival, and nothing is more important to a politician than his or her own survival.

Berman was afraid, even though Leo had committed to support him as his successor. The real issue in that speakership fight was: when would Leo step down and concentrate solely on his statewide ambition and turn it over to Berman? And therein lies the ultimate fatal flaw or issue, whatever, because Leo naturally wanted to retain the speakership as long as he could, to get the benefits of that kind of statewide prominence that came with the office, and Berman wanted to get to it as soon as he could so that he could begin to develop what he saw as the needs of the caucus for them to retain him as speaker.

I was friendly with both—obviously, I was very friendly and loyal to McCarthy, but I also had developed close relationships with Berman's staff and Berman himself. I was the person who would often talk on a casual basis with the Berman people, and I kept alerting Leo that they were getting impatient. I was urging him to give Berman a date, a time certain as to when he would finally step down. There was no question that he was going to step down. There was no question that he was going to support Berman. The only question was when was he going to do it, and would Berman have enough time to solidify his own base.

While this was going on the tensions were increasing, but McCarthy was always preoccupied with the legislative process and advancing the Democratic agenda and did not spend enough time—and I think he would acknowledge

this—with the social components of the speakership, going to the bars at night. Going to the lobbyists' events, and there you pick up intelligence, political intelligence about what's happening, with a comment here or a statement there, and pretty soon you start putting pieces together. Instead Leo always went home to his family.

I didn't do that, either. Both of us were preoccupied or committed to our wives and children, and as soon as we were through work, we went home to our families. That's a disadvantage in politics because there's a lot of advantages to the social culture of politics. That hurt me as mayor, as well, later on—but we can talk about that—simply because I didn't go do the schmoozing. When I was through work, I went home to my family instead of going out to dinner with Herb Caen or something like that and schmoozing.

Anyway, Leo didn't do it, either, and that's why we were so close, because we both had the same values about family and the rest. Not that others didn't, it's just that that's the way we chose to spend our off-duty time, rather than the social part. Anyway, that hurt us because we were the last to find out that Berman had run out of patience and had begun soliciting votes to speed up what everybody knew was inevitable, which was that Leo would step down.

And it was ironic. We were driving to Sacramento, I remember—it was either in January of '80 or sometime late in '79, and Leo said to me, "Art, you're going to be happy that I'm going to give Berman a date." Because I had been pushing him: "I think it's important." I'd sensed these tensions from his staff, and we talked, and I was passing it on to Leo and urging him to give them

a date. "If he knows it's going to be November the 30th, then he'll relax, and he can start pointing to that."

So finally that day, I remember we were driving to Sacramento, as we did often, because we commuted a lot, because he wanted to be home at night. So he said, "I'm going to give Berman a date today. I'm going to call him in, and we're going have a meeting." So about noontime—it was about eleven-thirty or quarter to twelve—the door was closed. I asked the secretary, "Who's in there?" "Oh, Berman's in there." I said, "Oh, great, he's having that conversation with him." Thinking to myself that he's giving him the date that he's going to step down and Berman can move up to the speakership.

I walked in because I was the chief of staff. All I did was knock and pssht, go through. I could do that with anybody in the speaker's office. As soon as I walked in, I knew something was terribly wrong, because the look on Leo's face, the look on Berman's face, was extreme tension. Leo was flushed, as he was when he was upset. He would get crimson. Berman was drained and gaunt-looking and very tense, the both of them. And I said, "We're not talking about the date?" "No, Art, I'll fill you in in a moment." So I knew I was to step out. They finished their conversation. He said, "No, we're having a very serious conversation. I'll fill you in in a moment." So I stepped out, and Berman left five minutes later.

I went in, and he said, "He's just told me that he has enough votes to replace me for speaker today, and he's asking me to step down so that there will be no bloody Democratic internal battle, warfare. I told him I was going

to tell him when the date was, but he said he couldn't wait that long and he couldn't wait and he wasn't interested, that this now had momentum and he couldn't stop it." So I said, "What are we going to do?" He said, "I told him I want to sleep on it, and I want to discuss it with my wife, and I'll give an answer tomorrow."

Well, it was a brilliant move on his part. I don't know if he really thought about it, but he was stalling for time. We got in the car, and he started making calls and stayed up half the night making calls to people to block him, checking out the votes to see who was who. He found out some people had indeed done this. But what came out was Berman didn't have, solidified, the votes to replace him. He had a number of votes, but he didn't have enough to replace him, and we could hold them off. He didn't have enough votes to replace him. He had a majority of votes, more votes than Leo did, but he didn't have forty-one votes to replace him, which is what you have got to do to have the speakership. And the Republicans weren't going to support Berman.

So the next day, he told Berman that he was not going to resign, that he was upset because he felt that he had been betrayed by the man who was supposed to be his right-hand man on the floor of the assembly, the assembly majority leader, and he was deeply upset and hurt. We began a civil war—it felt like a political civil war—that was extremely damaging to all the individuals and the Democratic caucus. We weren't able to really pass legislation because we were divided. People took sides, as they do in a civil war. Some of my best friends were on the other side. We stopped speaking.

It became a very bitter, bitter, politically bloody battle, where we would go—with the upcoming Democratic primaries, there would be a candidate, and if that candidate was for Berman, we would try to get someone else to run against him, and if that candidate was for McCarthy, they would try to get someone else. So in the Democratic primary, we were having these bloody fights, using up resources that ultimately proved to be an advantage for the Republicans.

McCREERY: Can you give me an example of a race in that election year, 1980, that was affected by this?

AGNOS: Yes, absolutely. In Stockton, Carmen Perino was an incumbent assemblyman who had decided to switch over to Berman because he never could raise enough money on his own and Berman promised to give him all the money he needed. We had always given him money he needed, but he decided to go with Berman. And so another candidate was coming along who was interested in running because he thought that Perino was too conservative. He wanted to run, but he didn't have the resources, and that was Pat Johnston. We encouraged Pat Johnston to run. I gave him political strategy, campaign strategy. We got money to him, and he defeated Perino in that primary and then was so weakened that he won by forty votes in a recount. They used to call him Landslide Johnston because it was such a close election. It shouldn't have been, except that he and Perino had damaged each other so badly that the Republican [candidate] was viable for the first time in many years in that district that usually was a strong Democratic one.

McCREERY: Now, you actually called on him to run?

AGNOS: He came to us, and candidates knew. They played both sides. He knew that Perino was with Berman, so he came to us, and we said, "Sure, we're going to help you." It turned out that he was a better political candidate anyway, on the issues. He was more progressive than Perino was. But it wouldn't have mattered to us, to be very honest with you. What mattered to us was that he was going to be for Leo if he got elected, and we were all fighting for what would happen in November or December, when the Democrats reassembled to choose the next speaker.

So we went through a whole series of primaries and general elections, and even in the general if a Democrat was for Berman, we didn't do anything to help him, and vice versa. Well, after the November elections, McCarthy counted his votes and realized that he didn't have enough to get the forty-one. By then it was so bitter between two allies that Willie Brown, who had stayed out of everything, because he had been defeated by McCarthy with Berman's help in 1974—and he had sort of put his career on hold, in limbo, because he was sort of devastated by that defeat in '74 when he was the odds-on favorite and Leo came from nowhere to become speaker.

Suddenly, several of the black members suggested that he step forward because Willie had always maintained a cordial relationship with the Republicans. He came and talked to Leo and said he could put some Republicans in with the minority of Democrats, and the Republicans—he

could overcome the numerical superiority of those Democrats who were committed to Berman.

McCREERY: Had the Republicans entered into this in any way up till that point?

AGNOS: Not up until that point.

McCREERY: They just sat back and watched the Democrats fight.

AGNOS: They sat back, because they were hoping to gain control of the assembly with their own caucus, and if they had gotten forty-one-plus Republicans elected, they wouldn't have needed Willie Brown or Leo McCarthy or anybody else. They would have elected their own speaker. But they didn't, and so it was now a very tight vote. I can't remember the specific numbers, but the Republican Party was in the minority. The Democrats were in the majority; however, the Democrats were badly divided between the Berman votes and McCarthy votes, and Berman had more votes, but not forty-one, in the Democratic caucus.

McCREERY: Now, to what extent was all of this centered on north versus south issues? How important was that?

AGNOS: That wasn't the issue at all. It really wasn't the issue at all, because some southern California legislators were very loyal to Leo; some northern California legislators were loyal to Berman. It was really about what individuals thought would benefit them most, who would provide them with the resources, whether it was political fund raising or political endorsements, committee assignments, committee chairmanships. All those things are what come into play in that kind of a battle. They saw Berman as the future and McCarthy as the past, because he had announced he was running for higher

office, and that always creates, as I said earlier, a liability for the speaker and a tension.

So McCarthy, who didn't have the greatest relationship with Willie Brown because of their earlier battle in '74, decided that he would support Brown because Brown had been loyal to him in the McCarthy-Berman fight. He had stuck with McCarthy, even though he wasn't crazy about McCarthy. And so McCarthy rewarded his loyalty by saying, "I will deliver my votes to you," and together with the Republican votes, [Willie Brown] became speaker. What the Republicans thought was that Willie Brown was a better deal maker for them, would give them more benefits, politically speaking, as a speaker than Howard Berman, who was seen as a more partisan Democrat

It was resolved with Willie Brown becoming the speaker and coming from political limbo to gain what he thought he had lost forever. As we know, he went on to be speaker for fifteen years. Leo went on to run for lieutenant governor. He went from speaker to lieutenant governor, I guess. He gave up the senate idea and went to the lieutenant governor thing because he realized he couldn't make it in the U.S. Senate. I can't remember the details now. But anyway, he went on to become lieutenant governor, was never really fulfilled as lieutenant governor because he was far more proactive. He did run subsequent to that for the U.S. Senate and lost to Barbara Boxer in the primary and retired in 1994, I think.

Willie Brown went on to a lengthy career as the speaker, and I served under him and was one of his major supporters and allies while I was there, and then

I left to run for the mayorship. Howard Berman left soon after the speakership fight to run for Congress for an open congressional seat and has never really reached high office in the Congress, despite the great promise that he showed. He's a bright member, he's a respected member, but he's never gone up the seniority ladder. I can't help but think that the residuals of that terrible, terrible fight, which left scars on all of us, all of us—I mean, we used to have dinner together, we brought our babies over to each other's houses, and all that stuff—left scars that never really were healed, even though they're cordial. All because of dates, when somebody wanted it and when somebody was going to give it.

I think the state was left poorer, in terms of policy, because I think Howard Berman would have been a great successor to Leo McCarthy in terms of the kinds of things that Leo thought were important, because Berman did, too, advancing progressive issues for the state in health care and education, the environment, a number of other issues that they were very simpatico over. Civil rights.

McCREERY: How about you? Would you have liked to see that happen, Mr. Berman become speaker?

AGNOS: Oh, absolutely. I was a big supporter of his, and I kept pushing Leo to give him a date because, as I said earlier, I knew the tensions were rising and were picking up, that he wanted to get going. He needed to know because, you see, when you are the primary person, like Berman was, there are people around you that say, "Hey, he's going to screw you. He should be giving you a date."

So after a while, this sort of plays on you. I think Howard Berman was the victim of people around him who were not as trustful of Leo as they should have been and perhaps, I think, sabotaged him.

McCREERY: Go on to talk, then, a little bit about Willie Brown's time as speaker, up until you left, of course.

AGNOS: Willie Brown learned a lot, I think, from his first defeat, about humility and all the things that had cost him his defeat, an arrogance. He regained it [Laughter] later on, but initially he was humble, and he shared the platform with—Willie Brown's style is not as proactive as Leo. Leo fought hard, consulted with people and said, "OK, here's our agenda, these eight points." Willie never did that. Willie never had an agenda except to stay in office, and he allowed the caucus to set their own agenda. The only thing he wanted from them was their loyalty to stay as speaker.

McCREERY: You were caucus chair at the time he came in.

AGNOS: Yes, and then I stepped out of that and took on a committee chairmanship, the Health and Welfare subcommittee, because I wanted to do more in that area. I was caucus chair for Leo. I didn't want to be caucus chair for him. I thought he should have his own political operatives. And so what Willie did, and Willie's style of leadership, which helped him a lot as speaker and I don't think served him as well as mayor, was to let the agenda be set by the caucus, by the leadership in the caucus who were committee chairs.

So, for example, welfare reform, which we've talked about—he didn't push for welfare reform. I pushed for welfare reform because it was my issue,

as a Democrat, and brought it to him, and he endorsed it. I did the work, set it all up, and said, "Here's the idea. Are you comfortable?" "Yes." He endorsed it and supported it as I went through the assembly, and it became part of the Democratic agenda.

McCREERY: What do you think of that approach, of letting the caucus set the agenda?

AGNOS: I don't think as much gets done, because it is dependent on who's in the chairs and what they want to do with it, rather than the party pushing it. But it worked for him, in that members did not feel pressured. Leo pressured members to move an agenda, to keep issues at the forefront. Willie never pressured or rarely pressured—I shouldn't say never—rarely pressured members to vote for issues they knew might be right but weren't comfortable [with] politically.

For example, Leo, in order to pass a farm worker bill, would pressure a farm legislator to vote for it because it was the right thing to do, and if that person was chair of a committee, they owed something to Leo and felt that pressure. Willie would not pressure that way. The way he would do it—I'll give you one small example. When I was chairman of the subcommittee of Ways and Means, Health and Welfare—it used to be Health, Welfare, and Corrections—and in the corrections area, I had the budget of the judiciary, the Supreme Court. It was a tough political year in 1984 or '85. We were cutting the budgets. All welfare budgets had to be cut, and I hated doing that because I knew poor people were in trouble.

So the word came that everybody had to take 5 or 6 percent cuts. I said, "Okay." So we were looking for how to do that in a careful, humane way. So then we come up to the budget for the Supreme Court. [Chief Justice] Rose Bird and others were coming in to see me, asking for a 10 percent increase in their budget. What they wanted—I'll never forget this—they wanted more staff, "elbow clerks," they called them. An elbow clerk is just, I guess, a phrase of the business or art. They're lawyers who do research work for the justices, symbolically sit at their elbow.

I said, "We can't be giving you an increase." I said, "I'm cutting the budgets for the elderly, the blind, the disabled, the women with children, all this stuff, and you're going to have to take a cut." They thought they should be exempt, and when the time came for their budget, I, as chairman, cut their budget. They went and complained to Willie, to the speaker, that Agnos was cutting their budget. This was going to hurt the judiciary and all this stuff. When Willie asked me about it, I said, "Hey, we're going to hurt poor people by cutting their budgets. They make a hell of a lot more than we do. They're going to get it, too."

Now, Leo would have sat down with me and pressured me, with arguments and finally, push came to shove, he'd tell me to do it. That's what he would do. Willie never said a word. But a week later, that subject matter was removed from the jurisdiction of my committee and given to Maxine Waters, who gave them the increase. That's the way he handled it, so he didn't have to have a confrontation with me. I knew what he was doing.

