

California State Archives  
State Government Oral History Program

Oral History Interview

with

HON. LEON D. RALPH

California State Assemblyman, 1966 - 1976

March 1, 1990  
March 5, 1990  
March 12, 1990  
Bellflower, California

By Arlene Lazarowitz  
California State University, Fullerton

A HISTORY OF REAPPORTIONMENT IN CALIFORNIA

## RESTRICTIONS ON THIS INTERVIEW

None

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## PREFACE

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

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

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

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

Participating as cooperating institutions in the State Government  
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University of California, Los Angeles

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

John F. Burns  
State Archivist

July 27, 1988

This interview is printed on acid-free paper.

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## INTERVIEW HISTORY

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### Interview Time and Place

March 1, 1990

Home of Leon D. Ralph in Bellflower, California  
Session of two hours

March 5, 1990

Home of Leon D. Ralph in Bellflower, California  
Session of two hours

March 12, 1990

Home of Leon D. Ralph in Bellflower, California  
Session of two hours

### Editing

Arlene Lazarowitz checked the verbatim manuscript of the interviews against the original tape recordings, did some editing for punctuation, paragraphing, and spellings.

In the summer of 1990, the edited transcript was forwarded to Leon D. Ralph who did minor editing. He added information in response to additional questions which were not recorded in a follow-up session, but were forwarded by the interviewer. These insertions are bracketed and followed by an asterisk. Additional editing and verification of proper names has been performed by Shirley Stephenson and G. Sylvia Kouyoumjian.

Shirley Stephenson, Associate Director/Archivist Emeritus of the Oral History Program, California State University, Fullerton, performed the final proofreading of the manuscript, prepared introductory materials, the name index, and all forms required by the California State Archives.

### Papers

No private papers were consulted by the interviewer for this interview.

### Tapes and Interview Records

The original tape recordings of the interviews are at the California State University, Fullerton, Oral History Program along with records relating to the interview. Archival tapes are deposited in the California State Archives at Sacramento.

## BIOGRAPHICAL SUMMARY

Leon Douglas Ralph was born in Richmond, Virginia, on August 20, 1932. His father, Arthur Ralph, who was born on December 17, 1889, was a Pullman porter and married to Leanne Ralph, a housewife. Young Ralph attended public school at Armstrong High School in Richmond from 1946-1950; Los Angeles Valley College from 1959-1961, and received an Associate of Arts degree; Windsor University, Ontario, Canada, from 1974-1975 and received a Bachelor of Arts degree; Fuller Seminary, Pasadena, and City University of Los Angeles. Leon Ralph is currently married to Ruth Gonzales Banda Ralph. He has three daughters and two sons: Mardi Ralph Webster, Ruth Ralph, Tiffany Marie Ralph, Leon Arthur Ralph, and Tyronne Anthony Ralph. He has a stepdaughter Maya Gonzales Banda and a stepson Vicente Ramon Banda.

During World War II, Leon Ralph served as a staff sergeant in the United States Air Force from August 1950 to July 1954. Ralph served as a logistical analyst for Douglas Aircraft and North American from 1956-1963.

Beginning his political career, Ralph became an administrative assistant to Speaker Jesse Unruh and later served as an assemblyman in the California State Assembly from 1966-1976 when he resigned to enter the ministry. Ralph ran unsuccessfully for a second term in the assembly in 1988. During his career in the assembly, he served on the Ways and Means Committee, and the subcommittee on the urban problems, the subcommittee on mental health, the Social Welfare Committee, the Elections and Reapportionment, the Rules Committee, the Governmental Organizational Committee, the Watts Labor Community Action Committee, the Capitol Restoration Project, and pushed the Ralph Civil Rights Act legislation.

Other committees Ralph served on were: County and state Democratic Central Committees during the 1960s and 1970s, and he was a member of the Democratic National Committee from 1972-1976. He was and still is active with political action committees, such as the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Congress of Racial Equality, the Southern California League of Cities, Sons of Watts, and other community and church activities. While a pastor of the Interdenominational Church of God in Sacramento, he did lobbying in the state legislature to supplement his income.

[Session 1, March 1, 1990]

[Begin Tape 1, Side A]

LAZAROWITZ: Let us begin with the preliminaries, and that is where were you born, when?

RALPH: I was born in Richmond, Virginia, August 20, 1932.

LAZAROWITZ: When did you leave Virginia for California?

RALPH: I didn't leave Virginia for California. Upon graduation from high school, I left Virginia, supposedly going to college directly from high school. But because of a decision I made, I decided to go into the air force, which was not a good decision.

LAZAROWITZ: Why did you make the decision?

RALPH: It was sort of to pay back my brother for, without our parents' consent, helping him to enlist. Things went very poorly for him at first, so as an act of contrition, I suppose you'd call it, I decided rather than proceed on to college that I would also join, which was youthful thinking. But that's why. Then, upon discharge from the air force, I went to the University of Colorado for a spell, and then I did not finish my work there. I came to Los Angeles and began working in the aerospace industry

and returned to school and pursued formal education in political science, earning an A.A. [Associate of Arts] and, eventually, a B.A. [Bachelor of Arts] in political science.

LAZAROWITZ: Where is the A.A. from?

RALPH: [Los Angeles] Valley College, and the B.A. is from Windsor University [Ontario, Canada].

LAZAROWITZ: What year was this?

RALPH: Valley College was 1961, and Windsor was 1975.

LAZAROWITZ: I want to talk a little bit more about your background and your parents in Virginia. What did your father do?

RALPH: My father was a pullman porter; my mother was a housewife. I have two brothers and a sister.

LAZAROWITZ: Did they come out here to California with you?

RALPH: My brother was here before I came, the one whom I had made that traumatic decision about. On his discharge, he came here to go to school. I came later, for better educational opportunities and economic opportunities. My sister came after my brother and I were kind of established here. They both live here now. I have an older brother in New York, who is now retired from the advertising industry. That's where we're located.

LAZAROWITZ: You're married to Pamela Joynes, married her in 1972?

RALPH: I married Pamela Joynes in 1972, but we were divorced in 1989. I'm married again to a young woman whose name is Ruth Gonzales Banda, and she has two children. So I have two stepchildren and five children of my own.

LAZAROWITZ: What about your career before entering politics.

RALPH: I was a logistical analyst in the aerospace industry. Between [McDonnell] Douglas and North American, I spent about five years in that. It was prior to my entering the political arena. In fact, that was what I was doing in 1963 when [Eugene] Gene Wyman, at Tom Bane and Jesse [Unruh's] urging, appointed me the assistant director of field organization for the Democratic party. In fact, that's where I met Doug Jeffe [in 1963]. He was working for the Democratic party there, also. I did that until 1964, and Jesse asked if I would like to go on [President] Lyndon [B.] Johnson's staff as a field coordinator for the western United States for Johnson, which I accepted. Following that assignment, Jesse asked if I would come on the speaker's staff--there's the speaker's [staff] and the assemblymen's staff--as an administrative assistant assigned to southern California, which I did until 1966 when I resigned to run for the assembly in the then Fifty-fifth Assembly District, which was represented by Reverend [F. Douglas] Ferrell, who had defeated an incumbent whose name was [Vernon] Kilpatrick in the old Fifty-fifth Assembly District. Doug defeated him in 1962. He was the pastor of a large Baptist church [Tabernacle of Faith] and had committed to his congregation that he would serve no more than four years, and he approached me in 1963

about the possibility of running. At that time, I was assistant director of field organization for the Democratic party when Gene Wyman was state chairman. I really had plans to go on to law school. As I think I told Doug, I thought I would probably be more comfortable. . . . After going to law school, presumably passing the bar, practicing law, I really had my eye on wanting to becoming a judge. A lot of that changed because I'd gotten involved in politics originally in the John Kennedy campaign. His opponent, Richard [M.] Nixon, frightened me. Just looking at him and watching him and listening to him talk, he so disturbed me, what I thought he represented and the threat that I just in my gut felt he was for the people of the United States. I was at Valley College at the time, a political science major. He just so disturbed me that I decided to get involved in John Kennedy's campaign. [Mervyn M.] Merv Dymally, who's now a United States congressman, was part of a group that [Congressman Augustus F.] Gus Hawkins had organized: "New Frontiersmen for John Kennedy." I became a part of that, a volunteer--this was all volunteer--field organizer for the Kennedy campaign in the San Fernando Valley, which is where I lived at the time. Then in 1962, while still working in the aerospace industry, I ran for the Los Angeles County Central Committee there in the old Sixty-second Assembly District, and won.

LAZAROWITZ: You were also active in the NAACP [National Association for the Advancement of Colored People] on the political action committee.

RALPH: Yes. I was the chairman of the political action committee for the San Fernando Valley of the NAACP, participated in that. I was active in CORE [Congress of Racial Equality] demonstrations. [I] marched in supportive demonstrations for Dr. [Martin Luther] King, [Jr.], in the San Fernando Valley in support of his march from Selma, [Alabama], to Montgomery after the "Bloody Sunday." Civil rights organizations, as you know, around the country marched in support of Dr. King once he decided to go back across the [Edmund] Pettus Bridge, where so many people had been beaten about a week earlier. I was very active in organizing and participating in the march. We marched from Pacoima to Van Nuys in support of what he was doing in [the march from] Selma to Montgomery. I guess that in that era people who were concerned, not just blacks but people of human concern and compassion across ethnic lines, participated in. . . . I may be skipping back and forth. It's not rolling out in as chronological a way as maybe you might want.

LAZAROWITZ: That's OK.

RALPH: I talked about meeting Doug Ferrell in '63, and he indicated that he had committed to his church membership

that he would serve two terms--four years--[and] asked if I would consider running for the assembly. I, at first, hesitated for about a year and told him I wasn't sure. That's when I shared with him my desire to go to law school. But then the '65 [Watts] riots occurred, and I think Doug felt a great deal of frustration about the riots. He felt very strongly that that was not the appropriate way to address the legitimate concerns people in the Watts area had, which he understood and was very supportive of. He just was hurt and frustrated that people had chosen that method of protest and said that '66 would have to be his last year. While he was feeling that way, I felt a greater arousal within my own heart that because of my commitment to the cause of justice and blacks, predominantly, and Latinos--or Hispanics, at the time--I couldn't afford the luxury of doing just what I wanted to do, but I probably had some sort of a community responsibility to at least seriously reconsider running for the assembly. I did a little soul searching. I talked with Doug Ferrell about it, told him where I was and what I really wanted to do. He kept urging me, "Talk with Jesse about it." Jesse--I was on his staff, then, at the time--also suggested that I give it some serious thought. I finally made the decision in '65 and moved my family from Pacoima, where I lived, to the Fifty-fifth Assembly

RALPH: District. It was November of 1965, about a year before the general [election], which at that time was what the law required, I believe, on residency. [I] declared my candidacy sometime in January or February of 1966 at Doug Ferrell's church--that's where we first made the announcement--and went through a very trying primary. It seems to me that there were about eleven other candidates. There was one candidate who had run against Doug in 1964, [David A.] Dave Scott, who was an administrator in the Enterprise School District. He was my major competition.

But Jesse committed to raise, as I remember, \$25,000 for my campaign. Then, he asked me if I could win. He first committed when I told him I was going to run. Sam Hartog, who was on Jesse's staff at the time. . . . I talked to Sam. Jesse was in Sacramento at session. I talked to Sam in the middle of the week, and he said, "That's good. I'm sure Jesse will want to hear it from you, so why don't you come down? Jesse will be in the office on Friday." It used to be in the 417 South Hill Building. So I waited for him. He came in. We were drinking coffee at the coffee machine, and I told him what I'd decided. He looked at me and said, "All right, I'll raise \$25,000 for you." Then, about a minute later, he said, "By the way, do you think you can win?" [Laughter] I said, "Well, I think so, Jesse." But the field was

RALPH: crowded. Johnny Otis, he had a lot of name identification. [He] did a TV show in Los Angeles. When I first came to L.A., he was doing a TV show on Friday night, rhythm and blues music. He was well known. He was going to run. Dave Scott, the man who had not defeated Doug at all but had come within 4,000 votes of him, I think, in 1964--a strong opponent. There were several others. But I ran. We got UAW's [United Auto Workers] support through Local 887. That was a major turning point in the campaign. Gus Hawkins who, for reasons that probably are better known to himself, thought that I was too close to Jesse, and so he did all he could to keep the AFL-CIO [American Federation of Labor-Congress of Industrial Organizations], the COPE [Committee on Political Education] body, from endorsing me. But thanks to Hank Lacayo, who was at that time president of Local 887, and Jerry Lamonthé, who was his special assistant and is now dead, they went into a COPE meeting one night. I don't remember what night it was. We couldn't go in, because we weren't delegates. Harvey Howard [was there], who was my campaign manager who is also deceased now, as is Doug Ferrell. We waited outside while they went into the COPE meeting and fought on the floor of the COPE convention and were able to fight it to a "no endorsement," which would allow 887 and a lot of the UAW support that I had to support me. Gus had

RALPH: pulled out all stops. The AFL-CIO in Washington, [D.C.], had sent out some field organizers, and they had worked COPE thoroughly to try to slam the door against me. If I'd lost the COPE endorsement, chances are, if I had made it, it would have been very close. We considered that to be a very significant victory for us, just to have an open endorsement. Gus was trying to have it closed and endorse Dave Scott, the fellow who had come close to defeating Doug Ferrell. In any event, we came out there with a "no endorsement." Then, Jesse helped me to pick up the Teamsters' endorsement. That was probably the only other significant one that he was really able to garner for me.

We went through the primary. We had a couple of polls. We'd been running what we thought was a good campaign. The UAW had assigned two or three of its staff people, Jerry Lamonth being one of them, to help us. Merv Dymally was running for the [California State] Senate, and Bill Greene was running for the assembly in Merv's seat. This is 1966, after the [California State] Supreme Court had held that the state senate needed to be reapportioned along the lines of one man, one vote. We had [Thomas M.] Tommy Rees as the sole state senator [from] Los Angeles at that point. That was the first time that the senate delegation in Los Angeles County was open. Merv moved up

RALPH: to the senate, and Bill ran in his seat. Ferrell stepped out; I ran for his seat. We ran as a team.

Ten days before the vote, we did a second poll. We did a first poll to find out what the people's concerns were: their fears, their strengths; what my strengths and weaknesses were; and [we] tried to run a campaign pretty much along the indicated preferences. I thought we were doing very well. Then, we had a second poll taken ten days before the election, and I had slipped to third in that second poll. We decided--Merv, Bill, [Los Angeles City Councilman] Billy Mills, Doug Ferrell, Jesse, all of us--that we needed to intensify circulation of literature. We just flooded the area with literature. The final vote, I think I won it by about 3,200 votes.<sup>1</sup> I was indeed very happy about that. As you know, the general [election] in the old Fifty-fifth [District], which is now the Forty-eighth District, was no problem at all for the Democratic nominee. So I was elected in November, went to Sacramento, was sworn in in January of 1967. Jesse was speaker.

LAZAROWITZ: Before we talk about your assembly career, I'd like to back up a little bit and talk about your career with Jesse Unruh

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1. Ralph won by a margin of 2,745 votes.

in his staff. Certainly, I'd like you to talk about Jesse Unruh. What did you think of him? How close were you to him?

RALPH: Very close. I was not in Sacramento. I was an administrative assistant on the speaker's staff in Los Angeles. I was headquartered in the old State Building, I think it's First and Broadway. I represented him in different parts of the community, not just the black community. Jesse was committed to educating people. I think his attitude was if there were parts of L.A. County or southern California where having a black representing him made someone in the audience uncomfortable, they had a problem. That's Jesse, in his usual sweet way. He was a very decent man. I loved Jesse as a brother. That was during the time of his "Big Daddy" image, which I felt was gravely unfair to him. His obesity had nothing to do with the kind of commitment that he had to decency in government, fairness for people, opportunities for minorities. Jesse genuinely believed that the south-central Los Angeles area should elect black officials. He genuinely believed that, and he put his money and his power where he spoke. He supported Billy Mills for city council; he supported Merv for the assembly in 1962 and again for the senate, in 1966; he supported Bill Greene. He really believed in representation for minorities.

He did the same thing in the Chicano community. [John] Johnny Moreno and [Philip L.] Phil Soto were elected, and Jesse had supported them for the assembly. Unfortunately, they were defeated. I think they were elected about 1962, at the same time I think Merv was, and were defeated in 1964. Johnny had some personal problems which I think he's probably worked through now. But he probably did some things that hurt him a lot. Phil had no problems except that he lost in the Republican sweep of 1966. I think he's a fine man. We're still friends. We communicate by phone mostly, now. But he [Jesse Unruh] showed his commitment to minority representation by raising funds for minority candidates, because if he had not assisted me significantly, I never would have won the election. I say that very proudly, because he was very careful many times about the candidates that he would align himself with.

[Kenneth] Ken Cory and I were elected in 1966. Both of us were on his staff, so he had two staff members running. He gave us top priority, in terms of his resources statewide for that year. In fact, I remember calling him at home, because in the general election of 1966, the east end precincts of his district—which were predominantly black—came in after the precincts in Hawthorne and the west end of Inglewood and the rest of

RALPH: that district which, at that time was conservative white. So Jesse ran behind in those precincts. The day after the election, the reports had him trailing. I called him at home: "You know, Jesse, I don't know if I really want to serve if you're not going to be there as speaker." He said, "Strange thing, Leon. I was thinking, if you and Ken were elected and if I'm defeated, then I would have felt fulfilled." I said, "Aw, come on. That's hogwash. What are Ken and I going to do up there without you?"

But he was genuinely committed to opening doors for minorities, and we needed that at that time. We needed the opportunity to learn the fundamentals of politics at the staff level. We needed the support, financially, that he gave. He said, and he was criticized for this, I think unfairly, that money is the mother's milk of politics, and he understood that. He provided a lot of "mother's milk" to a lot of us. He helped Doug Ferrell, although Doug Ferrell was not a candidate of Jesse Unruh when he first ran in 1962. He was an Independent. He looked at the district and concluded that Kilpatrick could be defeated [and] went after him. Kilpatrick had been in the assembly, I think, for twenty-four or twenty-six years--I think it's twenty-four--when Doug decided to take him on. Jesse didn't help him in the primary. It was a shock to the Democratic party that he won. I can say that because I

RALPH: was a staff member of the Democratic party. Nobody thought Doug Ferrell could do it. Once Doug went to Sacramento, Jesse, I think, really developed a high respect and a great love for Doug. In 1964, Jesse was there with all the resources he could muster to help Doug, because people in the district were critical of Doug. He was a fine gentleman, a decent man.

LAZAROWITZ: Why were they critical?

RALPH: Because Doug wasn't as flamboyant as some of the more militant voices in Watts wanted him to be. He was just as committed to civil rights as I or anyone else, but his style was different. He was a Baptist preacher, and he was a man of God, first of all, and he would always consider what was fair, what was decent, and that was what he would do. That was not the style that some people in Watts, in the old Fifty-fifth [District], wanted of their assemblyman. Jesse looked through all of that and saw the quality of the man and, because of that, gave him all of the support he could in 1964, raising funds, doing whatever Doug Ferrell needed. He raised funds for Billy Mills when Billy ran for the city council; he raised funds for Merv when Merv ran for the assembly and, subsequently, when he ran for the senate; he raised funds for Bill Greene. It was just his nature, because he believed in equality. Jesse was a farm boy, originally from [Kansas and] Texas,

I guess, and he had slept in chicken coops. He had hitchhiked his way to California, and a lot of that, I'm sure, gave him a deeper insight into what many of us were feeling, "us" meaning people from the black and Chicano communities, [at] being cut out of the system deliberately, by design. He had a great deal of empathy in that area.

I remember after I was elected in 1970, I was selected by the press corps to attend the Eagleton Institute of Politics, which was in Marco Island, Florida, and Jesse was a speaker.<sup>1</sup> You're familiar with Eagleton, I'm sure. During the day, we had sessions. [Assemblyman James A.] Jim Hayes and I went that year together. Jim went to the L.A. County Board of Supervisors and subsequently left to go back into law practice. But we went that year, and I'll never forget this: in the bar, they had a Confederate flag hanging behind the bandstand. So Jesse and I were sitting there drinking one night after classes. Jesse looked at me and he said, "Leon, I suppose that Confederate flag bothers you, doesn't it?" I said, "It sure does." He said, "What do you think about us going up there and snatching it, taking it down?" I said, "Well, if you're game, so am I."

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1. Ralph attended the Eagleton Seminar for young legislators which consisted of a panel of legislative leaders, members of the press, lobbyists, and other government officials. Jesse Unruh was the dean of this program.

RALPH: The band was up there playing this country music, and we walked past them, went up, and took down the Confederate flag. He threw it over the table and said, "We don't have any takers. I guess this is going to stay down."  
[Laughter] He was a decent man, a loving man, very committed to fair treatment of people.

LAZAROWITZ: How did Jesse Unruh consolidate his power?

RALPH: Good question. One of the things that Jesse saw was a need to (1) shift the power from the Third House [lobbyists]. I remember him telling me that when he went there, the lobbyists, some of them, were sitting on the floor actually voting for legislators. He said, "I couldn't believe it." He told me a story. He never did name these people. There was one legislator who had apparently sold out to both sides, and they had a roll call. [Laughter] They got to this legislator, and both of the lobbyists were standing there--he had, apparently, made a deal with both of them--in the chambers, waiting for him to vote. He looked up at the board. It was a 39 to 40 vote, and his vote would decide. He [Jesse] said rather than make a decision, he fainted right on the floor. [Laughter] He just passed out. He [Jesse] concluded then that. . . . Oh, he had concluded before then, but that was sort of the straw that broke the camel's back. He was not really that popular when he first went there and began to bring about some of

the reforms. But getting the lobbyists out of the immediate operations of the legislature was a major reform. Then, he began to raise funds to support candidates who shared at least some of his ideas about reform and running the legislature. I think that those two moves on his part enabled him to shift and to recapture--if you can use that [term]--the legislature, take it away from the awesome power of the Third House at the time that he was there. Part of his supporting minority candidates, I'm sure, was part of his overall belief that, if you could elect quality candidates from minority communities who understood his vision and who were willing to stand with him, that that would not only enhance his strength but it would also enhance the various minorities' communities' political opportunities. So I think it was, essentially, that two-pronged attack.

[LAZAROWITZ: What is your view of legislative reform?

RALPH: My view of legislative reform is that more is needed. Jesse Unruh made the major contribution to legislative reform in California. Those reforms need to be enhanced. He worked to place the Third House in a proper relationship with the legislature. Lobbyists used to sit on the floor of the legislature and exercise power. That was changed. Committee hearings are open to the public. But the public does not feel as though it is a real partner in California

government because such issues as insurance reform, which is badly needed, have not come from the legislature. That lack of action raises the level of cynicism among the voters. The legislative battles are not looked upon with favor by many voters. When I was a member, my impression of what we did was far different than it is now. Too many times, the legislature seems self-serving and petty. I opposed the 1990 Proposition 140<sup>1</sup> because it was mean spirited, but the legislative leadership made a very serious mistake by trying to kill the idea of term limits. Proposition 131<sup>2</sup> could have been approached differently. In typical fashion, the legislature reacted angrily to the sponsor of the idea without finding out what direction the public was moving in and without dealing with the very strong support for change in Sacramento leadership. Even an idea as radical and mean as Prop. 140! Their legal challenge may overturn the vote for 140. That will only further enrage the public; resentment grows deeper and deeper. Prop. 103 has caused severe frustration among voters. The legislature is blamed for much of the delay because it is frequently viewed as the cause of the problem of auto insurance rates in the first place. Legislators

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1. Proposition 140 (June 1990).

2. Proposition 131 (June 1990).

RALPH: who have businesses or [law] practices before they are elected should put them in blind trusts. A ban on all outside income is badly needed. A tradeoff for higher income and public financing of campaigns would go a long way toward developing public confidence. The time has come for a reasonable look at term limitations without a ban on former legislators seeking office again and a retirement system that provides some protection for people who serve and interrupt their practices, businesses, and lives.

LAZAROWITZ: Why do you think public funding is so important?

RALPH: I believe public funding is very important because the cost of campaigns has continued to rise to unbelievable levels. When I ran for the assembly in 1966, we spent \$30,000 to win. I ran again in 1968, and we spent about \$125,000 and lost. Our opponent spent at least three times that amount and he received many in-kind contributions, which pushed his expenditures far above that figure. In California, those with access to large sums of money will continue. That has a negative effect on politics because too many voters believe that their votes do not count at all. The low voter participation is in large part due to the feeling of powerlessness. Many people believe that they cannot make a difference in government. Why bother? Public

funding will give new life to the process and new hope for change among the voters.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: You say, then, that Jesse Unruh made the legislature more professional?

RALPH: Oh, absolutely. No question about that. I know he did. He realized the absolute necessity to have professional staff. He professionalized the legislative staff, research facilities, and so on, second to none. Some have said Congress was better equipped, but I might debate that point, maybe because of my own preferences. He did an awful lot to professionalize the legislature. Then, in 1966, on the ballot--I don't remember the number of the proposition--there was a proposition that established the California [State] Legislature for the first time to be a full-time legislature.<sup>1</sup> The salary was raised from \$500 a month, which would be \$6,000 a year. The salary when I was elected went to \$16,000 a year. He was able to secure the support of some of the major newspapers in California for that initiative. That went a long way in terms of streamlining the legislature. You began to be able to attract people who were not just independently wealthy, as

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

1. Proposition 1-a (November 1966).

some were. But at the same time, he was pushing for election of minority representatives. He was also pushing for a salary that, although it wasn't a whole lot of money, was, at least, a livable income. Then, the per diem was helpful, so we could piece things together and live comfortably, not lavishly. The retirement benefits. . . . He did a lot of things, not only for the professional staff, but for the legislators themselves: helping them to raise funds; helping them to have a decent salary level at that time; helping them with other kinds of perks, [such as] retirement and hospitalization and so on. Then, every year after that as you know, I'm sure, the salary of the legislators had cost-of-living escalation provisions in it, so the salary did not remain at the \$16,000 but would go as the cost of living did. All of those were, I think, the central ingredients that he cranked into that system to devise a legislature that I have felt over the years was second to none.