McCREERY: Did that change make sense, over and above the immediate budget question?

AGNOS: No, no. It was a way to do what he was going to do for the judiciary, because he was a lawyer. I wasn't surprised, because I knew how Willie operated. So that's how he would do stuff, to avoid a confrontation, because if I got angry, I might do something.

McCREERY: What about his relationship with Republicans? You described how he—

AGNOS: That ultimately went sour, yes. At first he gave them a couple of things, but ultimately, as soon as—he knew that wouldn't last a long time. He was a smart enough politician, and he was immediately setting about solidifying his Democratic base. As soon as he did that, he started to cut out the Republicans, or not acknowledge what they wanted or see to what they wanted as frequently and as often as he did in the early days of his speakership, when he hadn't solidified the Democratic caucus and brought it together.

McCREERY: He also started work, early on, on the reapportionment issues arising out of the 1980 census. Did you have much view of what he was doing there?

AGNOS: Basically, that's another wonderful tool to solidify your base, with your own caucus, because members, politicians—all of them, myself included—want to be safe and secure. As Phil Burton said, "You want to be in your mother's arms." The reapportionment is a way to guarantee that someone's going to be safe, because you give them enough Democrats in their district to make them secure. It's a magnificent tool that someone who's in power at that particular time can use to solidify their base, and Willie used that very well.

McCREERY: Once he got in as speaker, what was his relationship with Jerry Brown during the last couple of years of Brown's administration? How did things change there?

AGNOS: He got along okay with Jerry, because Willie really, as I said, was never pressuring for an agenda. He had a few issues that he cared about, but he wasn't as—what's the right word?—policy oriented as Leo was. Every year, Leo would think, "Now, what do we have to do as a party? What do we have to do as a caucus to advance the policy agenda in health care and the environment and welfare reform or whatever it was, tax policy, Prop. 13?" And he'd talk to his chairs and say, "Okay, here's what we're going to do, and this is our goal for the year."

Willie didn't really pursue that. He came at it differently. It was a handicap, while I'm thinking about it. It's been a handicap for him as mayor. He has not fulfilled the potential that people thought he would have as mayor because when he was mayor, he acted as though he was the speaker, but what was missing were the committee chairs to do the work of the policy setting. Because when you're the mayor, you don't have committee chairs, you've got department heads, and the department heads are not part of your team necessarily. They're not part of the Democratic Party; they are professional bureaucrats who are primarily interested in maintaining their own status and their department, and so if you ask them for cuts, they're going to come up with cuts that are politically embarrassing rather than making something work for you. Or they're not going to propose reforms or ideas if they're

uncomfortable with them, whereas the chairs of committees do. So Willie, as the mayor, struggled with policy issues because he didn't have the support system that he had in the state legislature on policy issues, like the committee chairs.

A perfect example is when he came into office, homelessness was a major issue, and he—after a year—declared it wasn't solvable, because he really didn't have a grasp of it and there was nobody around him to help him. If I had been chair of the committee, I would have been bringing him a plan. I would have been working on a plan, or that kind of thing.

As mayor—as I said, the methods that enabled him to stay in office for fifteen years as speaker have caused him to struggle and be criticized, because he really did not advance policy initiatives that would make a difference in the lives of the citizens of San Francisco. In the state legislature, his caucus did that for him, through the chairmanships.

McCREERY: Yes, it's quite a different job, isn't it? You're in a position to know.

AGNOS: Yes, right.

McCREERY: Just to complete our discussion of his time as speaker, I wonder how much things changed when George Deukmejian came in as governor. Obviously, it's a very different setup, with the Republican administration. How did he operate in that environment?

AGNOS: Willie operates, as many politicians do, not through policy initiatives but through personal relationships, and it was hard to have a personal relationship with George Deukmejian. He was a cautious man, not an ebullient man.

McCREERY: We talked a little bit about that last time.

AGNOS: Yes, yes. Sort of tightly wrapped. So I don't think much got done, frankly, and Willie would not push for a Democratic agenda other than whatever his caucus brought to him. So I don't remember anything, frankly, that specific to give you.

McCREERY: Now, you had moved up from a very early time in the assembly, through the caucus structure. Did you ever have any thoughts of wanting to go for a leadership position yourself outside the caucus?

AGNOS: Good question. By the way, just to finish—we did welfare reform under George Deukmejian.

McCREERY: Not under Jerry Brown.

AGNOS: With Willie. But I did it, and brought it to Willie. He signed off and became a supporter, and he was sort of the emcee and I was the promoter with George Deukmejian. But to his credit, Deukmejian was open to the things that I needed in order to make that happen.

Did I have leadership ambition? You know, I'm amazed to be where I am. I've always been amazed. As you know, I'm a social worker by training, always wanted to be a social worker, and sort of backed into politics in order to empower myself to be more effective as a social worker, and that's really what I always wanted to do with politics. So I was uncomfortable seeking elected leadership positions. So I never dreamed of being speaker. I didn't want to be speaker.

McCREERY: You turned down the opportunity to go to Congress.

AGNOS: Because of my family. I wanted a balance in my life, which I've been lucky enough to achieve. So I wasn't looking for high elective office. I was looking for the most powerful way to deliver the services that I thought people needed, as a social worker. If you look at the thread of my career, and you've heard enough about it, everything I do, if you understand I'm a social worker trying to be a better social worker, a powerful social worker, you understand what I'm doing.

McCREERY: It's evident in all of your [assembly] annual reports, for example.

AGNOS: Yes, everything I did was to balance the playing field for people to get their fair share of what this country promises to every American but often doesn't deliver because of race or poverty or poor health, and so my job was to make sure that everybody had a fair chance at it. That's how I used political office. I didn't want to use political office to promote myself, and I've always been uncomfortable with the folderol of politics. If I'm repeating myself, I apologize to whoever is typing this thing.

That's why I never went to Democratic conventions. I went to one. Did I say this before? I went to one in my whole career, in 1988, when Mike Dukakis was nominated, because he was Greek-American and I was Greek-American, and it was an important thing in the Greek-American community to have somebody like Mike be the presidential nominee. Other than that, I never went to the Democratic conventions. In fact, in 1984 the convention was here, and Mario Cuomo gave his famous speech, "the shining city on a hill." I was in Tahoe with my family because I wasn't interested, and it was literally a mile

from my house, the convention. So I was not interested in moving up the ladder, as long as I could fulfill my needs as a professional person. So that's what I used political office for.

Someone said, "What did you become mayor for?" And sometimes I ask myself that, because I really didn't want to be mayor in the sense that I wanted to be in a high political office. But I was sort of—not drafted, but pushed by a lot of people who came to me and said, in 1987, "You really ought to be mayor. You've done a great job as a state legislator."

What they meant by that was that I was responsive to community needs with my constituent service, that my legislative agenda reflected a concern for the issues and the people who lived in San Francisco, working people, ethnic minorities, gays, you know, the whole thing. And so leaders of those communities said, "We want you to be mayor, because the person who's running does not reflect that kind of value system that you have and that we think would be good in the mayor's office."

McCREERY: As an aside, your name was mentioned in some of the publications as early as the 1983 mayor's race, as a possible challenger to Dianne Feinstein. Is there anything to that?

AGNOS: Yes, in the sense—not that I wanted it, and I never promoted it, didn't push it, but in the politics of San Francisco, whenever leaders of community groups, special interest groups—by special interest, I mean any group that's organized around an issue—are unhappy with the mayor, they look for someone else to challenge him and make that person nervous and hopefully move him off the

intransigence on their issue. So very often people who mention candidates are really trying to fulfill their own needs, not the person's. You see that going on now in San Francisco as various people get tossed into the arena as possible candidates. They might not necessarily be anxious to do it, but others who are anxious to get someone in it so that they can have a horse in the race will do that.

McCREERY: Yes. For example, the next [mayor's] race is quite a ways off, and yet we're reading about it daily, aren't we, about who's going to run?

AGNOS: Yes, exactly. It's not necessarily the individuals who are being named who are promoting it, but people who have an agenda in the city who promote it. So in 1987—by that time, I'd been in the legislature almost twelve years and was popular because of what I'd done, the work, with a part of the city—I was not popular with the business community, for example, who saw me as an anti-business kind of person.

McCREERY: So then how did it actually come up that you began to consider—how early were you thinking of it, and who was encouraging you?

AGNOS: Let's see, in 1986, people were starting to come to me: "You're a wonderful man." I always say that when someone says to you, "You ought to be"—and then fill in the blank—"you ought to be president, you ought to run for governor, you ought to"—it's the political equivalent of "Have a nice day." You know, people say to you, "Have a nice day," or "Have a good one." I mean, they're being polite, but how much do they really mean it? And so in politics, if you're a politician, if you're an assemblyman, someone will say,

"You ought to be governor." If you're the governor, they want to say something—instead of saying, "Have a nice day," they say, "You ought to run for president." And so I always discounted that.

But I was getting enough of that kind of pressure, people urging me to run, that I began to look at it and saw that I would run a city differently than Mayor Feinstein, who I've had some differences in policy with. We always got along politely, but I didn't agree with—for example, in the area of housing she wasn't aggressive about building moderate-priced, affordable housing. Because I felt that the magic of San Francisco is the chemistry that's created by all of the different people who live there.

It's not the magnificent geographical location of the city, with the hills and the fog and the views and the good weather that makes San Francisco an exciting place to go. It's a pretty place, that's for sure. But what makes it exciting are the artists and the ethnics and the gays and the working people, combining with, obviously, wealthy people to create a certain kind of chemistry that makes that place special, whether it's the food, whether it's the art, whether it's the symphony, the various parts of our culture, the whole milieu.

Now, why do I say that? Well, Tiburon has the same geographical location that San Francisco has. Who's excited about Tiburon? Well, it's because it's a one-dimensional place, whereas San Francisco has so many different dimensions. It's where immigrants come and go to work to create something for themselves and ultimately for the community. I saw that being threatened,

and it was for me. I was one of those people. It was in 1966. I came to that city on a Greyhound bus with five hundred bucks in my pocket, and I was able to start a life. I was able to be who I wanted to be, with whoever I wanted, whenever I wanted to do it, as long as I didn't interfere with someone else.

San Francisco has always offered that kind of opportunity for people. I think that's the attraction for talented, creative people and immigrants and everything in between that come to that city. Gay people came to San Francisco because it was a place that would accept them to be who they wanted to be and to do what they wanted to do. As a result, we've been the beneficiary of enormous talent and creativity that the gay community brings to us. The same thing, whether you're a Chinese immigrant these days or a refugee from Vietnam or an Italian immigrant who started a fishing business years ago, or the Irish or everything in between. San Francisco has always said: "Come to our city. You can do it, and we'll encourage you." Because it was that kind of place.

Now, in 1987, I began to see that "that kind of place" needed to be guided in such a way as to retain those features that made it attractive, because housing prices were going through the roof, and I don't care how motivated you were, if you couldn't find a place to live, you couldn't come to San Francisco the way I did and find a place to rent for six hundred dollars.

McCREERY: When you say the city was threatened, do you mean in that regard?

AGNOS: In that regard, yes. I saw that being able to provide affordable housing for newcomers—the ones who were already in there were safe, but the newcomers

who would come in and generate new excitement and new energy weren't going to be able to come. If you didn't retain an income, if you got to be an older person on retirement, you had to leave because you couldn't afford it anymore. So I wanted to do something about housing policy, to create housing that would be available to the newcomer, be available to the working-class person, to retain the librarians, to retain the hospitality industry—hotel workers—in the city, rather than coming from Fremont or from San Jose or somewhere else. I wanted them in the city.

I didn't think that my opponent would push for that kind of a value system. I wanted a health care system that would offer working people, through the clinics that we had in our city and public hospitals, the education system—just to run government so that it supported everyone's opportunity to live there, rather than just somebody who was rich and famous, which is always the tension in San Francisco, always the tension. I ran for mayor because I wanted an emphasis that would retain the people I had always cared about in the city.

McCREERY: When this first became a serious thought and you were considering, how did you decide to actually go ahead and run? Whom did you consult and talk to?

AGNOS: A lot of people were coming to me. A lot of people were coming to me because they saw me as the hope for those kinds of values that they shared. For example, one of the things that the mayor does, one of the important things that the mayor does, is appoint people from the community to serve on policy-making boards that run the city departments. So you appoint police commissioners, you appoint people to serve on the police commission who

direct policy for the police department, to make sure that they don't abuse citizens, that it's an integrated place. The same thing with the fire department, the health department, the port, the airport, the MUNI [San Francisco Municipal Railway], a whole variety of places.

It is sort of the parallel to the committee system in the state legislature, is the commission system in the city, except you're appointing citizens. Now, the question becomes, what kind of citizens are going to be on there? And that ultimately leads to what kind of a city it's going to be. I don't want to be critical of my predecessor when I was mayor, but, you know, she came from an orientation that thought differently than I did, and therefore the commissioners more often than not reflected her values or her social status, which was more wealthy, more well-to-do, upper-class people.

I came in and turned it upside down, turned it upside down and said they didn't have to be my personal friends, they didn't have to be my supporters, although obviously I did some of that—any politician does—but I appointed people who had never been in public office before, held public office. By that I mean commissions.

McCREERY: Pretty much following the pattern that you had in the assembly of putting in staff who hadn't worked in politics.

AGNOS: Precisely. It was the same values, same policy, same orientation. For example, for the first time in the history of San Francisco, there was a black woman who was overseeing the police department in 1987. Never been done before.

One of the little sidebar stories that sort of captures this is—how are we doing on time here? Okay. This is a good story. So I came in. As I said, I wanted to have city government reflect all the people who lived in it. Chinatown, for example, had never really been brought into city government. Politicians got their support by going to their banquets, and they were pleased that someone came and paid respects to them. [We said,] "We're going to change that. That's not enough. You have a talent. You have a contribution to make." And so I put Chinese people throughout the different commissions, on the police commission, for example, and stuff like that so that they could understand they were not going to be limited to the geographical boundaries of Chinatown but they were going to part of all of San Francisco. And the same with Latinos and gays, et cetera.

Literally the first—I was sworn in on a Monday, and on Tuesday I'm into the office. Monday I was sworn in at noontime, so there wasn't much to do in the afternoon. I came in on Tuesday morning, and the city attorney, Louise Renne, was waiting for me, and she said, "Art, we have to go see a federal court judge over in the federal building." I said, "Sure." I didn't know a lot of things about city legal issues, and I leaned on her. She became a strong adviser, especially in the early years.

I said, "What's this about?" She said, "I don't know. This has never happened before." What had never happened before? That a federal judge would summon a mayor to her office to talk to her about this. So we went over there. It was Marilyn [Hall] Patel. I went over to see her at eleven o'clock or

so that morning. I walked into her office, and she said, "Mr. Mayor," she said, "I know you were just sworn in yesterday, but I've been working with your fire department on racial discrimination issues and sexual harassment issues, and it's out of control, and I'm not going to wait anymore. I'm sorry to saddle you with this, but you've got to address it right here and now."

At the time, I didn't even know who the fire chief was, because there hadn't been any real discussion during the campaign the previous year about the fire department. She put a decree on us, a judicial order that saddled us, the city, with potential fines. We had a court monitor to oversee the integration because the fire department, in a city that was almost fifty-fifty racial minorities with whites at that time—now it's even more racial minorities, ethnic minorities—was about 95 percent white because that is a wonderful job in the city, a city, to be a firefighter. You see, with working people, union people, the only thing that they can pass on to their sons and daughters, in this case their sons, is the job. With wealthy people, the son and daughter inherit their parents' wealth. With working people, the son and daughter inherit their parents' job. That's the way it was, has been. So you'll see a lot of sons working in the longshoremen's union, and you see a lot of sons, and sons upon sons, generation after generation, in the fire department and police department of San Francisco. No women. No real minorities, because they couldn't break in. And it's a good job. It's a great job.

So the minorities complained to the courts and brought suits, and so boom, it hits me in between the eyes. So I went back to city hall, and I said to my

staff. "Who's the fire chief? I want to see him." He came in, and he was sort of this decent, mild-mannered Irish man, and he resigned on the spot.

McCREERY: Did he know what was up?

AGNOS: Oh, yes, he knew what was up. He knew what was up. And he did the right thing, because I would have asked for it. So he was out, and I had to find a fire chief, and I did. Fred Postel was—we looked around, and I made the tough decision to pick somebody from the inside, who would know where all the bodies were and all the rest of that, and he turned out to be a very courageous man. My successor replaced him with someone else because he was so unpopular and I was so unpopular with the fire department because we forced them to integrate and hire women for the first time. Today it's a totally different department because of that.

McCREERY: I noticed that you were willing to take the political risks, even very early on in your term, knowing and even hearing out loud that it might cost you later. You were more interested in accomplishing that task at the time?

AGNOS: Yes, absolutely, in doing the right thing. The people that were around me, whether they were commissioners, citizens, or my staff, department heads—the question I always asked is, "What's the right thing to do?" not, "What's the politically expedient?" Now, maybe I should have done a little bit more of that, but my philosophy has always been that I'm not going to be there forever. The most I could have been there was for eight years. I was there for four. So even if I had been reelected, I'd be out of office right now. What I find myself doing, all these years that I'm out of office, is thinking back, when I look at

issues and stuff. What did I do? And the great satisfaction that I live with for the rest of my life, as long as that is, is that I used the time well while I had it to do the right thing. That's what sticks to you like a good breakfast in the morning, the knowledge that whatever time you have in office, even if you serve a long time, eventually it ends and then you are left with your memory and knowledge about what you did during the time you had an opportunity to make a difference in your state, your city, or, in the case of other people, their country.

If you just sort of mark the time, what a terrible thing to have to live with the rest of your life, when you think about what you could have done but didn't do. As we get into this mayor stuff, the Embarcadero is another example. Today I drive down that Embarcadero and listen to people who think the earthquake did it, but I remember—and we'll get into that. Too many politicians today, and when I talk to students as well as other politicians—too many of the decisions today in public life, I believe, are made based on a fear of losing, rather than a commitment to doing what's right. It's not just the politician who does this, it's the people around the politician who have an investment in that politician being in office because they can say, "Well, So-and-so is my friend. Mayor Agnos is my friend. You want me to talk to him for you?" I mean, that gives them a certain kind of status, so they have an investment in keeping him, so they'll say, "Well, don't do that. You'll lose the election," or "Don't vote for this. You'll lose that constituency." "But it's the

right thing to do." "Yeah, but figure out something else. Compromise it or something."

I have the great satisfaction of knowing that I didn't do that with the issues that I cared about, because I was more committed to doing the right thing, and that's what was my sort of operating motivation. Now that I've lost, which was a painful thing for me, I realize that you get over it. What replaces it is the extraordinary comfort and satisfaction that comes with knowing that while you were there, you did what you thought was right, and that is a wonderful thing that you have, if no one else does, and ultimately people start to get it. People say to me now or they say to my kids, which makes me feel good, "You know, your father did the right thing."

I was going through the airport, coming back to San Francisco from Los Angeles, when this tall, elderly man came up to me and tapped me on the shoulder and said, "You don't remember me," he said, "but thirty years ago, 1978"—is that thirty years ago?

McCREERY: More like twenty-five.

AGNOS: Twenty-five years ago. He said, "You passed a bill to require all newborn babies to be tested for metabolic diseases at birth that can cause deformities and retardation and ultimately death, and if you get it early enough, we can eliminate it; we can take care of it, and they live healthy lives." And he said, "I'm a doctor, and I'm getting ready to retire. I was a doctor with the public health department in Sacramento then, and I'm still there now." He said, "I just want to tell you that we have probably saved over 100,000 babies from a

lifetime of some kind of disability because those tests were given." And he says, "You know, the governor didn't want to do it, but you pushed it."

I looked at him, and I said, "Well, thank you very much for telling me that." Because I'd forgotten it. I just forgot. It was just one of those things you do. Then I was looking [back] at my annual reports, and this thing—you know, I saw it, but it was just one line in the thing. But it really brought it home when this doctor stopped me to say, "I just want to thank you. You ought to know what you did. We determined over 100,000 babies were saved during these twenty-five years from some kind of disability."

McCREERY: As a legislator or other leader, you don't always know the long-term impact, do you?

AGNOS: Exactly. And so when you get that—I mean, the reason I'm telling you that is doing the right thing—at that time, I remember the governor didn't want to do it. I could have been a good guy and just gave up. "Okay, fine, we'll just do—what do I know, and care?" But it wasn't the right thing to do. So that's really what I'm talking about, doing the right thing, even if it's not comfortable or popular at the time. Ultimately, if no one else realizes it, you will because you'll live with it the rest of your life, as you think back to those times.

I have that happen to me a lot, which really makes me feel good. This is a little embarrassing, but I went into a store a couple of weeks ago, to a woodworking shop, and I wanted a little six-inch box made for a pedestal for a piece of art we have at home. So the guy took the measurements, and as I said it was twelve inches by twelve inches, six inches high. He made it and called

me up, and I came back, and I said, "How much do I owe you?" He said, "Nothing." I said, "Oh, sure. It's got to cost something." "No," he said, "twenty-five years ago, you did something for me and helped me with difficulties I was having with social security for my mother," or something like that. And he said, "I owe you, and it's nice to pay you back." I said, "I was getting paid well then, and I really want to pay." He said, "No, this is a small thing. You take it from me and you'll make me feel better."

McCREERY: But he did all the work and then told you.

AGNOS: Yes, yes. So it's nice to have that kind of thing. What it tells me is that when you help people, not only are you rewarded but others remind you of it in a very nice way.

So, that's doing the right thing. But it always doesn't work. It doesn't always work. I mean, you're not always recognized. So you don't do it unless you really believe it.

McCREERY: Not for the recognition.

AGNOS: Exactly, not for the recognition. You got to do it because you believe it.

McCREERY: When you first decided to run for mayor and approached that whole job, it sounds as if you were thinking of it as an opportunity to accomplish some things.

AGNOS: I wanted to keep the promise that San Francisco offered me in 1966 when I came, as I said, on a Greyhound bus with five hundred bucks in my pocket and got a place to live, found a job, and found people to build a life with. By 1987, the cost of living and the policies of the city were such that that promise was

dimming, and so that's what got me interested in being mayor, because I thought that the things, as I've said, that the mayor could impact would make the promise brighter.

McCREERY: Once you decided to go for it, how did you—I mean, as you say, a lot of people were approaching you to run for mayor, but how did you go about organizing your campaign?

AGNOS: It was easy. My campaign organization was easy. It just fell together. It took me a while to make up my mind because I was really not sure. I loved what I was doing. I was very happy in the assembly, as you know. I turned down chances to run for the Congress, and so I really wasn't looking for higher office. I was a political social worker. So running for mayor was a decision I made when I finally came to understand what I've just described to you. Other people were pushing me early on, and I kept hesitating because I wasn't sure why I was going to do it, and when I finally got it, then I was full into it because I knew my opponent wouldn't reflect what I thought was important in the mayor's office. He was a fine man but just came from a different orientation.

McCREERY: You're speaking of John Molinari?

AGNOS: Yes. He was the son of a judge, a very important man. The judge was a very important, dignified, popular man, and Molinari had come from the institutional establishment of San Francisco. You see a sort of a replay of that here in 2003, with Gavin Newsom being the same kind of guy, son of a judge, who had an uncle who was a doctor in the fire department. [Laughter] Now

they're going to take over the city. But I don't know who Art Agnos is going to be in 2003. It's not going to be me.

But in March of '87, I said, "We're going." And it was so easy to organize all these groups. You know, everything you see in my annual reports, these different groups—they were ready to go, so the gays were organizing, the African-Americans, the Latinos, all the ethnics that I had worked with for the previous twelve years, the environmentalists, the neighborhood types who wanted a real change in city hall because they had been kept out of city hall through the appointments in the commissions, and so they didn't feel like they could go to the planning department and be heard about neighborhood issues, and I was the neighborhood candidate. So I started in March of '87, started in March of '87 at about 14 percent in the polls. My opponent was already up in the 40s.

McCREERY: He was a real insider.

AGNOS: Oh, yes, and had been president of the board of supervisors and been reelected a couple of times and was a product of local schools, local colleges. His father was a judge, and I was a guy who came in on a Greyhound bus. So it took a while for me to get the message out. My campaign manager, Richie Ross, who had also been my chief of staff when I was in the assembly, and then he'd moved on and started his own political consulting firm, came up with an ingenious idea. He said, "You know, Art, what you're about is policy and about issues." He said, "Let's write a book." He said, "Let's write a book and tell people what you're all about, and we'll tell people to read your book."

That had never been done before. It was an ingenious idea. He says, "That's what you're about, substance." Richie had been the one who had helped me and been the primary drafter of the staff manual where we tried to put down all the things. He said, "That's what you're about. You write things down, you create policies." He says, "So let's put a book together." This is not really a book, it's a pamphlet. You know, it's only ninety-some-odd pages or eighty-two pages.

McCREERY: But published as a paperback.

AGNOS: As a small paperback book, that's right. So it became my book. We told people. I'd give my little speeches. I'd say, "Read my book." All my signs said, "Read my book," and it just sort of captured the imagination of people that a politician would respect them enough to write a book and then try to get it to them. We hand-carried these to all the voters in the city.

McCREERY: Now, talk about how you decided on the title.

AGNOS: When I was in the legislature, as a social worker I wanted to get things done for people and level the playing field so that I could empower them to get things done. So that became the title of the book, *Getting Things Done*, because that's what I do in government, is do things. I don't like to do ceremonies. I don't like to do celebrity things. I always resisted that. I think I've talked about this.

McCREERY: Yes.

AGNOS: I don't like to give speeches, either. I always used to get nervous giving speeches. Still do. I talked to Jane Fonda about that one. She says, "Oh, I get nervous every time I do a movie." I said, "You've done so many movies." She

says, "I still get nervous." And she said, "What you need to do is take that nervous energy and put it into the performance as an actor, and so if you get nervous just put it into the passion that you deliver your speech with." So I try to think of that. But the person I thought of, as I told you before, is Ronald Reagan.

McCREERY: Yes.

AGNOS: That's to do the ceremonial things. But I still chafe at doing those kinds of things, but I learned to do them because I want to get things done.

McCREERY: So your book title is *Getting Things Done*, and you distributed this by handing it out in the—?

AGNOS: Precincts.

McCREERY: How did you do it?

AGNOS: As the campaign got into full bore by September and October—the election was in November—we had anywhere from 800 to 1,000 people every weekend going door to door in precincts. Had a wonderful campaign organization all over, with precinct captains and all that kind of thing. We'd have rallies every Saturday morning, where people would come together, and I would give a speech on what had happened, a talk on what would happen that week and what was going on and how the campaign was and what the issue of the week was and all that, and then they'd go out and they'd do this.

McCREERY: So by September your numbers were—?

AGNOS: I was closing fast. In November, with five major candidates in there—the city attorney, Louise Renne; Roger Boas, the chief administrative officer; Jack

Molinari; myself; and one other person—so it was five major players. Then I got almost 49 percent of the vote in the primary, so to speak. Then we had a runoff, and I got 73 percent and crushed my opponent.

But we had our ups and downs. Every campaign is different from the other, and it takes on a life of its own. It has ups and downs. When I got started we started to go up, and then in June the newspapers—the *Chronicle*, which was never supportive of me—they were owned at that time by a wealthy family, the Thieriots. They wanted to stop me because I was the outsider. They looked into my background and found that I had accepted loans from a close friend of mine, who is my son's godfather.

This is a story I ought to tell a little bit about. When I first got elected to the state assembly in 1977, around 1978 this man approached me, who was Greek American, and said to me, "You know, we're very proud of you because you're Greek American, and we want you to succeed." And he said, "I've made a lot of money in business in Sacramento and I want to help you make money." This was strange. So I ignored it. Six, seven months went by. I ran into him at another Greek American event where I gave a speech. He said, "You know, that was great. I meant what I said to you." He said, "I want you to call Nick Petris," who was one of my early heroes.

I called Nick Petris, and I said, "Who's this guy that keeps telling me he wants to help me succeed and make money and all this stuff?" He said, "This man is a very unusual man." He said, "I know him well because I've invested with him myself. What he does is he takes your capital and invests it in real

estate investments that he makes money on, and then you're a partner in it, but you don't have to do the work because you are a silent investor."

So, on Nick's recommendation, the next time he approached me, I said, "Okay, I'd like to get to know you, and we'll see what we can do." I said, "But why do you do this?" He said, "Because what I do well, I know that other people can't do well, and what you do well, other people can't do as well as you do, and you're part of our culture. You're Greek American, and we want you to go up higher. I was terribly embarrassed," he said, "as an ethnic Greek American man, when Spiro Agnew was convicted of taking money in payments as governor and in the White House in order to survive." He says, "You public officials—in the ancient days of Greece, public officials never had to work because they were doing the affairs of state. There ought to be something like that. You shouldn't have to worry about it."

So, with two kids and not making a lot of money and looking at colleges, I said, "Okay, how do we do this?" So he loaned me some money, and I invested it with him, declared it all, and started to run for mayor a couple of years later. They found that I had taken money from him, declared it, but had missed a couple of spots on the forms. I had it in one section but not the other. It was a paperwork problem, but they made it into a front-page story that Agnos was taking loans from a Sacramento developer and hadn't reported them properly.

So it was in the headlines of the paper in June. It was crushing. Whoo! Because you would have thought that I assassinated the president or something.

McCREERY: How did you answer those charges?

AGNOS: It was a real test in my life. It was one of the most defining moments in my life because I went down in the polls to about 8 or 9 [percent] because I looked like a criminal, the way they made it out to be. Basically I had taken money from somebody who had loaned it to me at no interest. I left that out. It had no interest because he said, "I don't want any money off of you." I reported it all, but it looked, and still sounds, to a cynical person or even a fair-minded person, as fishy. Why does someone give you money at no interest, to help you make money and they're not going to get anything back for it?