LAZAROWITZ: How did he exert control or influence over his fellow Democrats?

RALPH: It's an interesting question. I served, with Jesse as speaker, from '66 until '68. We lost it in '68, because Jesse was really grieving tremendously over the death of [U.S. Senator Robert F.] Bob Kennedy. He was very instrumental, probably more than any other person in the

United States, in convincing Bobby to run for president. As we all know, sadly, Bobby was assassinated here in Los Angeles in June of '68. I've never seen Jesse in that kind of condition. He was hurting so badly [that], as he often did, he turned to the bottle to try to deal with his deep hurt. A lot of us who were supportive of Bobby and of Jesse and the vision of both were also hurting. It was a very difficult year. King had been assassinated. Then, a few months later, Bobby was assassinated. And we lost control of the assembly in the elections of November of '68. We regained it in 1970. But that period for us was [difficult]. We floundered a bit, I guess, for lack of a better description. From '68 to '70, [Robert T.] Bob Monagan was the speaker. But I think that Jesse, what he did during the time that I was there with him, provided the kind of leadership. . . . He would bring experts from wherever he could find them. Those he could hire or rent he would bring to the California legislature, primarily the assembly. We were viewed, I guess, as the kids, the assembly [was]. We were more inclined to change than the so-called upper house. But whatever Jesse did in the assembly, he always shared it with the leadership in the senate, although I'm not sure they were excited about some of that at that time. [Laughter] I think there's tremendous leadership in the senate now, but the senate was

RALPH: not as progressive then as the assembly was and that was really because of Jesse Unruh. Jesse had the vision and the guts, and it took a lot of guts to take on the powerful interests that he had to take on in order to bring some balance into the operation of government in the assembly.

[LAZAROWITZ: What was Jesse Unruh's role in Robert Kennedy's decision to run in 1968?

RALPH: Jesse played a major role in convincing Senator Robert Kennedy to seek the presidency in 1968. Bobby was not convinced that 1968 was his year to run, but Jesse strongly believed that he could win if he would run. He also believed that Bobby's vision for change in the United States and the world were badly needed. I am sure that Jesse missed the relationship that he enjoyed with the Kennedy White House because it was very helpful with California problems. To have the support and friendship of a bright, tough, and progressive president is ideal for a state leader who had tremendous vision for his own political agenda in California.

LAZAROWITZ: Please elaborate on Bobby Kennedy's campaign in California and in the African-American community?

RALPH: Senator Bobby Kennedy's campaign began after some of us had already committed to other candidates. Jesse asked me if I would be willing to introduce legislation which would allow those of us who had already become part of the President

Johnson slate for the Democratic National Convention in Chicago. The legislation did not pass. The next move Jesse put together was to place our wives or husbands on the Kennedy slate. After it won, we would be made part of the Kennedy delegation. Before Bobby's entry into the presidential primary, Jesse did all he could to convince him that 1968 was his year to win the presidency. Bobby and many of those close to him in the eastern United States, Kenneth O'Donnell and others, didn't think so. Jesse and those close to him really believed that the Johnson administration had lost its direction of the nation by its involvement in Vietnam. We also feared that the president would lose the 1968 election. We pushed very hard to convince Bobby to run. Sometime in April 1968 he sent telegrams indicating to many of us that he would enter the primary battle, and the war was on.

On his first visit to California as a presidential candidate, he traveled from northern California through southern California. He went through my assembly district. It was a great pleasure for me and the people in my district to have him in the race for the White House; he brought new hope for poor people. Merv Dymally, Bill Greene, and I coordinated his campaign. I was asked to serve as overall campaign coordinator in the African-American community in southern California, which I

RALPH: did. There was overwhelming support for Bobby throughout the African-American community. The day before his assassination he made one last sweep through California from the north through the Central Valley-Los Angeles area, which included the swing through my district and a swing through Bill Greene's district. While we were in Bill's district riding in an open car, Bobby saw a little girl standing on the sidewalk waving at him. He was so taken with her that he demanded that the driver stop the car. He talked with her. She wanted to ride with us, so he placed her between Ethel and himself. She rode with us to Santa Monica, our last stop before Bobby went to San Diego. San Diego was his last stop for campaigning in California. The next day was the primary election.

While traveling in the open car to Santa Monica on the Santa Monica Freeway, a car apparently backfired. It caused a brief moment of great concern in our car. We were riding with Bobby and Ethel, former Ram [David] Deacon Jones, Rafer Johnson, Bill Greene, and [Roosevelt] Rosie Greer. When we finished the swing, we left Bobby and Ethel. Before he left, he asked me if I wanted to travel with him to San Diego. I told him that I would love to, but couldn't. He jokingly said, "What's the matter? Are you afraid of getting killed with me?" His final words to me, said in a joking manner, have lingered in my mind for

RALPH: years. The next day, the Kennedy slate won an impressive victory, only to experience his death. I was on my way to the Ambassador Hotel after checking the results in south-central Los Angeles and other precincts when I heard on my car radio that Bobby had been shot. I went to the Good Samaritan Hospital and waited all night in the rooms provided for family and friends. I finally left the hospital around 6:00 A.M., feeling that Bobby wouldn't make it. When I arrived home I advised my wife and children that I believed it was just a matter of time before he would die. The pain of President Kennedy's death and that of Dr. King only a couple of months earlier was almost unbearable.

Not only did I begin to drink heavily to try coping with the pain and great sense of loss, but Jesse tried to bury himself in drinking. He took it very hard. His pain was so great that he was not as effective leading the assembly. We lost our majority in the assembly in the 1968 fall elections. I remember the deep pain that I saw in Bobby's eyes when we talked briefly at Dr. King's funeral in Atlanta. Jesse had that same deep pain showing in his eyes after Bobby's death.]\*

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

LAZAROWITZ: What was Unruh's relationship with Governor [Edmund G.] Pat Brown, [Sr.]?

RALPH: Jesse wanted to be governor, bottom line, and Pat knew that. Jesse, as speaker, had tremendous power. Pat, as governor, also had tremendous power. So they frequently clashed. In December of 1964, those of us who were close to Jesse gathered in Palm Springs to discuss Jesse's potential bid for governor. Just a short time later, and Pat Brown was up for reelection. It did not come to pass; he did not take Pat Brown on. We were kind of hoping that Pat would step out without having a conflict. But as you know, and history reveals, Pat decided to go, and we ended up with that man who's been president of the United States, Ronald Reagan.

[LAZAROWITZ: What was your perspective on the 1966 campaign? How did you feel about Brown's decision to run? How did Jesse Unruh respond to it?

RALPH: Jesse and those of us close to him believed that Governor Pat Brown would lose if he ran again in 1966. We were convinced of that in 1964 and hoped that he would not run. Our hope was that Jesse would get a chance to become governor of California; he would have been an outstanding governor. He had a superior working knowledge of California and its government. History now reveals that we were right about Governor Brown's fate at the polls. More

than that, California elected Ronald Reagan governor, who did not like or understand government. Even worse, he became president.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: What happened in 1970? Jesse Unruh challenged Reagan?

RALPH: Yes. [Laughter] Jesse wanted to run. I think he was frustrated with the assembly somewhat at that time, because we had lost the leadership of the assembly. I remember talking to Jesse on the floor of the assembly one day. Subsequent to that, I raised the possibility of him running against George Murphy for the United States Senate.<sup>1</sup> He looked at me like I had just said a bad word to him or something. He took a deep breath and he looked at me and he said, "Leon, I don't want to be a United States Senator. I want to be governor." I said, "Well, OK, Jesse. I'm just thinking about your contributions that you can continue to make in the U.S. Senate. I think Murphy is a lot more beatable than Reagan." "I can beat him!" "Well, Jesse, I'm not trying to talk you out of a fight because I won't be there. I'll be there whether you go up or down, and you know that. But I just think that you can whip Murphy. I think he's defeatable. Reagan looks very

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

1. The Democratic party's eventual nominee for the United States Senate was John V. Tunney, who defeated Republican incumbent George Murphy in the November 1970 election.

tough to me." When I talked to him a second time in L.A., [I] again [used] the same approach: "I think you'd have a better shot at Murphy. Then, as things cool down and you have a chance to work in the [United States] Senate, you can always come back and run for governor." He looked at me and he said, "You and I've been around this issue before, and my attitude is that if I have to run statewide, and the seat's open, I may as well run for what I want. I want to be governor. That's what I want to do. I've dreamed of being governor of California. Even if I go down in defeat, at least I will have had the satisfaction of running for what I wanted." So that was his position. Of course, we supported him because he was the leader.

LAZAROWITZ: Why did he lose?

RALPH: Why? In my opinion, Reagan is a good soft-shoe act, and I do mean "soft-shoe." I have questioned for years. . . . In fact, I have a photograph around here somewhere that he gave me when he was governor, and I never had the tenacity to hang it up. I know a lot of people thought he was just wonderful, but they were not from the communities that I represented. He really didn't understand. Reagan didn't know what it meant to be black, in many cases uneducated, frustrated, unemployed or underemployed, and all that that meant for people in my community. I didn't personally dislike him. I disliked his lack of understanding. Even

more, I disliked his insensitivity to the needs of the people that I represented. I can think of a particular instance.

In 1967, I carried a piece of legislation that the NAACP had asked me to carry. The Watts NAACP had come to me with a legislative package to attack discrimination in apprenticeship training programs because of race, creed, color, national origin, or sex. The man, who's now dead, who was the chairman of their labor committee, a fellow by the name of John Cope, had done his homework before he came to me. I didn't need him to point out to me that there was apparent discrimination in apprenticeship training. All one needed to do was go by any construction site, and the case is very clear. But he did his homework, and he presented the statistics that showed that among the ironworkers and steelworkers and roofers and plumbers, right across the board, there were few, if any, blacks, Chicanos, or women in any of those apprenticeship training programs.

So to make a long story short, I introduced the bill, I got it through both the assembly and the senate. It went to his desk, and he sent his assembly liaison person, who at that time, I think, was George [R.] Steffes, who's now a lobbyist in Sacramento. In my freshman year, Jesse had appointed me to the Ways and Means Committee. I was on

RALPH: Ways and Means, and I remember him [Steffes] coming into 4202, walking across the front of the room, and going to the railing and asking me to come over. He signaled me. So I went over. This is the governor's man; I don't know why he wants me, because his boss and I don't see eye to eye. But I knew my bill was there. I think the bill was A.B. 492.<sup>1</sup> It's a long time. But it was "4" something, I think 492. He said, "The governor's going to veto your bill on discrimination in apprenticeship training programs." I said, "Why?" If I was able to get votes from conservative senators in the senate, I couldn't conceive of any reason why the governor wouldn't sign it. There were battles in both the assembly and the senate over it. In the assembly, it passed by, I don't know, forty-four, forty-three votes. It needed forty-one, so we just barely got it out of the assembly. It had come out of the senate. There were probably eight to ten votes against it in the senate, so the vote was close to twenty-nine or thirty votes for it.<sup>2</sup> I said, "For what reason?" He said, "I don't know, but he's got some problems." So I said, "May I talk to him before he makes that decision final?" He said, "Well, yes."

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1. A.B. 490, 1967 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 325.

2. The senate voted for the bill 22 to 1.

RALPH:                   So he went down to the governor's office. In a few minutes, he came back and said, "The governor's going to act this afternoon. He'd like you to come down now." I said, "Fine." So I went down. I walked in, and the governor was sitting there with his legs crossed, and he had a folder on his lap. The folder was on my bill. He said, "Assemblyman, sit down." So I did. I was trying to be as respectful as I could, because at this point I was puzzled and somewhat angry. That bill had generated, at least, hope among NAACP chapters, and I was able to talk about it to people whose opportunities economically, employmentwise, in Watts were rather limited. So it was a ray of hope. It wasn't walking on water stuff, but it was a significant step, we felt, in the right direction. So he said, "I'm going to have to veto your bill." I said, "Why?" I think my anger showed. He said, "Because it has a word in it, 'sex.'"

[End Tape 1, Side A]

[Begin Tape 1, Side B]

I said, "I don't think I understand." This is before the feminist movement had really gotten going, but I believed that women were at least my equal. I had a mother and a sister and a wife and two daughters. I couldn't think of any reason why it would be wrong to discriminate against black men or Latino men, but it's OK to do that to

RALPH: women. I had [not] put the word "sex" in because in my original drafting, it was an oversight on my part, and Pauline Davis nailed me on the floor. She said, "Why don't you have 'sex'?" Publicly, I said, "Please forgive me. I commit it to you that (1) it was an oversight, probably my maleness is showing. But I promise to you in this house that when I get to the senate, I will put in an amendment that does include women." So I did, and I explained to him [Reagan] where the word had come from. I said, "Governor, I can't go back on that. First of all, I don't believe in going back on it. Secondly, I made a public commitment to Yvonne Brathwaite"--[Brathwaite] at that time; her name is now Burke--"and Pauline Davis that I would put it in and I would fight to keep it in, I wouldn't play any games with them. So I cannot agree to take that out. I don't believe in taking it out, and I'm committed publicly." So he said, "Assemblyman, let me ask you. What would you think if a woman wanted to try out for tackle for the Los Angeles Rams?" I said, "Governor, I would think that if she is good enough, she ought to have an opportunity. Besides, I imagine if they could find a woman who's good enough to play tackle, that their gate receipts would probably soar because people from everywhere would want to go see that bad sister." I thought it was funny, and he just looked at me like he didn't know what I was talking about, which really irritated me.

RALPH:

So I'm sitting there thinking, "What can I do? We've gotten this bill through two committees in both houses--the assembly and the senate--and here it is, and he's talking about vetoing it over sex, of all things?" I used what I considered to be every logical argument that I could think of. I told him about the hope that I felt the bill raised for black youth in Watts, my district. We talked a little bit about the riots, and I told him that I had met with and had worked with the young men who I could identify were part of the Watts riots in '65. I had committed to them that I would do everything within my power to show them that working within the system was the way to go, and this sends just the opposite message to them, because I had talked to them about the bill, they were believing in the bill. They realized that it wasn't a panacea to solve all racial problems, but at least it was a step in the right direction. I used every argument that I could, trying to be as straightforward with him as I knew how. He said, "I just think I've got to veto it." Then, I got angry, and I stood up, because I knew this intimate discussion was over. I don't know how long I'd been there, but I was wet under my arms from perspiration, the pressure. I looked at him and I said, "Governor, I promise you that if this bill is vetoed, you think the Watts riots of '65 were bad? That's going to look like a Sunday school picnic compared

RALPH: to what could happen if that bill goes down the drain." He looked at me, and [for] the first time, I saw receptivity appear on his face. He said, "Is that right?" I said, "Governor, I believe that's true. I'm not threatening, but I really believe that this bill means that much, symbolically, to people out there. If I, coming from that district where the riots started and burned, come to Sacramento after making a commitment--campaign and personal--and I can't keep that, all of their hope is shattered." I leaned over and I took his hand. I looked him right in his eye and I said, "And I'm praying you make the right decision," and I left.

I went back to the Ways and Means, and I was sitting there. I was really hurting, just thinking about what I considered to be a bad meeting with the governor. It was my first encounter with him. I looked up, and George Steffes came in the door again, 4202, from the hall. The Ways and Means Committee just went on for hours and hours. I mean, the list of bills is just unbelievable. I was sitting there, and George came over and he was motioning to me to come over to the railing. So I went over. George said, "The governor asked me to tell you that he just signed the bill. He has one request." I said, "What is that?" and I said, "Thank you." "That you get on the phone and call those rioters and ask them not to riot."

RALPH: [Laughter] I said, "Right." That's the way I got the bill signed. I went back to my chair and I sat down. "Whew, there's got to be a different way to legislate than that."

You know, in 1968, there was a poor people's march to Sacramento. Asians, blacks, Chicanos, Indians--Native Americans--were all out on the west step. At that time, there was a window that went from the governor's office. I told that story. There were about 4,000, 5,000 folk out there, and they howled. I'm almost sure his people heard it because, soon after that, Willie [L.] Brown, [Jr.], and I--we were on friendly terms at that time--told the crowd we were going to lead them down the hall, and we were going to go into the governor's office, and asked them to follow us. Willie and I were going to go into the governor's office and present a list of demands from the poor people's campaign. [This was] in the spring of 1968. I think it was before Dr. King was killed. We got to the door and identified ourselves. They knew who we were. The guards were there because this was a big event. We told them who we were. One of them said, "Excuse me." He went in and came back and said to us very calmly, "The governor refuses to see you." [Laughter] I remember Willie and I were standing with our faces facing the door, not the crowd. The hall downstairs in the Capitol was just jammed with as many of these people as could get in. I remember looking

RALPH: at Willie and saying, "They think we had power. What are we going to say to them now? He won't even see us." We turned around and told them. It was somewhat embarrassing. We would have thought that, in spite of our differences, the fact that he knew that we were not friends, different parties, critical of his policies, we really thought that the urgency of the time would have suggested at least a meeting. He could have been whatever he wanted to be in the meeting, but at least to hear what these people who had come from all over the state had to say. There were farm workers; there were students from Berkeley; there were housewives; people from Watts. There was a rainbow coalition, really, in fact. But he refused to see us. [Laughter] I walked away thinking, "God, I don't know what you're going to have to do to that man in that office to at least sensitize him to the urgency of the problems that we have."

Then, in 1968, something else about him that really stood out. When King was killed, Jesse appointed a delegation of three to attend the funeral, representing the legislature. There was Willie Brown, [William T.] Bill Bagley, and myself. We went to Atlanta to represent the state legislature. But before he did that, the day that King was killed, Jesse called me and asked. . . . I was in the district; I never will forget it. I was in a meeting

RALPH: at the time that it was announced that King had been assassinated in my office on 103d Street, which was known as "Charcoal Alley" because that was where most of the burning occurred in '65. I had really reached out to the angry, militant young blacks, mostly men. I'm sure the women were as angry and as frustrated, but the young men were the activists out in the streets raising hell. Watts was still tender in '66 and '67 and '68. I had set a meeting that afternoon in my office, and we were all in my office: the representative from US, Ron Karenga's group; a Black Panther--I forget who represented them; the Sons of Watts; the Young Men for Total Democracy. They were sitting around my desk, and the phone rang, and it was Willie. He was in his office in San Francisco. He said, "Hey, man, they just killed King." And I'd just finished telling these people who were there, "We've got to work within the system. I'll do anything I can." I put the phone down, and I really didn't know how to tell them. It was probably one of the toughest jobs I've ever had as an assemblyman, to look at these angry, militant, distrusting black males. Because they just finished saying, "King's an Uncle Tom." To put the phone down and say to them, "King has just been killed in Memphis," I didn't know what their reaction was going to be. It was immediately angry and disillusioned and sort of a reaffirmation of their

RALPH: arguments. We'd been there about an hour and a half, going back and forth in this dialogue. It was just a reaffirmation, as far as they were concerned, that the system doesn't work for us, never worked for us. "They've been trying to use you like we told you they were, Leon. Why don't you come out of that mess you're in and come out and join us in the streets?" That was the reaction. With the help of Ron Karenga--who's now a professor, I guess, at UC [University of California], San Diego, Riverside, somewhere--and the US group, the Sons of Watts, Young Men for Total Democracy, we were able to call an emergency meeting and go out into the streets to try to keep the lid on Watts, [to keep it] from blowing wide open all over again.

But I could not understand why a governor didn't have at least some empathy for people who really were crying out for just an opportunity or a hand to help them--not a handout. The games that were run in my old district following the '65 riots and the Kerner Commission<sup>1</sup> Report, which pointed out what the problems were but really, in many cases, didn't come forward with the kinds of concrete solutions that we needed. . . . There were training

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1. The National Advisory Commission on Civil Disorders, chaired by former Illinois Governor Otto Kerner.

RALPH: programs. Some of the young men I knew in Watts, and middle-aged men who had families, went through welding programs that led nowhere. Then, they'd go back into another training program that led nowhere, then go back into another training [program]. I knew young fellows in Watts at that time who were going through as many as four different training programs, always hoping and expecting to get employment at the end of it, only to be told there were no jobs.

I felt so frustrated at times, as a legislator in Sacramento. Not only was the governor unaware--I'm trying to be charitable--but, in addition to his lack of awareness, he was insensitive to the kinds of things that really needed to be done. I remember being upset and frustrated to the point of drinking, just hurting so much. I had a bill that addressed the auto insurance problem in Watts. Insurance companies were using driving records from the Department of Motor Vehicles as a basis of their escalation rates, in addition to practicing geographic redlining around the community. If they went in, they would go in at an exorbitant amount of insurance premiums. I put a bill in to disallow them access. It may not have been realistic, but just out of frustration and hope, I drafted the bill and put it in and carried it to an assembly transportation committee hearing one afternoon to

RALPH: try to get some relief on the auto insurance concept. The bill died for lack of a motion. I was so frustrated and hurting so much that night. I remember buying a bottle of wine and going back to my room. I stayed at that time at the Marina Inn, across the Sacramento River over in Yolo County, just as you go across the Mall Bridge, on the right-hand side. [I remember] going to my room and just emptying the bottle of wine, trying to ease the hurt and the frustration. I didn't know how to come back sometimes and face the people in the district and tell them about the insensitivity that there was. They already suspected that, anyhow. But I was in my thirties, very idealistic, very hopeful that we could begin to change things faster than we could. That's one of the things I learned to live with.

The first bill I put in in 1967 addressed the business insurance problem in Watts, A.B. 16.<sup>1</sup> I never will forget it. I'd gone to Jesse and told him what I was doing and why. Jesse said, "I'll give you support." It was going to Finance and Insurance. "Any legislator there that you want me to talk to, I will. You've got my total support. You can tell any member of the committee." [Robert] Bob Moretti was chairman at the time; he's deceased, as you know. I told Bob I'd talked to Jesse and Jesse was 100

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1. A.B. 16, 1967 Reg. Sess., died in committee.

RALPH: percent with me. He said, "I'll come down and make an appearance with you in committee, if you want me to." I said, "No, I don't want to go that far. I think we can get it without that." He told me which lobbyists in the insurance industry he thought would be fighting me the most, and what things to be concerned about. The bill was coming out of the Finance and Insurance Committee with Jesse's support, with Moretti's support, as the chairman of that committee. The insurance industry saw that, and they came and offered to negotiate a deal. My question was, "How's it going to benefit the folk in my district?" They said, "We think that if we can sit down, we may be able to develop a pool--the whole insurance industry--to provide insurance for the people in that impacted area." That's where the California Fair Plan came from.<sup>1</sup> I went back to Jesse, and talked to Bob, and Jesse said, "Leon, you'll get it out of F and I. You're going to have a tougher time pulling it out of Ways and Means. Things are a little looser there. You'll get it to the floor and you'll have a tremendous fight, because they're going to unleash all kinds of lobbying against you. You might be better off to negotiate out a deal with them while you've got them on the

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1. A.B. 1577, 1968 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 574. The purpose of this measure was to give to all citizens of California "fair access to insurance requirements." West, California Insurance Code, 1990, 439-43.

RALPH: ropes. They were scared to death. They didn't think the bill was going to go anywhere when I first introduced it. As soon as I had an opportunity to put in a bill as a freshman legislator, that was the first one I dropped in the hopper. So I sat down with the insurance industry's representatives. They brought in their underwriters and people from all over the country, and we sat and we talked. We put the bill over. I told Bob we didn't want to take it to a vote . . .

[Interruption]

We were talking about A.B. 16, 1967 session of the legislature. As a result of the negotiations that took place, we were able to get concessions out of the casualty insurance industry. They subsequently set up what became known as the California Fair Plan which, in its inception, I think, worked pretty well. Lately, I've heard some complaints from people in business that it has drifted back very close to business as usual. Whether that's true or not, I'm not sure, but, at least, there were businessmen who I have talked to who feel that they are being set upon a bit by the insurance industry. But that's the long and short of A.B. 16. The California Fair Plan, the automobile insurance industry, apprenticeship training, those were all issues that were, I felt, really crucial to the people I represented, not just in Watts. But I felt that, as an

RALPH: elected official of color, there were certain requirements of me, and that meant I had to address the issues that affected blacks and Chicanos and women, because they also were discriminated against statewide. You couldn't just legislate for Watts. Whatever legislation we enacted or tried to enact would benefit people throughout the state of California. I felt that California would be better if it began to come to grips with these issues it was confronted with.

When I was in Denver, Colorado, as a student, I worked in the bean fields for half a day in a little place called Brighton, Colorado. It was twenty-four miles north of Denver. I saw there the horrors of the exploitation of and brutality [toward] mostly Mexican nationals, who were here on their green cards. This was back in '55. I never forgot that experience. As a result of that, I had a very heavy commitment to attacking the whole farm labor thing legislatively. I was able to get passed and signed into law [bills] that--I don't know if they're being enforced now; I'd question that--at least set up some licensing and policing of standards for farm labor camps. Many times. . . . We're the sum total, I guess, of our life experiences, and when we're elected to public office, we have. . . . As I used to tell folks, "I'm the newly elected assemblyman from Watts, and I've come to discuss

RALPH: the burning issues with you." Of course, in '66 and '67 that went over. They understood what I was saying. But truthfully, all of us have things that we feel deeply about based upon who we are and what we've been exposed to, and that's kind of how I legislated, in many instances.