Now, there had been nothing back for it, and to this day he's never gotten anything for it. I never could fix a ticket. I never put him on a commission, because he lived in Sacramento. He was just proud of it. He became the godfather to my son, so there's a certain kind of semi-familial relationship. But it became a scandal in June of 1987 of epic proportions, and for several days the newspapers—and everybody thought I was dead. I was deeply, deeply depressed and thinking of quitting, and a couple of advisers said, "Well, maybe you ought to drop out because you'll never recover from this."

Two things guided me. First, my mother, my immigrant mother said, "Don't you give up. We've never given up on anything, and you're not going to give up here. You're going to go back. If you believe what you did, explain it, and people will believe you." Then I thought back on Leo, who had gone through the speakership fight, and Leo had been devastated by Berman coming in and telling him that he had the votes, and when we drove back, I've never

seen a man so crushed. But he stood up and fought back, and ultimately the result was not what Berman expected.

So I did the same thing. We started by going to all of the media, the editorial boards, and laying out all what I had done, and said, "If I made a mistake, it was the mistake of not reporting it all properly, and for that I paid a penalty, but I did not do anything dishonest. I didn't steal. I didn't do any favors. I simply made a mistake in reporting this stuff." I went to the voters, more importantly, in June. Fortunately, I had enough time, from June to November. So in my political brochures, I explained it and said, "This is what I have done, and you judge." In political debates, my opponents would use it against me. I'd explain it. Ultimately I had enough time so that people believed me, and I won by the biggest margin in the history of the city.

But for me, what that means was it was a test whether I could handle enormous political setbacks and not give up. That has stayed with me all my life, and I try to pass it on to my—that no matter how bleak something may look, if you believe in yourself and what you're doing, don't give up, and keep going. That's what came out of that, for me.

That Greek man is still my very close friend. He walked my mother up and held my mother's hand when she held the Bible when I was sworn in. We're still very close, and the politics are old history.

McCREERY: Thank you.

AGNOS: But that was a tough time, let me tell you. So I got elected in spite of that or by overcoming that. The campaign was a magnificent campaign for mayor. I told

people—I knew it was magic while I was going through it because there was a real energy, and people believed in me because of what I said about what we were going to do together. I talked about this wasn't about me but it was about an enterprise that said that the ordinary person was going to manage and determine policies of their government, that they were going to be a part of it, and they believed it. I tried to put that into practice every day I was in public life and say, "This is what I believe in. This is what I don't believe in. So vote for me if you care about this."

As I say, I say that because too many politicians try to round off the corners and govern or campaign out of a fear of losing. We need to change politics in this country and campaign and govern out of a commitment to doing the right thing. When people ask me, "Why are people so cynical? Why are people so disenchanted with government?" I tell them what I just said, and they usually agree, because people would tell me they voted for me even though they didn't like a lot of the things I said, because I told them what I believed, and that was important to them.

McCREERY: Now, you had a lot of direct contact with your voters in this election, but you also, as you say, had to mend fences with the media.

AGNOS: I didn't mend fences with them. I didn't mend fences with the *Chronicle*. The *Chronicle* never liked me because I was not of their class. I'm talking about the ownership. The reporters liked me. The reporters were my class, my type of thing. Now, what made a big difference in that campaign was the *San*

Francisco Examiner, which was owned by the Hearsts, and run at that time by William Randolph Hearst III, I think he was?

McCREERY: Yes.

AGNOS: They could buy and sell the *Chronicle* people. But they interviewed me and decided to support me, which was a big, big boost to my campaign, because the *Examiner* was the rival to the *Chronicle* at that time. Now it's all changed, since the Hearsts bought the *Chronicle* and sold the *Examiner* and wiped it out, so to speak, except that it's run by some other people, but it's not the same paper. They looked at me in the eye like you are right now and listened to my story, both the positives about the issues and what I was going to do as mayor, and the negatives, which was this scandal, this so-called scandal that the *Chronicle* had put in the headlines. They listened to me, looked me in the eye, and believed what I said and checked it out, and it did check out, so they supported me. I'm told that when it was announced in the newsroom of the *Examiner* that they were endorsing me—I think it was in September or so—that a cheer went up among the reporters, which was unprecedented. It was really nice.

McCREERY: Very interesting.

AGNOS: Yes. Other reporters told me that.

McCREERY: Are there other newspapers that mattered in this race?

AGNOS: Well, the *Examiner* and the *Chronicle* were the two major ones. The [*San Francisco*] *Bay Guardian* also.

McCREERY: A weekly.

AGNOS: Yes, a weekly sort of counterculture paper.

McCREERY: Yes. Did you talk directly to Bruce Brugmann?

AGNOS: Yes. Oh, yes. They supported me. And the *San Francisco Progress* was a very strong, three-times-a-week newspaper that was very influential in the western part of the city, where I didn't have strong relationships. They endorsed me. In fact, they endorsed me before the *Examiner* did, and that was a major plus. All the papers that endorsed me went out of business. [Laughter] The *Progress* went out of business, and then the *Examiner* did years after. I mean, they were all there while I was there, but in the years after me.

McCREERY: That's quite a story, wasn't it, about overcoming a major hurdle in the midst of your campaign like that.

AGNOS: It was a major blow. It was really a major blow. As I said, I was really literally knocked off my feet and got helped up by my constituents and family. It's like if you ever watch a boxing match, some guy gets knocked down, and he staggers to his feet, and he sort of stays in the race and ultimately wins—I mean the match. But for a while there, you thought he was going to get knocked out and be defeated. That's the way I was for a good month.

I remember the humiliation of this story, how I felt it, because when you're walking down the street of a city like ours, you know, there's a newspaper box, where they sell the newspapers, on every corner, and what do I see? The headlines. You know, like "World War II Ends". It's "Agnos is"—whatever it was; I can't remember—"Tax Cheat" or something, and my picture. You're

walking, and you're seeing people, and you think every one of them is looking at you, saying, "You're a crook."

And you have to get up in front of an audience and talk about issues with this right there. They're holding the newspaper, and your opponents' supporters come up, and they're holding the newspaper. So it was a tough scene, but character building, as they say, and I needed it all when I became mayor.

McCREERY: I'll bet you did.

AGNOS: I needed it all.

[End of Session]

[Session 8, February 11, 2003]

[Begin Minidisc 8]

AGNOS: As I was driving over today, I was listening to public radio, KQED, the local station, and listening to the last portion of an interview that the show host was having with the incumbent mayor, Willie Brown. He said something that I thought might be a good starting point for some of our discussions on the mayor's race, the mayor's office, and that is—one of the issues was how to keep the city clean. He was responding to a caller, and he was saying how it's important that every citizen become involved in keeping the city clean because it's impossible to hire enough people to go around and pick up all of the trash that's left behind, he says. As he said it, "It doesn't walk there, it gets dropped there by a human being, and other human beings have to help pick it up because the city simply can't afford to do it all by themselves."

This was the interesting thing to me. He says, "When I'm out there, even when it's not a photo op, I'm picking up paper," and that struck home with me because I remember I was so desperate to try to keep the city clean. Wherever I went, I was picking up paper. Here I am, the mayor on the way to see an important visitor to the city, whether it was a foreign dignitary or a domestic dignitary or just a business leader, and I'm walking into a downtown hotel or

walking into a downtown high-rise, or out in the neighborhoods, but usually it's in the downtown areas you see it. I'd be picking up trash and walking over and throwing it over.

People always would notice me and remark on it. I still do it. It has now been ten years since I left the mayor's office, and every morning I go out and pick up with—I now have a hand easy-picker-upper tool. It's a thing you squeeze with your hand and pick it up, so I don't have to bend over. Ten years later, I'm still walking around the neighborhood picking up trash and putting it in a plastic bag and throwing it into the trash barrel. People always comment, "What are you doing that for?" And I say, "Well, it's the only way a mayor can keep his pension"—earn his pension, I should say. But basically I hope that people would follow, and nobody does. [Laughter] They are all complimentary, but I don't see anybody doing it.

McCREERY: They watch you pick it up.

AGNOS: I guess so. I guess so. But it's one of the vexations of a mayor, and I was thinking about what Willie's comment was because I did the same thing. I think—here's the sort of truism, if you will—and that is, every mayor may start out at a different place, with different ideas and different plans, but they all wind up at the same ending, worrying about keeping the streets clean, worrying about keeping the streets safe, and all these common denominators that are part of the function of being a mayor.

When I started, I had some big ambitions and big plans to deal with a totally different kind of job. The job of being a mayor is completely different,

almost an opposite of being in the state legislature. A legislator is an advocate and to some extent a mayor can be, but a legislator is an advocate, a creator, someone who is exploring new ideas to see how functional they may be in the form of legislation that will advance some issue to a new and better place on behalf of the state and the people who live in it.

A mayor is not creating new ideas in a legislative sense. They may explore new ideas to fix problems that exist in the city, but basically the mayor is a manager of a very large corporation. In my day, it was 25,000 employees, with a $2 billion budget, which is larger than most corporations and certainly more diverse than any corporation because you talk about even corporations that have many different holdings, different interests, like Philip Morris does everything from food to tobacco. A mayor is the CEO in a big city like San Francisco or Los Angeles, Chicago, et cetera. The mayor of San Francisco is the CEO of the airport, the port, a small public army which is the police department, the fire department, a health system, a public works system that keeps the roads and public facilities in shape, the parks and recreation department.

So you have many different departments that could be large businesses in and of themselves that you are the CEO for and responsible for. So the job is one wherein you are constantly worrying about management issues. On the other side, with unions, labor-management issues are always coming to you. You're deciding strikes, and it is an awkward position for someone who comes from the legislature, who is a progressive, as most legislators from San

Francisco are, who may graduate or move up or be promoted by the electorate to be mayor. Suddenly you're on the other side. After being an advocate for unions and union benefits and union issues, suddenly you're on the other side, saying, "I'm sorry, we can't do that."

An example of that was, in my case, the unions in my first year as mayor when we were facing a desperate budget deficit, the largest in the history of the city at that time, which was almost, what, 15, 20 percent of the budget—almost 10 percent, I should say, almost 10 percent of the budget. I was faced with making decisions that affected union membership that really were not decisions I wanted to make but had to make. I think that's the big difference as a mayor. Many times, you make decisions you have to make but you don't want to make, because if you had a preference, you'd rather do it another way.

McCREERY: Yes. To what extent were you aware of the vast differences in these two jobs at the outset?

AGNOS: A good question. Not at all. [Laughter] Not at all. Perhaps a person who runs for mayor from the city council or from the board of supervisors has a better idea, a notion, but I don't think anyone can really know the job unless they've had an opportunity to work inside a mayor's office with the mayor, as a chief deputy. I knew the legislature because I had been a chief of staff to the speaker, so I knew it from top to bottom. Even then, there was a difference between being in the job and being around the job, and I think the same was true of the mayor's office.

Most politicians who have not been in the mayor's office or on a city council, who may come from a legislative background either in Congress or in the state legislature, I believe, are completely unaware. I think that someone coming from the private sector is even more completely unaware. We have seen time and time again how people coming from the private sector—now, while they may learn quickly, there's such a broad, broad number of issues that a person from the private sector has no idea about, because they simply don't travel in that kind of a circle, if you will, that kind of a road.

So I was not prepared, I must confess, for those kinds of issues. I was not prepared for the labor-management negotiations. Now, there's staff there and you make fundamental decisions, but as I said, when you're in the legislature, you side with the working person—at least I did—when you're from San Francisco, and you want them to have protections. You want them to have benefits. For example, as you may recall in the legislature, I promoted legislation that would offer parental leave to working fathers, and the only thing I offered in 1982 was that a father could take up to six months off without pay. The only thing I was guaranteeing was that they could come back to their work. This was deemed to be—I'm sorry, six weeks, not six months, six weeks. That was deemed to be anti-business. Today that is the law, the national law, the federal law. Parents can take that kind of leave. We just had it passed in the state for even longer, I think. Anyway, ten years ago, it was anti-business.

So when I become mayor, having to face some of those issues, and you don't have the money—you may have the will and the desire and the philosophical interest, but if you don't have the money, you have to say no.

One of the examples was—and I must confess that I had strained relationships with unions, even though I was philosophically supportive of what their objectives were. The strained relations came from the fact that we didn't have the money to do what they were hoping someone with my philosophy would automatically do. A good example occurred in my first year. We were facing, as I said, the largest deficit in the history of the city, and so I had to make cuts in programs, had to make possible layoffs in employees, had to freeze wages and raise taxes.

In fact, there's a funny story, if I may digress for a minute. It was in 1988, my first year, first couple of months. There was a new congressman who was visiting the city. His name was Joe Kennedy from Massachusetts, the son of Robert Kennedy. Of course, everybody in California was always strongly supportive of the Kennedys, so he had been here and raised money during his campaign and was back making sort of a thank-you visit. I was co-host of a party in his honor, and so I was standing next to him and his sister, Courtney, in a receiving line at this political event. We were making small talk as people came to us, and he said, "Gee, Mr. Mayor, I read in the paper"—he had been briefed—"that you're having a tough time right now." I said, "Yes. How would you like to be a new mayor, in his first sixty days—I haven't even

finished ninety days, and here I am raising taxes, freezing wages, laying off employees, and cutting all programs."

His sister overhead me saying that to him, and she leaned over and said, "Are you really doing all four of those things: raising taxes, freezing salaries, laying off employees, and cutting all programs?" I said, "Yes, I have to. I don't have any choice." She looks at her brother, and she said, "Joe, what the hell are we getting our picture taken with this guy for?" [Laughter]

I think that was a wonderful sort of—oh, what's the word? Vignette or something. I never forgot it because it sort of characterized my whole four years. People said, "What are you doing that for?" It's because you've got to.

McCREERY: But your statement that you had no choice tells a lot about how you were approaching this job.

AGNOS: Well, absolutely, and we were trying to—and I'll speak to that in a moment, because you remind me of something. So the unions came in. I went to the business community, and I laid out the situation. I opened the books. I said, "There's no reason for me to try to be tricky or try to be clever or anything." I said, "You are welcome to look at the city's books, because I want you to believe what I'm saying, and that is, we have the most serious deficit and I have no choice but to do these things."

People wonder how do you have a deficit if you have a balanced budget requirement. Cities in California and the state have to balance their budgets every year. The federal government does not. They can simply borrow against the future, deficit spending. We cannot. So how do you wind up with a

shortfall? I asked that question. I said, "How did Mayor Feinstein,"—who was a very good manager; she micromanaged a lot of things that I didn't—I said, "How did we wind up with somebody who's like she was for ten years and we're short of money?"

What I learned was that in the early years of her administration, the city had won a legal decision that had brought a windfall of money, some hundred-and-some-odd million dollars, which she wisely put in the bank, and then every year when she came up short for what she wanted to do, she went to the bank account and took money out of the savings account and filled in the gap so that if her spending was 4 percent more than she had in income, she took the 4 percent extra out of the bank.