I carried dog racing legislation, not because I was a fan of dog racing, but the man, George Hardie, who was a proponent of that, came to me, and I saw some shrewd maneuvering. The horse racing industry, which had supported me very strongly financially when I was chairman of GO [Governmental Organization] Committee, hated dog racing with a passion. My position was, if we can discuss four-legged creatures known as horses in the legislature, we ought to also to be able to discuss four-legged creatures known as dogs. To discriminate between dogs and horses is just unacceptable. I told George Hardie, who now manages a bicycle cart club in Bell Gardens. . . . We became good friends. He came to me and he said he'd found a state senator who would author dog racing legislation. I had told him I really didn't want to--I just wasn't that excited about dog racing--but if he couldn't find an author, that I would. This was after I had moved from chairman of GO to chairman of [the] Rules [Committee]. [I told him] that I'm really trying to distance myself from that kind of legislation; I wanted to do some new things.

RALPH: "But that's a commitment to you." So he came back all excited. I won't name the senator; he's now dead. But he said, "Senator So-and-So is going to carry the dog racing bill for me." I said, "I don't think so. I think you're being set up by the racing industry, because they've been very generous to you. They've been generous to me, too, and probably wouldn't expect me to do that, but there's a principle involved here, and that is that dog racing should have its day in the legislature. Whether it passes or not is beside the point. It should be heard." So what they did was, this particular senator had promised him that he would carry the legislation up to the cutoff date for introduction of legislation. George went by this senator's office. It was about two o'clock in the afternoon. The desk closed at five. They left it open that day; it was the last day to get bills in. He told him, "I've reconsidered. I don't think I can introduce your legislation." George made a beeline from that senator's office--who's a fine man--to my office on the third floor. I was chairman of Rules. He walked in, and his eyes were big as saucers. He said, "It happened." I said, "You don't even have to tell me. I know what happened. He won't carry it, right?" He said, "No." He had had the legislation drafted with his name on. I said, "Give it to me." I took a pen and struck out that senator's name and

RALPH: wrote my name in and said, "I'll put it in because I think it deserves its day."

LAZAROWITZ: What happened to it?

RALPH: In addition to receiving about four threats on my life [Laughter] through the mail, my family and I lived under protective custody for about a year of my last two years in the legislature. I had representatives--some of them were very decent guys, lobbyists for Hollywood [Park] and Santa Anita, people who I knew and still know and still love and respect--come to my office and just went up one side of me and down the other. "How could you do this to us?" Everybody in California thinks you're a great man until this." "You guys don't seem to understand that my position is that dog racing has as much right to be discussed in the legislature as horse racing. You don't own the territory." But anyhow, it died. I really wanted to get it out of [the] GO Committee. I was no longer chairman of that committee--Bob Wilson succeeded me--because of the threats. I figured if we're going to back down legislatively because some kook or some mean jerk out there decides that he's going to try to intimidate you, the way you deal with that is you push straight ahead. The bill died, and maybe that was the Lord's wise way of protecting me from my own pigheadedness. But at any event, that was one of the highlights, in a bad sort of way, of the ten years that I was there.

[LAZAROWITZ: Please elaborate on the death threats over the dog racing bill. Also, please discuss the lobbying techniques.

RALPH: I carried the dog racing bill as a personal favor to George Hardie, whom I had come to know after he arrived on the Sacramento scene. I believed, and still do, that he was a decent man on a mission for dog racing because he thought California should try it. After all, we had horse racing. I told him that I really didn't want to carry legislation authorizing dog racing, but if he couldn't find another author, I would, because I believed that the idea of dog racing had as much right to be discussed in the California Legislature as horse racing, even though I had received large campaign contributions from the horse racing industry while I served as chairman of the assembly Government[al] Organization Committee from 1971 until 1974. George was not able to find another author, and I introduced it for him as I had promised.

After the bill was set for committee hearing, a letter arrived in my Sacramento office warning me that if I took the legislation to the committee hearing, I would be killed. My staff notified then Sergeant-at-Arms Tony Beard of the threat before they told me. He immediately notified the Sacramento FBI [Federal Bureau of Investigation] Office and the California State Police Protective Services. When my principal consultant and longtime friend Jim Ware

notified me about the threat, those agencies were on their way to my office. My reaction was one of intense anger, because I believed then, and I believe now, that the legislature should allow room for all points of view. That was the only reason I had consented to carry the legislation. I immediately called the then chairman of the Committee on Governmental Organization, Bob Wilson, and asked that the bill be set as quickly as possible without telling him what had happened. Soon after I got off the phone, an agent from the FBI arrived to discuss the threat with me. Frankly, I didn't trust that agency because I had recently discovered that they had bugged my telephones from 1968 until 1974, illegally removed papers from my district office, and behaved strangely in other respects. The African-American informant who had secretly worked against me during that period gave that information to my attorney, who is now Sacramento Superior Court Judge James Long. That informant, Darthard Perry, worked against the Watts Writers Workshop and other African-American activists in the Watts area during that same period. Our sin, apparently, was being outspoken during that period of great unrest. I gave this information to both the United States Senate and the House Committee on Intelligence and the chairman of the House subcommittee with the oversight responsibility for the FBI, Congressman Don Edwards. The

RALPH: FBI informant, whose code name was Othello, told his story to Penthouse magazine; it was published in the April 1980 issue. In that article, I was not the only public figure named by him as targets of the FBI's illegal activities. The others were Sammy Davis, Jr., Reverend Jesse Jackson, Operation PUSH [People United to Save Humanity], and many others.

The public was notified through normal legislative channels that the dog racing legislation had been set for hearing, and the threats increased. Tony Beard arranged with the state police for protection for my family and me. The closer we got to the hearing date the more frequent the threats, and they broadened it [protection] to include my family. The California State Police Protective Services decided to provide twenty-four-hour protection for me and my family in Sacramento. I visited Washington, D.C., on legislative business in the spring of 1975 with an agent of the California Protective Services. Upon our landing at the San Francisco Airport, the pilot asked over the PA for "Assemblyman Ralph to identify yourself to the flight attendant." The agent traveling with me answered the call only to learn that we were not to walk through the San Francisco Airport because something had happened in Sacramento. An unmarked car met us on the runway and took us to Sacramento. On the way we learned that the

RALPH: Sacramento Police Department had picked up a tip in a local bar that a bomb was to be planted in my car. I was informed that my wife and children were OK. My wife's car had been checked and nothing was found. My car was to be checked next. When we arrived in the basement of the Capitol, there must have been fifteen undercover security people waiting for me, which emphasized to me how real they considered the threats. The security was beefed up. I lobbied the committee even harder to get the legislation passed. We went to hearing, but the vote was one short of the required number for passage. I really appreciated the support given me by the committee chairman, Assemblyman Bob Wilson, and Assemblyman Tom Bane. The press didn't find out about the threats until I made the statements in the committee hearing for the legislation. George Hardie consistently suggested that I drop the legislation if I was too frightened to continue carrying it, but my strong belief then and now is that the legislature cannot ever give in to that kind of pressure.

The organized crime section of the California Attorney General's office informed me a couple of months after the legislation had been killed in committee that they were convinced that the threats had come from within organized crime, but they were not able to pinpoint the exact organization. I received one more threat after the

RALPH: legislation was dead, and an attempt was made upon my life once after I left the legislature by a lone gunman from a long distance, but without success, thanks to divine intervention.

I have talked some about the threat to elected African Americans from extreme elements in our society. One of the most dangerous is the use of law enforcement agencies to hassle and defeat those who serve us in public office. There is a pattern of this behavior by federal agencies and some local ones that make life very difficult and risky for African Americans in public life. Even with the Freedom of Information Act we still do not get all of the information needed to prevent these abuses. I would have sued the FBI for many of the things they did to me and some of my friends if I had received that information before the statute of limitations had expired. I do not read Penthouse magazine; I didn't see the article in which an informant told some of the things that were done to me while I was an elected official. But the danger is a very real one. This era of political progress is not the first for African Americans in this country, since during the Reconstruction Era many outstanding people from our community were elected and held public office. They were removed from office. When I grew up in Richmond, Virginia, we had to dig to find a record of any of them. Not only

RALPH: were we removed from office through various devices, but our records were hidden as though we were never there. This historical project is excellent because it will help prevent the same thing from occurring in California.

I am not suggesting that African-American politicians who conduct themselves improperly should receive special treatment. But neither should they be singled out for special investigations and prosecution while others are not. In 1968 after Jesse Unruh appointed me chairman of the Subcommittee on Urban Problems, I selected and appointed activists from the Latino, African-American, and Asian communities. Governor Reagan's office indicated that they didn't approve of some of my choices. We met in different areas of California. Sometime in the fall of 1968 quite a few members of our advisory committee informed me that they felt they were being followed and watched by someone. At first I tried to ignore it, but more members began having similar experiences. It is interesting that the African-American FBI informant advised my attorney that he began operating against me in 1968 and continued until 1974. Three years after I left the legislature, a former sergeant-at-arms testified before my church on a Sunday morning that the FBI had tried to recruit him to spy on me in 1975. After he shared that with my church--about 150 people were present that day--I was stunned, because I had

RALPH: never heard anything like it or suspected anyone who worked for or reported to me.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: Before we get into a complete discussion of your role in the assembly, I want to go back and ask one group of questions about Unruh: That is, his role in reapportionment in 1965. What was his involvement in drawing the lines on the basis of population?

RALPH: He had a dominant role in that. He had long since said and believed and worked for the reapportionment of the senate. Even there was a time when people discussed the possibility of Jesse running for the state senate, but he had established his base of power in the assembly and was very comfortable with that. He also was very instrumental in drawing lines that gave minorities a fair shot at being elected. I don't remember who the chairman of E and R [Committee on Elections and Reapportionment] at that time was,<sup>1</sup> because I was not a member; I was a staff member. I don't even remember who the person was when I was there. But Jesse believed very deeply, as we have already said, in minority representation. He went out of his way to make sure there were districts in L.A. County where black and

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

1. The chairman was Don A. Allen, Sr.

Chicano candidates could run and have a reasonable chance of winning. As it turns out, in L.A. County at the time Yvonne Brathwaite Burke won the seat that had been held, I think, by Don [A.] Allen, [Sr.]. This is memory, now. It's been a long time. Bill Greene won the seat that was held by Merv [Dymally], and he took the one that had previously been represented by Gus [Hawkins]. [In] the district that I moved into at the time, which was the Fifty-fifth, there was a larger black growth in there than I think the reapportionment staff had projected for, and I think that was the basis of Doug Ferrell's victory there. But Jesse had a very deep commitment to that. He also had a deep commitment to seeing the state senate statewide begin to move away from special interest upper house to people upper house. His role in all of that was pivotal.

I was, as you know, in L.A., [and] did not have the day-to-day working knowledge of what actually happened in Sacramento, but Jesse did some very significant things. As a matter of fact, in 1963, the Rumford Fair Housing Act<sup>1</sup> was bottled up in the old Senate Government[al] Efficiency Committee. I think the chairman of it was--I don't know if he's still alive or not--Luther [E.] Gibson from northern

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1. A.B. 1240, 1963 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1853.

RALPH: California, who represented the Carquinez Strait area. Word that we got [was]--I was not present when this took place--Jesse and Jack Kennedy came to California about June of '63 [and] appeared at the Hollywood Palladium, among other places. During that time, Jesse had a conversation with him and pointed out to him that there was a naval yard in Luther Gibson's district, and Luther Gibson was sitting on the Rumford Fair Housing Bill, and Jesse wanted it out. He wondered if John Connolly, who was then the Secretary of the Navy, might give the dear senator a call and suggest to him that the naval yard in his district might suddenly begin to close down unless that bill found its way out of senate G and E. Needless to say, the Rumford Fair Housing Bill did come out. I'm not sure that Senator Gibson was too pleased about it, but wisdom, I think, prevailed over his own personal views. But reapportionment and Jesse, and civil rights and Jesse were synonymous. Fair reapportionment, because northern counties, prior to 1965, dominated the state senate. End of report.

LAZAROWITZ: Let's turn our attention to your role in the assembly. You've talked about Watts, but your district included Compton, Lynwood, and South Gate as well. Were they different in constituent needs from Watts?

RALPH: Oh, yes. I really don't intend to slight Lynwood or South Gate or Compton. I had great rapport and good support in

Compton. I had pretty good support in Lynwood. I did not have good support in South Gate. South Gate was across the boundaries of the old district. It [the district] stopped at the eastern end of South Gate, but between South Gate and Watts was Alameda [Street], sort of a main traffic thoroughfare. The people in South Gate were blue-collar, redneck, and, in many cases, just downright mean. Uneducated, frightened. I did not have all of South Gate to begin with; I only had a small portion of South Gate. They did not like it that Doug Ferrell and I represented them. As a matter of fact, in 1966, when I was running in the general election, the man who represented the rest of South Gate was a man whose name was Floyd Wakefield, an interesting gentleman. At a meeting in South Gate Methodist Church on Sunday afternoon, [there was a] candidates forum. As I remember it, Mr. Wakefield indicated that it would be better if South Gate were in one district. He had concerns about the difference in the people, between South Gate and Watts. It really offended me, but it was the thinking at that time of the old-line resident in South Gate. In 1968, as I remember it, George Wallace received more votes in South Gate than he did through almost any other community in California. The reason I remember that is because I was somewhat offended by that. I'm involved in Bob Kennedy's campaign, I was

RALPH: involved in Jack Kennedy's campaign, believed in what they stood for and was prepared to fight for it, and here a portion of my district votes overwhelmingly for George Wallace. So they were not very pleased that I was their assemblyman.

As a matter of fact, in 1972, when we did the reapportionment, I was a member of the Elections and Reapportionment Committee. [Robert W.] Bob Crown wasn't chairman, but he was on the committee. Jack Fenton may have been chairman then.<sup>1</sup> A delegation from the South Gate city fathers came to Sacramento. Within that delegation there were two city councilmen and the mayor, a three-person delegation, [who] came to the E and R Committee, and we were using, I think, 4202 that day. We may have moved across the hall to 4203; senate Finance wasn't meeting. In any event, there were double-tiered committee seats. We were sitting up there, and this delegation came, and, in as tactless a way as they were able, they told the committee that they would really rather have another person as their assemblyman. I'm sitting on the committee. They wouldn't say it was because of my color. Finally, Bob Crown, when the time came. . . . Bob was a classy guy. After the presentation of the witnesses,

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1. The chairman was Henry A. Waxman.

RALPH: the members asked questions during the period of their presentation. Bob Crown asked them publicly if they objected to the fact that I was black. They said, "Oh, no, that's not it at all." He said, "Would you mind telling the committee what it is?" "Well, he's a Democrat, and most of us are Republicans." They just hemmed and hawed all around it. So when Bob finished, I sought recognition from the chairman, and it was granted. My comment to them was one I've heard all my life, and I thoroughly enjoyed being able to share it with them. What I said, in effect, was, "As soon as you people get yourselves qualified and as soon as you all get organized, I'll support you all getting yourselves your own assemblyman. But until then, I'm it," which is what I'd heard all my life: You've got to become qualified, and you've got to get organized. If you do that, come back to the table, maybe we'll let you play a little bit. They didn't think it was funny at all, but I did.

In any event, we put all of South Gate in my district. [Laughter] That's when it became the Forty-eighth Assembly District. The Fifty-fifth District went somewhere else. In reapportionment, you not only, as you know, redraw the lines but many times you shift the numerical, identifying number of the district, and that's when it became the Forty-eighth District.

LAZAROWITZ: Was Compton all black in those days?

RALPH: No. It was changing fast. In 1963, I think Ross Miller, who was a physician in Compton, had a cross burned on his lawn in Compton. He later was elected to the city council. Maxcy [D.] Filer, who's still on the Compton City Council, we demonstrated out in Torrance together. The Los Angeles Fair Housing Council had a housing demonstration out there because there was a new tract going on, and they weren't selling to blacks. So we went out and demonstrated. While we were on the picket line, I remember Maxcy telling me that the whites were fleeing out of Compton; it was fast becoming a black community. He expressed some hope that at some point the city itself would begin to change so there'd be more opportunities for blacks politically to help make policy. I did not represent all of Compton. My district stopped at Rosecrans; that was the southernmost boundary of my district. Beyond Rosecrans to Greenleaf, the balance of that was in Carley Porter's district. I represented all of Lynwood and a small portion of South Gate and the rest of south-central [Los Angeles], which included the traditional old Watts area. The press, since the riot, has included all of south-central as Watts and even included exclusive, rich areas like Baldwin Hills as south-central. The poor folk in Baldwin Hills must really shudder out of

frustration, after qualifying themselves and working so hard. That's no more south-central Los Angeles than I am Tom Bane. In any event, that's showing the ignorance and the lack of sensitivity and awareness of how diverse the black community is in Los Angeles. That's probably the wealthiest black area in the entire United States, Baldwin Hills. Very expensive homes, very successful people--professional, business individuals, entertainers. But that's south-central in the minds of so many people.

LAZAROWITZ: When you entered the assembly, what was the transition like from being a staff member to an assemblyman?

RALPH: It wasn't too difficult for me, except with Jesse. I still held Jesse in awe. To his credit, Jesse never, ever, during the time that he was either minority leader or speaker, I don't remember him ever coming to me and asking me for a vote, not one time. Maybe he thought he knew me well enough to know pretty much where I was going to go. I remember one time he did call me. I was vice chairman of the Assembly Social Welfare Committee; John Burton was chairman. We had a guy on the committee whose name is John [V.] Briggs, who was a very conservative assemblyman from Orange County. I was a coauthor with John. [Eugene A.] Gene Chappie was chairman. But anyhow, John was on the committee. We had the legislation to give state administration of welfare, hoping to reduce the

administrative costs, hoping to equalize the benefits throughout the fifty-eight counties in California because some counties had a richer endowment than others. Those cow counties, they did almost nothing for people who needed welfare. So our concept was that if we give it state administration, we can equalize it, cut the administrative cost, and so on. John Briggs and some of the Republicans were just adamantly opposed to that. I was chairing the committee as vice chairman, a freshman, and it was getting ready to go to a vote. We had the votes, but we had few members sitting there. If one member left, we wouldn't have a quorum, so the vote wouldn't be legal. John Briggs looked around and very quickly realized what a predicament I was in. So he stood up and said, "Mr. Chairman, I think you're running roughshod over this committee." While he was running his mouth, we still had a quorum. I think Burton moved, and I seconded, that the bill go out. . . . Briggs said, "Before you will do that with me, I am leaving the room." So we couldn't do the roll call. No, we went to the roll call, but I couldn't announce the vote. But Briggs had more to say. He left, went out the back door--it was on the second floor--and came back in the room and stood at the door and pointed his finger and proceeded to tell me what a terrible chairman I was. While he was standing there, he didn't realize that he'd made a quorum.

RALPH: So I banged the gavel, and the bill was out. [Laughter] His coming back to give me another piece of his mind gave me the quorum that I needed. So when he saw what I did, he said, "You don't have a quorum." I said, "But you made that quorum. Thanks for coming back." Then, I gaveled that the committee was adjourned.

I went back to my office. Ken Cory's office and mine were next to each other on the second floor by the elevator. I was sitting there laughing about what had happened and the phone rang, and it was Jesse. Jesse said, "Leon, what are you doing?" [Laughter] I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "You know damn well what I mean. What did you do in the Social Welfare Committee?" I said, "I put the bill out." He said, "You didn't have a quorum." I said, "Jesse, let me tell you the story. If Briggs had stayed out in the hall, we were dead. But he came back into the committee to tell me furthermore how bad I was as a committee chairman. And I let him talk, Jesse, because when he came back, we had a quorum. We had already taken a roll call. I couldn't announce the vote because I didn't have a quorum. We were at a stalemate. But when he came back raising all that Cain, I gaveled the bill out." He said, "Leon, Leon, Leon." [Laughter] I've been accused of having a fast gavel around here. Apparently, Briggs had gone up to see Don [R.] Mulford from Oakland; he was caucus

RALPH: chairman. Briggs had gone directly from the committee room to Don's office. Don ran to Jesse, and Don and John Briggs were in Jesse's office when he called. So I said, "Jesse, we had a quorum. You ask anybody there. The press was there. We didn't do anything." He chuckled and he put the phone down. Next day, I saw him on the floor. He said, "You slick rascal you, don't do that. I get the heat when you do that kind of stuff." I said, "All right, Jesse. But we had to get the bill out." That's the only time he ever called me on a vote. [Laughter] John was so angry with me he thought I was the devil himself.

[End Tape 1, Side B]

[Begin Tape 2, Side A]

LAZAROWITZ: What kinds of bills did you deal with?

RALPH: That committee dealt with gambling legislation, horse racing, liquor legislation, and any legislation that dealt with governmental agencies, looking into how they functioned, their sizes and effectiveness. Those were the areas that we were responsible for.

LAZAROWITZ: Did you introduce legislation for the lottery, also?

RALPH: I sure did, much to the chagrin of my strong church supporters at that time. Yes. What I did was, thanks to Jesse again, I had two staff people, Park Terry, who is now a lobbyist in Sacramento. . . . Moretti was my predecessor as chairman of GO. Park was holdover staff from Moretti, but I learned to respect and like him a lot. He was very

competent, very professional, very bright. He was principal consultant. The other consultant I had was Jim Turner--black, bright, [an] able guy. When we started talking about the areas that we should be concerned with. . . . First of all, when you become chairman of a committee, I think it's wise to find out what subject areas you're responsible for. Sometimes I wonder if they do. But within our area of responsibility would be subjects like the lottery, dog racing, horse racing, liquor . . .

LAZAROWITZ: Track betting.

RALPH: Yes, off-track betting. But before we introduced the legislation, I asked my staff to find out (1) which states already had lotteries; (2) who were the administrators; (3) what were their reputations; (4) what kind of revenue was it generating for the state; (5) what kind of crime problems had it created for the state. At that time, the forerunner and the vanguard of that whole movement was New Jersey. We took one or two staff members, and we went back and visited the New Jersey Lottery Commission in Trenton and looked at all of the stuff they were doing. There's a ticket sales group. I'm trying to think of their name; you'd recognize it. Yes, Ticketron. Anyhow, there's a man whose name is Ted Helwig who is the president of that group that handled the sales. They were private vendors with the state of New Jersey. We met with him, looked at his

operation, and I became convinced that lottery was a reasonably safe bet for a state to generate revenues. I dismissed the moral arguments against it, although I'm not a gambler, personally, because I feel that people should have the right to decide whether they want to participate in the lottery or not. That really angered the council of churches. They felt that we should never do that.

LAZAROWITZ: Were you involved in the ministry at that time?

RALPH: No, I wasn't. I was not officially involved in a ministry. I don't know if it was an intellectual and conscious decision that I made, even though I wouldn't bet. I don't participate in football pools. I was burned badly as a student at the University of Colorado on dog racing. Someone gave us a number. They said it was going to surely win the next night. [It was] 89, I'll never forget it. I was an employee in the post office while going to school during the day and took half my paycheck and put it on that dumb dog. It had rained that day. The dog led. It was 89, and they led into the first turn. Somehow or another, one of them bumped the other, and the dog came back down the track in the same direction it had just run. It took me six months to dig myself out of that hole. It cured me. I don't bet on anything. I wouldn't bet that I'd walk across the street--not because I'm superstitious, but to me, I'm cured. I don't want to be

involved. But I felt that, even though I had that attitude, that certainly should not prevail as state policy. People should have the freedom to decide whether they want it; that was the basis of the decision. I wanted to know if there were crime problems with it, because one of the bogeymen that was always raised is that organized crime would move in and make big money on it. We spent some time with a man whose name was Salerno, I think, the New York State Off-Track Betting Commission, an expert on organized crime. He indicated there was no information to substantiate that. We looked at the poor, and that was the argument the church used. Of course, representing my district, I had to be concerned about that. The poor would bet more frequently than those who could afford it. The argument was that those who could least afford it were the ones who [would do it]. Anyhow, we went through all those arguments, dug up all of the research data we could find anywhere in the country, even pulled some out of England and maybe France, as I remember it, and none of the data supported the traditional arguments against the lottery.

Being convinced of that--it required a constitutional amendment--I then introduced it in the assembly and got it out of my committee. I was then chairman of GO. It may have gone to Ways and Means; I think it did. We got it out of Ways and Means, carried it to the floor. I got it out

RALPH: of the assembly. It went to the senate, and it died in the senate. I didn't attempt it anymore. That was as far as the lottery legislation had gotten in recent history in California in the legislature. I knew I couldn't get it out of the senate, so I just decided to not waste my time doing that. I felt that I'd made the point.

During the course of the debate on legislation--the legislative process is an educational process, also--I had hoped that we'd raise the conscious level of the electorate in California that there isn't this bogeyman, organized crime. There are ways you can put a lottery into force, which is what New Jersey had done, and Illinois was doing it, and other states were doing it, where you don't have to worry about that. You don't have an increase in the crime wave, people robbing liquor stores to buy lottery tickets, which was one of the bogeymen that had been raised. That the revenue to the state would not be significant--it was pennies--that was one of the arguments against it. New Jersey and Illinois were receiving great revenue from it. So anyhow, we dealt with all of those arguments. The thing died, and I left it alone.

But I did it because I believed that it was the right thing to do from a public policy point of view. It had nothing in the world to do with my own personal views. I

RALPH: don't believe that I should enact legislation on the basis of my own prejudices. That's bad public policy, in my opinion. So that was why I did it. Doug Ferrell, who was a dear friend until the day he died, supported me, [but] called me on the carpet about it. He wanted to know why I, of all people, had embarrassed him among his ministerial colleagues. For that, I was very sorry. I wouldn't have done anything to hurt him or embarrass him, but I felt that the issue was, for me as an elected official, what was good government policy. That's what Jesse had always emphasized: If it's good government policy, then go with it. It doesn't matter what people think. And I appreciate Jesse for that. But it didn't pass. It ultimately, as we all know now, was passed by the people of California and, to my knowledge, is working fine. To my knowledge. My wife, who's an administrator at Cal[ifornia] State [University], Dominguez [Hills], in the Student Affirmative Action program, [says that] a lot of their program is paid for from lottery funds. I haven't bought a lottery ticket since it's been in existence. I see this \$62 million pot and I think about it, but I just can't bring myself to do it as a human being--not as a preacher, but just as a human being. But I don't think state legislators or governors or presidents or congressmen should run states or nations on the basis of their own personal biases. It's bad policy.

LAZAROWITZ: You also chaired the assembly subcommittee on urban problems in 1968. What were the issues you dealt with there?

RALPH: Jesse appointed me to chair that committee the day that King was killed, kind of as a tribute to King [and] as an opportunity for me. From Jesse's announcement of that committee's formation, the challenge was to look at all of the problems that were bugging urban California. I hired a fellow from the Kerner Commission staff and another fellow who was a Ph.D. candidate in labor economics from UCLA, very bright people, and another Argentinian who was a Ph.D. We sat down. We spent probably two months just in discussion, brainstorming, trying to identify the issues that were really hurting, we thought, minorities. Not just blacks, but Asians [and] Chicanos in California. We then held some hearings in five different areas in California: East Oakland; Hunter's Point; Watts; Roosevelt High [School] in East L.A.; and there was a fifth one. What we found was that education and its dysfunctional product, the children, was number one on the minds of parents and students. Probably number two was community and police relations: the use of police power by police personnel when they stopped black men, particularly, Chicano men. They many times stopped them with a high level of suspicion that the person was either guilty or possibly armed, and so

their conduct left a lot to be desired. Insurance was another problem, and we had tried to deal with that. Employment and training opportunities. Not K-12 and community college, but training and trades and crafts, and then, after the training, opportunities for employment. As a result of the things that we had found. . . . I don't know if we have time now, but I started to illustrate another point. I'll just make this point and move on.

LAZAROWITZ: No, I'd like you to go through the point. We can pick this material up next time, so go ahead.

RALPH: The governor's office objected. I appointed an advisory committee to that subcommittee on urban problems made up of the most relevant people from the black, Chicano, Asian, and Native American communities I could identify. My staff and I spent time trying to identify [them], because we didn't know all of these people. In each of those communities statewide, who were among the most "right on" people, not because they had a long list of academic credentials but what had they contributed? Where was their head? What was their courage, in terms of stating issues and things that needed to be done? There was a fellow at Roosevelt High whose name was Saul Castro, a teacher. Ron Karenga. Walt Bremon, who was a black activist; he's now dead. There was a fellow by the name of George Chung, Asian and black, in the Sacramento area who was really out

there doing stuff. A woman here in L.A. whose name was Margaret Wright. She was really into the educational bag. She had all kinds of concepts of how to make it relevant. Anyhow, I had about thirty people, and I appointed them to my statewide Advisory Committee on Urban Problems. [I] submitted it to the administration, because they were going to be paid per diem. They couldn't afford to participate unless we could get per diem for them, and Jesse had given me authority to do that. The governor's office again sent a representative to tell me that they objected to some of the names on the panel, because some of them they suspected of criminal activity. My position was I want all of them. I'm not shaving off one person because the governor objects to them. Anyhow, we kept them all on. We would meet around the state. They'd get per diem plus travel expenses.

We sat many a night well past midnight in some hotel room brainstorming, trying to narrow down, because urban communities have an array of problems. We tried to prioritize them as best we could, not by waving a wand but by really talking it out, what the members of the committee and what the hearings had helped us to focus on as the most pressing issues. Number one statewide continued to be lack of quality in education. From that hearing, I then introduced legislation that was based upon a report that we wrote, "Self-determination in Public Education in

RALPH: California." We published it about 1969.<sup>1</sup> We brought in a fellow from the Oceanville-Brownsville School District--I guess that's the name of it--in Brooklyn. He took a school and completely turned it around in a couple of years. Of course, the AFT [American Federation of Teachers] in New York, they weren't pleased with that because some of what he asked for and received, known as the Pilot Demonstration Project, was the ability to remove incompetent teachers in spite of tenure and the ability to give parents and teachers more say in their school. We brought him out as an expert witness, and he talked to the legislative committees when we had a hearing. [We] almost got that passed, but [State Senator Randolph] Randy Collier--the "Silver Fox," they used to call him--from northern California killed that bill without even giving us a hearing in senate Finance. We'd gone through the assembly Education and Ways and Means, and also senate Education. We got into the closing days of the '69 session, I think it was, and he wouldn't even set it for a hearing.

[LAZAROWITZ: Why wouldn't Collier give your education bill a hearing? What forces were at work in the senate?

RALPH: Senator Collier wouldn't give our education reform

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1. "Self-determination in Public Education in California." Sacramento: State Printing Office, 1969.

legislation a hearing because the Los Angeles Unified School District fought it very hard. They lobbied Collier and got him to agree to refuse us a hearing without regard for the merits.]\*

But those were the kinds of issues that we dealt with, and that's why we dealt with the issues that we did, because the parents convinced us overwhelmingly that education of their children was their number one issue for the future. Many of them would say, "My life's been miserable, Assemblyman, but my hope is for my daughter or my son or my sons and daughters. If you can do anything to help them, then I will feel that my life has really not been in vain." Their hope was pinned on their children. The other thing they did not want, they did not want their sons or daughters brutalized by police personnel on the streets, and there was a lot of that and there may still be, I don't know. But those were the top issues. We could not really find a way to get a handle on the police brutality. We were still working on it. But we lost control of the legislature in '68. The committee continued to survive for a little while after that.

Then Bob Monagan, who became speaker--he served

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

RALPH: '69-'70, as I remember--appointed [Peter B.] Pete Wilson, who's now U.S. senator,<sup>1</sup> to handle the first full standing committee in the assembly on urban problems. I don't remember what the appropriate name is now [Assembly Committee on Urban Affairs and Housing], but that's where that all came from. It was Jesse Unruh's brain child, as a tribute to Martin Luther King. When Monagan appointed Pete to chair it, he asked me if I would cochair it, and I refused to do it on principle. My attitude was that Pete didn't have any credibility in the black or Chicano or Asian or Native American community, and I had established credibility with them and I wasn't going to lend my credibility to him. I think since then he has kind of demonstrated a sensitivity, at least, in those areas, but I was, quite frankly, suspicious of where his head was, and I did not want to participate in it. They then went to Alex [P.] Garcia and asked him if he would serve as vice chair. I went to Alex and asked him, as a personal favor to me, not to accept it, because what I felt the Republicans were looking for was credibility from minorities. I said, "The day is over when people use us. We happen to be too bright and too alert to allow that kind

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1. Elected governor of California November 1990.

RALPH: of thing to happen." So he didn't accept it, either. Alex was defeated by Art Torres. I don't know what's happened to him since. But anyhow, that's kind of how that all came about.

[Session 2, March 5, 1990]

[Continued on Tape 2, Side A]

LAZAROWITZ: Let's begin with the 1968 California freeway housing law for poor people.<sup>1</sup> What was it?

RALPH: In 1967, as I began my duties as a new assemblyman, I found out that the Century Freeway corridor, which cut right through my district, had been approved in November 1965, about a year before I was elected. There was no chance of me removing it from the approved plan, so I talked to the California Transportation Department<sup>2</sup> to find out what impact it was going to have on my district. When they showed me the map of where it was going, it was cutting through some of the really nice housing in Watts. In fact, my predecessor, Reverend Ferrell, his home was right in the path of it, as well as some older homes that were owned by senior citizens who'd raised their children. In the Willowbrook area and Watts area, the real estate values were depressed because it was an economically depressed

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1. A.B. 1072, 1968 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 953.

2. The official name is the California Transportation Agency.

area. So I, in working with a man in the California Transportation department, Stewart Hill, I think is his last name, developed a concept that required the state of California to pay replacement value for housing, rather than market value for housing. Market value would be fine if the real estate market in that impacted area was not depressed, and that depression is related to supply and demand. There was very little demand for housing in the path of that freeway in south-central Los Angeles. People were leaving; they weren't coming in. So we developed that. The bill passed. We were able to get the governor to sign it. The bill required the California Transportation department that, wherever there was a freeway going through an economically depressed area, the owners of the property, the residents, would be given replacement value rather than market value. Renters would be given an additional 25 percent above their rental cost as a grant from the state to assist them in relocating to another area. So that's where it came from. Subsequent to our enactment here in California, [U.S.] Senator [Edmund S.] Muskie from Maine called for a copy of the legislation and subsequently passed that same concept at the federal level. So it's now a nationwide concept, but it really generated out of the crisis that I saw for people in the path of the Century Freeway.

[LAZAROWITZ: How were you able to get Ronald Reagan's signature on the Century Freeway housing spending bill?

RALPH: I was able to secure Ronald Reagan's signature by working closely with the California Department of Transportation staff. Their technical knowledge was very valuable in the legislative process. And when I needed support in the administration, they worked very hard with their cabinet official, who worked with the governor and secured his signature.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: Let's go to a broader question, and that is the campus violence in the 1960s. What was the reaction to that in the assembly, and your reaction, also?

RALPH: I had mixed reactions, as I think many of the black legislators had. I understood the frustrations of black students. I understood their cry for equality. Where I drew a line, though, was where they began to move into violent reactions to legitimate concerns and causes. In fact, I think it was in 1967 or '68, the Black Panthers walked into the assembly chamber. They had come from Oakland, so far as we knew. They were armed. We had heard that they were coming and we were braced for them. The sergeant-at-arms of [both] the assembly and senate were,

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

obviously, very concerned. I remember when they came into the assembly chamber, some of them had weapons before the sergeants could react. Jesse was presiding, so Jesse immediately proceeded to call for Willie to come up and officiate. Willie's response was, "They'll shoot me just as quickly as they would you," in a humorous sense. But it was a very tense moment. I remember being at the University of California in Berkeley at a meeting with the chancellor and his staff [about] that whole issue. There was a demonstration going on outside. I don't know if it was a National Guard helicopter or sheriff's helicopter, but a helicopter flew over the building that we were meeting in and tear gassed everybody, including demonstrators and students and the chancellor and myself, as a legislator. I think I may have been the only one in attendance at the moment. But the bottom line was that the tear gas that they used caused blariness in the eyesight for about six hours, and I couldn't drive back to Sacramento; I had to have somebody drive me back to Sacramento. But that was an aside of the whole issue. As you know, campuses were in deep turmoil in the sixties, as was the rest of the country. In the '68 convention in Chicago, at which I was a delegate, I think there was as much oppression inside the convention by the then-Johnson presidential crowd as there was on the outside by the then-Mayor [Richard J.] Daley's operation.

RALPH:

It was just a part of the landscape, as far as I could see, in the sixties. Students were reacting to legitimate grievances. Masses of people were reacting to legitimate, long-unaddressed grievances. And police agencies and government officials and university officials, in many cases, were all overreacting in ways that at times tended to heighten the conflict rather than lessen the problems. That's my view of what was going on and what we participated in as legislators. Many times, I would go out and address crowds on college campuses--University of California, Davis; Berkeley; UCLA; Cal[ifornia] State [University], Los Angeles; and some community colleges--in an effort to really find out what the students were concerned about. There was a cry for a greater opportunity to study in ethnic areas. I carried legislation that did, in fact, have some requirements for ethnic studies at the community college levels, offered primarily in the social science departments. Those were legitimate demands, I felt, of students of different ethnic backgrounds in the United States. There were times when different people on faculties may have said or done things that may have added to the tension or the feeling of neglect or hurt. When I was in college, I found an anthropology professor at Valley College was just appallingly ignorant as far as black studies were concerned, just unbelievable. Some of the

RALPH: history professors. . . . I had one who was a Ph.D. from USC [University of Southern California], just really, in my opinion, woefully lacking in his understanding of ethnic studies. I had an anthropology professor who happened. . . . His name, I think it was [Bertram Wallace] Korn. . . . He taught both physical and cultural anthropology, and his comment in cultural anthropology is that blacks really had no history, and the emphasis on black studies was an effort by people who had no history to develop something out of nothing. I could not believe [it]. He was an accredited lecturer, teacher at an accredited college, author of the textbook we were using, and with those kinds of sentiments, it was just appalling to me, very offensive. I'd had the opportunity to study black history as a high school student, so I had, at least, an introduction to my own history, which was very helpful in terms of my own self-esteem. But to have a professor at an accredited college who was himself a recognized authority on anthropology--he was recognized because his textbook was used at a lot of colleges, I guess--to make such an ignorant, appalling, and aggravating statement in a classroom. . . . He didn't say it to me personally, he said it to the whole class, and I was the only black student there. Those kinds of incidents extended into the sixties, and, rightfully, students were offended and reacted to that kind of ignorance and insensitivity.

LAZAROWITZ: Let's move to the 1970s. How was Bob Moretti elected speaker in the '70 election?

RALPH: Bob had been planning for a long time to be speaker. Speakers don't just evolve; they work at it. Bob Moretti and I went back to the days that both of us were part of Tom Bane's operation in the San Fernando Valley. That's where I began. That's where I first met Bob. Bob ran in 1964 when Tom Bane ran for Congress. He was chairman of Rules; he ran for Congress. Then [Ed] Reinecke, a name that we could hardly even pronounce, defeated Tom on the issue of Proposition 14 in 1964, which was a referendum of the Rumford Fair Housing Act, and it had become a politically hot issue. Tom, who had voted for the Rumford Fair Housing Act in the assembly, took the same position publicly in the election, and, as a result, Reinecke beat him in reactionary white areas in Antelope Valley, Burbank. . . . Anyhow, when he moved up, Bob Moretti moved into his seat with Tom's support and our support. From day one, Bob had his eye on being speaker. He became very close to Jesse Unruh. He knew Jesse very well and was close to him before he ran for the assembly. He became a protégé of Jesse's. When Jesse moved out--I think he ran for governor in 1970--Moretti then put together the speakership with, essentially, the close alliance of John Burton, Jack Fenton, Willie Brown, [Walter J.] Wally

Karabian, Wadie Deddeh, and myself. His opponent who emerged, not a very serious one, was Ken Cory, who I loved very much, but I had been committed to Moretti. With that coalition, Moretti emerged as speaker. It just didn't happen. He was chairman of the GO Committee during the two years that Bob Monagan was speaker, which was known then as a "juice" committee or a committee where you could raise campaign funds if you chose to do that kind of thing. Moretti did, because he wanted to be speaker. He used his tremendous fund raising abilities as chairman of the GO Committee to raise funds at dinners and get people who worked with him to contribute to candidates that he wanted to see in the assembly. He did build his base, so that in 1971, I guess it was, when the Republicans lost control. . . . He provided a tremendous amount of leadership in the 1970 fall elections. He helped to recapture the assembly through his leadership and direction and fund raising ability. So when we were sworn in at the beginning of the next year, Moretti had the votes pretty well corralled to be speaker. I guess you could say it was a "slam dunk."

LAZAROWITZ: Was he effective as a speaker?

RALPH: Yes, I think Bob was very effective as a speaker. He was very cordial, very bright, had the capacity to work with diverse interests in the assembly as well as the senate. I

think he was respected in the senate as well. He pushed through some reforms. He was the kind of speaker who worked with the membership, so that there was a great sense of loyalty from the Democratic members to Moretti as speaker. If they had campaign fund needs, he would do what he could to help raise funds. The same kind of approach that Jesse Unruh had. He [Moretti] had been a protégé of Jesse, and I'm sure he learned an awful lot in that relationship with Jesse.

LAZAROWITZ: What about Watergate? How did Watergate affect the politics in the assembly?

RALPH: I, personally, didn't observe any impact upon the assembly internally, except through the passage of Proposition 9 in 1974, which did create the Fair Political Practices Commission [FPPC]. That, then, required a lot of reporting of activities: fund raising and gifts and trips and dinners. It reduced the ability of the Third House, in effect, to contribute. At that time, they were prohibited from spending more than ten dollars a month, as I remember, on a legislator. I've been told that it's since been revised, but probably through constitutional challenges and so on. But I didn't notice any appreciable change in the way things were done in the legislature as a result of Prop. 9, except the reporting requirements were just a pain in the neck.

LAZAROWITZ: Did you have any role in the Political Reform Act of 1974?<sup>1</sup>

RALPH: I opposed it publicly.

LAZAROWITZ: Why?

RALPH: Just as a matter of personal conviction. First of all, I was not aware of the abuses in the legislature that had brought about that whole climate in Watergate. I thought that Proposition 9 was an overreaction as a result of the times. I had the opinion that if there were legislators there who were going to be dishonest, that they were certainly not going to report it to the Fair Political Practices Commission. I thought it was kind of like fool's gold. It probably made the public feel that they had cleaned up government. My position was that California government really, from my contacts, wasn't dirty. I thought Jesse was the one who had really reformed the California legislature. Those reforms, I felt, were working well in 1974, at least in the assembly. I can't speak for the senate as well as I can for the assembly. I was not an internal member of the senate; therefore, I didn't know what was going on or what wasn't going on. But I saw no signs of the kind of corruption that I think people suspected. I used to get angry with legislators who

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1. Proposition 9, passed June 1975, became law January 1976.

would say, "Yes, I know this is rotten, but I'm going to support it in my district because the polls show that it's running" whatever it was. I think Merv Dymally and, I think, Wally Karabian. . . . I'm not sure Wally [supported it] in '74. He may not have, because he ran for secretary of state. His sentiments were "This is hogwash," which were mine, too. I think the time that has followed since then really hasn't uncovered any major problems by the FPPC, except that I think there have, perhaps, been some abuses of campaign funds, but none of the outright thievery. Unfortunately, I guess, it's taken the sting operations that seem to have begun to move and bring people down, not the FPPC; they get people for not filling out a report correctly. It's just makeshift work, and I still have the same opinion. I still don't respect nor appreciate the FPPC. I think they're a pain in the butt. While they're over here fanning flies, apparently someone is over there in the Capitol with the back door wide open, doing whatever they want to do. That was my opinion then, and I've seen nothing to change my attitude. I know that a dear friend of mine, Diane Watson, was fined because she paid for her Ph.D. and some other things, unfortunately. I think she's a very fine person. I don't think her violations in any way indicated that she was dishonest. [It was] just a violation of one of those dumb rules that

RALPH: have been set up by the FPPC and their staff. That's my attitude.

LAZAROWITZ: You were also active in national politics. You were a member of the California [U.S. Senator George S.] McGovern delegation in 1972.

RALPH: I sure was. [Laughter] Julian Bond in Atlanta was the first black to publicly endorse McGovern. Willie Brown, John Miller, and I were the second, third, and fourth black elected officials nationally to endorse McGovern. We then set about to try to pull the black community as much as we could into his campaign. He was a liberal. He was a man, we felt, of great integrity. He had a lot of compassion. He was a decent man. His politics were not in step with the mainstream of American thinking, which really didn't bother me except that I didn't like the defeat. I felt that the mainstream of American politics needed some changes. We were, I felt, too insensitive, too cold, too indoctrinated as far as the Vietnam War was concerned, and all of the other junk that was going on at that time. We'd come out of that situation badly scarred as a nation. During a lot of it, I felt, we had been lied to by administration officials, Pentagon officials, and I just wanted someone who I felt was honest. I did not like Nixon, did not trust him, and suspected that he was the same devil that I thought he was in 1960 when he scared me

to death just watching him on television. I was dissatisfied with all other candidates, and so we decided we would go with McGovern. Willie and I agreed that he would go for delegation chairman and I was going to run for national [Democratic] committeeman. I thought that the time had arrived when a [member of the] "rainbow coalition" should be a member of the Democratic National Committee. Never before had there been a minority on the national committee from California. Within the delegation, it appeared more and more that Willie had the delegation chairmanship sewed up, and I supported him wholeheartedly. I then began to work on the national committee election, and I pulled together the black, the Latino, Hispanic, the Asian, the women, and the gay caucuses in the national delegation from California and won at, I think it was, the Los Angeles International Hotel where we had the vote.

The election was challenged by those who were supporting the man who I beat. I've forgotten his name now; he was an attorney from Beverly Hills. I put my campaign together in about seven days. He had been campaigning for a year at least to become a national committeeman. We had a balance in that delegation, and I looked around and figured we ought to put it together. We did. It was challenged. We never knew what the basis of the challenge was, not that we did anything dishonest or

RALPH: unethical. They just challenged it, he and his supporters. We went to Miami, and the rules were changed. They decided we could have ten national committee people in California, five men and five women. That was fine, as far as I was concerned. I guess we had won our point. I was elected as one of the five men from California who were elected at the '72 convention in Miami, and there were five women who were elected. I served on the national committee from '72 until '76.

In fact, my being on the national committee was the place where Willie and I parted company in December 1972. He denied that, but I had learned from very reliable sources that he had been in constant contact with his friend Elmer Cooper in an effort to hurt me on the Democratic National Committee. After the election was over--as you know, McGovern lost badly, which is perhaps an understatement--we had a woman, she was a national committee chairwoman, Jean [ ]. . . . I've forgotten Jean's last name now, but anyhow, we convened. . . . See how important people are? [Laughter] Good old what's her name. But I thought it was significant that we had a woman as chairperson, and she was McGovern's choice. But in December, the national committee reconvened in Washington at the Washington Hilton to elect a new chairman, because the moderates and the conservatives in the party said that

RALPH: those wild-eyed liberals, the McGovernites, had led us astray, [and] we needed to get someone who is more middle-of-the-road as chairman. We convened for that purpose. Gene Wyman, who I'd worked for, if you remember, when I first started out, called me and said, "Leon, I know you're on the national committee. I have a good friend who's running for chairman. His name is [Robert] Bob Strauss from Texas, and Bob's going to win. I'd like to see you tie into Bob's operation. Since you're on the national committee, you could be of some help. He's a good guy. He has the image of being a Lyndon Johnson Democrat, but, really, he's a decent guy and he's really more liberal than his image is, so I urge you to support him." I said, "Why don't you have him call me?" So Bob called me, and I committed to him.

Willie's denied that, because when I returned from Washington I was so angry with him I really was ready to have a physical confrontation with him. But I called Moretti, who was speaker and both of our friend, and told him that I had uncovered what Willie had been doing while I was in Washington. Willie, as it turns out, was in Jamaica, he and Moretti. . . . There was a man in Washington whose name is Elmer Cooper, who--it had been reported to me from a couple of sources--had been receiving instructions from Willie by phone from Jamaica, and the

RALPH: instructions were to undercut me on the national committee with the Black Caucus. I was just horrified, because there was no reason for him to be playing those kinds of games with me; I'd been 110 percent loyal to him. In fact, Ed Salzman, who was a reporter for the Oakland Tribune, had written an article in the Oakland Tribune critical of me for my loyalty to Willie and inferring that I was either stupid or blind not to be able to see that Willie was not equally loyal to me. That was leading up to the speakership fight in 1974. I was a little bit offended by it because my attitude was I'd been loyal to Jesse, and people had criticized him. Though Jesse was not perfect, he was a dear, dear friend. I took Jesse the way he was. But Jesse never did play games with me. Jesse was always loyal to me. I found that that was not the case with Willie. I called Bob Moretti and told him what I had been informed of back in Washington, and Moretti immediately set up a meeting. He defended Willie immediately, which really didn't carry much weight with me because my information, I felt, was unimpeachable. People were in the room listening to the conversations that were going on on the telephone. When we met in Moretti's office, Willie denied it. I told him I didn't believe it. Ken Cory was there when the meeting first started, and I was so angry I was threatening to physically attack Willie. That's how angry I was. Cory

RALPH:           said, "I think I'm going to get out of here," laughing.  
                  "I've never seen you like this, Leon, and I don't ever want  
                  to get you mad at me," something to that effect, and he  
                  left. I was hurt.

[End Tape 2, Side A]

[Begin Tape 2, Side B]

I felt that it was almost an unforgivable offense against me, because I had been very loyal to Willie to the point of trying to protect his back. He, I felt, had been loyal to me up to that point. But anyhow, that was the first breach in the relationship between Willie and me. We had been delegates to Atlanta, representing the legislature at Dr. King's funeral--Willie, Bill Bagley, and myself. We'd done things together. We were delegates together to Bob Kennedy's funeral in New York, Saint Patrick's Cathedral. We had traveled a lot of roads together, and I really did not understand that one at all.