So in 1988, it's my turn, and we're short $175 million, and I'm looking at, "Well, where did she get the money?" "She got it from the savings account." "Good. What have we got in the savings account?" The answer was "Nothing," because it was all spent down. Like a smart politician, she spent the money that she had. She never liked me to say these things, but nevertheless that's what I found, and it irritated her no end when I said it, so I tried to say it as little as I could. But nevertheless, it was something that occurred and the extra money from savings was built into the base budget. In fairness, that year we were starting what was to be a four-year recession, so the revenues were down even below normal, so that wasn't her fault.

So anyway, I was now approaching the different interest groups in the city in order to, first, inform them and then tell them what the options were that I

was considering and wanted their review and comments. I went to the business community and told them I wanted to raise taxes. I went to neighborhood groups and special interest groups, like those who lobby for children's issues, those who lobby for the parks. That's one of the things—well, let me finish this. Then I came to the labor unions, who I told the same thing. Each time, I had a full presentation that started and ended with, "You can look at the books. Send in your accountants, whatever you want."

Well, to finish the story about the labor unions, I told them that I was going to freeze wages and perhaps lay off people but try to keep that as minimal as possible. The labor unions were asking for an increase, a pay raise of somewhere around—and I don't remember the numbers, maybe 5 to 6 percent. That's what they came back with when I finished with my presentation. I said, "Now, clearly you've been hearing me, and you've heard me say that I'm short of money, and you're asking for a pay raise. The only way I could give you a pay raise is to lay off more people. If I'm going to lay off twenty or thirty, I have to lay off another 150 or 200 to give all the 25,000 employees"—or whatever it was at the time—"a pay raise of forty dollars."

They said, "Go ahead and do it." I said, "Let me get this straight. You want me to lay off more workers than I planned so that I can give all the rest a forty-dollar-a-month increase." "That's right." The reason was, quite clearly, that the union leaders stay in office by getting pay raises and getting benefits, and therefore they were more interested in those who were working and paying the dues than those who were laid off and not working and paying dues.

Well, I said, "I'm sorry. I'm not going to put another 100 or 150 or 200 people on the street with no income for their families so we can give forty dollars to everybody else. They're going to have to forgo their forty dollars." So that sort of was the first year of four tough years with unions, who always wanted the mayor to take care of their interests, irrespective of anyone else's interests, because their interest is their membership. It's a single-minded, single-track issue. Now, there are some wonderful exceptions. The longshoremen's union, for example, always was interested in other issues. Now, they weren't negotiating with me either, but they were interested in other issues. I found the nurses union was always interested in other issues, like health care of people that didn't affect their pocketbooks. Once in a while, the SEIU [Service Employees International Union]. But for the most part unions, the rest of them, were interested in one end. How much money do we get, and how much are our benefits?

McCREERY: What kind of relationship did you have with San Francisco unions from the beginning? Did you have much that you could build on when you became mayor?

AGNOS: When I went into office I was supported by the unions, and so they figured their payoff would be a blank check for them. For all I knew, that was fine, because I thought I could take care of those kinds of things. I wanted to pay workers. I wanted to give them better benefits and sought to do that in some areas where I had leeway, but when you don't have the money, I don't care

how pro-union you are. If you're honest, you simply can't give it to them. I would look for other things that I could do.

For example, one of the areas where we broke new ground was seeking to develop laws in the city that would help workers who were working with computers, with carpal tunnel syndrome, in setting up a whole new set of work rules and regulations that would help people who were working with computers, as we saw the introduction of computers throughout the workplace. Giving breaks at certain times and a whole variety of other things. I'll have to look and see what it was. But employers didn't want to do it. I set up a task force, and today many of those things are in place that we put in, that started to break new ground in San Francisco, in my office.

But on the fundamental issue of, "We want more money in our pocket," I couldn't give it to them, simply because I didn't have it. The fact that you don't have it doesn't matter. What they say is, "Go get it." Well, go get it by either raising taxes even more, because I was already raising taxes, or lay off more people or something, but "Get us the money. That's all we care about."

So I didn't have a warm and fuzzy relationship with the unions, even though I started off with it, simply because of that. They are characteristic of what I found to be, in the mayor's office, the philosophy, if you will, the institutional philosophy of virtually every group in the city. San Francisco is a city organized around special interests. What I say about the city, in trying to describe what I'm talking about here, is that San Francisco has always been a city that attracts rebels, rebellious people. What I mean by that, I don't mean

someone who's out to start a revolution against the government necessarily, but people who are counterculture, people who don't feel comfortable wherever they are in the country or in the world.

For example, Sun Yat-sen came to San Francisco's Chinatown to plan the Chinese revolution. Central American revolutionaries came to get support for El Salvador, Nicaragua, Guatemala. A variety of movements, democratic movements, would come to San Francisco to get support. The peace movement was always strong in San Francisco. And then moving over across the spectrum, people who were artists, who didn't feel comfortable in Des Moines, just to pick out a place, or a gay person who didn't feel comfortable in Iowa would come to San Francisco because San Francisco was a place where you could be what you wanted to be, with whomever you wanted to be it with, as long as it didn't interfere with someone else.

That's not new for San Francisco. That's been the history of San Francisco from the time it was an "anything goes" kind of port city in the gold rush days and all those other things. It was a place that had a greater tolerance for diversity, for differences, for eccentricities, for anything that you wanted to do that was legal and sometimes not so legal that wasn't acceptable in most other parts of the country.

So what that means to me is that it brought these kinds of folks who were struggling to find themselves or find what they wanted to do, and when they found it, we were the beneficiaries of some extraordinary creativity, whether it was in the arts or in business or in the professions and politics. It's no accident

that we see in San Francisco some of the most wonderful artists and musicians, business leaders, political leaders, education—the whole—because the positive side of this rebelliousness is this creativity, I believe. The Silicon Valley. I'm talking about, people come to the Bay Area because this is a place they can be something that they can't find in their own community.

That was me, by the way, what I just described. In Springfield, Massachusetts, I didn't feel I could be all that I wanted to be, even though I didn't know what it was at twenty-five. I had no idea what I wanted to be. I'll tell you one thing. I could never have been mayor of Springfield, Massachusetts. But I just felt stultified there, so I wanted to get out. What was the place that was open, that was accessible, that was where you could be something special, even though you couldn't define it? It was California and San Francisco in particular.

So I came in 1966, as we know, and ten years later, I'm in the legislature. Twenty years later, I'm the mayor of that city. That kind of thing doesn't happen in most cities. There isn't that kind of, "Well, who are you? Where'd you come from? Why do your parents do what they do?" They don't ask those kinds of questions. At least they didn't of me. I think that that's why you find people coming to our city, to find themselves in whatever they choose or define for themselves.

Now, that's the positive side. We get a great creativity in our universities, our colleges, everything. Now, the negative side is we get some of the most cantankerous, obstreperous citizens who will fight tooth and nail over the most

insignificant little detail, because that's the nature of that citizen, and in San Francisco we have them all.

That was a long preface for an example I'm about to give. As I was trying to deal with this huge deficit—and we had it every year—I was trying to be careful and not do what I call the meat-ax approach, which is just cut everything across the board and let everyone suffer equally, because I didn't think and didn't believe that you cut the hospital where poor people got their care, or the trauma unit, where everybody got their life saved, the same way you might cut something at the Recreation and Park Department, for example. I might take 11 percent or 12 percent out of Rec and Park, or DPW [Department of Public Works] and make a 4 percent cut at the hospital.

So even though I had to cut 10 percent, I cut more out of one place, the way you do in your family, which is how I approached it. The family may say, "Okay, we're not going out to dinner at all this year because we can't afford it, so we don't cut our medical insurance." That's the way you make decisions in a family, and that's frankly the way you make decisions in a city when you're at the top of a $2 billion budget at that time.

One of the things was the swimming pools. The city had, I think, four or five indoor swimming pools, and we were going to reduce the hours that you could use them from three days to two days, free, because I couldn't afford the lifeguards and the persons to watch it. We just didn't have the money. Well, the aquatics platform was born, and I had protests in city hall with several dozen people, who came to protest how I was ruining the quality of life in San

Francisco because I had reduced the number of days you could use the swimming pool from three to two free days.

When I tried to explain to them what I was doing with that money—it wasn't going into my pocket, it wasn't going into pay raises, it was going into saving lives at the hospital—it wasn't their life I was trying to save, so they only cared about their swimming pool. I found too much of that during my four years, and I daresay any mayor that tells the truth afterwards—you don't know it going in, you know it coming out. I'm talking about we all wind up at the same place when we walk out. We're coming from different places when we walk in, and it seems as though everything sort of narrows each year, depending, and you come out at the same place. Everybody is picking up the trash. [Laughter] Every mayor is picking up the trash their last year because they're just trying so hard to just make it clean and maybe they can do it with their own effort.

So I found that the institutional groups, be they large or small, were too telescopic. You know how you see things at a telescope from the big end? It just gets smaller and smaller as you look at the other end? That's the way they approach too many issues. Everybody was just protecting their own turf. San Francisco is full of one-square-foot turf fights because—I think if you trace it all the way back, it's the rebellious nature. They want to challenge authority, and by God, they're going to do it over that one square foot. I got that in so many different places, where I would have to go through that.

Sometimes you would just have to eat it. That's why a mayor usually comes out less popular than when they start, because, as I've said, politicians—their capital is their popularity; the business person, it's their money. So you start withdrawing from the account from the first day you're in office, and if you're lucky you replenish it by doing good stuff that puts it back in. But I found in the mayor's office very often, if you didn't restore the third day of the two days that you took away in the swimming—among the aquatics platform, they didn't care if you built the new Embarcadero, because they were using the swimming pool.

An example of that was we took down Kezar Stadium as part of developing, during my four years, a wonderful high school athletic facility. The old Kezar Stadium was a professional football field that the 49ers used, that they moved out of when they went to San Francisco's baseball stadium at Candlestick [Park] and used that with the Giants at that time, in '88. So Kezar was, by and large, a huge stadium that held—I don't know what it was—40,000 to 50,000 people but never used for that because there was nobody to use it, just high school teams.

So we decided to demolish it and rebuild it for high school teams to use for an athletic facility, for track and field as well as football. The neighbors who were on the south side of Golden Gate Park, where Kezar Stadium was located, right at the eastern end, had always looked at a three- or four-story high brick wall that blocked them from seeing anything across the street other than this huge stadium. So we took it down. Of course, then suddenly a new vista was

available to that four-block, five-block area on the south side of Kezar Stadium, because they were looking at Golden Gate Park and a wide-open expanse, and they liked it.

So when the time came to build a new athletic facility, football stadium and stuff for the high schools, the neighbors in that four-block area said, "We don't want that because it's going to block our views." "But you didn't have views. You bought these homes looking at a brick—" "But we do now, and we want that now." "Well, okay, we're going to build a high school football and track facility that won't have a giant wall. It's going to be below the ground, so the stands will be looking down, beneath the ground. It'll be sort of excavated, and the only thing that will be above ground will be a one-story facility that is what you get in any neighborhood."

Then they said, "Well, we don't like the four-story-high or three-story-high light poles." Now, the light poles are like a telephone pole, with a light on top, and the lights were the new kind of lights that didn't cast a great glare that would trouble people at night, even though they had them at Kezar. I think they had them at Kezar, although I'm not sure they had them at Kezar.

Anyway, so they said, "We don't want the light poles." It wasn't the lights; it was the light poles. So I went back. "You don't want the light poles." Did I tell you this story?

So we had progressed from this giant three-story, four-story wall to light poles that were two feet wide, and they didn't want those because that would ruin their views. So I went back to the bureaucrats and said, "Is there anything

I can say? I'm running for reelection, and I need to tell them something. I'll eat it if I have to, but I'd like to have something positive." "Easy, Mr. Mayor, just tell them we're going to have trees in front of the light poles, so it'll be like an extension of the park that they're looking at right now. They'll just see a tree in front of the light poles, and the rest of it will be the trees of Golden Gate Park."

So I went back, and the neighbors said okay, and we proceeded. The following year, the facility was finished. The poles were in, the trees were in, and I went back, and the neighbors were waiting for me because the poles were three stories high, as they knew, but the trees were only three feet high, because the bureaucrats had not told me that they were going to grow to be that high in fifteen years. And so the neighbors were ticked off at me. That's a commentary both on the bureaucrats who tell you what they think you need to know and not the whole story, but it's also a comment on the neighbors who said, "God, we're getting rid of this monstrosity of a football stadium, and we're going to fight about the light poles."

Another example of this same thing was the Embarcadero Freeway. Didn't I talk about this?

McCREERY: No, you haven't yet, on tape.

AGNOS: Okay, we'll talk a little bit about that, being an example of the one-foot turf fights, although this one may have been three square feet.

McCREERY: Because there were plans in place when you became mayor to repair the freeway? No, this was after the [Loma Prieta] earthquake.

AGNOS: No, no. Mayor Feinstein, to her credit, had recognized that the Embarcadero Freeway, going along the waterfront, which was originally designed to be a nonstop, three-way route through the city to the Golden Gate Bridge—this double-decker freeway was to take traffic directly from the Bay Bridge to the Golden Gate Bridge. When they started construction and people in the city began to see this monstrosity that was inching its way along the waterfront toward the Golden Gate Bridge, with the route being through the Marina [district], they went absolutely crazy. That's why it was stopped at Broadway. People said, "That's enough. Stop it." There was a stub there where it was stubbed off, and ever since that time many people in the city thought the Embarcadero should be removed. It was a scar on the side of the city's face.

Mayor Feinstein had tried, to her credit, several years before, I think in the early eighties, '85, '84 perhaps—I don't remember exactly—through an initiative in this city, to demolish it, just take it down because it's ugly and a blight on the city. It failed. People said, "We like the convenience, and we want to keep it, even though we understand the unsightliness of it."

So in 1989, after the Loma Prieta earthquake, suddenly the freeway was badly damaged but still standing. In fact, it didn't look badly damaged, from looking at it. It looked like you could drive on it, you could do anything you wanted to. But the engineers said that it had been damaged sort of internally, that there were cracks and that it could come down. It wasn't stable, and it had to be reinforced. Even though they didn't say so at the time, they said that they would have to invent the methodology by which they reinforced it because no

one had ever reinforced earthquake-damaged freeway columns. It was the columns that held it in an elevated state which were damaged.

Of course, we know, sadly, in Oakland the same freeway, meaning double-decker—the upper deck collapsed onto the lower deck and in some places completely collapsed, but in San Francisco that did not happen. So the dilemma was, it looks usable, it feels usable, but you can't use it, so it was closed down. The state engineers, who never saw a freeway they didn't like, said that for $35 million they could retrofit the Embarcadero Freeway and make it usable.

Well, that immediately set up a clamor with those institutional forces that liked the freeway for its convenience. The financial district people who drove in and out of the city might live down on the peninsula but drive to the big high-rises. Then Chinatown liked the freeway because it emptied right there at Washington, I think it is, and brought people into Chinatown. We were in the midst of a recession. The earthquake compounded the local effects of the recession, and that area down there was hard hit.

On the other hand, there were people who said, "Art, this is an opportunity to demolish that freeway because it can't be used as it is, and we're not sure it can ever be made safe again." There was a seismic standard. I think it was 8.2 earthquake seismic standard that they would have to retrofit it to. The engineers were saying for $35 million they could retrofit it to an 8.2.

I began to ask questions. I saw the opportunity that this condition of our freeway left for me. The first thing was safety, and the second thing was

aesthetics. I asked the engineers, "Can you guarantee that what you are about to invent will stand up in an 8.2 earthquake?" "No, we can't guarantee, but we're reasonably sure." In the meantime, the architects, who had a professional association I can't remember the name of, became my experts in opposing the retrofit. They began to do the scientific or professional inquiry and research and would come back and say, "There's no way they can guarantee that this would ever be safe, and we believe that if you demolish it and create a surface sort of roadway, you can take care of most of the traffic that used to use the Embarcadero Freeway."

I decided to set up a citizens task force, a citizens planning body that would look at all the options and advise me as well as—if we decided to go forward. My inclination was to demolish it. But I wanted to make sure that I had a planning process that concurred with that because I knew there would be a tremendous opposition to demolishing it. I was convinced when the engineers and the safety experts could not guarantee me it would be safe and that there was an alternative which would move traffic in a sensible, smooth way, although perhaps not as perfectly as the Embarcadero did, and that we would create a much more beautiful place for the city that would be open for a new kind of development and new kind of public transit. That was the vision in 1989 and '90.

So I needed to develop community support for it, citizen support, and so I set up this task force that would look at all these options, conduct hearings, take the pros and cons, make recommendations to me and then oversee the

execution of whatever the final decision was. I sat in on many of those. The ultimate decision was that we would do that, we would demolish it, and it was because we could take the $35 million from the federal government that would have been the retrofit and use it towards a new kind of facility.

Chinatown, some parts of North Beach, certainly the financial district were unalterably opposed to the demolition, but most other people were supportive of it. But what usually happens in these cases is the opponents are ten times more vociferous than the supporters. Rarely do you find issues where supporters are as vociferous as opponents. I don't know why. It happens. For example, the "woman's right to choose issue," you have supporters who are as vociferous as the opponents, but that's a rare exception, and that's not, certainly, a city issue most of the time.

So anyway, on the Embarcadero, after listening carefully and going to some of the hearings, I made the decision to demolish it, and I bumped into one of my biggest political constituencies, supporter constituencies, and that was Chinatown. In my races for the state legislature and then for mayor, I'd always won in Chinatown with 60, 65 percent of the vote. Remember, over 55 percent is a landslide. When I ran for reelection in '92 and lost, my opponent, Frank Jordan, capitalized on my decision to demolish the freeway by distributing [the message] in Chinese—because he didn't want to come out with it in English, because he knew that [the decision] was popular in other parts of the city—that I had demolished the freeway and hurt business, which continued to struggle.

The problems in Chinatown were not really related to the removal of the freeway but their unwillingness to upgrade menus and remodel their stores. Their Chinatown restaurants have to compete with the newer Chinatowns, if you will, in the Richmond and Sunset neighborhoods of San Francisco and in the East Bay and down on the peninsula. What we've seen in Chinatown, to digress for a moment, is everybody thirty, forty years ago who wanted Chinese food in some sort of original recipe had to go to Chinatown, and it was an experience. But the owners and the business community didn't keep pace with modern changes, and as the Chinese community matured, they moved out of Chinatown, first to the Richmond neighborhood of San Francisco, then to Sunset, and then out to San Bruno Avenue, near Candlestick Park on the other side, to Oakland, and to some parts of the peninsula. So now in San Francisco they will say there are four Chinatowns. Chinatown number one is the one downtown; Chinatown number two is in the Richmond; three is in the Sunset; four is on San Bruno Avenue. Among the Chinese, they'll say Chinatown number one, two, three, four.

So anyway, that's the real reason they were struggling, and I recognized that and gave them $3 million to do economic development as part of the demolition of the freeway. But at the time I made the decision, the biggest opposition came from Chinatown, and one of my best supporters, who wanted to stop the demolition and rebuild [the freeway] organized and led the closing of all the stores on Grant Avenue. For the first time in the hundred-year history of Chinatown, all the stores closed. They're never closed. It's

24/7 in Chinatown, 24/7. They don't close for Christmas or anything else. But they closed on the day that my proposal to demolish the freeway and replace it with a surface-level roadway was before the board of supervisors. Busloads of merchants and constituents came in to lobby and demonstrate their opposition.

My decision and proposal, which had to be ratified by the board of supervisors in San Francisco, won six to five. One vote. One vote sustained my decision to demolish it. We went forward, and the citizens group sort of oversaw the planning process. It was demolished, and now we see what happened there. That was the plan. That was the vision.

But I remember even in the planning process there were great debates, huge debates over palm trees, whether palm trees should be planted along the Embarcadero. There were the purists who said, "San Francisco is not a place for palm trees." Now, the practical reason for palm trees is it's one of the few large trees, great trees—it's almost like a mini-redwood, if there's such a term. It's just a very tall tree—and if you go there, you'll see what I mean—that you can plant that has a shallow root base that doesn't require going way down. [Anything else] tears up the roadways and needs a huge area for its root base. [The palm] just doesn't need it, because it comes from an area where [trees] have a shallow root base. So that's why we use palm trees. But there was a knockdown, drag-out fight over palm trees.

It gets back to where I started with this long, long monologue, which is San Francisco is a place where you have turf fights over one square foot, and there were the palm tree people and the anti-palm tree people. So the fight over the

Embarcadero Freeway was a very costly one for me at the time. Today people say, "What a great thing you did!" And "Isn't it wonderful that the earthquake demolished the freeway so that we could do this?" I don't bother to tell them anything different because, as I said when we started this whole process, when you go into this business, you have to understand that the decisions you make and the things you do are because you do so out of a conviction to do the right thing and not because you expect a lot of glory. That fades. People think the earthquake knocked down the Embarcadero. It's just what you get out of it, rather than what you expect other people to think of you.

So the Embarcadero coming down was a major milestone in San Francisco's sort of planning history because it opened up the whole southeast part of the waterfront to housing, and I was there first, with Delancey Street. We gave them a certain part of that plot, which they then used to build their own housing, and then next to it I built the first—and last [Laughter], because that's all I had time for—low-income housing. If you are ever there it's called, I think, South Beach. It's right on the Embarcadero roadway, right immediately south of Delancey Street. It's for low-income people. You would never know it, because it's right next to housing that's selling $750,000 minimum condominiums the next one over. So you have Delancey Street and South Beach, this low-income rental housing we built with Bridge housing developers, and right next to it is a huge condominium facility with every condominium selling for $750,000 and up.

So I'm very proud of that kind of diversity along the waterfront that's opened it all up for spectacular housing as well as a vista of the city. It's like we did plastic surgery on the face of the city to remove a huge scar. Of course, Gap, which put its headquarters there, further up—and I was working on eminent domain to get that from redevelopment. I used to call up the founder of Gap—Don Fisher, his name was—and kind of hold his hand, because he was a real doer. He was used to doing things, like many successful men, and they just spend what it takes or do what it takes to get something done, and when you're working in the city process, it's not often that easy.

I used to call up to listen to him and be supportive and all that stuff, to encourage them to hang in there because I wanted him to build that facility there. I knew it would be a wonderful building, and he would be a great neighbor for the city to have as a headquarters based in the city. Even then, we had started to lose headquarters in the city as these companies became more and more global and moved to different parts of the country and world. The notion of putting Gap's headquarters here was important, so we encouraged him.

He wanted it on the waterfront because it would be a signature building in a signature location, and so we made sure that happened through the redevelopment agency that I controlled. Across the street, he's putting in a wonderful park. You ought to go by there sometime. It's just being finished, with new art, the Cupid's Bow that's there. Have you seen that? That's all with Gap and Don Fisher's generosity in donating it to the city. He's going to

take care of that park for ten years, and his signature building is right across the street.

All that was part of the opening of the Embarcadero. Then, driving along, make believe there's a two-story freeway there, a three-story freeway, double deckers, and you'll see all those businesses that are suddenly open. Buildings that didn't have sort of a window onto the waterfront now look at the waterfront, so it increased their property values but made the city, most importantly, better. But it was a major political fight that involved, as I say, the special interest groups from Chinatown, parts of North Beach, as well as the financial district.

McCREERY: Now, you had been a San Franciscan for many years and were certainly very much aware of the prevalence of special interest groups in San Francisco, and yet it sounds as if you became educated about the extent of these special interests in their isolation.

AGNOS: Yes.

McCREERY: What kinds of things did you try, for example, in dealing with the Chinatown area on the Embarcadero Freeway matter? What kinds of things did you try to reach out to their point of view?

AGNOS: You start with what you think and hope that every citizen wants, which is a better run, more beautiful city that will be better because of this, not poorer, not worse, but better. It'll be improved. There will be a better quality of life for the city. "No, we want the money for ourselves that comes with people driving in." So to compensate for that perceived loss, as I said, I gave them $3 million

for an economic development fund so that they could begin the planning process to say what do we do in the absence of what we think we need to make money in this part of the city, Chinatown, with the freeway removed? How do we upgrade our businesses and then attract customers?

I thought and pushed them, and still do, to develop a theme kind of approach to Chinatown, to use the money to upgrade the facades of the businesses, to make Grant Avenue a place where people want to walk, as they naturally do, and make the insides better, more attractive restaurants and stores so that people would want to go down there to get the original theme of Chinatown, which is a spectacular Chinese culture, the largest assemblage of Chinese culture, business products, people outside of mainland China. It would have been a natural. They do some things now with night markets, to get people down there at night.

But by and large, they've been retarded. I don't mean as individuals but as a community. They've retarded that growth and haven't done it, and they still struggle down there. If you know San Francisco, you don't go to Chinatown because the food is not good in general, and the places are dull. You'd rather go—you always know better places in Chinatown number two, three, four or Oakland or something else, and that's where they go.

McCREERY: But you already had longstanding relationships there, and I wonder, with all your efforts to work with them, why didn't that succeed? Do you have any idea?

AGNOS: Yes. Money. They perceived and the leadership perceived—well, it's a good question. First of all, they wanted what they perceived would get them money as quickly as they could, which was put the freeway back in in six months—that's what the experts said, "In six months we'll have it fixed up."

By the way, before I get too far away, anybody who reads this or anybody who wants to see what it would look like today doesn't have to wonder or speculate. They can see it. The last remaining double-decker—Oakland tore theirs down and built new kinds of roadways. We did. But at the interchange between 101 and 280 in San Francisco one can see a double-decker freeway. So the next time you're going to the airport in San Francisco from the Bay Bridge and you come around what they call Hospital Curve—San Francisco General Hospital is to the right, Potrero Hill is to the left—you can see what we demolished along the waterfront. Right there to the left is the last double-decker freeway the state restored, repaired. If you look at the columns, they're twice the size as the original ones, so the process to fix them that they invented was to wrap iron rebar around the existing columns that were damaged but still standing and then another two or three feet of concrete. You'll see that at all the columns at all the elevated freeways in the Bay Area. That's how they [were] retrofitted.

So along the waterfront, we would have had the same number of columns holding up the double-decker freeway, but about 40 percent or 50 percent thicker and therefore more of a monstrosity that was so unsightly in the

original. So that's what Chinatown wanted, and nothing else, because they thought that would be the quickest solution to their economic problems.

Then you have, what I say, the rebellious, the cantankerous, the obstreperous people who want to prove they're leaders at the expense of the mayor. So I had a few of those who didn't like me for other reasons, other decisions that I had made that maybe they weren't supportive of. They were more conservative than I was, and so they choose something that they think they can win, and they thought they could win. Remember, it was six to five on the board of supervisors, a very close vote, and if they could win, it enhances their leadership. It has nothing to do with the city. It has to do with their own personal politics and community politics, just as with the union leader who doesn't care about the rest of the workers, they only care about the workers who vote for them because it enhances their position. It's like the community leaders who don't care about the rest of the city; they only care about that which enhances their status as a, quote, "community leader." I had those in Chinatown, I had them in Richmond, I had them in Bayview, I had them in every part of the city.

When you say I was not new to San Francisco politics, I certainly wasn't. When you're in the legislature, you're not involved in every single issue. You can choose those which you are involved in and disregard the rest because they're not in your bailiwick as a state assemblyman. But as a mayor, there are no issues you can choose not to be involved in. If you choose not to be involved in them, they come and get involved with you, because there are

leaders out there—and by leaders [I mean] you only need two other people. You're the leader of two other people in San Francisco because everybody's a leader. It's the nature of these rebellious folks. Berkeley has some of that. Most cities don't, I don't think.

Now, what I mean by that is they don't have leaders for every square foot. They have leaders for every ten or eight square miles or something of a community, but they don't have one for every square foot. Obviously, I'm exaggerating, but to make the point, San Francisco's got one for every square foot, and maybe Berkeley does but I'm not sure about this community.

For example, with Willie Brown as mayor, he decided that he couldn't do anything about homelessness, which is another subject we're going to talk about as part of my mayoralty, but he decided it was one of those unsolvable problems. He said, "I'm not going to deal with it." That's what a legislator would do. "That's not going to be my issue." Here in the state legislature, if you talk to someone: "That's not my issue. You ought to go talk to Assemblyman X. That's their issue. They're interested in that. They're working on it." So he said, "Homelessness is not going to be my issue." Now, he had a homeless coordinator, but he just did nothing.

But it came and sought him out, and the activists, the leaders said, "You're not doing anything about this," and they had demonstrations, there's newspaper articles as people became more aware of panhandling and all the other kinds of things. It became an albatross around his neck, and he tried to avoid it, but he couldn't. It follows you.

So that's the difference, in answer to your question. Sure, I knew about a lot of these things or I had been exposed to some of them, but I didn't ever get involved in them because I didn't need to and it wasn't my interest when I represented half the city or a third of the city in the assembly. But as mayor, it is the entire city that you get involved with.

McCREERY: Now, you set up a system of seven deputy mayors.

AGNOS: Oh, yes, that's true.

McCREERY: I don't know how that ties in with this idea that the mayor has to be involved in everything.

AGNOS: It sure does.

McCREERY: Talk about how you came to do that.

AGNOS: I'm glad you reminded me of that, because it became controversial, but it was my way of trying to organize my administration, my mayoralty, to be more responsive to the people of the city, and I frankly copied the model from state government and federal government. If you look at the president, he appoints a secretary of state, a secretary of health, a secretary of defense, a secretary of labor, and so on. If you look at the state government, so does the governor. The governor appoints a secretary of health and welfare, a secretary of prisons, and he has a secretary who runs the major departments of state government, and the president appoints a secretary who runs the major departments of the federal government. They meet with the president and the governor in a cabinet.