Nineteen seventy-two passed; I stayed on the national committee. Nineteen seventy-three was relatively uneventful, and then, in 1974, Bob Moretti decided to run for governor. I told him I wasn't sure he could make it. I wasn't as flatly blunt with him as I had been with Jesse, because I wanted to see Jesse go to the U.S. Senate, as I've indicated earlier. But with Moretti's case, I thought he might be able to make it if he could put the pieces

RALPH: together. He was convinced he could do it. As far as I was concerned, I was with him because we were friends--just because of that. I thought he would have been a good governor, and I think he would have been. As you know, he lost, probably ran third [in the primary] against [Edmund G.] Jerry Brown, [Jr., and Joseph Alioto]. Jerry Brown was riding on the Prop. 9 popularity as secretary of state. He swept over us. That, then, created a vacuum in the assembly for speaker. It was not a vacuum that was unexpected. We all knew that Moretti was going to go, and we all knew that Willie was his choice. I was supporting Willie, even though there had been a breach in our personal relationship in December '72 from his actions. I continued to support Willie, although I was having second thoughts about him as a person. He's a good speaker. He's a bright man, probably the brightest up there, in terms of natural intelligence. That wasn't the issue. A lot of charisma. He's got a great sense of humor. I really liked him as a person, and I continued to support him.

But in the '74 primary statewide elections, Merv Dymally, who I'd had some disputes with over the years. . . . We'd had a running feud from about 1967 probably until 1970. I just didn't like the way he did stuff. Maybe he was more sophisticated at being a political operative than I was, but I was used to Jesse's

RALPH: style. We're good friends, now. We worked through those differences. I respect him. He's a decent guy, a warm guy. But my point is that when he ran in 1974 for lieutenant governor, I had gotten it from several reliable sources that on a statewide slate doorknob hanger in northern California that Willie was in charge of--again, this same person, Elmer Cooper, was his operative--that Merv's name was left off. And here we had a chance to elect for the first time in the history of California--at least nominate--a black to be lieutenant governor, and I thought that was very significant. For some strange reason, Merv's name didn't appear on 300,000 of those doorknob hangers in northern California, enough, presumably, to defeat him. When I found that out, I wrote a letter to Willie. It was on the fifth of June; I still have a copy in my file. The election for speaker wasn't for another twenty days. I said to him in the letter, "If you were the only candidate for speaker, I couldn't vote for you because of what you've done to Merv Dymally. Dymally's candidacy is bigger than the person. It's symbolically significant for the entire black community." That's when I made my decision. No way. If there wasn't a Leo [McCarthy] around, if there was no other candidate for speaker, as far as I was concerned, I was going to get off the train of being a part of the leadership in the

RALPH: assembly. I just couldn't hack it with Willie doing that kind of stuff to, first, me, and now, Merv. Just some things that bothered me about it.

LAZAROWITZ: What do you think his motives were?

RALPH: He was not particularly friendly to Merv at that time. Politics changes. As the old saying goes, "Politics makes strange bedfellows." He had feuded with Merv, as I had, but I was supporting Merv and genuinely supporting him, because I thought the overriding issue was that he was a black who could become lieutenant governor and make history.

Out of fairness to him, Willie never told me why he did it. He never responded to my letter. This was a letter sent to him by me, a longtime ally, on the fifth of June. I had it hand carried to his office, and I told my staff person, "Give it to his executive secretary. Don't just walk in and hand it to anybody." Her name was Ida Charles. "Make sure she gets it so she can give it to Willie. I want him to see why I'm angry. This is not appeasable, as far as I'm concerned. It's a character defect that troubles me. I'm not going to support him, and I don't care if there's not another candidate. I'll take an office on the fifth floor; I'll give up all chairmanships. It doesn't matter."

I understood full well what the consequences were, having been trained by Jesse, being part of his speakership

and Moretti's speakership. I knew what the consequences were, but I couldn't handle that emotionally. I don't know what his real reasons were. He never gave me the opportunity to discuss that with him. Since I wrote him a letter fully twenty days before the speakership election, it seems to me that just decency would have suggested that he pick up the phone and call me and say, "Leon, you misunderstood. Let's talk about it. I'm sure, after we talk about it, we can resolve it." No effort was made on his part at all to communicate with me concerning that letter.

I then met with him, the Black Caucus met with him, because the Black Caucus was then becoming concerned that he wasn't going to be willing to share power with the Black Caucus. It was made up, at that time, of Bill Greene, John Miller, Julian Dixon, Frank Holoman, Willie, and myself. We met with him in his office. We requested the meeting. I went with the Black Caucus delegation to his office. He didn't commit any chairmanship, and that's, as you know, what the speakership fight is all about. That's when the deals are made. There's nothing illegal about that, or unethical. It's just a normal way of doing business, the same way as a banker in another professional endeavor: [when] you go in there to negotiate a loan, he wants to know what you have for collateral and what kind of credit

RALPH: you have. Or a doctor, you go to see him, he wants to know what your symptoms have been so he knows how to treat it. In politics and the legislative arena, that's one of the methods of putting together the speakership; it's always been, always will be. Our purpose of going to meet with him was to get some commitments from him to share power with the then Black Caucus in the assembly. He made no commitments to anyone. We left the meeting generally dismayed. Frank Holoman said he was going to support Willie simply because he was a brother. My reaction was, I'm a brother and I was his friend, and I don't think he's been straight with me, and I know he's not been straight with Merv, and that argument doesn't wash.

John Miller contacted me, because he knew that I was very hurt and disgruntled with Willie at that point. I was out jogging one morning, and John Miller was in his car. We lived in the same part of town. He saw me jogging, and he pulled up, and he said, "You want to talk about the speakership?" I said, "I can't now. I've got to finish another mile." He said, "Are you going to come by the office and talk about it?" I said, "Yes, I will." So I went by John's office. He said, "You're pretty upset with Willie, aren't you?" I said, "Yes, I am. I feel hurt." I'm kind of sensitive about being a black man. I grew up with a lot of instilled pride that my mother and father

RALPH: gave me, and the community in Richmond, Virginia, a kind of black middle-class community, they did a lot to instill black pride in us. I was hurting. Julian Dixon probably could tell you I cried once. I broke down and cried talking in my office about how hurt I was that I could not cast a vote for Willie because I was concerned about the way he was going to relate to us, the Black Caucus, and how much I wanted to, simply because it would have been symbolically good for the black community. Julian looked at me, and he said, "Hey, I understand." A decent guy. We had become friends after he was elected. We weren't very close before he was elected. But I remember Julian coming to my office the day before the vote, and he said, "Leon, I just want you to know, if you feel compelled to vote for Willie, I'll understand. I know you committed to Leo, but I see the turmoil that you're going through on this whole thing. I just want you to know I'll be there as your friend, no matter what you do." I thanked him and told him I just could not, in my own mind, support Willie for speaker--not because he wasn't bright, not because he wasn't an outstanding legislator. No question about it. But that wasn't really the issue that I was concerned about.

The vote came in caucus, and I noticed John Miller sitting behind me. I don't know if he was sitting there because he was wondering whether I was going to shift at

RALPH: the last moment or not, because Willie and Moretti had come to see me the day before the vote, either a day or two days before, and, in a last plea, asked me if I'd vote for Willie. I looked at both of them, and I said, "I just can't do it. I simply cannot vote for Willie. Willie, you've disappointed me on an issue that I don't know how to get over. I can't step over it as if it's politics as usual. It's too big an issue for me. So I won't be voting for you." They left. As I remember it, Willie wept in my office. Those were very painful times for us. I just told him I couldn't do it. I went to see Bobby once after that in his office, and he hugged me when I walked in. He was hurting an awful lot. He began to weep. He said, "Don't do this to me. I want Willie to be speaker." I said, "Bobby, I really wish I could, but I can't, man. There's something in me. I just can't go with it. I'm sorry. What I'd come to talk to you about, just forget it. I've got to get out of here."

People who are close to you, there's a camaraderie there. You begin to love people. I loved Bobby before he ever was an assemblyman, and to see him upset and hurting so much, there was a lot of pressure on me. But I couldn't get over those things in me that bothered me about [Brown]. If he'd made a commitment to the Black Caucus when we went to his office. . . . All of us were there.

RALPH: Frank Holoman was there; John Miller was there; Julian Dixon was there; Bill Greene was there; and I was there; and Willie was there. If he'd made a commitment then, I would have softened and would have said, "OK, looks like he's going to work with us as a caucus. I'm prepared to vote for him." But he didn't; he didn't make a commitment to anybody there. Rumor around the Capitol was that he was making all kinds of commitments to people. I wanted to be chairman of Rules, and we'd heard two or three different people named as possible chairman of Rules when he became speaker. I mean, just no concessions at all. I had told him in 1971 it was my hope to become chairman of Rules. John Burton got it when Moretti was speaker. That was fine. I went on and served as chairman of GO. It wasn't my preference, but it's what the leadership thought that I could do effectively. So I said, "OK, I'll accept it. But I want to be chairman of Rules." Three years later, I still wanted to be chairman of Rules, and he [Brown] was not prepared to make a commitment to me on that basis. So it wasn't just my own [feelings], but it was the whole Black Caucus. The only member of the Black Caucus who voted for him--just because he was black, not because he made a commitment to anybody--was Frank Holoman. He said, "I know the brother hasn't committed anything to anybody, and I'm leaving." Frank had run for the senate in the

RALPH: primary and had lost; Nate Holden had beaten him. So Frank was on his way out. He was only there for two years. So the Black Caucus put together a package with Leo. Out of that came Julian as caucus chairman; John Miller, chairman of Judiciary; Bill Greene, chairman of, I think, Industrial Relations, Labor Committee, something like that [Select Committee on Manpower Development]; and I became chairman of Rules. So we all shared the power, and that's what that battle was really all about in 1974. Willie has never, to my knowledge, admitted that as a cause of his being defeated, and he was defeated in that '74 election for speaker. Leo became speaker. I went on to become chairman of Rules. In two years, I left for the ministry. In 1980, Leo lost the speakership, and Willie emerged as speaker.

LAZAROWITZ: Were you involved in the reapportionment process in the early 1970s?

RALPH: Somewhat. I was on the committee in 1972, and I was really there to watch the interests of my own assembly district [and] Bill Greene's, and to pretty much watch the interest that the leadership had, as far as reapportionment was concerned, to make sure that--Moretti was speaker--minority representation was treated fairly.

LAZAROWITZ: Was it?

RALPH: I felt at that time that it was, based on the statistics that I had received. They would bring in outside experts

who did most of the technical work, as I'm sure you know. I didn't spend that much time in the day-to-day operation of the E and R [Elections and Reapportionment] Committee. That was left up pretty much to the chairman, who seems to me may have been. . . . It wasn't Fenton. Fenton was then majority floor leader. I don't remember who the chairman was, but he was one of ours.<sup>1</sup> I felt that it was pretty fair. I, since then, have come to appreciate the concerns that the Chicano community has, but I felt that it was a pretty fair reapportionment--not ideal, but that's a compromise.

LAZAROWITZ: Do you think it protected incumbency?

RALPH: Oh, sure. Realistically, I think, that's one of the major issues that incumbents who do the reapportionment address themselves to. I was concerned about my incumbency, quite honestly. I think I would be less than honest if I said I wasn't. Yes, it did. It protected incumbency and, at the same time, tried to create more Democratic seats so that we could continue to control the assembly, and that's what reapportionment's about, also. Whichever party's in power wants to control reapportionment. That's what this years's elections are targeting toward: the reapportionment of

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1. Henry A. Waxman was chairman of the Elections and Reapportionment Committee from 1971 to 1973.

1991. I justified it for the same reasons that I think many other Democratic legislators justified that mindset, and that is, if we don't gain control--and we did not have control of the governor's office in '72, we don't have it now--the only check that you have against a Republican governor and a Republican administration neglecting public education, trying to tear apart the mental health program which, I think, incidentally, is where a lot of the homeless population comes from today. . . . That was done when I was there on a subcommittee of Ways and Means.

[Peter F.] Pete Schabarum was on that subcommittee, and he was carrying water for the Reagan administration. They ripped up the mental health program in this state, in my opinion. I used to get angry in those hearings. We had control of the legislature, the assembly. I'm not sure we had total support of our ideals in the senate. I think they looked at the assembly as somewhat of an idealistic body of young radicals or reformists, and the senators at that time were a little more conservative. I think that's changed under [David A.] Roberti's leadership, presidency pro tem. I think [James R.] Jim Mills began to put that in place, too. But back then, it was the old guard over on the senate side, and they were closer to the governor than we were.

Jesse never was close to Reagan. Jesse was committed

RALPH: to human problems and sought solutions to those problems. Reagan, I cannot fairly say he wasn't [concerned], but giving him credit for being concerned about human problems, he had a very slanted view, in my opinion, as to how to solve them. I was on the subcommittee of Ways and Means on Mental Health, and I saw him just rip that whole program apart. So now we have this large homeless population. You go down on Pico Boulevard here in Los Angeles to see part of the homeless population. Just a casual look would suggest that many of those people have no business out on the streets by themselves. They're out of total touch with reality. That governor was interested in balancing the budget and not raising taxes, but my question, then and now, is, at what human cost?

The Founding Fathers gave us the whole concept of checks in government, and one of the, I think, realistic justifications for one party wanting control of the legislature through reapportionment is that that whole concept of checks and balances be in place. You don't allow a reactionary and conservative and shortsighted and, I think, uncaring governor to run rampant over the needs of the people in the state. Because the mentally ill, the poor, they don't have an advocate. Historically, the Democratic party is supposed to be that advocate in the marketplace for the poor, for the oppressed, for the

RALPH: discriminated against, for the disenfranchised. That's what we're supposed to be about.

We come back and forth as a party, quite frankly. There are times, as you know, I'm sure, as a political scientist, [that] you look at the horrible history of the United States Senate in terms of filibusters against something as humanly basic as antilynching laws; [they] never passed an antilynching law, which I think is horrible to even think of. Two hundred and forty-seven times, I think, there were attempts to try to get antilynching laws through the Senate. My point is there were southern Democratic senators who filibustered those bills to death. So the Democratic party history is not clean. We have some horrible skeletons in our closet. But of late, since John Kennedy, we've been moving in the right direction in some major areas. We still are not perfect. We still have shortcomings. But historically, when you look back--and I remember my political science studies--the party that has delivered social security, federal deposit insurance, rural electrification--all of these things I had to take as test questions in Poli[tical] Sci[ence] 101 and on and on and on--it makes one very proud, and that's, in fact, why I chose to be a Democrat. When I went to college, I was an undecided. My mother and father were dyed-in-the-wool Democrats. But I lived in Virginia, and I

RALPH: hated what [U.S. Senator Robert] Byrd stood for, and I questioned why they could be Democrats. So I decided maybe I ought to be a Republican, but I didn't like what I saw in the Republican party, either. But then when I studied political science myself and looked at its record, I became convinced that that was the party that I should belong to, because it was addressing the problems that I had concerns about. So that's why I'm a Democrat. I'm not a Democrat just because my mother and father were. I had to look at the records of the two parties before I could conclude for myself. Taking that as my cue, I think the Democratic party, state and nationally, must stand for people. It must stand for people-oriented programs and so on.

Jesse was totally committed to that. One of my strong attractions to him as a person was his commitment in those areas of equality and protection for women in the labor market. California has enacted so many laws over the years that protect women against demands to lift weights, and protection for equal toilet facilities--things that [for] normal-thinking people, you wouldn't think you would have to enact. But you do, because we've got some barbarians running loose in the land, and they have to be stopped.

People say you cannot legislate morality. I disagree with that totally. You can stop immoral conduct. You can stop people from lynching people. You can stop people from

RALPH: mistreating women in the marketplace. You can stop people from slamming doors on a black when they show up there and want to rent a house. You can stop all kinds of immoral conduct. So the people who make that argument simply haven't looked at the historical record of what has happened in the United States. When we put laws in place with teeth in those laws, you do cause people to modify their behavior. We may not change what's in their hearts. But the main thing is you want to get their hands off your neck and get their fingers from around a pistol and get their axe handles out of their hands, and that's what you're legislating. If they want to face their God with that kind of hatred in their heart for their fellow man, that's between them and Him. But when they face me on the street or face you on the street or some Latino kid on the street, like the young fellow who was deaf who was recently shot. . . . That kind of behavior, yes, it can be legislated, and people ought to be put away. I have a problem with the death penalty, but I think they ought to be put away permanently, without the possibility of ever being turned loose on the street again. They're animals. If their parents want to raise animals and turn them loose on society, then society has no choice but to snatch that animal and put him away forever. That's where all of this hatred comes from. Bigots and racists, they don't happen

RALPH: accidentally; they're homegrown. That's where they came from; that's where it all comes from. The people who believe that Jews are somehow inferior or tools of Satan--there's this crap I read in the paper--they've been taught that junk. That's where it comes from. They think that blacks are less than men or we're some sort of apes or wild people; their parents taught them that crap. If they want to lay that kind of burden on that child and then expect that child to somehow survive in a society that's rapidly changing, in terms of ethnicity, I think it's a terrible disservice to give a child, a terrible disservice to bring a child in the world and lay that kind of crap on them, and then expect them to somehow function. But since they want to do that, then enjoy the misery that that brings, not only for themselves but also for that child.

Government can stop that. Government can stop "skinheads," and it has to. And the party that has responded to that has been the Democratic party, and that's why I've been proudly a part of the Democratic party. But there are times when I've hung my head and walked away, not only in the historical past but also in the present. There are some things that I think we should do better than we've been doing. I don't think we have addressed all the problems as I think we have the capacity to address them, because sometimes we, the party, are looking at what's

RALPH: political, and I think we have to take some risks. As Bob Kennedy said, "We look at problems and ask, 'Why?' The dreamer looks at those things and asks, 'Why not?'" That's where I think we really need to go, and certainly people who are elected officials have to go and even have to lay their own seats on the line. If it means I'm going to go down to defeat, then so be it. It's worth going down for. That's what Tom did, Tom Bane, on the Rumford Fair Housing thing in 1964. I'm on a soapbox.

LAZAROWITZ: As a reformer, I want to ask you about the 1975 Watts Job Program.

RALPH: I'll have to think about that.

LAZAROWITZ: You sponsored it.

RALPH: [Laughter] Is that the one that I had WLCAC [Watts Labor Community Action Committee] to manage, do you know?

LAZAROWITZ: Yes, I believe so.

RALPH: OK. Yes. The 1968 replacement housing bill that I put in had some other concepts that I wanted to attach to it but I couldn't. Instead, I tried working out with the administrations, with the support of organizations in the community like Ted Watkins and the Watts Labor Community Action Committee, an effort to train people in the community in the areas of needs for the freeway as it was coming through, and then move them on out into the broader employment market after the freeway had met its needs.

Jerry Brown was then governor. I had a governor who could work with me. I don't care what people say about him, he had a lot of compassion for people. I've read these things in the paper calling him "Governor Moonbeam" and all of those, I think, derogatory comments about him. He was a very compassionate guy. He was a Democrat. There were times when his posturing for national presidential politics probably led him into pastures I wouldn't have gone into, but I wasn't a candidate for president. He was the governor, and I went to him and sat down. That was another thing about him: he was accessible. I'd never had a governor in the eight years that I'd been there as a legislator who was accessible, who not only would receive you but he would pick your mind, try to find out what's going on in your head. He discussed literature and philosophy; he's great for that. Religion. But just a fascinating guy. I like Jerry Brown very much. I went down and I sat down and talked to him. I told him what I planned, what I desired, what I dreamed of doing.

When I was able to get Ronald Reagan to sign the bill in 1968 on replacement housing, in conjunction with that, it was my hope, my aim, that we could develop a whole economic market in the Watts community that would be generated because the freeway was moving through. They were going to need truck drivers. I wanted us to train

RALPH: men, primarily. I wasn't discriminatory in my concept, but the unemployment rate for men--fathers, heads of households--in Watts at that time was awfully high. It was somewhere around 45-50 percent. What we wanted to do was to get those fathers gainfully employed and off of welfare. The welfare system was designed--I haven't looked at it lately, I don't know if it's changed--where there was a benefit for a mother who didn't have a man in the house. So the pressure was toward scattering families rather than building them and pulling them together. I felt the last thing we needed in my district was that kind of pressure against families. We had enough trouble with stability of families, not only there but all over the country. The effort was to get men, heads of households, employed as apprentices on the freeway and things that we needed. We also extended it to women. I was not being discriminatory, but I was alarmed, I was frightened by the statistics that I saw about what was happening to families in terms of structure and lack of stability and gainful employment and all of the other things that were happening. So we were able to get that. Brown committed that his administration would support it. He would have the Employment Development Department administer it, and we were able to get it implemented. In conjunction with that, I was able to get a onetime million dollar appropriation for the summer of

RALPH: 1975, I'm pretty sure, that was to be administered by the Watts Labor Community Action Committee for training of youth who were out of school for the summer. In conjunction with the act itself, I was able to get that million dollar appropriation, which did an awful lot to help in the unemployment in the Watts area in 1975.

LAZAROWITZ: What did you think of another black leader here in Los Angeles, [Thomas A.] Tom Bradley? You were quoted in the California Journal as saying, and I quote, "Tom Bradley hasn't lost his blackness."<sup>1</sup>

RALPH: He hasn't. Tom and I go back a long ways. I have known him since about 1962. I've watched. In fact, when I was on Gene Wyman's staff for the Democratic party, I'd go by and see Tom and [Los Angeles City Councilmen] Billy [Mills] and [Gilbert W.] Gil [Lindsay]. There was a guy on Tom's staff who's now dead who was a police colleague of Tom's at that time. His name was "Speedy" Curtis. Speedy had graduated from SC [the University of Southern California] while he was a policeman, and Tom had gone to UCLA and was a policeman. I'd go by, and Speedy, if he had just gotten a little correction from Tom, would say, "Tom's got those damn lieutenant's bars on today." [Laughter] I'd say,

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1. Mary R. Warner, "The Rise of Blacks in the Politics of California." California Journal 9 (August 1978): 247.

"What is it, man?" He'd go off and he'd explain all of the. . . . It was Tom as a city councilman, really trying to administer a very energetic, a very bright guy who was his field deputy by the name of Speedy Curtis. But the only criticism that I heard of him was along those lines.

In 1973, as a matter of fact, when Tom ran for mayor, I'd committed to support him, but I did not know that Jesse was going to run. Jesse came to me and said, "Leon, I'm going to run for mayor." I said, "Jesse, I know. I'm committed to Tom. I like Tom. But that causes an awful lot of pain in my heart. Jesse, I love you like a brother, and I don't know how to live opposing you on anything, I just don't. I don't think I could sleep through this one. Is it definite? Do you have to run against Tom? I'm supposed to be his campaign manager in the black community." Jesse said, "You do what you've got to do, but I just wanted you to know. I'm not asking you to break your commitment, because that's not the way we've done things." I said, "Jesse, I can't live with that. I just can't. I'll have to go and see Tom and tell him that I'm in real pain now." So I did. We met at Julie's Restaurant across from the [California Museum of Science and Industry] on Figueroa [Street], I guess, near the SC compound out there.

LAZAROWITZ: Exposition [Boulevard]?

RALPH: Yes, near the corner of Exposition and. . . . There was a restaurant in a triangle, and I think it was [at] Julie's Restaurant we met. Tom looked at me. I could see he was very disappointed. I said, "Tom, I can't support you, I just can't. I am who I am because Jesse made me. That's the bottom line. It's like a son turning against a father. Yes, I know he's white and you're black and I represent Watts." I told Tom, "I've already told Jesse he won't get 10 percent of the vote in my district, but I've got to be with him. I can't live with myself any other way. It's strange and it's not the way people do things politically, but that's the way I am. You'll probably win, but. . . ." He said, "Can you stay neutral?" I said, "Tom, I can't. Jesse was never neutral when it came to me. I must have the wrong kind of psyche for politics, but I can't stand on the sideline and watch my brother--and Jesse is like a brother to me--get his head beaten out there without me going out there and joining him." He said, "Does that mean you're going to support him?" I said, "Well, Tom, I guess it does. I've got to go. I've got to go be with Jesse. It really hurts me, because I'd really like to support you. I think you're going to win, but Jesse needs me. I know all the symbolism involved in your candidacy and how much it means to the black community." Tom said, "It's a bad decision, Leon. It

really hurts me to see you do that." I said, "I know. It hurts me, too, but I've got to go. It would hurt me more if I stayed with you. And as the years went by, I probably would end up being angry with you and me, and I don't think either of us needs that. So I've got to go. I've got to go stand out there on the firing line with my man." I did, and we lost. I have not regretted that decision. Yet, I always have had, and always will have, the utmost respect and deep appreciation and even love for Tom Bradley.

LAZAROWITZ: Do you think he's been an effective mayor?

RALPH: He's been an outstanding mayor. I think people who do not understand the ingredients of a political cake don't perceive the things that Tom had to do as mayor. Tom couldn't win in just the black community. Tom had, I believe, a right to expect the black community to vote for him because of who he was. He's dealt squarely with people. He has a great sense of history, has a deep sense of ethnic pride, those characteristics which carry him through the day when the pressures come on him, in my opinion. On the other hand, he needed the Jewish community very badly, not only because many of our struggles are identical, but the Jewish community had, and still has, the ability to raise the funds, the "mother's milk of politics." Realistically, how can you criticize the guy for being realistic in that kind of an arena? If any other

black, if it had been me or Dymally or Bill Greene or Maxine Waters or Gus Hawkins, if we had been in the spot where Tom Bradley was, able to win the mayor's office in Los Angeles, we would have had to make the same kind of an arrangement. Now, that isn't to say that perhaps he could have done some things in south-central Los Angeles that people expected. He could have done more. I think in his last term, he's striving all he knows how to do that. Whatever political factors he had to deal with during the other years that he was mayor, I'm not aware of.