Well, when the mayor walks into San Francisco, he has or she has major departments, as I said, in the strong-mayor form of government that San Francisco has, with the airport, port, police, fire, health, hospitals, clinics, parks, roads, et cetera. Each one of those departments has a bureaucratic head who is not necessarily responsive to you. They are people who are there before you get there, and you can't replace twenty of them at once—there's chaos—even if you were so inclined. So I had a certain number of staff positions. Every mayor has a budget, I should say. Every mayor has a budget with which to hire people who assist him or her to run these departments. So I chose to accept the same cuts I was asking every other department to take, and remember I said I had different percentages for different departments, depending on how I perceived their priority. Health didn't get the same cuts as DPW [Department of Public Works] or something.

If I can stop for a moment and go back to what I was talking about—it just reminded me. One of the ways I tried to save money was, we cleaned the street every week in every neighborhood, twice a week. So every week in San Francisco one side of the street has no parking for two hours or three hours, nine to twelve, don't park, or eight to ten, so all the cars park on the opposite side of the street, and the street sweeper comes up, cleans one side of the street, and then two days later or a day later, the other side gets done.

So to save money, my people came back with a recommendation: only do it once a week. So we do one side that week and the next week come back and do the other side, instead of the same week. That would save us X number of

dollars. I thought that would be a smart way to save money without doing real damage, because there are some parts of the city [that] don't need to be swept that often. But [people] like it, because every week they see the street sweeper going by. "That's my tax dollar," and so they felt like that were getting something. I understand their point of view, but when I'm trying to cut the budget in a smart way, I figured we don't have to sweep both sides of the street every week. We'll do it every other week.

Whew. I got hammered by those who said I was making the city a filthy place and all the rest of it. "But we're trying to save money so we can take care of lives, so we can keep the swimming pools open three days instead of two." Everybody wants what's in front of them. There was only one time, and we'll talk about it another time, that people stopped worrying about their own square foot, their own special need, their own narrow interest, and that was during the earthquake. So let me go back to where I just sort of interrupted.

McCREERY: You were saying that you had a certain budget to hire people to assist you, and you wanted to take a cut in your own budget as well as other city departments.

AGNOS: So I took [a cut] and said so publicly, "The mayor's budget will be the biggest cut of any department in the city." I did it, and then with the money remaining I wanted to organize them in what I thought was the most efficient way to carry out and manage the city the way I wanted to do it, and that was to hire a fewer number of people than Mayor Feinstein had but to pay them more so I could get a top-quality staffer.

To make the point to the bureaucrats and to the city that these people would carry weight, I called them deputy mayors, and I organized them around departmental cluster groups. For example, the deputy mayor for health and welfare had direct responsibility for the health department, which included the hospitals and a dozen or so health clinics, as well as the welfare department and the parks department. All were under the deputy health and welfare person. The deputy mayor for public safety oversaw the police department and the fire department. I had seven of them. There was a deputy mayor for the budget.

McCREERY: [The others were] business and economic development, housing, transportation and infrastructure, government-operations, and you've mentioned the others.

AGNOS: Every department was under one of these deputy mayors. They loved it. The bureaucrats loved it because they didn't have to come to the mayor to get a decision or a recommendation or to clear something. If they went to their deputy mayor, who met every week with their group of agencies, they would discuss the issues, the deputy mayor would get it and then come to me during our cabinet meetings and raise the issues. I would make the decision, based on a discussion among my cabinet, which were the seven deputy mayors, and if there was something more complex that I needed more information [about], we might call in the individual department head to meet with me—and we did this often—with the deputy mayor, the department head, and any other people he wanted for a more comprehensive discussion prior to my making a decision.

But it was much more efficient to have these deputy mayors because they could be concentrating just on their section.

As I said, it worked well because they could not only give direction to the city department, but when they went out to the public and someone wanted to get a message to the mayor or get something from the mayor, they knew by talking to a deputy mayor, this person was somebody who was close to the mayor or he wouldn't have that title, and they felt that they were being heard by me through this surrogate person. So the system was working.

However, my political opponents, who were looking for a handle to weaken me, to block me from something that they wanted to do, including running for reelection in three years or so, seized on the deputy mayor positions to hurt me politically, weaken [me], because when you're weak, your bank account isn't so big, right?—your capital, which is popularity. The less popularity, the weaker you are. So my opponents, Quentin Kopp, Tom Hsieh, people who were philosophically opposed to me, had never supported me, and wanted to continue to make it difficult for me, seized on this as a handle with which to be more successful in weakening me.

McCREERY: There was a lot of play in the media.

AGNOS: Oh, absolutely because, you see, it was an easily understandable issue by the public. They often can't understand these complex issues that involve millions of dollars and the pros and cons and experts, but if you say to somebody, "This is a deputy mayor who was not elected, who makes $90,000 a year in a year where we are cutting the budget because of the biggest deficit in the history of

the city." "Wait a minute, wait a minute, wait a minute! I cut my budget more than anybody else's, and with the money I've got left, this is how I want to spend it." That did not match the emotional weight of saying, "I don't care how much you cut your budget, you're paying that guy $90,000 a year and I'm hurting."

So I miscalculated, and I just said, "The hell with what they're saying," meaning my opponents, Quentin Kopp, who was a state senator at the time, not a judge, and a couple of the supervisors like Hsieh and Bill Maher and others. I didn't care what they said, because I had cut my budget, I had quality people, I had to be loyal to my people, and I was not going to—but it resonated. It resonated, is the word I'm looking for, with the public, who didn't pay that much attention that the mayor cut his budget by more than anyone else. When you look at all of the things that were going on during a very difficult time, those four years from '88 to '92, it resonated. They, my opponents, very cleverly exploited it by putting something on the ballot that said there should be no deputy mayors; they should all be assistants to the mayor. My opponent asked, "Who do these people think they are? They shouldn't be paid." That kind of thing. Once it got on the ballot, the voters were not about to say, "Yes, let's keep these people who we pay $90,000 a year for."

So it was a defeat for me, and it hurt me politically because it was something voters took away. To my opponents' credit, they took advantage of something. I should have, in retrospect, said, "You're right. I'm not going to have deputy mayors," and given them [another] title and just got rid of that

issue, just quickly get away with it. My staff would have had their feelings hurt, but in the long run they would have understood. I wouldn't have cut their salaries, I just would have said, okay, we're going to call them chief assistants. We'll call them chiefs of staff or something.

McCREERY: Yes, the title itself was a hot issue.

AGNOS: That's exactly right. Thank you. It was a huge hot button in the context of a time where people were raw and tender about a lot of things and angry—raw, angry, and tender about a lot of things. What I learned from that is hard times create hard attitudes. I want to talk a little bit about that. When there are hard times, people become hardened and less tolerant, less supportive of things than they normally might be, because from '88 to '92 we had the worst recession the country had seen. We're in another one now, and I'll speak to that in a moment, but from '88 to '92 we had the worst recession, according to the economists, that the city had seen—and the country had seen—perhaps all the way back to the Depression in the thirties.

We had, at the same time, simultaneously, the worst drought, according to the experts, in 500 years. They measure these in hundred years or fifty years, I think? That's as far back as they go, five hundred years. It was the worst drought from '88 to '92. No rain. Every day was absolutely beautiful sunshine. What that meant for San Francisco in particular was, in addition to what everybody else was experiencing [was] water rationing. When people have a lot of money invested in their landscaping, to just watch it burn, the guy who's making them do that is not popular. That's the mayor in San Francisco.

Their water bills are going up, and in San Francisco we made money from the sale of water from Hetch Hetchy [reservoir]. We were now buying water, which was just compounding our economic woes—our budgetary woes, I should say.

Anyway, so we had the recession, the worst recession since the 1930s, which was about fifty years, the worst recession in fifty-some-odd years, worst drought in five hundred years, and then along in '89 comes the worst earthquake in almost eighty years, which cost the city—was it $10 billion, $12 billion? I can't remember what the number was. So things were hard. And then we were not getting the kind of help from the federal and state government because, quite frankly, Presidents Reagan and Bush were in office, who were not inclined to support the big Democrat cities like San Francisco. [In California] we had George Deukmejian, who was a conservative, and then Pete Wilson, who weren't sort of pro-city, certainly not San Francisco, which was antithetical to their political careers and interests.

So it was a hard time for the city, and people were hardened. Now, if we had all the money we needed, and I wasn't proposing that we weren't going to clean the streets every week, when I wasn't proposing closing the swimming pools, when I wasn't proposing closing down some libraries, which was another thing I did—they said, "Are you going to close my library? We'll see what your deputy mayors do." [Laughter] My opponents would say, "We could take the money from the deputy mayors, who make $90, 000, and put it

into your library. We could open your pool. We can clean your streets." I mean, that's how they played it.

On top of that, we had the homeless problem and a variety of other things that I couldn't deal with as quickly as people would have liked, so it was hard times, and people had a hard attitude. Clearly, the easiest one to be hard toward is the mayor. So they took away, through the ballot initiative, my deputy mayors. The people didn't go away, the titles did, and some of the salaries were reduced. It demoralized them to a certain degree to be unappreciated, if you will, for all the hard work they were putting in.

So we went on, but that was the deputy mayor issue as it unfolded, and it was really, to my opponents' credit, a well-orchestrated issue, designed to weaken me so that they could either run against me or develop another candidate as an opponent against me.

I want to sort of kind of try this. It'll probably filter out over the next [interview] session or two. San Francisco [has] a strong-mayor form of government, and the mayor controls a lot of institutional interests, whether it's under his or her direct control or indirect control. Clearly, all the departments and what happens, planning, are under his or her direct control, but there are indirect things. Traditionally, I was the first non-San Franciscan elected, non-native elected, since the Gold Rush days, really. Now, George Christopher, who came as a two-year-old, sort of became a native, but I'm talking about someone like many of the modern domestic immigrants, say. I came at twenty-

five from another part of the country after college and said, "Hey, this is a great city. I'm going to live here."

Nobody like that had ever been elected mayor. They had all usually gone to local schools like Lowell or St. Ignatius or Sacred Heart, as high schools. They'd gone to USF or UC or something like that, SF State, and so they came up and people were familiar with them, and the institutional bodies were familiar with them. I'll tell you an example of this in a moment. [People] felt like they could connect with [these mayors].

I came from the outside and so many of the institutional bodies, the unofficial ones, didn't know me and were fearful of who I was and what I was. I don't know if this is for the history, but the one who today [you] can watch is Matt Gonzalez, who is the president of the board of supervisors. The institutional bodies are afraid of him. Why? Because he came to the city after law school, he's a progressive, he came from a little town in Texas, Mexican-American, went to Harvard, but "he ain't one of us, and we don't know where he's coming from, and we don't know his parents, and we don't know what he's going to do."

Gavin Newsom was born and raised in the city, went to the local schools, and they know him because they know his father, who is a judge. Just yesterday or a couple of days ago, both of them—Matt Gonzalez, because of his intellect and his politics, has been elected a district supervisor in the Haight-Ashbury, which is one of the more rebellious communities, and Gavin Newsom has been elected in the Marina, which is one of the conservative

areas. Gavin Newsom, as you know, is running for mayor. He's going to get killed politically. Put that in the history. You watch. He's going to get killed politically. Not as a candidate, as a mayor. Because he doesn't know what he's running for. Someone just [said,] "You ought to be mayor." He doesn't know what's involved, doesn't know, and he won't find out. Even though he's been on the board of supervisors, he's not been that involved with government as a supervisor. It's just been a title.

Anyway, I'm digressing, and even this example is a digression, because they were at a business forum, Gavin Newsom as a mayoral hopeful and Matt Gonzalez was there because he's the president of the board of supervisors. As a courtesy he went to the business community to let them know he's interested in hearing from them, talking to them, getting to know them. When Gavin Newsom is introduced, there's a roar of applause and approval. When Matt Gonzalez is introduced, who's there voluntarily, not seeking anything but just to be open and accessible, there's silence, drop-dead silence. I think that contrast—I identify with Matt Gonzalez. I was Matt Gonzalez, or Matt Gonzalez is me today. I was him, symbolically, in 1988.

Some examples. As soon as I was elected, the wealthy people—the ones who support the opera and the symphony—the rich people didn't know me, and they were trying to obtain a piece of land next to what is now Moscone Convention Center. I want to talk about this. If you will kindly make a note to prompt me about the convention center and the expansion of it?

McCREERY: Yes.

AGNOS: Anyway, they had identified a piece of land next to it that the redevelopment agency controlled through the redevelopment process, which designates a large area for redevelopment and then manages it in a way that gives an opportunity to upgrade or build something. So they wanted to build the new Museum of Modern Art, these rich people did. They didn't know how to get to me, because none of them had supported me, none of them knew me, none of them knew my family, none of them knew my friends, except one person.

They knew Leo McCarthy, who was my mentor. Leo McCarthy was born in San Francisco. Well, actually, he came when he was two years old, too, from New Zealand. But he had gone to St. Ignatius, he had gone to USF, he had been on the board of supervisors and clearly been a state legislator. So he knew all of those institutional bodies, both formal and informal, so they went to him, who came to me. Leo said, "Would you be willing to meet these people who want to build this Museum of Modern Art?" "Of course I want to meet them."

It's not my thing, but I realize the city has to have the arts and all that. I came to appreciate that much more as mayor, how important the arts are and these cultural institutions are to the economic viability of the city and all that, because often CEOs of big corporations will want to come to San Francisco not because the business is so great but because it's a great place to live, and the symphony and the opera and all that stuff, so we wanted to keep that looking and being terrific, even though I'm not a fan of modern art.

So I met with them, listened to them, and said we would do what they wanted, because I agreed with it, which was basically make sure that the redevelopment process was supportive of what they wanted to do, and they raised all the money to build the museum and did it. But the point of it all is they didn't have the vaguest idea of who I was and what I would be and how to talk to me. Some of them still are what I would call nice acquaintances. They're not friends.

That's what San Francisco is, in my opinion. There are institutional forces. The church is a strong one. The academic institutions—like the University of California Medical Center, the San Francisco State University, Hastings, and Golden Gate, to a lesser degree but growing—are an institutional force. The business community, obviously. The rich or the wealthy, separate from business, the sort of lifetime—the Gordon Getty types who support the opera and all that kind of stuff.

I empowered the neighborhoods—I forgot the unions. They're another institutional force, labor unions. But I was more into neighborhood power, based on all that stuff, without repeating it, that I did in the legislature to empower those people who usually don't get empowered. I still do it. I'm doing it with people in my neighborhood around dogs.

McCREERY: You mentioned the dogs, yes. You went with them to city hall.

AGNOS: As mayor, I wanted to empower those kinds of people, and so when I became mayor one of the first things I did was to create a group of people who would review all applications for commissions. Because one of the important jobs of

a mayor—one of the most important, I would say—is the selection of citizens who will serve on a commission which is a policy-making body for a city department. San Francisco is a commission form of government with a strong mayor who appoints citizens who oversee and set policy for a city department. Virtually all city departments have a group of citizens sitting at the top who, on paper, can pick or advise the mayor who should be the bureaucratic director—not the deputy mayor level, that's the mayor's personal staff, but at the departmental level.

Traditionally in San Francisco, mayors have relied—and I'm not saying I was too much different; I'm not saying I was a lot different, but I was different—have reached into the ranks of their best supporters, their big-money contributions, and they say, "You want to be a police commissioner? You can be a police commissioner and set policy for the police department in consultation with me and pick the chief, in consultation with me."

When I became mayor, I borrowed an idea from the only other real liberal who was elected to be mayor in San Francisco modern history, George Moscone, who was assassinated less than two years into office. One of the things he did, an idea that I borrowed, was to create a group of citizens who were supporters of his. By supporters I don't mean necessarily financial contributors. I'm talking also about people who shared a common philosophy about government, city government. That group of people, reflecting the diversity of the city—black, brown, yellow, white, et cetera—would review all the applications of people who wanted to serve on commissions. So any

citizen could submit their résumé, their application, and be reviewed and interviewed by this group, who would filter down a list of what they thought were the best-qualified people and then submit them to me for my review and "comfort," meaning the chemistry, the human chemistry.

So what I would do is I would take the list from these people. They met the whole four years I was there, and sometimes if I had an idea, say I want to nominate Laura McCreery for the health commission, I would take it to this body, who would sort of look at you and see what they thought of you and then come back, "Yes, she meets the qualifications, if you're interested," and so then I would pursue it.

But in the first couple of years I didn't have a lot of people that I wanted personally that I had met. So to open it all up, I just said, "Anybody who wants to apply for a position on a city commission can do so." So if Laura McCreery was interested, didn't know Art Agnos, maybe she voted for him but didn't know him, she would apply to this task force and then suddenly, a couple of months later, her name would pop up as somebody who was best qualified to be on the health commission, to be on the library commission. Then I would call you in, talk to you, see what are you interested in, what are your ideas, and I would tell you what I would like to see happen in the city, and if we were comfortable, the chemistry was right, I'd appoint you.

That body of people that initially met, some of them still meet today because they hit it off. They didn't know each other, and they got to be such good friends during that process. They bonded during that process of

reviewing citizens' applications for appointment and recommendation to the mayor on commissions. About a dozen of them still get together today, about every three or four months, to talk politics. They invite me to come in, and we talk politics.

McCREERY: How did you go about putting that group together?

AGNOS: I looked around and invited neighborhood leaders, my own supporters, people who had I met in the campaign that I was impressed with, and brought them together, brought them together. They all reflected the entire spectrum of San Francisco, as I said before, the ethnic communities, the gay and lesbian community, trade union, business folks.

McCREERY: You mentioned Mayor Moscone. Is it fair to say that many of the kinds of people who supported his ideas on government had been, in a sense, waiting.

AGNOS: They were on the bench during the Feinstein years and came off the bench to work for me. I was sort of his heir, politically speaking.

McCREERY: Okay, that's kind of what I'm getting at.

AGNOS: Yes. But the commissions were a way to empower people. I could take you through a list of commissioners, people who had never been in government before who had an opportunity to serve, because traditionally prior to that time, except for Moscone, very often they were just connected people who served, and once they got on, they stayed on. One of the problems I had is that people had served as commissioners for fifteen and twenty years, because successive mayors were all part of the same institutional kind of group, would keep them on.

The commission that I found most popular that I was surprised with—what would you think, just for the heck of it? I mean, you're pretty sophisticated, listening to all of us politicians talk about—what would you think would be the most popular commission, the one that I got more pressure to be on than any other?

McCREERY: Police or fire?

AGNOS: Yes, that's what I would expect a student of government to say. It was the War Memorial Board [of Trustees] that oversees the symphony and the opera. I mean, I got offered sexual favors, I got offered money for campaign contributions to get people on that board. You know why? Because the rich people who can buy anything they want can't buy the best seat at the opera, but the commissioner of the War Memorial Board that oversees the opera gets the best box or the best box at the symphony. I had never even heard of this thing! All of a sudden the rich people were all taking me out and trying to romance me, politically speaking, so that they could be appointed to this commission. An ordinary citizen didn't want to be on that thing.

So my price was that I wanted to see the symphony, the opera, the ballet figure out ways to be more accessible to the neighborhoods. You should have seen these people sort of look at me kind of the way you and I might look at some complicated physics problem. "What do I do with this?" [Laughter] When I would say, "How do you think the ballet can be more accessible to the Mission or to Bayview? How do I get kids in the Bayview to appreciate the symphony?" The conductors and all those people looked at me as though I

was giving them a physics problem from Einstein's book, the theory of relativity or something. But they would struggle and come back, and we did some things to try to expose the symphony and the opera and all that.

Another area where I had that issue come up was I had a wonderful zoo director. He's still there. I recruited him [David Anderson]. That's another thing that the mayor does is to recruit. It's like a basketball coach here at the university sees a star high school player, goes to his house, meets with his parents, brings him onto campus, walks him around. I would do that to get potentially starring people for my departments [from] around the country, around the world, literally.

There was a man in New Orleans who everybody told me was the best zoo director, so I called him up. I invited him out here. I'd call him up just to say, "I want you out here. I'm the mayor." "You're the mayor of San Francisco?" I remember one time also a man named [Goéry] Delacôte who's still the director of the—what's that wonderful—I'm blocking on the name. You know the museum, the Exploratorium, Exploratorium. Have you ever been to the Exploratorium?

McCREERY: I have many times.

AGNOS: Well, the guy who runs that is a Frenchman, and so they came to me and said, "This is the best guy we can find. He's in Paris right now." So I called up, and his children answered. I said, "This is the mayor of San Francisco." The child spoke English. I said, "I want to speak to your father." He came on, and he said, "Is this the mayor of San Francisco?" And I said, "Yes, it is. I'm calling

because I want you in San Francisco. Everybody tells me you would be wonderful. Your creativity is what our Exploratorium needs, and if you come,"—and I had a bunch of things to entice him. He came, and he still talks about how the mayor of San Francisco called him at home to recruit him.

Then when they came here, I would see them or something, whatever it was at the time. I can't remember all the details. But that's part of your role as the CEO of the city, to go looking for the best and the brightest—at least my role, as I defined it—to go looking for the best talent to run the department in the city.

And the commissions. When I talk about empowerment, I told commissioners, "I want you to really feel as though you're running this department, and I want you to feel free to disagree with me, because you are running it day to day. I see it from afar." I had several instances where I wanted people to be chosen to be the director of a city department, and the commission didn't. I want to tell you, there is not a commissioner still in office that disagreed with some mayors. But they could do it with me, because I feel as though if you are going to empower people, if you mean what you say about empowerment, you have to be willing to yield to their judgment if they can make the case. Even if they don't make the case, sometimes you go with them because you're saying, "I really want you to run it," and you can't overpower them, even though you're capable of it.

A good example of this, and how to handle it, is the health department. I inherited a very nice man as the director of the health department. I don't

know how we're going to [edit] some of this stuff, because some of these people are still around, but his name was [David] Werdegar. Dr. Werdegar was a nice man. He reminded me of [the TV character] Marcus Welby, as a physician. He was Mayor Feinstein's selection, and that was typical of Mayor Feinstein, who liked attractive, courteous, reasonably competent people around her. But they were, by and large, "yes" people. You didn't say no to Mayor Feinstein very often. You don't say no to most mayors very often. But I like to pride myself in saying I encouraged it, even though I didn't like it sometimes and maybe showed it.

He was my director of public health, and traditionally the director of public health is a doctor, M.D. So about a year or so into my mayoralty, my commissioners come and say, "We want to replace the director. The issues in front of the health department require more than what his skills are as a physician. He's a nice person, good physician, but we need more of a manager."

McCREERY: Do you know what brought them to say that to you?

AGNOS: Yes, they had watched his administrative decisions. They were not satisfied. For example, in our budgetary process, which my deputy mayor for the budget, Sam Yockey, sort of set in place, was a zero-based budget. Most budgets are built on last year's budget and you add or subtract from it. What he put in place with the major departments is that, "We're going to look at everything you're doing and see if we still need to be doing what you're saying we did in last year's budget before we add this year's."

One of the things that came up was the burn unit at the hospital, as they were going through the zero-based kind of approach. They say, "Okay, here's the burn unit at the hospital. Last year it got this much. The year before that, it got this much. The year before that, it got this much. What is it doing, and why does it need so many more sheets? How many patients did it deal with?" It didn't have any patients. "Well, how many patients did it have last year?" None. "How many before that?" None. "Well, where's the unit? Where in the hospital is it located?" There isn't one. So the burn unit didn't exist except in the budget, which the hospital administrators used for flexible money, and it was my people who found it. It had been there for years. [Laughter]

That's one of the kinds of things that the commission, when it was brought to them, eliminated. Because there wasn't any hardware to eliminate, but the money was still being allocated. It's funny, I haven't thought of that in ten years until I just started this stuff.

So these were the kinds of issues, personnel as well, that the commission—my new commissioners were not satisfied with this carry-over director's philosophy and approach and [he] wasn't in charge of it. So they said, "To accomplish what we need to accomplish, we need to go in a different direction."

So the question then became how do we remove somebody without humiliating him? Because they've done good service. They've been honorable. They haven't been corrupt. They haven't been grossly negligent or anything. It's just my commissioners, my policy makers wanted to bring in a

new kind of direction, and they came to me and said that. I hated that part of it. I don't like to fire people, especially when they haven't done anything really bad. He was a nice guy.

So I said, "Are you sure you want to do it?" "Oh, yes, we want to do it." I said, "Okay." So I brought him in, and I said, "Look, the commission wants to go in a different direction, and they're asking me to give them permission to remove you and get someone else. I want to talk to you about it and ask you what's the most—you have worked hard. You've served the previous mayor, the city, well. What's the best way to do this?" He couldn't believe that the commission was doing it instead of me, because he had been brought up, politically speaking, in an era that [said] it must be me as the mayor. To this day, I know he thinks it was my idea but it really was the commission. In the re-elect campaign he supported my opponent. I think he just blamed me. He wanted to stay on.

But he had return rights to the University of California [San Francisco] Medical Center, and he said, "Look, I'd like to stay six months from now. I will set the date for my retirement from city service,"—four or six months—"and I'll go back to the University of California." By the way, his wife is a supreme court judge now, a wonderful judge, Kathryn Werdegar, progressive, and a Wilson appointee.

He said, "I'll announce it in a couple of weeks,"—or a month. So I gave him time to depart honorably, without any kind of humiliation or controversy. And to this day, nobody knows because I told the commission, "I don't want

anybody to know. I don't want this released to the press." The press will read about it if we—whatever way we figure out how to write this [oral history]. They'll read about it, because it never hit the press.

So he announced that he was going to retire in six months or four months, whatever it was, and it gave us time to start the search process for his successor, and we did. That's the second half of this. The commission would do the national search for a person, come back and interview everybody, and then bring the top three candidates to me, and I would interview each of the three candidates and then make a choice. The commission presumably liked all three. That's why they brought them to me.

So they did, and the top three candidates—I remember two of them. The one I wanted was this Anglo woman who was a doctor from—I think she was in New Jersey, very liberal, spoke Cantonese. She was an attractive blonde woman, about forty, mid-forties, who spoke Cantonese and was married to a black guy. I went crazy! I said, "Here's a competent person." She was running the New Jersey health department or something like that. I said, "God, what a great choice for San Francisco! She speaks Cantonese, she's a woman, she's married to a black guy who is a doctor, and she has an administrative job. She's my choice."

The commission comes back and said, "She's terrific, but we don't want her." "What do you mean you don't want her? She's perfect." "No, she's not the manager. We need a manager." The person they wanted, who was one of the top three, was a guy who was a Ph.D. in psychology. Remember, we'd

always had a doctor before. But he was a management person who really could administer and do the things that needed to be sharpened, from a management perspective, not a medical perspective. He was a middle-aged white guy. I said, "Wait a minute." I'm politically correct and all. I said, "You're telling me that I'm not going to hire a woman who speaks Cantonese who's a doctor because I'm going to take this white guy who's a psychologist who's a management [person]?" And they said yes. The whole commission came in and said, "This is who we want." So I'm looking at them, and they're looking at me, and they're saying, "We really want this person."

So I have to make a choice. You know my favorite, because I'm thinking politics, versus my commissioners, my citizenry, who I'm supposedly empowering, who are telling me they want the white, middle-aged guy. It's always this kind of a dilemma because my political side is saying I could go out and say, "Hey, look at what I did. I took out a white male and brought in a white female who speaks Cantonese," and the whole number. Politically, it's a winner. But if I take out a white older male and replace him with a white middle-aged male, what's the big deal?

But the other question, the real issue in governance, for me, was—do I really believe in the principle of empowering people? And if this is their best judgment and they were unanimous, what do I do? I said, "Okay, we'll go your way." And so the commission chose Ray Baxter, who turned out to be a fantastic director, and the commission was right. Now, Molly [Coye] subsequently was chosen by Governor Wilson, I think, to be the director of

public health for the state. She was terrific on paper and turned out to be fine. She was a fine public health director for the state.

But Ray Baxter was what San Francisco needed, the public health department needed, during my four years, as my commissioners said. The bureaucrats in the department agreed. They loved him. When my successor came in after I lost, Baxter didn't want to continue under that philosophy and left within a year and went back to the East Coast, where he came from. But it's an example of what a mayor—at least what I did as mayor in terms of fulfilling the commitment to empowerment, and there are other stories like that I can tell you.

McCREERY: This must be a very common problem, though, of new administrations, inheriting appointees from the previous administration, even long-serving ones, and what to do about that.

AGNOS: Yes, it is.

McCREERY: Were there quite a few issues of that kind for you, from the Feinstein administration?

AGNOS: There were enough, but because I was so embroiled with all of the crises, starting with, as I told you before—the first one before the health department was the fire department. I also replaced the fire chief. Now, you have to be selective as to how many people you're going to replace and why, because you don't want to say, "Okay, I'm going to replace them for my four years." It's not fair to those people. I was recruiting people that I thought would make a difference, not only because of my philosophy, but the fundamental criterion

was their skill and competence and creativity and originality. Frankly, a number of them are still there. The zoo director is still there that I recruited. The Exploratorium [director] is still there. People that I picked were not fired by my successor. They left because, frankly, they didn't want to work for anybody but me. I had a kind of style that empowered people who I had great confidence in by letting them do their job.

You know, I'm going to try to get the name of one guy you can call, just for the hell of it, if you want, in the housing authority. I'll bring you his name or maybe I'll try to e-mail it to you. David Gilmore. We'll talk about him, because that's another example of what I was talking about in the housing authority, but we're running out of time here. It's twelve-thirty.

McCREERY: Okay. Why don't we stop here for the day, and we'll pick it up.

[End of Session]