It's easy for us from the outside to sit and call the shots. I played some football in high school and in the air force. It's hell out in that huddle. It's hell when you go up to the line and you know what the signal is and you know that you've got a major part in the next play. All of the people sitting on the bench and in the bleachers could conclude--and many of them do--that it should have been done differently. But the truth of the matter is that you're the person who's got the ball or you're the person who's got to block. My coach used to say, "There's very little difference between football and war. The only difference is that in war they use bullets and in football you don't." The same thing's true about politics. Politics is a form of warfare without bullets, and here's a guy who's facing life and death, almost, politically, [in]

RALPH: the decisions that he has to make. He's drawing from as broad a base of information as he can, based upon his own human values as a person. Tom's a decent man, a good guy--good values, good instincts, really a sweet man.

LAZAROWITZ: What do you think of his recent problems?

RALPH: I don't really know what to make of them, but I've guessed from a distance because I haven't talked with him about that. I have a hunch that he has people around him who have made decisions for him or who have advised him on decisions that he has made following their advice, which were not the best. And I say that having been an elected official myself. I made a decision in 1976 about leaving the legislature based upon bad information that a staff person gave me. I know people have wondered why I handled my departure the way I did. It was based upon bad information, sloppy staff work, people whom I had appointed. I didn't do it myself, and that I have to hold myself responsible for. Had I gone to the secretary of state's office and asked, "What should I do?" I would have gotten a different set of suggestions. But instead, I sent two people, one to check on the other. Whether they got together and talked before they came to me or not with what the secretary of state's office had given them, allegedly, I don't know. But I would never have handled it the way I did if I had done the legwork myself. I was busy being

chairman of Rules, fighting with a cantankerous, reactionary industry in this state on the Capitol Restoration Project. They were threatening a lawsuit, and I was in heavy negotiations with them after we had awarded the contract, trying to stave off a lawsuit against the state by the construction industry, which, in my opinion, was racist--was then and still is. I didn't particularly like the people that I was negotiating with personally, because I suspected them of being the worst kinds of human beings, in terms of human values. But I had to negotiate with them. I was concentrating on the Capitol Restoration Project at the same time that I was struggling in my own heart about leaving the legislature.

LAZAROWITZ: What were the issues of this Capitol Restoration Project? You opposed it. Why?

RALPH: I didn't oppose the restoration project; I'm the person who put it together. When I became chairman of Rules in 1974, I learned that the Capitol Restoration Project had been sitting there just sort of vacillating because my predecessor had some questions about going forward with it. That was John Burton. I was told by other members of the committee at that time that one of his major concerns was that it was going to be a highly controversial project simply because it was a restoration project and the nature of granting contracts could cause all kinds of questions.

I guess John really didn't relish that kind of controversy. Not that he lacked guts or integrity or any of that. I think John's a decent man of great integrity [who had] a lot of courage, [who] always has shown both of those. But I just think that he was reluctant to get himself into a lot of the controversy that was going to obviously follow that kind of a project.

[End Tape 2, Side B]

[Begin Tape 3, Side A]

I requested that the American Institute of Architects [AIA] send to Sacramento its representatives to share with me, as the newly appointed chairman of Rules and the newly elected chairman of the Joint Rules Committee, which had the responsibility to administer the restoration project. . . . I requested the American Institute of Architects to send to me a representative committee of people from whom I could garner their insights, their criticisms, their likes and dislikes about the way the project had been run up to that point. I spent the summer of 1974 meeting with the representatives from the AIA, the California branch, in my office, listening to them in depth about their criticisms and suggestions and so forth. I kept Leo McCarthy, the speaker, advised as to what I was doing. I met with them with staff, never alone, and the staff took notes per my request. We then consolidated all

RALPH: that we had garnered from them. The bottom line was, all of them thought that the state capitol was worth saving, because when I became chairman of Joint Rules, the dilemma for us was whether we would salvage the old capitol or scrap it or restore it to the level of being a museum, but not functional, and then build the twin Collier Towers at the end of Capitol Park. None of the people I met with in AIA thought that the Collier Towers was a good idea. I didn't think it was a good idea because that was about an \$80 million project, in addition to another \$40 million to restore the old capitol. Either we had to restore it or tear it down. I had asked George Murphy, who was legislative counsel, after I had become chairman of Joint Rules, legally, what position were we in as a legislature which represented the people of California. He said, "Leon, this is my legal opinion. I'm advising you not as a friend but as a lawyer. If a brick falls out of that building and kills or damages, wounds someone, the citizens of this state have a collective, unlimited liability, the reason being that there's been a seismic study done on the building. That study has advised us at least four years ago that this building is dangerously unsafe. While we have kept people out of there, if someone slips past our warnings and gets in there, we still could be held liable; the state could still be held liable by a court of law.

RALPH: That being the case, you have two choices." He was advising me as chairman of Joint Rules, then, "Either you have to tear it down--you can't leave it standing--or you have to restore it. You can't leave it standing unsafe." That was my direction. I decided that, (1), it was worth saving because of its historical significance. It's a beautiful building, and I think we in California have too few buildings like that. In Philadelphia, New York, or Virginia, you have buildings that are quite old. But this is a prize historical specimen.

So I made the decision that we were going to restore the capitol. I left it up to the committee, and I had Murphy and a man named John Worsley, who was then the state architect, who was a Reagan appointee, come before the committee and lay out for us what our options were. They both recommended restoration. They both recommended against the Collier Towers. That was Randy Collier, the dear old "Silver Fox" over in the senate, who wanted the Collier Towers built as a memorial to himself. That didn't touch me at all. In fact, it offended me. He came to my office one day and told me that he was an old man, and this was probably his swan song, and that he would like nothing more than to have the Collier Towers built as a monument to his years of service in the legislature. I gave him a curt and, maybe, impolite response. I think in my own heart

RALPH: that I had made up my mind that Collier Towers, no way. But anyhow, with the AIA, the state architect, the legislative counsel, George Murphy, and my staff. . . . I had appointed a fellow by the name of Gene Mansfield, who Leo McCarthy had recommended to me. We had done all of the homework and we had concluded during the summer of '74, during the recess. . . . We had about a six-week recess, and that's how I spent the recess. We concluded that we had to restore it.

When the joint committee came back, we presented our various proposals to them of restoration. We decided to keep the architect who had been retained prior to my being chairman of Joint Rules. It was a firm in L.A. I've forgotten the name now.<sup>1</sup> We decided to keep them. We had to move forward and select a contractor to do it, and we had to choose someone who had expertise in restoration. But in addition to that, I decided we had to have someone who had a commitment to affirmative action. There were fifty applicants. My staff consisted of Gene Mansfield, on that project; John Worsley, the state architect; [and] George Murphy, the legislative counsel. It was a committee of three that I'd appointed to narrow down the fifty

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1. The architectural firm was Welton Becket Associates.  
California State Capitol Restoration: California State Legislature, 1983.

RALPH: applicants to a workable four or five, based upon the criteria that we had outlined. One, they had to have a portfolio in terms of construction and a strong financial statement. They also had to have some demonstrated portfolio in restoration work, which is a specialty all of its own in construction. They had to have a demonstrated commitment to affirmative action for minorities and women. And they should be a domestic firm. We didn't want someone else to come in and do it. We couldn't explain that to the taxpayers in California, I felt, so I didn't. Out of the fifty, they narrowed it down to five. I then convened a six-hour executive session of the Joint Rules Committee, and we interviewed all five of them in person. We developed grading sheets. We went through a lot of elaboration to avoid even the appearance of anything that was wrong. Gene Mansfield and a lady named Julie Garcia, I think--she was the committee secretary--developed grading sheets so that each member--there were five senators and five assembly persons who were on the Joint Rules Committee--could grade the finalists in each of the areas.

There was only one firm that had a demonstrated commitment to affirmative action. They had gone to Denver, Colorado, and hired the executive director of the Denver Urban League, a black man whose name was, I think, Willie Anthony, before they got the contract. This was when they

RALPH: were preparing their proposal to present to the Joint Rules Committee. They had hired him about a month before they had to make their presentation, assuming they were going to be one of the finalists; they assumed that. They had also hired an expert in restoration, a guy out of Washington who had done work on the nation's Capitol and also had done work in Williamsburg and the University of Virginia. He had demonstrated restoration experience. When they came into the committee and had Willie Anthony to make the presentation--the black former executive director of the Denver Urban League--on affirmative action, they were miles ahead, as far as I was concerned, of everybody else. But then they brought in this fellow who was the restoration expert from Washington, D.C., and he had made the presentation on restoration. They had put a lot of thought and commitment into their proposal. They had spent their own resources developing the proposal. The runner-up was a construction firm from Los Angeles. I think the name is Peck. Peck was very close to a large newspaper in this town. I knew he was. When we arrived at these areas of concern--restoration experience, construction portfolio, commitment to affirmative action--he had nothing on the table. I asked--the owner made the presentation--"Mr. Peck, what are you going to do? One of the criteria we have is that you must have a demonstrated commitment to

RALPH: affirmative action. I am from Watts." [Assemblyman Joseph B.] Joe Montoya was on the committee. He was from El Monte. "We can't go back to our districts and explain to people that we allowed a \$43 million contract and it's business as usual, minorities not included." He said, "I promise you, Mr. Chairman, we're going to do our very best to include minorities." When he said that, as far as I was concerned, he was dead. He could have had the best looking proposal in town, but he had no demonstrated affirmative action plans. And those instructions were given to every applicant in writing. My attitude was he didn't think enough of that part of the contract to do what Continental Heller [Corporation]-Swinerton [&] Walberg contractors had done. They went on a nationwide search. I never heard of this man Willie Anthony before. I never saw him before in my life until he walked into my office and introduced himself. This guy walks in--intelligent, experienced, with a track record--and lays out, "We're going to do this and this and this." I mean, the ball game was over. So we announced that we had chosen them.

But my commitment was that at least 25 percent of the work on the restoration project had to go to minorities and women. I arrived at that figure by estimating based upon my census data the combined totals in the population in California at that time, saying that we are willing to

RALPH: concede 15 percent. "We ought to be 40 percent, but we're willing to concede 15 percent as a matter of compromise. But we've got to have at least 25 percent." Mike Heller, who was president of the Continental Heller construction firm, came to my office and said, "Mr. Chairman, the construction industry is threatening to go to court if you insist on holding your ground on that." I said, "But that's ridiculous. Here we are, we pay more than that in taxes, and this is a tax-paid-for project, and they're threatening to go to court because I'm asking for parity, for fair treatment?" He said, "That's what they've said." I said, "You go back and you tell them that we're going to have 25 percent or fight." Before he left, I said, "What is it they want?" He said, "They're thinking 12-15 percent." I said, "They're crazy. That's an insult. Tell them that I'm offended that they would even suggest a figure like that to me." At that time, the director of the General Services Administration [Department] under Jerry Brown was a black man, Leonard Grimes. He was at one time with Golden State Mutual Insurance Company. Leonard sat through all of the meetings with me on that, because of his concern. He had, and has, the same commitment to affirmative action that I did. Gene Mansfield, who was from my staff, sat through each meeting. I never met alone with any of these people because I wasn't sure what I was

RALPH: dealing with, what kind of accusations might come from them, because they might be trying to attack my credibility as chairman of Joint Rules. Just an instinct, just something inside. Caution. So I never met alone with them. Leonard said, "The administration supports Leon's position. If it goes to the governor, the governor will sign what he's asking for." We didn't have to have a bill because we were in contract negotiation, but he said that to emphasize how strongly Jerry supported the goals that we were fighting for.

Mike Heller came back. He said, "They said they'll go up to 18 percent." I said, "You go back and tell them I still say it's 25 percent." He was contacting people out of the Sacramento Building Trades Council and the California Building Trades Council. Those were the people who were opposing it. He came back for another meeting. In that meeting, I had gotten really angry and had kind of blown my top. Leonard was trying to calm me down. Mike could see that I was really fixed in that. "I'm the chairman, and I'm not even going to present this crap to the committee unless we have something that I'm at least comfortable with. I'm not going in there talking 15 percent to that committee." In another three days or so, Mike called me and said, "Leon, I think we've got a deal that maybe you can live with." I said, "All right, come on

RALPH: over." I got hold of Leonard, and Gene came in, because his office was next to mine. He [Heller] said, "They'll support 20 percent." I said, "They've moved up five points, I'll drop five. We'll settle at 20 percent minority participation." After they'd agreed upon that, there was a man--his name was Leonakis or something like that--who was part of the Sacramento Building Trades Council who was supposedly out of town when all these negotiations were going on. He came back in town and called Gene Mansfield. Gene was my chief consultant in Joint Rules who also happened to be white. [He] called him and said--from what Gene told me--the people who negotiated with Heller didn't have the authority to negotiate with him. Twenty percent is too high. "We're going to take the Joint Rules Committee and Leon to court." I said, "Gene, go back and call him and tell him that I will meet with him, with you, with Leonard, with Mike"--I didn't trust him--"and we'll sit down and see if we can avoid a court fight. I don't want a court fight because, if we get tied up in court, the cost of the restoration project will escalate. Our credibility is on the line."

During all this negotiation, I'm, at the same time, struggling with this personal decision about whether I should or should not remain because of the call that I felt on my life for the ministry. That's why I then delegated

RALPH

two people I trusted, both in terms of loyalty and competence, to search out this whole issue and come back to me in terms of what the secretary of state said. At the same time, in, I think, the winter of '75 after we had chosen Continental Heller, the leadership of Continental Heller, George Murphy, the legislative counsel--who was a decent guy--John Worsley, who was the state architect and a Reagan appointee, and one or two members from the Joint Rules Committee went back East to look at restoration projects. We stopped at the University of Virginia, which is a beautiful campus. Thomas Jefferson designed a lot of that and built a lot of that. It was in disrepair and it was being restored, so we wanted to go see what was happening at the University of Virginia in Charlottesville. From there, we drove down to Williamsburg to look at the restoration of that beautiful old colonial city, even though some of its history is offensive to me. Nevertheless, we went to see what they were doing in terms of restoration. So I was out of the state a good part of the time. Then, in December, we went to Israel on a legislative study mission, still struggling with that whole concept. I just slept through it. I just let staff people who I depended upon. . . . I think I had a right to depend upon them: paid them good money, competent people, well trained, holders of advanced degrees. You wouldn't think

RALPH: that they'd go to the secretary of state's office and come back with bad information because they didn't ask the right question. So I operated on a lot of presumptions based upon my confidence in the people I'd given to search out that whole issue for me.

On the restoration project, they finally said that they were going to go to court. They were going to challenge the 20 percent mandate that I'd put in. The first awarded contract that we gave while I was there was to the Palm-Iron Construction firm from Redwood City which was owned by a Latino fellow; it was Hispanic owned, which made me feel good. They didn't like that at all, so they began to attack the contract. The building trades industry almost en masse in California attacked the contract, saying that it had been awarded improperly because we had the executive session. The executive session was restricted to the five finalists, and everybody knew who they were. All five finalists were graded by all the members on the Joint Rules Committee. I didn't make the decision personally. I didn't sit in hearing with anybody privately, never met with anybody privately on that restoration project. To make a long story short, after I left in 1976, the Los Angeles Times began a series of articles questioning the propriety of the contract on the state capitol, alleging that we had met in secret. They were talking about that

RALPH: joint committee session. It was executive, it wasn't secret. One member of the press was allowed to come in, and the only reason one was allowed to come in is because he was the only one who agreed not to leave the hearing until it was over. That was the restriction that we had. We said, "The press can come, but you can't come in and leave," as they frequently did in committee hearings. They'd get enough to go and write their story, and miss some of it. More than that, we didn't want anyone to leave the room and tell the other people who had not come in yet, because it was a sequential schedule. We'd take, first, one finalist, then another finalist, and this went on for six hours. We allowed each finalist the same amount of time. I think it was forty minutes apiece. Then, at the end of the time, the committee had to decide. We had no one in the room where we would sit and make the decision among ourselves, based on our grades and things that we had observed. So it took more time for us to deliberate than it did for the presentation. But there was one [reporter]; I don't remember which newspaper he was from. He agreed. We told all the press, "These are the conditions. You can come, but this is what you have to do. You have to stay for the entire period. We don't want you out in the hall asking one participant, who may have not come in yet, 'What do you think about So-and-So?' We think it's unfair to

RALPH: those who already have come in." So that was the reason we did it. The L.A. Times article alleged that we had held secret meetings, that we had awarded the contract unfairly. I have the article somewhere. But the fellow who did that was a reporter with the Times by the name of Larry Stammer.

I was just infuriated. I was, at the time, being considered for an appointment to Jesse Jackson's staff on the West Coast. I was his West Coast director for PUSH [People United to Save Humanity] right after I left the legislature. The press was so filled with innuendoes and was so negative that Jesse flew out, and we met at the University Hilton, across from SC. Jesse said, "Leon, I want to appoint you the director, but I've got some questions. Rumors are that you're going to be indicted." I said, "Oh, Jesse. The worst thing that can happen as a result of my efforts on that committee is that the affirmative action proposal will be knocked out. That's the worst that can happen. As far as any personal incrimination, you can go to bed, take my word for it. There won't even be a grand jury convened when they look at the evidence. I tell you what. I'm going to write Leo, who's speaker, a letter, and I'm going to request that he request that the auditor general and legislative analyst and the attorney general look into everything that I did

RALPH: and report back to the legislature as to what they found. I'm going to ask that because I'm sick and tired of Stammer and his foolishness in the Times." So I did, and Leo did submit the letters of request for an investigation. All three of them did, and all three of them came back and gave everything we did a clean bill of health, without any cloud at all.

There were four court cases that came out of that whole project. One challenged the validity of the contract because of the way it was worded. But we got our concept of writing a contract for the restoration project from Anheuser-Busch. I had asked George Murphy, the legislative counsel, and John Worsley, the state architect, to go to Saint Louis, Missouri, because Gene Mansfield, my staff guy, had told me, based upon my directions to him, "I want to find out who has written restoration projects in the country. This is new for all of us." I asked him, "Where are restoration projects in the country? I want to go see them, see what they're doing. Once we find that out, I want to find out who has written restoration projects in the country, the contracts that seemed to have had the most favorable reaction from the legal community, from the construction community, and so on." He said, "Anheuser-Busch is clearly the leader." I said, "OK, get Murphy and Worsley in here." I asked them, "You guys are

RALPH: going with us to Williamsburg and Charlottesville and D.C." The nation's Capitol also had some work going on in it. "When you leave us, my request is that you guys go directly to Saint Louis and meet with the legal staff in Saint Louis, and find out what it is that they put into restoration projects, and bring that information back to us so that we can learn from them." They did. They spent two days in Saint Louis. Let's see, we went to D.C. first, then Charlottesville, then Williamsburg. From Williamsburg, they went to Saint Louis, "they" being John Worsley, the state architect, and George Murphy, legislative counsel. They came back to us with the format. They even had sample contracts that they'd gotten out of Saint Louis from Anheuser-Busch, and that was the foundation of our legal contract. It was George Murphy, Gene Mansfield, John Worsley who negotiated the contract with the awardee. I said, "I'm not coming into the meeting. I don't think it's wise for me to be anywhere near the negotiations, just in case someone, at some day in the future, accuses me of cutting a sweetheart deal with them. This is unusual, I know it is, but it's the only way we can move, based upon what you guys have told me." Restoration, you don't know what the costs are until you get into the building. By the very nature of it, it's contrary to a normal construction contract. When you're

RALPH: building a new house, you know what the unexpecteds are and have very few. Restoration in a building that's over one hundred years old, that is so deteriorated that it could collapse or kill or fall completely down. . . . We didn't know how much of the foundation we could use. We didn't know what the infrastructure was like. There's no way of ever knowing that until you actually begin to tear in there and find out what is going on. So we had to have clauses in the restoration contract to protect the state against those unknowns. What we did, we put a provision in there: If the work was done--I think it was within 15 percent of budget--whatever money was saved would be in the form of a bonus to the contractor. So that it was an incentive for him to do it under budget. We put in all kinds of protective clauses based upon what the legal eagle--the legislative counsel--had gotten from the legal department of Anheuser-Busch in Saint Louis. The architectural part, the state architect was a Reagan appointee. I'd never met him before we got involved in the restoration project. [He was] a fairly conservative guy, former professor of architecture from Cal[ifornia] Poly[technic State University], a man with impeccable credentials and integrity. I was careful to pick people like that, because I knew that we were headed for a storm--just my instincts told me--from day one. Also, I knew I had my own agenda.

RALPH: My agenda was that affirmative action provision of the restoration project.

There were four trials. The Third Appellate Court ruled in our favor on three of those, and it left to stand trial the last issue of the affirmative action provision. It was tried in the Sacramento Superior Court under. . . . I've forgotten his name now. I think he's still on the superior court in Sacramento. It was 1980 before we finally got the trial on the affirmative action provision of that. The trial lasted about eleven days. On about the afternoon of the ninth day, I was allowed to go on the stand. I began to explain, just as I am to you, all the precautions that I had taken to make sure not even the appearance of any corruption or evil could possibly have been part of our process. It wasn't a jury; it was a trial by the court. I explained to the judge the steps that we'd taken, the people I had brought to the project, and why I had brought them to the project; and what was the basis of my choosing the Continental Heller team over anyone else. I pointed out to him that it was because of the affirmative action. They had a proposal that was that thick on affirmative action that their guy, Willie Anthony, presented to the committee. I said, "Your Honor, it wasn't even a ball game. They were miles, light years, ahead of everybody else."

RALPH:

The morning of the next day, I spent another three hours on the witness stand testifying under questioning by the attorney that the legislative counsel had hired, a man who is dead now. He was an outstanding trial lawyer, brilliant mind. Just before noon, he said, "Your Honor, I have no further questions." Then, the Pacific Legal Foundation, which is a conservative legal foundation, they were the lawyers for the plaintiffs. The lawyer came--his name was [ ] Zumbran. . . . I never really cared for Zumbran; there was something about Zumbran that bothered me. He asked me one question, and the question was, "Reverend Ralph, why did you presume that there was discrimination in the construction industry that caused you to go to the lengths you did for the affirmative action?" And I unloaded. [Laughter] I unloaded. I talked for about forty-five minutes, because I'm from Virginia and I remember places like black institutions of higher learning like Hampton Institute, which George Washington Carver taught at and Booker T. Washington was involved with, where they taught and gave degrees in things like industrial engineering, where people came out competent to teach, not only to practice as carpenters and electricians and masons. I talked about Hampton Institute and North Carolina A&T [Agricultural and Technical], where my dad had gone. They trained people not only in agriculture but

RALPH: construction. The "A" is for agriculture and the "T" is for technical, where they taught people in fields like brick masonry and so on. In fact, a lot of free blacks prior to the Civil War in the South were craftsmen. I talked about all of that, and his face was getting redder and redder and redder. So when I finished, he just stood there silent in the courtroom. I looked over at our attorney, and he just kind of nodded. The judge said, "Mr. Zumbran, do you have any more questions?" He said, "Oh, no, Your Honor, we ask that Reverend Ralph be dismissed."  
[Laughter]

I didn't know it at the time, but there was a trial at the federal level on the same issue, because a black congressman, Parren Mitchell, from Baltimore, Maryland, had done the same thing at the federal level that I had at the state level when he was still in Congress. That day that the Sacramento Superior Court made public its decision. . . . I have a copy of the verdict around here somewhere. If you want it, I'll see if I can dig it up. The federal court--I think it was [in] the District of Columbia or Baltimore, one of those two places back East--announced that it was constitutional and just and, in view of the past history of the construction industry nationally that there be "set asides" in all federal construction projects. Then, the judge in Sacramento



RALPH: ask you to read the judge's comments. It should make you feel vindicated over all the anguish that you went through in this thing. It's late in coming, but the wheels of justice are kind of slow. But they finally have come." There were four trials. [In] every trial, I was upheld in every decision that I had made. In the final one, the one on affirmative action, the judge had gone to the additional step of commending me for my personal conduct and my own integrity in the whole process, which really made me feel very proud.

[LAZAROWITZ: How long did the justice system take over the capitol restoration issue?

RALPH: The justice system took over four years before all the suits and issues were resolved. The last issue decided was the affirmative action plan which I had put in place before I left the legislature. The Superior Court in Sacramento sustained all of my actions and the judge in the affirmative action case commended the committee and me for our integrity and foresight.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: I have a final question on your role in the assembly, and that is your proposed restrictions on foreign banks in California.<sup>1</sup>

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

1. H.R. 38. This measure died in committee November 30, 1974.

RALPH: Oh, yes. That was probably about 1972 or '73.

LAZAROWITZ: [It was] '73.

RALPH: A friend of mine, Judge James Garibaldi, who's a lobbyist, came to me and said, "Leon, the banks in California do not receive reciprocal treatment in Japan." It was primarily Japanese banking practices I was after. I said, "What do you mean?" because I wasn't aware of it. I was on the Finance and Insurance Committee, but I wasn't aware of that. He had a friend who had a bank. I don't remember the name of the community, but it was a small community in northern California. It seems to me it was between Sacramento and San Jose. It may have been Walnut Creek or something like that. I never met the banker himself. It was just Garibaldi who came. I said, "What do you mean, they can't?" He said, "You notice we have the Bank of Tokyo and this one and that one?" I don't remember the names of the banks then. I said, "Yes. In fact, I bought a Datsun for my son, and it's financed by the Bank of Tokyo in Los Angeles." He said, "Well, they do that here, but Bank of America or Security Pacific or Union Bank. . . ." I'm trying to think of the banks that were around then. I don't think there was a First Interstate Bank. He named two or three of them. He said, "They've applied for banking offices in Tokyo, and they were denied." I said, "That's not fair. I'm not anti-Japanese,

but that practice is unfair. [Even] if it was in Nigeria, the practice would be unfair. It's not their ethnicity that bothers me; it's their tendency to mistreat American banks that bothers me. What do you want me to do?" "I'd like for you to introduce some legislation." "What does it call for?" He said, "We simply want to secure reciprocity for domestic banks in Japan." I said, "Is that all?" He said, "Yes." I said, "I'll introduce it."

So I put the bill in, got it out of the assembly. Before it went to hearing in the senate. . . . And I wasn't sure we were going to have much of a chance in the senate. Dennis Carpenter was a supporter. I don't remember whether he coauthored it or not. Dennis was a senator, former FBI agent, conservative Republican from Orange County at the time. Dennis was a nice guy, an affable guy. I got along with him very well. He was a big supporter of the concept, and I felt comfortable with him working with me. But before the bill was set for hearing on the senate side, Dennis came over. He said, "Leon, I don't know if we're going to get the votes." I said, "We'll give it our best shot." Then I got a call from someone from the U.S. Department of Commerce, who had been contacted by the World Bank, who had asked the U.S. Department of Commerce to send a representative to Sacramento to talk with this legislator who was carrying

RALPH: this legislation that is anti-Japanese. [Laughter] My secretary at the time--her name was Ruby; she's now dead--called me and said. . . . I don't remember the name of the man who was on the phone; he was in Washington. She told me who was on the phone. So I got on the phone. "I'm coming to Sacramento next week, and I need to talk to you about your bill." I don't remember the number of the bill, but it was that banking bill. I only carried one, to my knowledge. I said, "All right, come out. I'll be glad to see you." He came out and he sat down, a nice, clean-cut, Anglo-looking fellow. He sat down in the chair across the desk. I didn't know what he was going to say. He told me on the phone that they had been contacted by the World Bank about my legislation. I said, "Well, we're making international recognition." I called Gary [Garibaldi] and I told him. I called Dennis and said, "Hey, man, we've got the World Bank upset." They said, "Let's see what this guy's got to say." So he came out. The first question out of his mouth was, "Are you anti-Japanese?" "What are you talking about? Anti-Japanese? Why would you conclude that?" "Because your bill is directed against banks in Japan. Have you ever been to Japan?" I said, "No. But I'm not anti-Japanese. I don't have any hangovers from Pearl Harbor, if that's what you're asking. I remember it, but I certainly am not upset with Japan now. When I was a

RALPH: kid, I was frightened. I was too young to be involved in the war, but it scared me to death. But I'm not anti-Japanese. As I think about it, I think your question really is kind of offensive. I mean, isn't there more merit to the bill than whether I am anti-Japanese, which I'm not?" He said, "We wondered about that." "'We' who?" "The World Bank called us, and that was one of the questions, and I need to find out if that's where you're coming from." I said, "No. The real issue is that domestic banks from California are not treated fairly in Japan. And if I were a congressman, I would have the same position. National banks from the United States ought to have equal treatment in Japan. It's just a fairness principle, as far as I'm concerned." So I answered his other questions, and he left. [He was] kind of a strange guy. Nixon was probably president then, and I thought he would probably fit into that mode of operation, as he probably did. But the bill died in the senate. We didn't get enough votes. I think it died in senate committee. This is memory now, so don't hold to the accuracy of that. But I know it died in the senate. Dennis, Gary, and I had a laugh later, and just said, "Well, I guess it wasn't the day for it." I know some of the people in the assembly wondered why I was carrying it, wondered if it was some sort of a "juice" bill. All kinds of questions.

RALPH

I'd heard at one point--and I went and saw the senator who Merv Dymally told me had said it--that I'd gotten \$20,000 in campaign contributions for carrying the bill. I said, "Merv, that's a lie. I haven't gotten a penny and I'm not looking for anything. Who told you?" He told me who told him. I went over to the senate floor and I told the senator who allegedly had said it that it had gotten back to me what he'd said, and I did not appreciate my reputation being muddied up like that. The truth of the matter is, I had not gotten a campaign contribution. I never met the banker who this bill was all about. But I was carrying it for Garibaldi who didn't have this banker as a client. He was doing it more as a friend. Gary is a highly respected lobbyist in Sacramento. He'd been around for years. He's a former assemblyman, former judge now, Mr. Lobbyist in Sacramento. We were friends. You become friends with lobbyists without it being corrupt. He had tickets to the Muhammad Ali fight--I've forgotten the other guy he fought; good old what's his name--at the Forum here in Inglewood. Gary said, "You want to go?" Under FPPC, we couldn't do that now, I guess. I said, "Yes, I'd love to go to it." He said, "I have two." My son, who's now a financial counselor with a CPA [Certified Public Accountant] up in Century City, and I went to the fight.

LAZAROWITZ: Floyd Patterson?

RALPH: It was Floyd Patterson. Yes, it was. Muhammad Ali whipped him. But Gary had a couple of tickets. I caught the plane and flew down and got my son, who was probably at Fairfax High at the time, and that was a big thing for him. But that had nothing in the world to do with the bill. That was probably before or after the bill, I don't remember. But we were friends. You develop relationships that were legitimate, honorable relationships with people you just happen to like.

Gary was adamantly opposed to the dog racing bill. He came to my office one day when I introduced the bill. He sat there and he pretended to cry. I mean, he really knew how to get to me. "Leon, all the years that we've been friends, how could you do this?" Then he went over to Ellis's--it used to be Ellis's Restaurant at the time--I'm told, later that afternoon and was laughing at me, telling the other guys how he had really made me squirm because I'm carrying this dumb dog racing bill, which none of them wanted anybody to carry. My point is you have good personal relationships with people, honorable; they're not corrupt. There are times when you agree with them, and there are times when you [don't].

[End Tape 3, Side A]

[Session 3, March 12, 1990]

[Begin Tape 3, Side B]

LAZAROWITZ: Let's talk about the Ralph Civil Rights Act.<sup>1</sup>

RALPH: In 1975, a representative from the Watts NAACP brought me a group of figures and some information concerning mistreatment of black males, primarily, at Taft Community College, which is outside of Bakersfield in Kern County. They were mistreated in that, apparently, they were football players who had come from Alabama on scholarship, and some of them had begun to date other than black coeds. Some of the roughnecks in the surrounding areas, oil fields, took strong exception to that and proceeded to try to physically attack them. Information I had received was that they had tried to beat them, and the California Highway Patrol was able to rescue them out of a very tense situation. When that information was given to me, I then introduced legislation. Much to their surprise and mine, there were no statutes on the books in California to protect people against violence because of their ethnicity

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1. A.B. 2986, 1975-1976 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1293 (1976).

or their sex. There were statutes against rape for women, but just being beaten simply because you happened to be around and you happened to be ethnically or sexually different than someone might prefer you to be. . . . So we introduced legislation that subsequently became known as the Ralph Civil Rights Act.

LAZAROWITZ: What year is this?

RALPH: Nineteen seventy-five. I introduced legislation. We got it through both houses of the legislature. It was sent down to then-Governor Jerry Brown's desk for signature, which he signed, subsequently. What it does, in effect, is that it establishes penalties, civil liability, of up to \$10,000 for the persons who are engaged in violence against people because of race, creed, color, national origin, or sex. The people who are involved in that are responsible for \$10,000 of civil liabilities.

In, I think it was, about 1982, Assemblyman [Thomas H.] Bates from Oakland amended the Ralph Civil Rights Act to include people who are gay.<sup>1</sup> There was a lot of gay bashing going on in San Francisco, and, believe it or not, they were not protected--"they" meaning gays--from physical violence simply because of their sexual preference. He came to me and asked if I would, as the

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1. A.B. 848, 1983-1984 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1437 (1984).

author of the original Ralph Civil Rights Act, support it, and I said I would. Strangely enough, there were some, I think, misguided people in the Christian community who felt that the Ralph Civil Rights Act was good without the amendment to protect gays from physical violence, so they were opposing the Bates bill. That's the reason he came to me, as a pastor in the Sacramento area at that time and as the author of the original civil rights act against violence, to ask if I would support it. I sent a letter to the governor. Apparently, [George] Deukmejian was governor then, so it must have been what? I don't remember the exact [date]. It may have been '84, '85, maybe. I said '82, but it may have been closer to '84 or '85. He was not sure what to do. He was getting lots of pressure from one group of Christians who said he should veto the bill. They had opposed the bill in hearing all along the legislative process, and it had passed. So Governor Deukmejian was trying to decide what to do with it. I sent a letter of support. Probably not just because of my letter, finally, Governor "Duke" did the right thing and signed the Bates bill, which now gives protection to gays in California. I'm really rather proud of it. It has been subsequently amended on at least one occasion. I think Assemblyman Tom Bane from Van Nuys has amended it to increase the penalties and give more teeth to it than we were able to get passed

RALPH: in 1975-76 because of the increase in violence against people of different ethnic backgrounds.<sup>1</sup> Vietnamese are now being victimized; black males are an endangered species in the United States and in California. Crimes of violence against persons in Los Angeles County in the year that Tom Bane carried his bill--I think which was 1987--had increased by about 155 percent in the year prior to that, based upon figures that the attorney general had compiled. He had a commission on racial violence, and what it showed was that black men, in particular, Chicano, Latino men, also, Asian men, were being victimized very badly. There's a great deal of pride within me that I participated in the process of putting that legislation on the books. That's it, I guess.

LAZAROWITZ: Why did you decide to retire in 1976?

RALPH: It didn't start in 1976. In 1975, I had a near death experience with viral pneumonia--January 1975, to be exact. I was hospitalized. I'd flown down to L.A. from Sacramento to speak in South Gate [and] met with the city council and the mayor of South Gate. It was on a Thursday. I was feeling very badly before I left Sacramento. That Friday, I became very, very ill, and finally I was admitted to a hospital Friday evening.

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1. A.B. 63, 1987-1988 Reg. Sess., Cal. Stat., ch. 1277 (1987).

Saturday, I guess, was when I had my crisis. Fortunately, I'd gone to the hospital on Friday. My doctors told me subsequently that I would not have survived had I not been already on their life support system when the crisis came. During that time, I remembered that years ago, as a young man, I had been called to preach the gospel in Colorado Springs, and had, for awhile, preached in Colorado, and had gotten away from it. It was during my illness that I really remembered my commitment to that first call. I had studied some for the ministry. I had married the daughter of the bishop of the Church of God in Christ in Colorado and northern New Mexico, Bishop Morgan, who's now deceased. But during that period of illness, I remembered, and I rededicated my life to the Lord and made a recommitment to go forward in the ministry. From January of 1975 until January of 1976, it was a constant deliberation on my part, without sharing it with very many people, because I felt that it was such a personal call and such a personal decision that I had to make. It was not a call that public officials would understand. Many of my friends and supporters probably would have felt awkward in trying to advise me as to what I should do. So I kept it pretty much to myself.

I know people speculated after I made the decision that the reason I handled my departure the way I did was

RALPH: to, (1), keep it a secret, which is completely fallacious. It used to anger me when I would read that, because the people who were closest to me, who walked with me during that year and who knew what I was struggling with, they were close enough and loyal enough that they would not dare divulge the deliberations that I was going through for the twelve-month period from January of '75 to January of '76, as to whether I should leave the legislature and accept the call to the ministry or whether I should remain in the legislature. One part of me really wanted to remain. I was enjoying the role as chairman of Rules. I was fascinated by the Capitol Restoration Project, which I had a great sense of pride about. [I] had spent a lot of time in laying the foundation to get that project moving. It was dead in the water when I became chairman of Joint Rules, and I really would like to have seen that project to its completion, which was not until 1982.

As a matter of fact, I had the check sent to pay the filing fee from the district office where my campaign funds were kept. There were about three people, in addition to my wife at the time, who were aware of this terrible struggle that was going on within me. One was the sergeant-at-arms, who had come by and would pray with me. Another was Johnny Collins, who subsequently ran to replace me. He was my choice. Another was Jim Ware, who had known

RALPH: me when I was a minister in Colorado Springs. We go back many, many years. They all saw me struggling with that issue. They all backed off and said, "This is a decision that you're going to have to make, [that] you should make by yourself." I received the check from the district office, and Johnny Collins and Jim Ware and I walked together to the secretary of state's office across the street. At that time, it was in the Ellis Building, across from the capitol. I remember distinctly walking across the lawn. It was January and kind of dreary, as Sacramento is that time of year. I said to Johnny and to Jim, "I really am not sure what I'm going to do." The check was made out for me; it was not made out for Johnny Collins. I'm sure we could dig up a copy of that, and I'm sure the secretary of state's office would readily indicate that.

LAZAROWITZ: The newspapers said that your committee paid his filing fee.

RALPH: It was because he walked across the street with me to the secretary of state's office. When I arrived at the desk to pay it, I just could not. I could not go forward with seeking a sixth term as an assemblyman. I turned to Johnny and I said, "Johnny, I can't do it. I just can't. I know that I need to go and answer the call for the ministry. Here's a check. It was made out for me. Why don't you take it and run?" I'd gone back to the office, and Marian Ash, who was in the secretary of state's office. . . . We

had waited until the last minute because I was still deliberating in my own mind. I hadn't talked to Leo McCarthy about it, [and] I hadn't talked to Julian Dixon, both of whom I considered to be good friends and decent people who would have responded in a very compassionate way. But I felt that I would have been imposing upon them had I gone to them and asked them to help me make a decision or to help me bail out of the decision that I felt that I had to make by myself. But Marian called me--she was working for the secretary of state then--and said, "Mr. Ralph, we have your check, but we don't have your declaration of intention to run." It was probably about quarter to five. She said, "You still have time to come back over and fill it out." I said, "Marian, I can't. I'm not going to run." She said, "Is this a scoop? Nobody else knows this, do they?" I said, "No. As a matter of fact, until about fifteen minutes ago, I wasn't sure myself. But I am going to support Johnny Collins in my place."

LAZAROWITZ: Why did you pick Johnny Collins?

RALPH: For several reasons. One, he was born and raised in the district. He was a product of Jordan High School, which was in the center of my district. He came from a large family. His father was a laborer at the B. F. Goodrich plant near the corner of Alameda [Street] and Firestone

[Boulevard]. His mother and father had moved into my district years before I had ever come to Los Angeles. They were sharecroppers from Oklahoma. In my mind, Johnny Collins represented a success story out of Watts. He had brothers and sisters who were at that time struggling. He had gone to Jordan High. He was, I think, student body president at Jordan High. He'd gone on to Occidental College, had gotten some scholarship funds. We had assisted him when I was an assemblyman. I met him when he was a sophomore in high school. He had worked for awhile on Congressman Hawkins's staff as a summer intern [and] had worked as a summer intern on John Tunney's staff. I'd recommended him to Bob Moretti when he was speaker, and he'd hired him. He had worked in some capacity in Bob Moretti's office while he was speaker. He had gone to Africa and worked a summer as a volunteer there because of his deep commitment to black people. In my view, he was honest. He was young. He had come through the ropes; I had watched him grow from a teenager. At that point, he was twenty-four, twenty-five years old. I really felt that Johnny Collins's candidacy would raise hope for other young people, not just men, in the Watts area who were struggling at that point to pull themselves up the educational ladder. Here would be a shining example of success, so that's why I chose Johnny Collins.

LAZAROWITZ: Why did he lose to Maxine Waters?

RALPH: We handled the campaign poorly. Maxine exploited and distorted my reasons for not announcing before. She made that a campaign issue. Johnny Collins, I think, was stunned, as he later reported to me, at the level of attack that Maxine was waging against us. I didn't take it as seriously, perhaps, as I should have. That was one of the mistakes. I think it was my handling of it because of my own indecision about whether I should run or enter the ministry. It was leading up to four-thirty, I think, on the last day to file my declaration of intention that I finally decided that I've got to do something, I can't sit here and not file and not do anything. I had the check to pay the fee for, probably, a week in my office and hadn't gone across the street to pay it because I was still struggling with that whole thing. So the way it was handled enabled her to develop a campaign issue where there really wasn't one. The alleged issue was that I had tried to cover it from the whole district. Leon Ralph didn't know what Leon Ralph was going to do, not even at four-thirty on the last day to file the declaration of intention. I couldn't very well go out to the district and say, "I'm undecided. I'm not sure what I'm going to do." I couldn't present that to people in the district. They would not respond positively to that kind of indecision. Only I knew the depths of that.

Two, I know I made a mistake in not choosing Harvey Howard to run the campaign. Harvey had managed a campaign for [Assemblyman] Frank Vicencia in what is now the district that I live in, the Fifty-fourth. Carley Porter had died. There was a special election in 1973. Frank had lost to a man whose name was [Robert M. McLennan], a Republican retired doctor who really was out of step with this day and time. He served about a year, long enough to revise the legislators' retirement plan. Then, in 1974, Frank came to me and asked me if I would help him. I told him that I would, that we would have to have strict control over his campaign, and I put Harvey Howard in charge, who laid the format and ran the campaign. He won; a year earlier, he'd lost it. My mistaken decision was that I did not also insist that Harvey run Johnny Collins's campaign. We would have had a much better run campaign than we eventually did. So those two things, those are the reasons that we lost. We blew it. She didn't win it in spite of her level of attacks. We could have weathered that perhaps, if I had done what a politician would have done. At that point, I was really kind of thinking more like a minister. If I'd filed my intention to run knowing full well that I wasn't going to run and not followed through, it would have then opened the campaign filing time

RALPH: automatically for everyone.<sup>1</sup> But because I was indecisive and wasn't sure whether I was going to run or not. . . .

I had talked a couple of days prior to the deadline with Frank Vicencia, who stopped by the office one day. I told him very confidentially--and I knew him well enough that I could trust him--about the dilemma that I was in. He said, "Frankly, Leon, I think it's too quick. I think you need to run one more time." I said, "I really don't think that I can." He was the only legislator that I mentioned it to, not as a legislator but as a person I considered at that time to be a very dear friend. The fact that I would break that confidential material. . . . Most of my staff didn't know. Those who were close to me, who had fellowship with me in church, who had prayed with me in the office, saw the pain that I was in, because it was probably the toughest decision that I've ever made. Because I was trying to handle it as a preacher rather than as a politician. . . . I knew the law. I think Tom Bane was the author of the law; he'd authored it when he was chairman of Rules. If the incumbent files a declaration of intention, then does not file, the whole filing period in that legislative district is reopened. I think it's for a

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1. When an incumbent doesn't file, the deadline is extended for three business days to give candidates additional time to garner needed signatures and/or filing fees.

RALPH: period of ten days. I was aware of that, but I wasn't even thinking as a legislator. If I had been thinking as a politician, I would have filed. Johnny would not have. At the end of that ten-day period, it would have automatically reopened. Maxine made an issue, dramatized that, going to court. There was an appeal to March Fong Eu, the secretary of state, as if there was even an issue. There wasn't an issue. March Fong Eu was going to have to reopen it, anyhow. That was already the law. So I did not handle it as a politician; I was beginning to think as a different individual, as a preacher, and not in terms of political strategies. We lost it for those two reasons.

LAZAROWITZ: Let's move on to the Interdenominational Church of God, of which you were the pastor. You received \$50,000 in donations from friends and lobbyists. These are legislative friends in Sacramento?

RALPH: They were. What happened was, when it became known that I was leaving, there were people in the Third House, the lobbyists. . . . Merv Dymally, who was lieutenant governor at that time, and Leo McCarthy, who was speaker at that time, said, "Leon, we think that it would be appropriate for there to be a retirement dinner for you." I said, "Fine." I'd never given any thought to it. The first person I heard mention a retirement dinner was Merv Dymally, who had suggested it to Johnny Collins, who had

told me what Merv had said. This was before I had left the legislature. I never pursued it. It sounded like a good idea to me, because I could utilize the money for the ministry, which is what I was going to do. After I left, sometime in 1977, about April, the retirement dinner was held. People like Merv Dymally and Leo McCarthy, primarily--they were the primary movers of that--had gotten pledges from lobbyists to buy tickets to my retirement dinner.

LAZAROWITZ: Why would a lobbyist buy a ticket to a retirement dinner? You're no longer in the assembly.

RALPH: I'm no longer in the assembly. I guess some of them felt that they wanted to show their appreciation to me. I had worked with them in the same spirit that Jesse had worked with them, tried to be a conscientious legislator and open to members of the Third House, lobbyists. I saw them then, and still do, as legitimate representatives of interests in California. Truckers would come; bankers would come. I carried a third of the AFL-CIO's labor package each year; I carried legislation for the United Auto Workers. I just felt that lobbyists were respectable, decent people who represented respectable, decent people. When they bought tickets to my dinner, so far as I know, they were showing their appreciation. There was a reporter from the Los Angeles Times, as I remember it, by the name of Larry

Stammer, who wrote a story that somehow inferred that perhaps there was something wrong with my having a retirement dinner [with] legislators and lobbyists. It was really the legislators and the lieutenant governor and those who I had worked with, they were the people who pulled the dinner together. I did not. They were the people who made the contacts with the lobbyists. I did not. The lobbyists wanted to do something to show their appreciation for my efforts, I assume, as a legislator who they had worked with; and I saw nothing wrong with that. There was certainly no way it could be a quid pro quo; I was no longer a legislator. I was, frankly, honored by their gesture of friendship and support. Quite frankly, some of those same lobbyists, after the church was established, quite a few of them would come and fellowship at that church. Paul Brown, who has since died of cancer, came to me as a pastor in the Sacramento area when he found that he was dying of cancer, and I ministered to him in his terminal illness at a time when he really needed someone. Many of them came to me when their families were sick. I officiated at quite a few funerals in Sacramento for lobbyists who, apparently, saw something unique in the decision that I'd made. They came to me for prayer and counseling. I remember when Leo Ryan, who I had served with in the assembly, was murdered in the jungles in

RALPH: Guyana, there was a fairly large contingent of lobbyists who came to church that Sunday, and we did a memorial service for Leo. It was kind of a painful thing, because all of us knew him and respected him and loved him. But it was spontaneous. I hadn't called them, nor had they called me and told me they were coming. But some of them--this is after I'd left the legislature. . . . When their children had problems, many of them would bring their children to the church for counsel. So for awhile, it was a place of refuge while I was there, a place of refuge for the lobbyists, many of whom had contributed and had gotten other people to contribute. Some of them came to Bible class, believe it or not. On a Wednesday night, I'd be teaching Bible class to the members, and two or three of them would come in and sit and go through Bible class. After that, we would sit and have counseling sessions, or prayer time together, or whatever. But it was, I think, a significant gesture on their part, which I will always appreciate and never have anything but appreciation for. No matter how anyone else may have looked at it and tried to make of it or tried to subtract from it, it was, I thought, a wonderful gesture on their part and very much appreciated and, frankly, very much needed at that particular time.

[LAZAROWITZ: What was your perception of the role of lobbyists during your legislative service? Who had clout?

RALPH: My perception of the role of lobbyists during my service in the legislature was mixed. The good lobbyists were helpful in their areas of knowledge; they would provide information, both technical and general, upon request. The fair to poor lobbyists were not as effective, because their information would prove unreliable or they lacked the ability to be straight. My rule was, once I found them to be lacking in either area, I would give them little time or help. The lobbyists with clout were Judge James Garibaldi; Robert Schillito of the California Retailers Association; Don Brown of Advocation; Clay Jackson; Dick Dugally of Ford Motor Company; Paul Brown; Paul Lardnia of the Wine Institute; Merle Goddard; Irv Mazzie of the United Auto Workers; and Jack Henning of the AFL-CIO. They were always there with information when needed: campaign help, contributions, and support.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: When did you lobby for the California State Baptist Convention?

RALPH: Nineteen eighty-four. I'm doing this from memory now. I think it was maybe 1983 until about 1986. The California State Baptist Convention, I lobbied for them. You want me to talk about what I lobbied for? They had had a camp,

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

which was at one time a [California] Youth Authority Camp, in Calaveras County, and they were about to lose it. A representative of the president of that convention came to me and asked if they could utilize my years of experience in Sacramento to lobby for them. They needed to get the property sold, because it was about to go into foreclosure. So I accepted. I took them on as a client. We were able to get \$5 million appropriated for the purpose of purchasing that camp for, not the youth authority, but it seems to me the Department of Corrections was going to use it. They subsequently lost that because of some of the entanglements that they had in the property. There were several lenders that they had put together to purchase the property, a beautiful piece of property. It was in Calaveras County. I don't remember what the name of the city [was] that they were near. Angels Camp, somewhere up near there. I went up once or twice with the director of the Department of Corrections to show them the property, and we subsequently were able to get it funded. But they lost it. It was John Garamendi's district, so I worked with John on that project.

LAZAROWITZ: Did you lobby for any other groups?

RALPH: Yes. I lobbied for the California Retailers. It's an interesting question. When I decided that I really needed to generate income to support my family, because I did not

expect the ministry to support us. . . . I think part of my deliberation with the Lord, if you will, during that year of 1975 to '76 was, "Lord, if you'd leave me, in a matter of six to eight years, I'll be eligible for a retirement plan, and churches won't always have to pay my salary." It's probably my own attitude, but I've been a little reluctant to depend upon churches totally for support. So in about 1978, almost two years after I left the legislature, I took on the first client as a lobbyist; it was the California Retailers. I remember talking with Bob Schillito and people who were Third House people who I had come to really respect and love like brothers about the kind of legislation that I could lobby for. We ruled out horse racing; we ruled out liquor; we ruled out any legislation that had anything to do with the vices that people have. As a minister, I couldn't advocate for those issues, although I had been chairman of the GO Committee for a period of time when I was in the assembly. So we ruled out all of those. I lobbied for an over-the-counter prescription trade association dealing with over-the-counter issues that were being generated by decisions which the Federal Trade Commission was making in Washington. The retailers. . . . The same kinds of issues I lobbied for the retailers, I handled for the over-the-counter group. I've forgotten their complete

- RALPH: name, but they were an over-the-counter trade association. Let's see, who else? The Baptist Convention. Oh, Cole National, which was a national optical outlet primarily for poor consumers or low income consumers, who could buy prescription glasses at Montgomery Ward and Sears. Those were the kinds of issues that I restricted myself to, although I did have some offers for some other contracts. But I declined those because of the issues that were involved.
- LAZAROWITZ: Are you still lobbying now?
- RALPH: No, I'm not.
- LAZAROWITZ: What is your business now, besides the ministry?
- RALPH: I'm doing ministry, and we operate a financial consulting business. We are headquartered in Brentwood.
- LAZAROWITZ: Do you have a church here?
- RALPH: No. In 1986, I was consecrated to the office of bishop, which gives me a little more latitude and a little more freedom. I'm not pastoring now. Some bishops do, but I've chosen not to, at least at this point in time. [I'm] just working administratively with churches, assisting where I can with whatever problems there are.
- LAZAROWITZ: These are the interdenominational churches?
- RALPH: Yes.
- LAZAROWITZ: Why did you move back to Bellflower?
- RALPH: I moved to Paramount in 1987. The reason I moved is

because I was going to become a candidate again for the assembly. One of the issues that I dealt with in trying to make a decision about whether to remain in the legislature or leave for the ministry was that there was a lot of training that I really knew that I needed. I felt that it would shortchange the voters in my district if I spent a lot of time preparing myself for the ministry while drawing a check as a legislator. Those were the kinds of issues that I was debating to myself and praying about. In '86, I was consecrated bishop and traveled to Europe to the World Conference on Evangelism at Amsterdam, Holland. I'd been invited to minister to U.S. military forces in Europe in '86, which I did. I began to realize that I had a little more free time, and I began to evaluate the debacle in the Fifty-fourth Assembly District in 1986, where a Republican won in a district that should have been represented by a Democrat.

LAZAROWITZ: Paul Zeltner?

RALPH: Paul Zeltner, to be exact. There was a big leadership attempt to elect Maxine's son here.

LAZAROWITZ: [Edward K.] Ed Waters.

RALPH: The voters rejected that. I had been approached in 1986 about running in this district, and I said no.

LAZAROWITZ: Which is Paramount. . . .

RALPH: It's Compton; it's Paramount; it's Bellflower; it's

Lakewood; and a portion of north Long Beach. Those are the communities that make up what is now the Fifty-fourth Assembly District, which had been held by Frank Vicencia since 1974. In 1986, I said no. One, I didn't think the time was right. There were still some things that I needed to resolve in my own life, so I turned down the invitation to run, both from some people here. . . . Assemblyman Tom Bane was one of the people who urged me in 1986 to run. I said, "Tom, it's going to be a bloodbath, and I don't have the stomach for that. I don't want to get involved." If Willie has a candidate, if Maxine's son is running, I don't want to get involved in the things that they're doing. [It would] just cause people to think that I'm out on some sort of a collision path with them, and I'm not. I, frankly, wish both of them well. I didn't support Willie for speaker, but since he was speaker, I wished him well in that role and thought that we could work together. But time has proved that he was not willing to, purely for purposes of revenge, nothing else. Just to go back to 1975, Leo had become speaker. Willie and I sat down. I was now chairman of Rules; he was chairman of the Revenue and Taxation Committee. We sat down in the cafeteria in the capitol, and I told him why I had come to the conclusion I could not support him for speaker in '74. I thought we had resolved all of those issues, or, at least,

RALPH: he led me to believe [so], and in my own heart, I'd resolved them. He was very friendly with me throughout the tenure of Leo as speaker. [Brown] was majority floor leader the last time I saw him, before they had the conflict and Leo lost the speakership, and he had given me some help. Oh, the other client I had was Inheritance Tax Referees, and he'd given me some help with the Inheritance Tax Referees. He was close to them. I foolishly believed that the relationship had been healed, because I frankly felt, and had told him personally, that he'd lost my support because of his conduct and for no other reason. I had written him a letter to that effect twenty days before the vote for speaker, as I think I've indicated already in the interview. Once he became speaker, his relationship with me changed dramatically. As I've already indicated, the way he mistreated me as far as the Capitol Restoration Project dedication. . . . Subsequently, I lost the Inheritance Tax Referee account because of his influence in making sure that that would happen. So I had had these undertones. Losing an account as a lobbyist, which was something I used to support my family, [was] a kind of critical, serious situation. In view of that history, I decided in 1986, since Willie and Maxine were going with Maxine's son, that I would not get involved.

That having passed, and Zeltner winning in a district

RALPH: that was Democratic, I decided that I had free time. I felt that I had achieved some things as a preacher. Perhaps I could be of service, both to the church. . . . Quite frankly, I feel that there are times when church people, well-meaning as they are, go off half-cocked on political issues. I look at some of that sometimes and just cringe. I think it misrepresents the heart of God many times. It makes God appear to be uncaring, and I thought perhaps I could be some sort of a facilitator in that role as a legislator who had now been through the ropes. I made my mistakes as a pastor, learned from those mistakes, but, hopefully, I could share that insight in the legislature. After praying about it and talking to the folks in the churches about it, they agreed, and they agreed to support me. I moved into Paramount so I would be a legitimate resident of the district, moved in in December of 1987 for the purpose of running for the assembly in the Fifty-fourth Assembly District in the 1988 election. I subsequently declared my candidacy. On January 30, 1988, Willie was supposed to speak to the Fifty-fourth Assembly District coalition, which were a group of Democrats-- Democratic clubs, grass roots Democrats, organized labor, and so on--who wanted to see a Democrat win the seat and wanted to say to the speaker, "Give us a chance to choose our own candidate, and we will do our best to send a

RALPH: Democrat who's decent and responsive to our community who will also work with you, who's not coming up with an ax to grind." Willie didn't come to that; he didn't show. He said that he was snowed in in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Of course, the weather man subsequently revealed that the only snow that fell that day was in Lakewood. [Laughter] But anyhow, because he didn't show. . . . He was working with a candidate at that time, a man by the name of Les Robbins, who is now a city councilman in Long Beach. The leadership had decided that's who they wanted. The argument was that a black couldn't win the district, and I strongly disagreed with that. I used to get riled every time I'd hear that, because I was living in the district. People would tell me how racist Paramount was. The apartment complex that I moved into was predominantly black in Paramount, and I said, "That's crazy. Here are the guys in Sacramento making the same mistake in 1988 that they made in 1986. They're totally misreading the district, and for me as a black man, it's very offensive for the leadership of the Democratic party--which included the speaker, Willie Brown--to be saying that a black couldn't win in this district. I knew, in fact, that a qualified black candidate could win. I called Bruce Lee, who's the regional director of the United Auto Workers and a longtime friend. I carried legislation for the United Auto Workers,

RALPH: and they considered me a strong ally as a legislator. I went to Bruce, told him what I was up to, asked if he would support [me], whereupon he said, "Yes, UAW will be there for you 120 percent. You were always there for us when we needed you. We'd like to see you go back. There's one issue, Leon, that I have to ask you about. Will you support Willie Brown for speaker? You guys seem to have parted ways somewhere back, and we don't want to get into that. We support Willie's speakership." I said, "Bruce, without any questions or without any qualifications, when elected, I will support Willie for speaker, and you can convey that to him. As far as I'm concerned, everything that's happened in the past is in the past. My objective is to represent the people in this district." Bruce said, "I'll convey that to Willie."

[End Tape 3, Side B]

[Begin Tape 4, Side A]

So I became a candidate. Willie didn't show at that January 30 Fifty-fourth Assembly District coalition, what they called a "peace brunch." They asked the candidates who were there, which included Les Robbins, Willard Murray, and myself, if we would be willing to speak, since Willie wasn't coming. I agreed to. At first, Les was reluctant. But I said, "Sure, a candidate for public office who's not willing to speak is not going to be a very strong candidate

RALPH: for public office." They came back to me and said, "Les is unwilling to answer questions. Are you willing to submit yourself to questioning after your speech?" I said, "Of course." That, to me, seems like a legitimate part of the electoral process. So in any event, Les went on first. I think he appeared weak as a candidate, and that was my assessment of him. He was a nice guy, but probably needed some more growth as a human being to be a candidate. Quite frankly, I was convinced that Zeltner would cream him in the general. When you have two white males, both of whom are sheriffs, which Les Robbins was as was Zeltner, how are you going to sell that kind of candidate to the black community in Compton? It's Tweedledee and Tweedledum, and I'm sitting there wondering what in the name of heaven is going through their heads in Sacramento? How do they expect to sell a Les Robbins, who, number one, is not that strong, not that well developed at this point in his life, as a candidate? How are you going to sell him to Compton black folks when he's a white sheriff just as Zeltner is? So I went up and I spoke. Incidentally, that's where I met my wife. She was the emcee of the program. She's an elected official, recently elected, at that time, to the Cerritos College Board of Trustees. We have since married. So I thank Willie for that. Both my wife and I are deeply appreciative that he gave us the opportunity to

RALPH: get to meet each other. We probably wouldn't have had that close a contact had he come and had he spoken rather than filtering snow. [Laughter] The snow job, we call it.

After that meeting, we tried to work with him. There had been a voter profile done in this district that the leadership in the assembly paid for, which someone in Sacramento had given me a copy of. The voter profile said that a black candidate could win, which was contrary to everything that was coming out of Sacramento. Even my close friend Tom Bane told me that a black candidate can't win. I said, "Tom, that's absolutely false. I'm down there." He said, "I know. I don't live in the district, and so probably you're right. But at least the people up here perceive it as being a lost cause for a black candidate."

The next part of the skulduggery that was directed towards me was that I was allegedly part of the "Gang of Five" movement.<sup>1</sup> That story kept filtering around Sacramento. The sources that I kept getting would all, ultimately, trace it back to Willie. The fellow who's from

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1. The "Gang of Five" consisted of five Democrats in the assembly who joined with Republicans to thwart the policies of Speaker Brown. They were: Rusty Areias, Los Angeles; Charles Calderon, Los Angeles; Steve Peace, Chula Vista; Gary Condit, Ceres; and Gerald Eaves, Rialto. Richard Zeiger and A. G. Block, "The Decline and Fall of Speaker Willie Brown Jr.?" California Journal, 19 (April 1988): 152-58.

RALPH: San Bernardino--I can't even think of his name now--kind of a senior member of the Gang of Five, I had talked with him on two occasions while I was a lobbyist representing the Inheritance Tax Referees, because he was on the Revenue and Tax Committee. But I had no contact with him since then. I didn't know the rest of them. They had all been elected since I had last been there.

When I went to Sacramento, I was stopped by two people and asked why had I linked up with the Gang of Five. John Vasconcellos, who I respect very much and think he's a fine man, had stopped me. I appreciated the way he handled it. He came to me on the lawn and said, "Why are you doing this? Don't you know that they are opposed to everything that we believe in?" I said, "John, I'm not committed. I haven't even talked with anybody from the Gang of Five." I was so disturbed by that, because he was the second legislator who'd asked me that. I wrote a letter to all of the Democratic members of the assembly and all the Democratic members of the senate, indicating that any rumors that they may have heard to the contrary--because this was the second time I'd encountered it--were absolutely false; there was no truth to it whatsoever. Then, [Richard E.] Dick Floyd, who was one member in the assembly--in the entire legislature, as a matter of fact, except for Joe Montoya--who hung with me in 1988, advised

RALPH: me that Willie was going to fund Willard Murray. The effort, apparently, was to stop me from being elected to the legislature. That was the thrust of the movement. I was very disappointed about that. After Willie began to pump such heavy funds into the district against me, I did have a subsequent conversation by telephone with a fellow who's now running for the senate out in Joe Montoya's district. He ran for speaker. You know who I'm talking about. He was part of the Gang of Five.

LAZAROWITZ: I can't remember.

RALPH: He is an assemblyman currently, is running for Joe Montoya's seat, who, unfortunately, has a very serious problem. He ran for speaker last time.<sup>1</sup>

LAZAROWITZ: I'll find out before we do the transcript of the tape.

RALPH: I went to him. This was May now, closing days of the campaign, and Willie had cut off my money. I went to Gil Lindsay, who I had known since 1962, an old, old friend, who had committed to support me in 1987 and 1988. [Wesley] Wes Sanders, who's the treasurer of Compton, who was also my campaign treasurer, went with me. We went down to the [L.A.] City Hall to tell him that we needed the other money that he had promised. He'd given us about \$8,000 to \$10,000; he'd committed for \$20,000. In the closing days

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1. Now Senator Charles Calderon.

RALPH: of the campaign, I went down there to get the additional \$10,000, and he told Wes and me he couldn't keep his commitment because Willie had asked him not to. My response was, "I've known you before you knew Willie." He said, "That's beside the point. He's the speaker and he's asked me not to contribute." Organized labor showed the courage of endorsing me in spite of Willie's opposition. He had called, personally, one hundred labor officials in this county, and what he had misrepresented to them was that the reason he didn't want me there is because in the speakership fight [of] 1974, he didn't know until the last minute what I was going to do, whether I was going to vote for him or not. He told one labor vice president, who told me the story verbatim, that when he looked at me and called for me to vote for him in the speakership fight, I just sat there and finally threw up my hands. Well, I've got a copy of the letter that I sent him on the fifth of June 1974, advising him in writing that I would under no circumstances vote for him for speaker. The speakership vote finally came about the twentieth or the twenty-first of June of 1974. Fully twenty days before there was a vote for speakership, I went on record advising him that he could not count on my vote under any circumstances. So it was just blatantly untrue, what he had been telling labor officials. They would come to me and say, "Leon, I never

RALPH: knew you were like that." "What are you talking about?" Then Richard Katz, who is the assemblyman from the [San Fernando] Valley who was one of his lieutenants, the labor officials quoted him telling the same story. And [Richard G.] Polanco, who I've never met, labor officials quoted him telling the same story. I said, "None of these guys were there, and they ought to be very careful about telling a story that someone else told them, as though they are aware of what they're talking about. Because, in fact, the story that they are relating is blatantly false." I never met Polanco. I had talked to Katz on an occasion when I was in Sacramento lobbying for clients, but that was the extent of my contact with him. The bottom line is that I lost the election in 1988. My funds were cut off, and tremendous funds were spent by Willie through the [Howard L.] Berman-Waxman operation, who ran the campaign for Willard. It was about a 2 to 1 vote. The voters in this district were getting mailings, sometimes two or three pieces of mail per day for the last ten days of the campaign. We were having difficulty getting our mailings out because we didn't have the funds to pay the postage. As a matter of fact, I still have a campaign deficit from 1988, and we're struggling to get those paid off where we can. But that's the long and the short of it.

LAZAROWITZ: Do you miss politics?

RALPH: I have mixed reactions to that. I really felt in 1988 that I could have made a contribution to the people in this area, which is the reason I ran. So for that reason, I miss that part of it. What it has evolved to--the political process and the legislature, based upon my observations and reports that I hear--I don't miss that at all. I'm indeed glad that I was not there when the investigation began by the Federal Bureau of Investigation, not because I would be concerned personally, but I don't relish being in that kind of an environment. I think the way. . . . The seeming combativeness that's apparently the order of the day there now, I don't appreciate that, either. We had combat when I was there, and I'm not reluctant to have combat. I think that goes with the game. But it seems to me that there ought to be a point where people can work together. The way things worked when Jesse was there as speaker; or Moretti; or even Bob Monagan, who was a Republican speaker but a good speaker; or Leo McCarthy. It just seems to me that that was a little better way of doing business for legislators, for their independence, for the representation that the people in their districts should get and could get and, in most cases, did receive from legislators. I'm concerned about the direction the body politic has moved. In California now, it appears that the shots are being called totally

from within the legislature, primarily through the speaker. He, apparently, has developed a philosophy that he exercises the privilege to decide who will serve in the assembly. That goes a bit far beyond any concepts I've ever been willing to accept for a speaker. I beg to differ with him. I think it ought to be the privilege of the people and the districts who are choosing the representatives whom they will choose. We're now in a very highly sophisticated, mechanized political era. Money has taken on an increased importance in the political arena. I never was ashamed of the necessity for money in politics, nor am I now. I have some concerns. It seems to me that reform of what is now the order of the day is badly needed. The reform that I think of is public finance for campaigns. If there ever was a time when we needed it, it sure is now. To borrow an old phrase out of the church, "If we ever needed the Lord before, we sure do need him now." If we ever needed public finance for campaigns, we surely need it now. I just hope that that day is not forestalled too much longer, for the good of the party, for the good of people in the state of California.

[LAZAROWITZ: What does the future hold for African Americans in California politics?

RALPH: There are some who have said that the future for African Americans in California politics is bleak. I do not agree

with that assessment. There is a need for politicians from the African-American community to build new alliances with those people who are moving into formerly mostly African-American areas. We are moving into the era of collation politics, when politicians from the African-American community can and will represent people of all ethnic backgrounds. Mayor Tom Bradley, Governor [L.] Doug[las] Wilder of Virginia, and others have demonstrated that this is possible. As historical areas of opportunity change, so will the style of politics. We are moving toward a time when people of ability can make changes, in terms of method and accomplishments. The future is bright for those who prepare and learn from the mistakes of the past. African-American politicians are not a dying species.]\*

LAZAROWITZ: What do you see as your political legacy?

RALPH: I'm extremely proud of all that I put into the restoration of the capitol and what it meant for minorities, what it did to establish the rights of minorities to participate in public works projects, which I think we did by [the] affirmative action program. I'm very proud of the Ralph Civil Rights Act and what it hopefully means for freedom

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\* Assemblyman Ralph and Ms. Lazarowitz added the preceding bracketed material during their review of the draft transcript.

from violence, which I think is basic to human decency. I don't think a wife in her home should have any fear at all, physically, of her husband, nor should the children. Nor should I or you as an individual walking down the street anyplace in this country. You shouldn't have to be afraid of men brutalizing you because you're a woman. Nor should I have to live in fear of someone brutalizing me or my sons. I have three sons now. One is a stepson. Two are black and one is Chicano. I shudder that any of those three men should have to live in any form of fear of a threat of violence because of who they are. That's very deep inside of me. I think that what we did with the subcommittee on urban problems, which was a forerunner of the full standing committee now in urban problems in the assembly, thanks to Jesse, was a significant contribution towards looking at housing and some of the other related problems for minorities, not just blacks. My legislative approach was never just for blacks. I've always believed that if we're going to be a strong society. . . . Many times we, as blacks, may have been the cannon fodder for battles. But as we paid the price, it had to be to open the doors for Chicanos, for Asians, for women, for whomever was being oppressed. I used to say to churches that I felt that God's plan was that blacks would be the least common denominator for justice in this country. We are so quickly

RALPH: don't know how thoroughly enforced it is, but at least it set some standards and some licensing procedures for farm workers and their families, because they carry a disproportionately unfair share of the load for producing food that we eat. In 1967, I participated in getting \$4.5 million for the development and building of the Martin Luther King Hospital. That gives me a great sense of pride. In 1968 or 1969, I was able to get--and I'm not sure, because it was permissive, at least [it gave] the opportunity for minorities to study their own history--something called ethnic studies incorporated into the overall curriculum of institutions of learning.<sup>1</sup> That was at the community college level, [in] social science departments.

LAZAROWITZ: Right now, at the Cal[ifornia] State [University] level. . . . Certainly Cal State Long Beach, is debating this issue over making it a general education requirement.

RALPH: Good, I guess. But those are some of things that I'm really thankful that I had an opportunity to serve and am appreciative of. The bill that Governor Reagan signed in the whole apprenticeship area. The Watts NAACP, the chairman of their labor committee, went back two years

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1. H.R. 234, 1968 Reg. Sess., 2109, amended 3645 and 3646, urged the California State Board of Education to establish Black Studies programs in all publicly supported educational institutions.

RALPH: identified, so frequently hated, so quickly abused, that if we can get justice in the courtroom, then, perhaps, the level of justice will have raised to the point where a Latino or an Asian, whoever is oppressed, they can also receive it. Or in the marketplace or in the housing market. That's my own philosophy.

People, I think, sometimes are chosen to suffer, and it seems as though in this country that may have been the role that the good Lord in his wisdom has given us. I can't say we always agree with that, but I didn't hear Him ask, either. [Laughter] He may have allowed us to fulfill that role. So I'm very proud of that. I'm extremely proud of the replacement housing concept, where, for the first time in California and, subsequently, through [United States Senator Edmund S.] Muskie and the nation, people were no longer being expected to carry the brunt of freeway development and expansion. As I go by the Century Freeway now, I have a sense of involvement with that, because when the environmentalists. . . . I believed in environmental protection, but I believe that the Century Freeway was needed and fought during my entire time in the legislature to try to see it come to fruition. It's getting closer now, and I have a great sense of involvement with that and appreciation for that. Because of my involvement with farm workers, legislation that I carried is now the law. I

later and checked the statistics of minorities in the apprenticeship training program for ironworkers, and it had gone up well over 200 percent simply because there were laws on the books that said, if there's a pattern of discrimination, then the president, all of the VPs, and the secretary-treasurers of this local [union] are subject to fine and imprisonment. With that kind of legislation, people began to change their attitudes a bit. At least, if not the attitudes changed, their behavior changed. And that's, in the final analysis, all we were trying to deal with. But those are really fun times for me. I missed Jesse as speaker; I miss him now as a friend. I officiated at his funeral, at his request, which was really a great honor for me. I guess that's it.

LAZAROWITZ: Where do you think the blacks are going in the Democratic party, specifically Jesse Jackson?

RALPH: I like Jesse. When I left the legislature, the first job I had was as a West Coast director for Operation PUSH in 1977. I didn't stay there long, because I really needed to get to my church in Sacramento. Jesse is a bright man, and I say that having worked closely with him. I stayed in his home in Chicago for about a week after he'd hired me, just to gather in the vision that he had for PUSH. I think that the American public has begun to appreciate Jesse for his intellect, not just the charisma but for his thoughtfulness

and his vision. He had more acceptance and receptivity in 1988 than he did in 1984. People saw him as a strange, as an enigma; I don't know if enigma is the correct word. Maybe it's not strong enough. Some people have just a knee-jerk reaction to him because he is black. I think Jesse's presence in the Democratic party is so healthy. He addresses issues that, many times, the party is afraid to deal with. I think his presence brings them to the place of acceptance, at least of dealing with those issues. So I think that's very healthy. I think it's not coincidental that he's a preacher. If the church has any responsibility in society, my view is that it has a responsibility to address moral issues. That's part of the reason that I get kind of peeved with the church at times. When you look at the history of this country--you're a historian--too many people during the period of slavery found justification in their Bible for slavery in the name of God, and that still offends me. I know Christian theology teaches you're supposed to forgive. I'm having a real struggle with that one, quite frankly. Then you see the grandsons of those people who were critical of Martin Luther King when he came forward as he had to, dealing with moral issues that I think that preachers ought to have a keener understanding of than nonpreachers. If they go through courses like systematic theology, which we have to go through, and

RALPH: ethics, which we have to go through, it ought to give us a keener sense and understanding and sense of direction as to where we are and where we ought to go, and address those. I think King was just a miracle, and a real blessing to the whole country, not just black folks. But as we become free, it tends to free the whole country and I think Jesse has some of the same mission. His style is a little different than King's, but who said that all of us want to act the same, anyhow?

The Democratic party worries me at times as a body, when I see it beginning to react to what it considers shifts to the right. I'm realistic enough to realize that people who are going to be elected have to have, maybe, some political positions on issues. But I do get concerned, and I do become somewhat alarmed at times, when it appears as though they're shifting too far to the right, at times at the expense of the people who have made up the Democratic party loyally over the years with their votes. You know, blacks and Latinos. Asians, not as much; they tend to be in a category of their own. But we've been there year in and year out, and we've made the difference in many elections between whether we'll have a Democratic president or not. If blacks had not supported John Kennedy--who turned out to be very good for blacks--the way they did, he would not have made it. The history of that

RALPH: is just countless, over and over and over again. I don't think we can afford to abandon things like civil rights, and I think all blacks are worried about that. If one would just reflect at all on the history of this country, we came out of the Civil War, went into the period of Reconstruction, and for awhile we began to see blacks in elected offices and began to see laws that were protective of blacks, to be snatched [away] all too quickly. All of us have a sense of historical memory of that. We didn't live through it, but we garnered it from books and people who did. Our parents may have told us; our grandparents may have told us. But when you see people equivocating on major issues. . . . The [U.S.] Supreme Court appointments. It frightens me to death that [U.S. Supreme Court Justice] Thurgood Marshall, who's a fine gentleman, a great jurist. . . . But the probability of him not being on the bench too much longer--and others--it worries me to death. We need to capture the White House and we need to put together the kind of winning campaign that will enable us to do that, around a candidate who understands that, as a matter of moral principle, there are certain issues that we don't negotiate on. Among those, I think, are the protection of people in America who have, in the past, had no protection at all. Included in that group are women. Included in that group, and probably the center of that

RALPH:           group from my perspective, are blacks and Latinos. You look at farm workers and the hell they go through, and you look at factory workers and the hell they go through. To me, it's unthinkable that the party would even consider negotiating on those issues, from a moral perspective. But that's what my view is.

[End Tape 4, Side A]

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